



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Department of Tourism and Northern Studies

Culinary relationships in Tromsø, Norway

An exploratory food tourism study from the supply-side perspective

Maribel Reyes Orantes

Master's thesis in Tourism Studies...REI-3910...May 2024



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Abstract

This master thesis research aimed to explore the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, and how this might impact the final food offering arriving at the tourist restaurant's table. The research is supported by a supply chain conceptual context, followed by a theoretical framework that includes relationship marketing theory and commitment and trust theory. The data collection came from semi-structured interviews and ethnography. Narrative and thematic analysis followed and resulted in three themes: 1) The role in the tourism industry, 2) Local food and local food networks, and 3) the variables encountered in the relationship between these actors. In the third theme, variables were categorized to assess the findings, these were common values, communication, commitment and trust, and the last category included cooperation, competition, word of mouth, and it was also left open for any other variable that could arise. This research study found that communication is the variable affecting the most to the final food and dish but it could turn positive or negative. Awareness of the industry, common values, commitment and trust, affects positively the interactions in the relationship, thus having positive influences on the final dish. Perceptions of local food impact the final dish offering but it can be positive or negative. Lastly, of the other variables encountered, cooperation stands out as having the biggest positive impact on the final dish when actors work together.

1 Introduction

1.1 Opening section

As the interest and demand by tourists for local food continue to rise, understanding the dynamics of the relationship between restaurants and local food producers becomes crucial for any tourism stakeholder's success. This master's thesis research study will delve into the various elements encountered in the interaction between these actors and how this might impact the food offering that arrives on the menus and tables of the tourist's restaurant tables visiting the arctic city of Tromsø in Norway.

In this introduction chapter, I will first give a brief background and overview of the research that has been done related to the topic of relationships in food tourism, alongside highlighting the supply side research gap in the literature. Later on, I will address my research aim and objectives. Followed by the significance of my study and its limitations. I will finalize outlining this thesis structure.

1.2 Study background and overview

Tourism is a social relational phenomenon (Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernández, 2016, p.122), and the quality of a tourist destination's experience is more than just its parts. It depends heavily on the interconnections and relationships between its actors (March & Wilkinson, 2009).

If well the marketing approach in the tourism literature has been mainly used for research (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018; Stalmirska, 2021), the relationship marketing in Business-to-Business (B2B) or Inter-Organizational Relations (IOR) in tourism has been limited (Shi & Liao, 2013). From those, most of the relationships in tourism have been examined by the hospitality industry, for example, tour operators (Alkier, Milojica, & Roblek, 2022; Gruchmann, Topp, & Seeler, 2022).

The growing trend of local food and restaurants offering it is also the response of tourists seeking to experience local culture through food (Everett, 2008; Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernández, 2016). Despite the growing food tourism literature and local food subjects (Shekhar, 2022), little research has been done from the suppliers' perspectives (J. Murphy & Smith, 2009).

Hence, I specifically found a research gap in the literature from a supply chain context and, the relationships within it. This gap highlights a big and important piece that has been missing in the food tourism literature that becomes crucial for understanding the whole food tourism supply chain and its impacts on the food tourism experience. Hence, it is of great significance to implement it in the context of Tromsø. In this wake, is pertinent to bring some statistics to the table and illustrate the tourism growth that Norway and the Tromsø region have been experiencing.

Overall tourist consumption in Norway grew 10.6 % in 2021 (Sentralbyrå, 2024) . And 2023 had been a record year for commercial overnight stays in Northern Norway with a 6% increase compared to 2022. Specifically, the county of Troms grew in this category by 3% (NHO Arktis, 2024). Showing this way, the overall growth of tourism in Norway and the Northern region.

In the interest of presenting the tourist food consumption in Norway, the following table was made and brought to illustrate the overall expenditure in the tourism sector at present rates from 2015 to 2021, with two of its categories to serve as comparison, accommodation services and catering services. The category of catering services, which includes restaurants, cafes and catering, has grown almost to pre-pandemic numbers. Paramount to the latter, the percentage of catering services in relation to the total consumption shows an increase of up to 16% as the total share (Sentralbyrå, 2024).

Tourist consumption in Norway (million NOK) by consumer group, tourism industry, statistical variable and year								
	Current prices (mill. NOK)							
Total Consumption	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
0 Tourist consumption in total	158669	170002	176306	186288	194330	129750	147821	..
01.01 Accommodation services	15871	17179	18166	18850	20295	13223	16477	..
01.02 Catering services	20450	21817	22921	24587	25867	20725	23718	..
Percentage of Catering services vs Total	13%	13%	13%	13%	13%	16%	16%	

*This table was made by manually selecting only these two categories and years in the Satellite accounting for tourism on the website of Sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway in English).

*The percentage of catering services as a share of the total tourist consumption was extracted manually.

It is relevant to observe the growth of total tourist expenditure before the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, is more relevant to expose and consider the growth in the share of expenditure on food-related services that has grown in the last two years displayed. Because, this goes in line with proving that people are spending more and more on food in their travels, and by the same token, the increasing trend in food tourism itself. Which follows the premise that “the

interest in food tourism is a representation of tourism today”(Yeoman & McMahon-Beatte, 2016, p. 95), Consequently, points out the importance of the tourism industry in the region, the city, and its impacts on its communities.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

This master’s degree in tourism studies was driven by my desire to study food tourism in Northern Norway. From the moment I arrived in Tromsø as a tourist in 2017 until today as a local now, I never stopped wondering what was behind its culinary scene. I used to wonder what was affecting the offer and the demand for local and Norwegian dishes here, were tourists interested in these delicacies? Were restaurants interested in advertising or offering it? And with my previous professional experience in supply chain, I could not stop wondering how that was affecting the final dish I would find on the restaurant’s menus. There seemed to be many and diverse actors and factors involved in what was landing at the tourists’ mouths. After moving to Tromsø and designated this city as the location for my research, I was determined to find the answers.

Following those grounds, this master thesis research aimed to explore the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, and how this might impact the final food or dish offering arriving at the tourist restaurant's table. The research is supported by a supply chain conceptual context, followed by a theoretical framework that includes relationship marketing theory and commitment and trust theory. The data collection came from semi-structured interviews and ethnography. A total of 7 participants who are shown anonymously were interviewed. Three are local and beverage producers and four are restaurants. Findings and results followed a thematic analysis in which three themes were identified: 1) Role in the tourism industry, 2) Local food, and 3) Variables and elements encountered in the relationship. These themes helped to achieve the following research topic, question, aim and objectives.

- The topic of this master's thesis is the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway.
- The research question: How is the relationship between local food producers and restaurants impacting the food offered to tourists in Tromso, Norway?
- The research aim: This research aims to explore the relationship of local food producers with restaurants and how this impacts the final food offering to tourists.

- The research objectives of this research study are:
 - 1.- To examine the perspectives, thoughts, ideas, and desires of local food producers and restaurants about themselves, each other, and in regard to the tourism industry.
 - 2.- To identify the variables involved in the relationship between these two actors.
 - 3.- To assess how these variables could be affecting the food offerings presented to tourists.

1.3.1 6.- The limitations of the study

- 1.- This research study was limited to only the participants who agreed to participate in this research. Therefore, the findings and results cannot be generalized to this population or location.
- 2.- Time resources and information provided by the participants were limited, so extended research into other themes, interactions, or variables could not be addressed.

1.4 The significance of the study

Having stated the background and overview of this master's thesis, this research study contributes to narrowing the gap of the little research that has been done about the peculiar and fascinating bond of food and tourism in the Arctic region (De la Barre & Brouder, 2013). So far, this is the first academic research study of this kind in the city of Tromsø, Norway. Attempting to research the relationships between local food producers and restaurants using a supply chain conceptual context, and theoretically framed in relationship marketing to explain the findings from a supply-side perspective. And it could have diverse impacts in the academic field as well as in the community researched as I will describe later in this section.

Baum (2019) explains how difficult it is to prove the academic research value to stakeholders because they usually only look for rapid specific answers when instead theory should be seen as the route to explanation. Academic research "aspires to one or more generalization, theory-building, theory-testing or in-depth explanation of phenomena" (p.158). In this thesis, I take up on this and try to bring different theories attempting to explain from new approaches like the supply chain context through the lens of food tourism studies.

Following this line, this study also attempts to contribute to broadening the knowledge and understanding of the role played by these relationships and their impacts on the food tourism experience that may help stakeholders to open to new perspectives that lead to new solutions. Because, as Baum (2019) said, the chances of valuing academic research are higher when stakeholders see these impacts.

Taking Baum (2019) context, my research could impact the following ranges: civil society, cultural life, economic prosperity, place, and sustainability. How? Because, following and applying Baum's (2019, p.161) explanations of each index to my research: I will inform about the form and content of associations between people or groups, trying to shed light on its values and social assumptions; I will try to create and interpret cultural and social capital to enrich the knowledge of groups; I will try to transfer insights and knowledge that can create wealth in the industry; thus, it can contribute to the development of a specific location, in my case Tromsø; and lastly, It may help to understand the importance on creating sustainable food networks for the communities future.

However, let's also not forget that, as Vong (2017:116 as cited in Baum, 2019, p.158) describes, the recipe for adopting and valuing research outcomes requires not only the researcher's work and transfer of knowledge but also the capacity of business to absorb and execute it.

1.5 The structural outline

I will now provide a road map of what to expect throughout this master's thesis.

1. Chapter 1 is where we stand now, the introduction of this master's thesis.
2. Chapter 2 will take you on a trip throughout the literature review. Starting from what food tourism is, to the use of supply chain in the tourism literature, until the studies about relationships in tourism.
3. Chapter 3 will deepen into the theories that build the theoretical framework of this research study, which are the relationship marketing theory and the trust and commitment theory.
4. Chapter 4 describes the methodology followed in this research study
5. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this research study.
6. Chapter 6 presents the results and opens the discussion of them.
7. Chapter 7 concludes this master's thesis.

2 Literature Review

For this research thesis exploring the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, I will outline my literature review thematically. This, with the intention to provide a better understanding of the developments and growth of food within the tourism studies to the recent implementation and use of Supply Chain concepts in the tourism industry and literature. Along the way, I will highlight some marketing perspectives and theories used in tourism research as well as the gap I have found in the literature that helped me ground my research in a more specific context. Lastly, I will briefly discuss food tourism research that has been done in the same or similar geographical area, from the Arctic to Norwegian cases.

In the past two decades, many researchers have highlighted the role and importance of food in tourism. From looking into the historical development of food within tourism (Boniface, 2003), to gaining recognition as a subject within the tourism studies field (Hall & Sharples, 2003) to differentiate it from a mere necessity to a whole experience (Maurer, 2019).

Food tourism has been popularly described by C. Michael Hall and Sharples (2004) as an essential element of the tourism experience, where the tourist's primary motivation is the desire to taste or experience a particular type of food from a specific region. Thus, food tourism is "the consumption of the local and the consumption and production of place" (p.10). Moreover, food tourism has the capacity to help grow local communities, their economies, the environment, and their sustainability (C. Michael Hall & Sharples, 2004).

From this point, many researchers started to take up the food tourism literature to unfold, conceptualize, thematize, synthesize, or contrast differences or gaps in the literature. This set the pace for a significant growth of food tourism literature between 2008 and 2015 (Ellis et al., 2018; Shekhar, 2022).

Three disciplinary approaches have been described by Hall & Sharples (2003, as cited in Ellis et. al, 2018) in the food tourism literature: Management and marketing, social and cultural studies, and geography. In which the first one is argued to be the most commonly used, applying it to target marketing, market segmentation, branding, consumer behavior, and motivation. It is precisely the commercial opportunities that food tourism offers that have demonstrated its growing role in the industry and the literature (Henderson, 2009). Showing, therefore, the reasons why the marketing approach has been the most used, as well as the demand side the most researched (Stalmirska, 2021). In contrast, as I will show next, little has been investigated

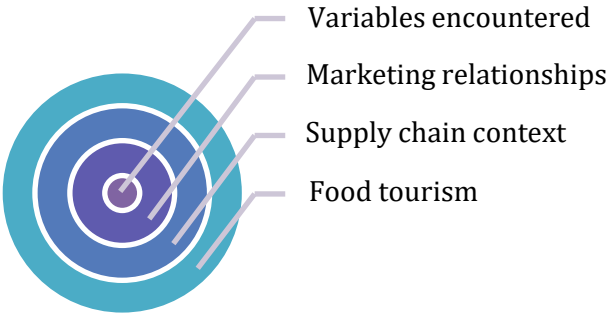
in tourism studies from the supply-side or a supply-chain perspective and even less in the specific context of food tourism.

It was in Henderson (2009, p. 323) food tourism review that I found the first researcher calling out for a future agenda that specifically mentions the supply chain perspective as follows: "From the perspective of suppliers, questions about the supply chain, skills, and service delivery should be examined, and governments need more information about the economics of food tourism interactions as a basis for better-informed policy-making".

However, despite the call outs, the supply side in tourism has remained little researched, as can be shown, for example, by Lee and Scott (2015) systematic review. Their findings showed that out of 48 articles analyzed, 28 focused on the demand side (consumer) and 19 on the supply side (stakeholders such as government, DMO, food suppliers, etc.), and one examined both. Of those on the supply side, the focus has been on tourism organizations in other countries (p.109). This study concluded that food is a good marketing tool to attract tourists to a destination. And that branding food can help to build a positive destination image and become a purpose to revisit. This study also showed how from the marketing perspective and supply side, tourism organizations have been one of the main focus areas studied. Correspondingly, it also shows us how other studies and authors are leaving out the examination of the supply chain actors and factors involved in the whole supply chain itself that goes from the land to the tourist plate.

It is valuable to bring operational theories to the tourism literature because as Lucy M. Long (2012, p.344) points out, "These theories provide models for best practices and making predictions within tourism and hospitality providers, usually with the aim of improving efficiency and profitability". As I will continue to explain in deeper detail in the next section.

To assist the reader in visualizing the bigger picture of my literature review and theory, and how the supply chain context holds within it the relationships among actors and its variables, the following graphic was developed.



2.1 Supply chain in tourism research

Supply Chain (SC) concepts and practices started in the manufacturing sector. Since the 1980s, they have become popular in other sectors by proving their fundamental principles of lowering costs, asset utilization, quality improvement, and maximizing profits aiming to create a competitive advantage (Anderson, Britt, & Favre, 2007; Crandall, Crandall, & Chen, 2014; Wisner, Tan, & Leong, 2014). Competitive advantage is the economic value created by leveraging a combination of resources and capabilities (Newbert, 2008, as cited in Wilke, Costa, Freire, & Ferreira, 2019, p.343).

There is no single definition of Supply Chain (CS) or Supply Chain Management (SCM). However, making a cross through the most utilized, Wisner et al. (2014) state it as:

"The idea of coordinating or integrating a number of goods- and services-related activities among supply chain participants to improve operating efficiencies, quality, and customer service. Thus, for supply chain management to be successful, firms must work together by sharing information on things like demand, forecasts, production plans, capacity changes, new marketing strategies, new product and service developments, new technologies employed, purchasing plans, delivery dates, and anything else impacting the firm's purchasing, production, and distribution plans" (p.7-8).

Given the complexities of the development of tourism industry operations and the high competitiveness, implementing supply chain management in tourism looks promising (Szpilko, 2017; Zhang, Song, & Huang, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is argued that placing supply chain in a tourism context is less about moving raw materials and instead about tourism products and services (Gruchmann et al., 2022, p. 330). All things considered, as Tapper and Font (2004) accurately summarize in their report of existing Tourism Supply Chains (TSC) around the world, "The supply chain comprises the suppliers of all the goods and services that go into the delivery of tourism products to consumers" (p.1).

Supply chain concepts and approaches in the tourism literature are new, still in their infancy, and have been limited (Mandal and Dubey, 2020, as cited in Gruchmann et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2009). Moreover, it has mainly been used to examine how tour operators, hotels, and tour activity providers work together (Alkier et al., 2022; Gruchmann et al., 2022)

It is because of this new, limited, and uneven research on supply chain in tourism, that Zhang et al. (2009), provided a review of the Supply Chain Management (SCM) research within the context of tourism, and developed a framework for it. Their paper has served ever since as a base to look at the start and development of tourism supply chains. Zhang et al. (2009) placed the supply chain in a macro perspective in tourism as “a network of enterprises that are engaged in different functions, ranging from the supply of raw materials through the production and delivery of end products to target customers” (p.346). They also highlight the characteristics of a supply chain as a two-way flow of goods and information (Cooper, Lambert & Pagh, 1997, as cited in Zhang et al., 2009p. 346).

Following this subject, Supply Chain Management (SCM) refers to the practices of a firm based on SC concepts. And Zhang et al. (2009) place the heart of SCM in the recognition of the interdependency of its participants and the necessary integration of its links in the whole chain.

The latest growth of the supply chain theme in tourism research is shown in Szpilko (2017) overview of selected literature about tourism supply chains. In which she shows how the research papers have grown from the first publication about the supply chain itself in 1960 to its immersion in the tourism field with the first paper about the supply chain in tourism published in 1993, increasing after 2007. Yet only 212 publications about tourism SC were found between 1993 and 2016. This shows how despite the relevance of SC practices growing and proving its success in other industries, the research on it within tourism contexts is low (Szpilko, 2017). It is essential to notice that in her analysis, Szpilko (2017) also found that the co-occurrence of keywords between the research papers was not dense, indicating the small and diverse development of supply chain research within tourism. Results showed that the main areas researched had been supply chain management, followed by environmental management and sustainability, sustainable development, and marketing (p.691).

Similar to the latter, Alkier et al. (2022), in their quantitative bibliometric analysis of Tourism Supply Chains identified 10 clusters categorized by themes. Based on the number of citations and co-word analysis, the three major clusters identified were: 1) sustainability issues, 2) agrotourism and food supply chain, and 3) corporate social responsibility. Even though this analysis has found cluster number 2 as the food supply chain, these articles were about culinary tourism, the role of agritourism, barriers and drivers. Among the examples given as the most relevant articles in this category, not one is mentioned regarding the relationships between food suppliers and restaurants or hotel managers or chefs.

Following this line, and realizing the concern for more sustainable SC practices, Gruchmann et al. (2022) systematic literature review of Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) practices in tourism showed that in the 44 papers studied, of those from the supply-side perspective, nine papers concerned hotels, six papers concerned tour operators, four were about green SCM and three about sustainability and education. Showing once again that the main focus of research has been on tour operators and sustainability.

2.2 Supply chain relationships in tourism

After having shown the main focus areas within the Tourism Supply Chain (TSC) research, which shows how narrowed, sporadic, and divergent it has been, it becomes easier to discern that if the supply side of tourism has been limited, the study of the relationships between the actors inside the supply chain, has consequently been too. And this should be of high value given the fundamental premise that "supply chains operate through business-to-business relationships" (Tapper & Font, 2004). Thus, this is where I will continue.

The research to study Inter-Organizational Relationships (IOR) among actors in the TSC is also emerging and limited (Shi & Liao, 2013). Although there is no one definition of inter-organizational relationships (Galaskiewicz, 1985), the main idea of it is nicely summarized in Shi and Liao (2013, p.112) study as an "interdependent and trust-based mutual commitment between organizational partners with common goals in a long-term orientation" and they are an integral part of the supply chain.

Decades ago, Selin and Beason (1991) pointed out the relevance of studying inter-organizational relations in the tourism field given the benefits reported at the time such as cost-effective solutions, cooperative marketing strategies, and improved communications.

Ever since then, the interest in studying relationships in tourism and its various characteristics has grown (Mwesiumo & Halpern, 2019) and become an important factor in understanding tourism itself (Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernández, 2016).

At the heart of Inter-Organizational Relations in Tourism (IOR-T) is the idea that tourism actors are not self-contained and need collaboration and partnership with others to supplement their resources and activities to achieve collective goals (Mwesiumo & Halpern, 2019). Even though we have extensive literature on IOR-T as shown in Mwesiumo and Halpern (2019) study of 269 papers published between 1989 to 2017, some aspects of it have been little researched, for example, the analysis of supply networks.

But how are these relationships being studied and assessed? According to Palmatier, Dant, and Grewal (2007), many theoretical approaches from a variety of fields have been used to understand inter-organizational relationship performance. Which four theoretical perspectives dominate now: commitment-trust, dependence, transaction cost economics, and relational norms.

Indeed, following the previous lines, the two most common variables that have been used to evaluate marketing relationships since its theorization by Morgan and Hunt (1994), are *Commitment* and *Trust* (cursive letters for attention). Which are presented as key drivers to maintain cooperative long-term relationships that produce efficient, productive and effective outcomes (p.22).

Alongside the trust and commitment theory, other variables that precede them or result from them, have been discussed in the marketing literature. A good literature review of them is the one that Chowdhury (2012) summarized in his study. He presented the variables preceding trust and commitment as: interdependence, shared values, relational norm, relationship-specific investment, seller expertise, communication, opportunism, market orientation, and bonding strategies. At the other end of the line, the outcome variables he found were: cooperation, conflict, loyalty, word of mouth, uncertainty, expectation of continuity, acquiescence, relationship performance, cooperation, conflict, loyalty, word of mouth, and coordination (p.57).

The commitment and trust theory has been largely used now to evaluate, explain and proof its value in any industry. And they have become variables I could also find being used in the tourism literature, although it is argued that they are still very recent and limited (Roy, Hall, & Ballantine, 2017).

For instance, Shi and Liao (2013) examined the effects of inter-organizational trust and interdependence on relationship quality between supply chain partners in the hospitality service by using the social exchange theory and the resource dependence theory, which are theoretical foundations of supply chain relationships (p.112-113). Another element to distinguish here is the use of relationship quality to evaluate how good the relationship is. In their study they define relationship quality "as the extent to which the supply chain partners are satisfied with the ongoing relation, have mutual commitment, and intend to continue the relation in the future" (p.113). Henceforth, the factors or variables taken into consideration here were trust,

satisfaction, commitment, and long-term orientation. They concluded that trust and interdependence determine the relationship quality and that joint teamwork plays a central role in mediating its effects at the same time that the variables impact joint teamwork, as in a cycling effect way.

Another popular factor that has been used is cooperation, which means simultaneous cooperation and competition with the goal of creating value (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1996 as cited in Fong, Hong, & Wong, 2021) and it has been used, for example by Fong et al. (2021) to analyze triadic relationships in tourism supply chains.

The upcoming Theory Chapter of this master thesis research will provide a detailed explanation of some of the previously presented variables, characteristics, and factors within inter-organizational and business-to-business relationships. These elements, in conjunction with the relationship marketing theory, will form the theoretical framework for the present study.

2.3 Culinary supply chains

Going further down into the literature, specifically what I found in the food tourism context, Smith and Xiao (2008) examined the culinary tourism supply chains for three culinary tourism products in Ontario, Canada (farmer's markets, festivals, and restaurants). In this study, applying supply chain theory helps them better comprehend the context of creating culinary tourism products and distribution challenges along the chain, from producers to consumers. Their analysis showed that restaurants' supply chain consists of five general sources of supply. The most essential are the food and beverage suppliers, the other four are "peripheral" suppliers related to table settings or backstage operations. A major common issue found here was access to ingredients.

Although that study is looked at from the customers' perspective (tourists), it has hugely contributed to the introduction of the concept of supply chain to the tourism literature, specifically into food tourism, which can be vital for tourism companies to succeed (Smith & Xiao, 2008).

Following the latter and contributing to the supply-side research within culinary tourism supply chains, J. Murphy and Smith (2009) explored the relationship between chefs and suppliers from a SCM perspective. Their findings first show how a supply chain can look like in the context

of culinary tourism. Which in their case is a short chain that extends from farmers through producers to chefs, then servers, and finally to the consumer. And secondly, they show the chef's interest in communicating their cuisine through local products and cultivating relationships with their suppliers; how they provide and exchange knowledge with the producers that consequently helps them to improve quality, selection, new products and to weave out problems in the supply chain (p.219). Lastly, the authors called for further research to widen supply-side interactions, such as the producer's perspective and their interaction with chefs, as well as to study the perspectives of restaurants using purchasing departments.

Later and likewise, Roy et al. (2017) examined the role of trust and personal relationships among tourism stakeholders within local food networks and how this affects their purchasing decisions. Their findings show how social networks are vital to local food systems, and how local food was purchased as a result of the trust and exchange of knowledge in their personal relationships.

And lastly, following the marketing and supply concepts in tourism, Nebioglu (2020) has studied the factors affecting the production and presentation of local dishes in restaurants operating in touristic destinations, in whose case was Alanya, Turkey. This might be the most similar study to the one I would like to carry out in this research. But in this research study case, I will focus on the relationship between two actors of the supply chain, the local food producers and the restaurateurs.

So far, it has been shown here from the evolution of food tourism as a subject in tourism studies, to the marketing approach becoming popular and gaining terrain. To the initial use of supply chain concepts in tourism and how there is a gap in it, specifically in the food tourism literature
Let's move on

2.4 Food tourism research in the Arctic

Coming to the last section of this thematically outlined literature review, I have found that, as De la Barre and Brouder (2013) said, the unique bond of food and tourism in the Arctic has been little researched (p.214). However, there are some food trends growing in the Nordic countries that can be related to how food tourism is developing in each of these countries.

One of the first papers researching food tourism in the Arctic was precisely that of De la Barre and Brouder (2013) exploring the role of food in the Arctic tourism experience, specifically in Yukon, Canada, and the Swedish Lapland. They recognize and highlight the unique geography of the circumpolar North, the beauty and challenges, as well as how this feature impacts production and the way tourism is consumed. Through textual and visual analysis, examining how food and food cultural dimensions are embedded in the Arctic tourist experience, they conclude that food is an experiential component that is linked to the land, the past, and its people; thus it tells stories of the North. Henceforth enhancing the Arctic tourism experience. As the authors state, "In the Arctic tourism experience, consuming food is also about consuming stories" (p.221).

Going specifically to a Norwegian context from the supply-side perspective, Mei, Lerfald, and Bråtå (2017) identified the challenges and possibilities of networking and collaboration between different tourism actors and agricultural actors based on the project Taste of National Tourist Routes. They identified challenging factors impeding the success of this type of project such as negative attitudes and dissatisfaction, no exchange of knowledge, different priorities, the length of the geographical scope, and lack of willingness, involvement, and trust. Yet, on the positive side, first interactions may lead to future formal collaboration and food tourism ventures.

Additionally, a distinctive point in this section is that as the geographic location is linked to local food, some of the research here that I found is not precisely about food tourism in the area, but instead, about the local food concept, trends, projects developing here or the link to agriculture and agritourism.

Of those, highly valuable to my research was, for instance, discovering and understanding the so-called "quality turn in Nordic food", in which Halkier, James, and Stræte (2017) comparative analysis showed that the market is demanding specialty foods which are local and artisanal; that Norway has incentivized local food products and production in the past two decades and with this has established its own food protection labels. This helps to match the line followed by the desire to consume local food in a Norwegian food tourism context.

Following this specialty food trend, Dreyer, Strandhagen, Hvolby, Romsdal, and Alfnes (2016) explored the supply chain strategies for specialty food in mid-Norway as a case study. Even though this research is made from a managerial and operational academic approach, it has

provided relevant insights into how food supply chains work in Norway, specifically in regard to local and specialty food, that I will later be placing into Tromsø's food tourism context.

Additionally, we can see in Bertella (2011) research, the case of food tourism in Lofoten being studied from a context of agriculture and fishery areas. In which results show that gourmet food tourism in Lofoten could develop through two important types of knowledge, scientific food knowledge and managerial and political knowledge. Here as well, she presented some collaboration projects towards making Lofoten a food region, which are emerging as a result of the tourism growth in the area combined with the growing trend in local food.

Lastly, I would like to close this section with a prime example of a successful Norwegian local food project (now a corporation) that is mentioned in a few papers, the case of Røros local food and branding. Lange-Vik and Idsø (2012) deeply studied Røros' tourism opportunities, and they conclude by highlighting the success due to the good synergy and teamwork, although with some challenges, between all actors and stakeholders. The Rørosmat (Rørosfood in English) case represents the eagerness, feasibility, and fruition of a local food project that can be learned from, or applied to other local food projects in Norway.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude the literature review I have carried out for my research on the relationship between local food producers and the restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, I can sum up that as shown throughout the chapter, even though food tourism has experienced a meaningful and powerful growth all over the world in the past two decades (Maurer, 2019), research areas within it are still new and little research. Such as the way I have shown it is the supply-side, specifically the marketing relationship dynamics within a food tourism context.

Considering that most of the little tourism literature with a supply-side perspective has been done through hospitality research with a predominant economic perspective, my research takes up on this supply chain side but from the food tourism research lens and a more socially interactive perspective, helping to provide a deeper view and meaningful understanding of the interaction inside the relationships between actors in the supply side and its impact in food tourism, therefore helping to holistically widen that understanding of the sheer size of all of what food tourism entails.

Having described the literature review thematically, allowed me to go zooming-in from the big picture to the specific context in the following way: from the general food tourism conceptual development; to later adopting a marketing approach; consequently, going into supply chain concepts and its uses in tourism research; to later on unfold the studies that have researched the interactions and relationships between actors in tourism supply chains. And how these studies have tried to evaluate those inter-organizational and business relationships with different variables. Finalizing by portraying some previous food tourism research done in the area to provide a context of the geographical population studied in this Master thesis.

Coming next, in the theory chapter, I will take up from here and will unfold and describe in a more specific way the relationship marketing theory and the variables that have been mostly used to assess marketing relationships, whether they are business to business (B2B), inter-organizational, stakeholder, or network relationships.

After the theory chapter, I will describe my research methodology, following indeed the researchers' call and urge to widen the theories and perspectives used in food tourism research so far, specifically on the supply side. Attempting to gain and give a more holistic view of the multidimensional and complex interactions among relationships in the whole supply chain in food tourism.

3 Research Methodology Design

3.1 Introduction

My research aims to explore the relationship between local food producers and the restaurants in Tromsø and how this affects the food offered to tourists. This topic pertains to the social science field. As such, social research is carried out because questions occur to us, the researchers. And the theories we use to understand the social world will influence what and how we research and interpret what we see and find (Bryman, 2016).

In this essence, in the following sections of this methodology chapter, I will be describing each step taken in this thesis research process. First, I will discuss the philosophy my research is based on, followed by the methodology. Next comes the sampling strategy to continue later with the data collection methods and the subsequent data analysis techniques used in the research. Lastly, I will shortly address the relevance of reflexivity to conclude with a summary and final thoughts of the chapter.

3.2 Research aims and objectives

I would like to call up the research aims and objectives of this master's thesis to enhance the further understanding of the methodology design explained in the rest of this chapter.

- The topic of this master's thesis is the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway.
- The research question: How is the relationship between local food producers and restaurants impacting the food offered to tourists in Tromsø, Norway?
- The research aim: This research aims to explore the relationship of local food producers with restaurants and how this impacts the final food offering to tourists.
- The research objectives of this research study are:
 - 1.- To examine the perspectives, thoughts, ideas, and desires of local food producers and restaurants about themselves, each other, and regarding the tourism industry.
 - 2.- To identify the variables involved in the relationship between these two actors.
 - 3.- To assess how these variables could be affecting the food offerings presented to tourists.

3.3 Research philosophy

In any research design lies the researcher's way of understanding the nature of the world and how it should be studied (Moses & Knutsen, 2019). Therefore, there are particular considerations to take into the social research process (Bryman, 2016). Three of these are what Moses and Knutsen (2019) called "the three musketeers of Metaphysics: *Ontology* – referring to the study of the being-, *Epistemology* – referring to the study of knowledge-, and *Methodology* – referring to the way we acquire that knowledge-" (p.4).

The philosophy of science trio in this Master thesis research outlines as follows:

- For the *ontological* consideration, I took a constructivist position due to, first, my research field being in social science, and second, because it considers social entities and their meanings as social constructions made up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman, 2016, p.29-30). Hence, it recognizes two relevant things, one, that people are intelligent, reflective, and willful. Thus people may look differently at the same object, and two, the role of society and the researcher in constructing or influencing the patterns we study as social scientists (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.9). Therefrom, knowledge is intersubjective, carried by individuals yet grounded in collectives. Thus, social knowledge is always contextual. And so, constructivists protect this context, whether it is historical, social, ideational, or language-based, as these provide insight and meaning (Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.199-200).
- For the *epistemology* consideration, I chose *interpretivism* because, according to Bryman (2016, p.26-28), it is the position that emphasizes humans' uniqueness versus the natural order and demands social scientists understand social action's subjective meaning. This way, the researcher shows how its participants interpret the world around them and then places those interpretations in a social scientific framework. Furthermore, it becomes a double interpretation since the researcher gives an interpretation of others' interpretations.
- And for the *methodological* considerations, I will conduct a qualitative research methodology since it focuses and emphasizes words rather than numbers in both the collection and the analysis of the data, which usually comes together with the two previous considerations taken above (Bryman, 2016). The methodology will be described in greater detail in the next section.

3.4 Research methodology

I decided to conduct a qualitative research type since, based on its features, I found it the most suitable to achieve the aim and objectives I pursue in my research. I will next briefly describe these features.

First, and recapping Bryman (2016, p.375), qualitative research is distinguished by having an inductive view where theory will be generated from the research; it is interpretative because it looks to understand a specific social world by interpreting the lives of its participants; and is constructivist since the characteristics and outcomes of that social world emerge from the interactions between individuals.

Following this line, qualitative researchers "seek to understand situations and contexts, interpret actions and develop deep knowledge of interactions and relationships" (Radel, 2018, p.129). Thus, they are immersed in the matter in subjective forms and are willing to go with the flow of research (MacLaren, Georgiadou, Bradford, & Taylor, 2017).

Putting qualitative features into my research context looks as follows. Qualitative research has become the most common methodology in social sciences because most researchers rely on interviews (Alvesson, 2012), which suits my semi-structured interview research method. Also, it is argued that a qualitative approach is appropriate when the research question is exploratory and a profound description and explanation of a multifaceted phenomenon is required (Than and Kirova (2017), p.33), which suits my exploratory research. And lastly, when reporting their findings, qualitative researchers tend to give a considerable amount of descriptive detail (Bryman, 2016). Which fits my descriptive findings, as you will read later.

Additionally to the latter, and specifically to my research context, I will also attempt to address the gap regarding the most common methods used in the food tourism literature. These can be found, for example, in Okumus, Koseoglu, and Ma (2018's) bibliometric analysis on the evolution of food research in hospitality and tourism between 1976 and 2016. The authors found that of those 462 publications analyzed in the study, 64.7% used a quantitative methods approach, and 25.1% used qualitative methods (p.69). Moreover, it is also mentioned that questionnaires were the preferred data collection method with a 61% rate, followed by secondary data sources with 14.1%, and interviews with 8.4%.

Another example is Lee and Scott (2015) literature review of food marketing to tourists, where from 48 articles examined, 24 articles used quantitative methods, 22 used qualitative methods, and two used a mix of both.

Overall, from what qualitative research entails and considering these last figures, I found a guideline to follow for my research design and the methods I could use. I will continue to describe the sampling strategy, followed by the data collection methods and its posterior analysis techniques.

3.5 Research sampling strategy

The sampling strategy refers to what data and whom you will collect it from. The most commonly used in qualitative research is purposive sampling, which means the selection of units from which you will get the data, such as people, places, or things; therefore, it is a non-probability or random sample. Moreover, these units are linked to the research question since this will indicate which units to look for and use (Bryman, 2016).

In this research thesis, in order to explore the relationship between food producers and restaurateurs, the data I will need to gather is the information about their companies and how they feel and interact with one another; this may include but is not limited to, their perspectives, thoughts, ideas, desires, mission, and vision for themselves, their companies and towards the tourism industry in Tromsø.

From here, the participants in this research will be selected from the availability of local food producers and the managers or chefs working in restaurants in Tromsø, Norway. Hence, since the sample will be selected, the sampling is purposive.

The way participants were selected was, on the one hand, through Trip Advisor's rankings for the best restaurants in Tromsø, how reachable they were, and their willingness to participate. As for the local producers' selection, besides the two latter characteristics, using key informants from the local food industry has been the way to reach out to them. By selecting these participants, I ensured they belonged to our geographical population case and that the person was closest to giving the most relevant insights in my research context.

It is important to note that the participants will remain all anonymous. To keep all participants anonymous, guidelines from The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) were followed. These required to display participants in a way they cannot be tracked down and for all information gathered to be deleted after the research has concluded. Therefore, names and companies won't be displayed at all. They will be enlisted and shown in this thesis as Producer 1, Producer 2, Producer 3; and Restaurant 1, Restaurant 2, Restaurant 3, and Restaurant 4. This was decided in virtue of protecting their free speech and answers, and to not create any animosity or disharmony among them. Next, I will detail the methods I will employ to collect the data from these participants.

3.6 Research data collection methods

Multiple methods are commonly used in social science (Bryman, 2016, p.378). Thus, I have chosen ethnography and semi/structured interviews as the most suitable methods to gather the information and data needed for my research.

3.6.1 Ethnography

Ethnography has its origins in anthropology. Since the early 20th century, ethnography has involved living for long periods with the communities they studied, participating in daily activities, interviewing them, collecting genealogies, etc. Nowadays, ethnographers focus on a particular work location when it is in operation, studying only parts of people's lives and for shorter periods. Therefore, it cannot be generalized or concluded that what the researcher experienced while there, is what perpetually or repeatedly happens (Hammersley, 2006).

In this research study, I have used my experience in supply chain positions in Mexico such as inventory control specialist, buyer and demand planner, as well as my experience as an employee in diverse restaurants, hotels, and organizations in Norway. This experience is not directly used as such in the findings or results but was used more as a way to inspire me in designing this research methodology. For instance, assisted me in designing the questionnaire, and helped me navigate the interviews and the subsequent analysis so I could assess the results in a more sophisticated way.

A little about my work experience in tourism specifically, is that, in the last 5 years I have had the opportunity to work as a tour guide, as a waiter, and as a bartender in different tourist places in Northern Norway, precisely in the areas of Alta, Lyngen, and Tromsø. In those jobs, I became

involved in endless talks with not only the customers and tourists but also with the chefs and managers of the place, allowing me to immerse in the tourism experiences and to get first-hand insight into how the kitchen and the restaurant work, alongside the role that food plays in the tourism experience in Northern Norway. Moreover, I also worked on a local food project involving local food producers and restaurants in the whole district of Troms and Finnmark. In this project, I was able to see and understand on a deeper level the local food producers and the networks around producers, restaurants, and other tourism businesses. In fact, due to this job experience, my interest in the role of local food and local food producers in tourism increased, and made me take such a turn in my research, that in large part, is the reason *why* behind this research study.

3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews

The other data collection method I will employ is the interview. Because interviews capture perspectives and give participants a voice, the interview has always gone hand in hand with the ethnographic principles (Hammersley, 2006). Since my research type is qualitative, my interview type falls in the same category.

Following this line, according to Alvesson (2012, p.2), the qualitative interview has four categories that will guide the position in the interview: the structure, the size, the communication style and the category. I will now describe these four in relation to my research.

The *structure* refers to how the interview will be planned and followed. For my interviews, I will conduct semi-structured interviews, in which some questions are prepared and asked, but the interviewer can be free and flexible. I will be recording the interviews so it will be easier to make a transcript and analysis of them. I will also be taking notes while I interview them. These recordings and notes will be deleted after the thesis has been graded. This is due to following SIKT guidelines for the anonymity of the participants.

The *size* refers to the number of people to be interviewed. In my case, some interviews were conducted between one single interviewee and me, and others were between two persons representing the food place and me; in some cases, these two persons were the two owners or a combination of the manager and the chef. A total of 7 companies participated in this study. Three were local food or beverage producers and four were restaurants. Of those 7 companies -which I will call the participants- a total of 9 persons were present in the interviews since in two of the interviews there were two people.

Communication refers to the way the meeting for the interview will be. Some of my interviews were conducted face-to-face, and others were conducted online on Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The online meetings were conducted this way due to the Covid-19 restrictions at the moment.

The *category* field refers to the group of people to be interviewed. In my case, it is the restaurants and food producers.

Furthermore, prior to the interview, the participants were sent a questionnaire to assist them in knowing what was going to be discussed. Two questionnaires were made, one for the producers and one for the restaurants. I will now display these below. However, it is relevant to remember that a qualitative interview is open to the interviewees' feelings and what they think is suitable or not to talk about, therefore, there might be different responses (Alvesson, 2012).

Questions guiding the interview for food producers will be such as:

- Describe the role that your company plays in the tourism industry.
- Are you currently selling to hotels or restaurants in Tromsø? Of these two, who do you sell the most?
- How does your work chain develop from the moment you get a purchasing order?
 - What are the challenges and what works smoothly?
- How is the communication between suppliers and buyers?
- What are the main values encountered in your relationship with your clients?
- What are the main challenges or obstacles in the relationship with your clients?
- Are you currently being part of a network that improves communication or sales between producers and hotels/restaurants?
- Are you interested in growing within the tourism industry?
- What is Norwegian or local food to you?
- Are you currently offering or interested in offering Norwegian or local food products?
- Are you using any traditional or local practices to harvest or produce your products?
- Which ones are your top-selling products?
- How are you advertising Norwegian or local food to your customers?
- What kind of food products or dishes do you think tourists are looking for?
- Do you know if tourists would like to find more traditional Norwegian food in the restaurants?

Questions guiding the interview for restaurant managers and chefs will be such as:

- Can you describe your restaurant's role in the tourism industry in Tromsø?
- How does your work chain develop from the moment you order from suppliers?
- How is communication between you and your suppliers?
- What are the main values encountered in your relationship with your suppliers?
- What are the main challenges or benefits in the relationship with your suppliers?
- Are you currently part of a network that improves communication or sales between producers and restaurants? Or have you created your own network?
- How is your relationship with suppliers affecting the final dish presented to tourists?
- Are you interested in growing within the tourism industry?
- How many of your employees are foreigners, how many are Norwegians, and in which positions?
- What is Norwegian or local food to you, and what is it for the restaurant?
- Are you currently offering or interested in offering Norwegian or local food?
- Where do you buy or obtain the local food you use in the restaurant?
- Which Norwegian or local ingredients do you use the most?
- How difficult is it to get the ingredients you need to create Norwegian dishes?
- Are you using traditional or local practices to cook/prepare the food?
- Are you innovating Norwegian dishes? If so, in which ways?
- How are Norwegian culture and identity being transmitted through your dishes?
- Are you advertising Norwegian or local food to attract tourists?
- What kind of food do you think tourists are looking for?
- When tourists visit the restaurant, are they asking for Norwegian, traditional or local dishes? What are they ordering the most?
- Do you know who engages more on the restaurant's social media, tourists or locals? For example, Reviews, posts, and tags.
- How are they engaging the most on social media? And how has this benefited the restaurant? For example, better ranking on Trip Advisor, popularity, sales, etc.
- What do tourists perceive most from eating Norwegian/local dishes?

3.7 Research data analysis techniques

Qualitative methods, such as autoethnography and interviews, may produce a lot of unstructured, unorganized data that is hard to analyze because there are no precise or explicit rules for how to do it (Bryman, 2016). So, from the most commonly used analysis techniques, I will employ narrative analysis since my research question is exploratory and I carried out interviews. I will later use coding for thematic analysis since I will try to extract from those interviews the factors and concepts used to describe their relationship and then categorize the themes that are related to my research so I can ultimately assess how these are impacting the food and final dish presented to the tourists in Tromsø.

3.7.1 Narrative and thematic analysis

I decided to employ a narrative analysis alongside the thematic analysis to help me gain deeper insights into the relationship between the producers and the restaurants. Since my research question is exploratory, analyzing their personal experiences and perspectives in the development and day-to-day contact between these two actors, is very valuable to provide deeper context and understanding of the situation.

Narrative analysis focuses on the stories people tell about their own experiences or a phenomena, whether they are oral, in text, or images. These stories are viewed as personal constructs that reflect collective ways of viewing and experiencing the world. Hence, by examining people's narratives the researcher can get a view of the social phenomena studied at a macro level (Mura & Sharif, 2017). The narrative analysis brings awareness that the stories not only represent a social phenomenon but also construct “realities” (p.195). Therefore, narratives become powerful in understanding social and personal phenomena. Narrative analysis also emphasizes the researcher’s reflexivity role.

3.7.2 Coding for thematic analysis.

Even though there is no specific procedure to analyze qualitative data, I decided to follow Bryman (2016) guideline based on a grounded theory approach which has coding and thematic analysis in its core. I followed grounded theory because it is the most common framework for analyzing qualitative data; second, my research sampling is purposive and more effective at generating categories than theories (Bryman, 2016).

Coding is key and the starting point for most qualitative data analysis, and it entails fragmenting the information collected into labels or categories and then discerning them into codes (Bryman,

2016, p.581-583). For my research purposes, I will be coding the data based on the existing concepts around the marketing relationship literature used to describe or measure the state and success of B2B and inter-organizational relationships in the tourism literature. Such as commitment, trust, cooperation, competition, satisfaction, relationship quality, and a long-term orientation, as I have already started to describe in the Literature Review chapter.

However, the coding process can also produce new concepts (Bryman, 2016), and since I am conducting semi-structured interviews, where the interviewee will be free to speak, this may as well throw new concepts.

The thematic analysis comes hand in hand with coding. For some researchers, a code and a theme mean the same; for others, a theme is backed or compounded by groups of codes (Bryman, 2016). There is no specification on what a theme is constituted of, but Bryman (2016, p.584) describes some of its features as being a category identified through data related to the research focus or question, built up on codes, that provide a basis for a theoretical understanding of the data.

In this nature, the way I proceeded with the interview recordings, was that while listening to them, I labelled words and concepts as codes that would later form a theme. This way, I categorized three big themes: one was the role of the participants in the tourism industry, the second was the local food and local food networks, and the third one was the variables encountered in the relationship between them. This thematization was therefore a result of the findings combined with the subsequent analysis and consideration of being the most suitable themes to assist me in achieving the three research objectives and consequently the research question of this study. This will be further explained in the Findings and Results chapters.

3.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a recent social science concept arising from the issues of representation and subjectivity in qualitative research (Feighery, 2006). It refers to the notion that the researcher's background, context, and values will impact the research process, findings, interpretation, and knowledge generation and how these affect the participants or communities studied (Bryman, 2016). Hence, it becomes an essential element as an analytical tool of the data collection process and its interpretation (Radel, 2018).

It is pointed out by Feighery (2006, p.270) that tourism studies embrace the whole human experience; and that if we want to help the understanding of the universal phenomenon of tourism, we should ask where and how we are situating ourselves as researchers in our texts.

In the wake of reflexivity in tourism research, I have taken a reflexive approach throughout my research process by constantly reflecting on the factors inside and out affecting it. For example, I would ask myself how I am feeling personally before, during, and after conducting the interview. Is there something that I may have taken differently because of that? Is the environment of the interview affecting me or the interviewee? Is my previous work experience impacting my understanding of the information I receive? I am collecting the information neutrally while on shift work? Have I affected the interviewee while conducting the interview or the workflow of the restaurant or workplace? Am I representing the interviewees' voices and perspectives academically? Am I constructive knowledge ethically and equitably? Will I create an impact or value for the community studied or the participants?

I have found it vital to understand how my history, values, knowledge and understanding of the world would affect and impact my research process for the sake of the knowledge it will generate.

3.9 Practicalities

A difficulty encountered was having access to the people I wanted to interview. Some would only have time while working, which leads to many interruptions and distractions. Some of them would decline the invitation to the interview, arguing to not have time due to their busy schedules. And many others did not even reply to the emails requesting the interviews. As Bryman (2016) points out, gaining access to a social setting, in this case, people, is critical for the research but also one of its most difficult steps.

The access issue was augmented with what happened to be the biggest obstacle in this research thesis, the outbreak of the global pandemic of Covid-19 in March 2020. Due to this, Norway and several other countries worldwide closed their borders to international tourism, not allowing any foreigners to come for touristic purposes. Consequently, international tourism was stopped in Norway, having to change the dynamic and outcomes for hotels, restaurants, and tourism organizations. Since the Covid pandemic started in 2020 until I finished writing this thesis in May 2024, many things changed. During this time, the restrictions went down in

Norway and many other countries. And even though many things came back to normal, the pandemic changed in many ways how things were done before. For example, cease using paper menus and instead, read a Quick-Response code (QR code) with your phone. Or ordering in a restaurant through your phone instead of a waiter. Therefore, throughout these years, my original research aim had to be changed and adjusted to the current situation making it more feasible to accomplish in time and with the resources and sources within reach.

3.10 Conclusion

All in all, in this thesis research exploring the relationship between the local food producers and the restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, I have followed a qualitative social research methodology. With a constructivist and interpretive philosophy approach by virtue of seeking to understand the world we are constructing, following here what the famous constructivist Alexander Wendt (1992) said "the world is what we make of it" (as cited in Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.198).

The qualitative methodology guided me through which qualitative research methods were available and which were the best fit to follow in my research. First, given my research aim and objectives having a specific location and actors, the research sampling is purposive, meaning I selected the participants for the interviews. Second, it led me to conduct semi-structured interviews to acquire in-depth information about the topic researched. Moreover, my job experience, based on an ethnographic research method, allowed me to get immersed in what was happening inside the restaurants, talking with customers, including tourists, as well as the chefs and managers. And third, all the information and data gathered were analyzed through narrative and thematic analysis taking theoretical concepts and themes already existing in the marketing and tourism literature while being flexible and open to generating new ones if needed.

Worth noting is that the literature review accompanied the analysis techniques mentioned above. This helped me to early understand how the relationships among actors in the tourism industry have been looked at and evaluated. Later on assisted me to know what to look for in the interviews, whether these may be common concepts or not; and lastly, to subtract them and place them in a theoretical understanding. Likewise, I keep the reflexivity approach through the

research process; understanding and reminding myself where I stand and end, and where my participants and the other begin.

Lastly, I would like to allude to Rorty's (1979, p.377, as cited in Moses & Knutsen, 2019, p.199) that "the point for many constructivists is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth". Which also goes along with my research analysis techniques based on grounded theory, where the final aim is not to generate the theory itself. Instead, and in fact, my research aim is exploratory and attempts to analyze, identify, and assess the factors involved in the relationship between the producers and restaurants. Aiming to identify the variables encountered in the interactions among these two actors and assess if and how these variables are impacting the final food and dish offered to tourists in Tromsø.

The next chapter presents the findings of this research study, followed by a subsequent chapter where the results are discussed, concluding with the variables impacting the final dish that arrives at the tourist's restaurant table.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This research study aims to explore the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, and how this impacts the final food offering arriving at the tourists' tables. The interactions between these two groups of actors have been based on the previously explained theoretical framework that encompasses a supply chain practices background context, the relationship marketing theory to base and frame the interactions between them, and the commitment and trust theory with other of its elements involved, as the variables shaping those interactions between them. All through the lens of tourism.

This chapter will present the findings of the interviews. A subsequent chapter with the results and the discussion will come afterwards. This is the way I found it most fitting to present the answers of this research study due to the open, exploratory, and assessable research question. Moreover, due to the extensive, open, and semi-structured interviews, much miscellaneous information was provided. Because of this, I found it better to first segment the findings and analysis into two clusters, one for the local food and beverage producers and the other for the restaurants. Buhagiar (2021, p.210) explains that clusters are at the micro level of the tourism ecosystem and refer to a group of companies typically formed by geographical closeness and deeply connected to a tourism product. This level of segmentation becomes most suitable to apply to my study for understanding learning between two organizations in tourism.

Subsequently, through the codification and thematic analysis, I categorized the data into themes. These are: 1) Their role in the tourism industry which will refer to their awareness, interest, and impact in the tourism industry. This will set the context of where the producers stand in relation to tourism. 2) Local food, which sheds light on what the producers consider as local food, their interest in offering it, and its possible influence on it. And 3) The variables encountered in the relationship between the two cluster groups, such as common values, communication, trust and commitment, cooperation and competition, or any other variable that could arise.

Building upon this trajectory, the first two themes are relatively shorter but vital to set the background and context that leads to the main analysis which is the third theme. Hence, the first two themes, their role in tourism and local food, assisted me in accomplishing my research objective number one which is analyzing the perspectives, thoughts, ideas, and desires of local

food producers and restaurants about themselves, each other, and regarding the tourism industry. Furthermore, the third theme, the variables encountered in the relationship, assisted me in achieving my other two research objectives. Research objective number two seeks to identify the variables, factors, and elements in the relationship between the producers and the restaurants; and research objective three is the final assessment of how these factors could affect the food offered to tourists. All will lead to answering the research question of how the relationship between local food producers and restaurants impacts the food offered to tourists.

This thematization allowed me to gain a more comprehensive understanding and a wider picture of the state of the relationship between the local food producers and the restaurants in Tromsø. Additionally, it helped me to dig deeper into the producers' and restaurants' perspectives and situations so I can provide a more detailed answer to my research question and try to find the potential influence or impact on the final food offering. To finalize this chapter, I will provide a conclusion with the results of these findings and discussions alongside the key ideas that have been addressed. With that being stated, let us get into it next, but not before taking a look at the table I have made below to assist in visualizing this segmentation and thematization.

Cluster 1	Cluster 2
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Local Food and Beverage Producers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Role in the Tourism Industry • Theme 2: Local Food and Food Networks • Theme 3: Variables and Elements encountered in the relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common values • Communication • Commitment and Trust • Other variables (Ex.Cooperation/Competition/WoM) 	<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Restaurants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme 1: Role in the Tourism Industry • Theme 2: Local Food and Food Networks • Theme 3: Variables and Elements encountered in the relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common values • Communication • Commitment and Trust • Other variables (Ex.Cooperation/Competition/WoM)

4.2 Cluster 1: The local food and beverage producers

The local food and beverage producers interviewed will be displayed as **Producer 1**, **Producer 2**, and **Producer 3**, and will be shown in bold letters just to visually make it easier for the reader to follow up. There is no particular reason for assigning a number to the producer. It was randomly the way I started the transcriptions, therefore, the way I identified them easier myself. I will now present each producer's replies, opinions, expressions, and thoughts in order of theme and later in order of Producer's number.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Role in the Tourism Industry

This theme seeks to find if the producers are aware of their role in the tourism industry and if they are interested in growing their bonds with it and their business through it. As well as if they know their impact or influence on the industry or specifically what arrives at the tourists' paladar. I will now follow presenting what they had to say on this subject.

For instance, **Producer 1** is aware of its company's role in the tourism industry in town but stated that it varies a lot depending on the restaurant's head chef at that given moment because some of the chefs might just care about the price instead of wanting to work with local products. And it's usually the head chef who decides what to buy. At the same time, that is also the reason why he highlighted that he likes to "*work very close with chefs*". After giving this context, he specifically stated "*So, there are some impacts and I'm aware of it, but I don't have any control of it*". This shows he is aware of the influence of food given by his side but acknowledges he has no full control until the last point where the tourist receives their dish because other actors are involved.

For **Producer 2**, tourism has brought more business. He expresses how the cruise ships, restaurants, and even the Northern Lights tours have increased their sales. Moreover, they even have a specific reindeer product that they know tourists love and look for. They also realized how with the Covid pandemic and the closure of tourism that followed, the sales of this product and overall sales dropped considerably. He also perceived and knows that "*reindeer is the most exotic for tourists*". And they have an interest in growing more with the tourist industry because "*it's a new market for us, so it's a chance to have bigger production batches*".

When it comes to **Producer 3**, besides the production company, they have got themselves into the tourism business by providing other tourist services. So they are very well aware of their role in the tourism industry in the area and its shaping influence. Furthermore, they said they have got some tourists from all over the world with the sole purpose of visiting them, so they acknowledge they bring value to both, the tourist experience itself and to other tourist companies in the area. They also stated their interest in growing in the tourism industry even more as they said, "*we would love to, but it's not always easy*".

Overall, the three producers acknowledge very well their role in the tourist industry in town and their interest and influence. Each of them has tried their ways to enter and grow in the

tourism industry while recognizing how tourism impacts their sales and the tourists' interest in local food, which is where I head next.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Local food and food networks

Theme two seeks to find what is local food for the local food producers. What do they mean by local food, and what are their thoughts and perceptions of it? This theme also involves how many local ingredients they use or if they use traditional practices or skills to produce them. Next is how they describe it.

For **Producer 1**, "*Local food to me is, like, made in the north of Norway*". He explained how a lot of food cannot grow in this geographical area because of the weather. Therefore, for some ingredients or sometimes of the year, they must bring them from other parts of Norway. However, as they are processed and prepared here, whether in a specific local way or not, they become local. So then he follows with an example: "*If you get some meat from other parts of Norway and we work it here to be a sausage or something else, that's local to me*". He continued to explain that it is the process that the food goes through here where they get that added value of locality. Then, he proceeded to explain some of the Norwegian and local traditional techniques for food that they use at the company, such as drying and salting, which have prevailed for centuries in this area.

In addition, **Producer 1** acknowledges tourists' interest in local food through what he hears from the restaurants and from what he researches himself, such as their interest in eating reindeer. He also remarks that the interest in preparing and showcasing local food on their menus is higher in the restaurants than (for example) in the hotels. However, this comes up and down depending on the chef's or management's interest in offering local food. Moreover, regarding local food networks, he would like more focus from other stakeholders on this because he only finds events where it seems that they only want to economically benefit temporarily from that event. Nevertheless, he sees the value of meeting with the people in the industry, stakeholders that share the same vision on local food, and how this networking could benefit all.

For **Producer 2**, local food is also food that comes or has been prepared in Northern Norway. When we were discussing local food and how most hotels in Tromsø buy their ingredients through big chains in the south, he got to say "*But they can't call it local food when you buy it from Oslo*" and later, he also stated, "*..for us, it's not the most important where the animal is*

coming from because it is (instead) how we produce it here...how we dry the meat, how we do it actually and manufacture it. So for us, is local food when is produced in this environment, in this climate, in this light and everything that comes into it". He then gave an example with fenalår. A Norwegian local product they particularly make from lamb meat that comes from Iceland. At another time, he also referred to the sheep from Lofoten as local since Lofoten is in the North of Norway. He highlighted the environmental and northern climate factors impacting the food's taste, mentioning how even the fresh air of the north can be impregnated and tasted in the dried meats.

Moreover, **Producer 2** also pointed out local food being "*about expertise and the way to do things here*". This statement invokes the perceptions of knowledge and skills transmitted through food (Boniface, 2003). Lastly, **Producer 2**, also acknowledges the growing interest of tourists in local food and their sharing on social media, creating word of mouth for their products. And regarding local food networks, **Producer 2** only pointed out that NHO - Norway's largest association for companies- is a way to connect restaurants and hotels and that with a membership in it, buyers get discounts.

Producer 3 also mentioned the difficulty of getting 100% of the ingredients from the local area, so they try to harvest and source as many local ingredients as possible. For them, local food "*is all about the ingredients, where they come from and also where it is made*". Moreover, they recognize that tourists are looking for it, and they like it more when local ingredients are used. In addition, they are trying to use social media channels to communicate and "*tell the story of where the ingredients come from*" enriching this way, the locality behind their products. Regarding local food networks, **Producer 3** said they don't belong to any network besides the wholesalers they sell their products through.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Variables and elements encountered in the relationships.

Theme three seeks to find what variables, elements or factors exist in the interactions between the relationship of the local food producers and the restaurants. Due to my previous work experience and what I found in the marketing as well as in the tourism literature, I decided to focus on categorizing the analysis interviews into four main variables that I perceived as the ones impacting the most in the relationship, therefore, the final dish presented to tourist.

Let's start then with the Producers cluster. Generally, the three of them expressed mostly and commonly friendly and good relationships with their buyers and contact persons at the

restaurants. Nevertheless, occasionally or in certain aspects, a pinch of challenges is always on the menu. I will follow in discerning in greater detail.

4.2.3.1 Common values

Producer 1 stated that *"very often I get a really good connection with the chefs because we have the same interests [referring to local food products]"*. He follows by explaining how sometimes they have put much effort into good quality local products, and *"some of the chefs are very, very eager to take these products and tell the tale"*. Another example he gave was that when the head chef became the manager in one of the mentioned restaurants, their relationship, and business grew tighter because, as he said, *"they have the exact same feelings for food that I have"*. So, for **Producer 1**, an element that seemed to be vital for a good relationship was sharing an interest in local food, which would also lead to the production process being seen and told.

One of the advantages and positive things that **Producer 1** mentioned about having a good relationship with them is that *"they don't want to fuck you over"*. This shows his perception of not being taken advantage of. He also mentions the other way around, that *"it's important for both of us to realize that I cannot sell them stuff I should not, because it is bad for their business"*. He actually sees himself *"as a team player in their kitchen"*. These lines speak of the integrity displayed and perceived on both sides of the actors.

From the interview with **Producer 2**, it is perceived that the common value encountered in the relationship was the appreciation for quality products. For instance, they can rely on farmers to do a proper work by putting quality as the main element. In this line, they are glad to bring the chefs to their facilities and teach and share their values and interests regarding how to work with their products.

And for **Producer 3**, sharing the same values and feelings about local products is one of the main values encountered in their relationships. They expressed, *"We try to build relationships with restaurants and bars but it is difficult because there's a lot of players in the industry, a lot of big players with huge, huge budgets, and we can't compete with that. We also can't compete in price. So we really need to find those that are interested in working with local products. That's our way in"*. Later in the interview when discussing commitment, they also imply how sharing values weights positively to their connection, commitment, and loyalty. They said, *"It's a sense of, I think for both parties, valuing local culture, and this because we as well, try to use*

as much local as we can in our production". In addition, they convey "We appreciate all local effort. We appreciate locals, and local businesses that take us in and focus on us...we appreciate people who appreciate us". In the same way, they like that their products can add value to the restaurants' services and products. All this highlights the appreciation for the local business connections and the shared mutual respect and feelings.

4.2.3.2 Communication

There exists now a wide range of ways to communicate, from face-to-face to phone calls, texts, emails, video calls, and beyond. Even though the ways to communicate create different interactions, overall communication's effectiveness and key role in determining B2B relationship outcomes are widely demonstrated because it is one of the greatest connection-building methods that produce positive outcomes (M. Murphy & Sashi, 2018). Let's now see what the Producers have to say about their communication with their buyers, in this research case, the restaurants in Tromsø.

For **producer 1**, despite having a good relationship with the restaurants, he answered that communication is awful, dreadful, and a huge challenge. Sometimes he has to go after them to be able to forecast and prepare himself on time for what they will be buying from him. In his perception, the communication problem arises from the structure of the kitchens and their lack of time to forecast ingredients and communicate that to the producers.

Another challenge **Producer 1** sees is the lack of understanding from the restaurants' side on how logistics and preparations (supply chain) work in the North of Norway, specifically from foreign employees. The challenge of production, the seasonality, the available stock, among other elements. He expresses *"If a chef comes to me and says, I would like to have duck breast on the menu, I say, ok, I can manage. It will be frozen like everything else up here...I have to get it up here. It takes sometimes 14 days for my order to arrive. And that is hard for me to get these guys to understand"*. He describes that he often gets special orders for the next day and sometimes, depending on the product, it is simply impossible. Hence, because communication is not frequent or good, he ends up spending a lot more time on forecasting and logistic work (issues pertaining supply chain) that could be improved if there were better communication. In the best interest of both, **Producer 1** tries to be empathic, flexible, and adjustable to its buyer's needs, making it as easy for them as possible and keeping a good relationship and a good business for both ends. It is because of his personal passion and good work that **Producer 1** claims that even the chefs ask for his recommendations. I have experienced and seen myself in

my previous work experience how communication problems lead to logistics problems and therefore inventory problems. And this is no different from what **Producer 1** was trying to make his point with.

Going next with **Producer 2**, and regarding communication with the restaurants, he claims "*I think it's very good because they know us and they are very loyal. I feel it because a lot of the customers we have, we have had them for many, many years. So it's a good communication because they know us, they know the quality we have*". When asked about its supply chain process with the restaurants, he finds it usually easy and they also try to adapt and be flexible to the customer demands within its possibilities.

However, **Producer 2**, the same way as **Producer 1**, also finds it difficult for its customers to understand the logistics and production challenges from the producer's side. And when discussing these, he said, "*The customers don't understand these kinds of things*". And also the same way, they put in the work to improve communication, specifically again, to try to get a forecast from them so they can get prepared. For this, they try to send a salesperson to the restaurants to discuss the prognosis of ingredients, if there are new menus for how long they will need it and such on.

Passing to **Producer 3**, they responded that there's really no direct communication with a lot of their customers since they sell through wholesalers and distributor companies, and this is also why they cannot know every restaurant that is selling their products. The advantage of this supply chain system is that logistics are fine and easy. But when it comes to the relationships with restaurants in the area that they sell directly to, they try their best to work closely and follow up as they can. Here is where the main challenge arises, as they pointed out "*We don't have the resources to go to all restaurants and bars and continuously work with them and talk to them because, I mean, that's what big companies do*".

4.2.3.3 Trust and commitment

When it comes to Trust and Commitment, **Producer 1** even stated that because of his busyness and passion at work, now he says, "*I get to make new friends who are on the same page as me...so I trust them a lot...I could have them to watch all my children, I think*". However, in spite of having close and good relationships with its buyers/clients, it's also always professional. It can also be perceived from the analysis of **Producer 1**, its commitment to the

relationships and its maintenance given the flexibility, adaptability, problem-solving capabilities and willingness toward its customers.

Producer 2 has the perception that their customers trust them because of how long the company has existed and for how long they have known them, but also because of the expertise they have with them. For example, he responded that the restaurants come to visit them and *"We have chefs here, we have specialists. So we know about new things on the market, new ways to do things...So we take them to the factory and say, we can do this for you. Have you tried this? This is a smooth way to do things. So they get inspired by coming here"*. He also said that they have a person doing weekly visits to the restaurants to keep up and *"keep them warm"*. This represents as well, the efforts of the company to show their commitment toward maintaining good business and good relationships.

Producer's 3 commitment to maintaining good relationships can be seen through their ambassadors' program in which their customers stock up on all their products and in return they get access to special releases. And with this program, they can create a frequent platform of communication. The importance of reciprocity was also highlighted when they expressed being committed to *"the ones who are committed to us"* by for example valuing their products and the local culture, so they *"like to work with partners that do the same"*. And from there a perception of loyalty arises for them.

On the other hand, one of the industries that **Producer 3** sells to (alcoholic beverages) was said particularly hard to trust. They perceive it as a business where *"people's loyalties shift around and people switch places and brands and all these things... It's like, you work really hard, and then that person leaves, and you start at zero again...next week it might be a new one and you work on that person. And then eight weeks later, oh they're actually gone now. So it's a new person"*. Therefore, they said how sometimes is more important the relationship with the particular person running the kitchen or bar, than with the place itself. Despite being a different production industry from **Producers 1 and 2**, this thought actually coincides with the same view that **Producers 1 and 2** had about the chefs and personnel working on the restaurants. In the end, the three producers referred the same way to the personnel working on the restaurant, and how the shift in the personnel creates highs and lows for the business and the way to order.

4.2.3.4 Cooperation/Competition/WoM/Other variables

When it comes to other variables or elements encountered in the relationships that arose in the interviews, it could be for instance, that **Producer 1** mentioned Worth of Mouth (WoM). Here he says "the best advertising is our fellow chef buddies" referring to how the word passes from chef to chef in town about their local products. Moreover, when asked about Cooperation and competition among all actors, he says "*there's always a little bit of both and a mix of everything*".

Producer 2 admitted the competition between producers when we were discussing the price factor and said "*Of course, they try other companies sometimes because we are not the cheapest. We are a little bit more expensive because we buy meat with high-quality*". This reflects how the price point can create competition among the producers (Lee & Lee, 2009).

Regarding cooperation, **Producer 2** gave a full example of a special project that was initiated some years ago and is current today, in which 32 farmers got together to work on a special production program for baby goats. And this is a special and unique program because it "*is a new way to manufacture local food, from local farmers, from animals*". This program exemplifies how when all parties involved are willing to cooperate and are committed, the results are positive. The creation of this program along with the new special product derived from it created a competitive advantage for the company, which is a great way to exemplify how competitive advantage and higher profits are achieved through supply chain collaboration as stated by Simatupang and Sridharan (2005, as cited in Derrouiche, Neubert, Bouras, & Savino, 2010, p. 529).

Another variable that came out in the conversations was Word of Mouth, which referred to how the tourists were sharing is food products on social media and this was creating good advertising for them.

In the interview with **Producer 2**, another variable was exposed, politics and regulations. **Producer 2** encounters many challenges when it comes to managerial politics. For example, the restaurants that are part but not totally part of a hotel. In these cases, even when the restaurant wants to buy local food, the hotel politics won't let them source locally because they have to go through the same suppliers as the hotel. To work this out, new agreements must be worked out and created. **Producer 2** also claimed how politics have complicated things for

farms and sometimes even shut them down. So for their company is important both things, that farmers have good ways to do their farms and, also that they are being supported.

Lastly, Producer 3 only explicitly mentioned Word of Mouth regarding how customers will talk about both their products, local production and tourism services.

Next, the findings for the Restaurant cluster about the same themes will be presented.

4.3 Cluster 2: The restaurants

Cluster 2 of interviewees is composed of the restaurant's chefs and/or managers who have been interviewed for this study. For some interviews, both, the chef and the manager were present, and in others only one of them. To keep their anonymity, the interviewees will be displayed as **Restaurant 1, Restaurant 2, Restaurant 3, and Restaurant 4**. They will also be displayed in bold letters to facilitate the reader's understanding. And I will follow the same thematization as with the producers. It is good to notice that the restaurants will refer to the local food producers also as the suppliers since most of the local food producers supply themselves. However, it is different when it comes to beverages local producers who usually have to distribute their products through other companies such as wholesale distributors, and in those cases, it will be specifically mentioned. Let's now bounce to the other side and dive into the restaurants' perceptions, thoughts, and experiences.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Role in the tourism industry

The restaurants, opposite the producers, have direct contact with the tourists since it is their direct and final customers. It is, therefore, where the interaction between the two final nodes of the entire supply chain from farm to table ends. So let's read how they feel in regard to the tourism industry.

For **Restaurant 1**, their role in tourism comes naturally given its favorable location in the city center to attract tourists while also asserting that Tromsø is a small town, so they are very well known. Additionally, he brought attention to the fact that their offering of local food plays a great role for the tourist's experience in Tromsø because he acknowledges that nowadays "*people are traveling and want to taste local food*". In fact, even though he recognized that their main focus is on local people, his tourist clientele has grown so much in the last few years that has become now a share of 50/50 between locals and tourists.

Coinciding with the latter, **Restaurant 2** also claimed to have their focus on local customers, but they as well have noticed the rapid and huge growth of tourism in the city in the last 10 years and how that has benefited the business. They also expressed their feelings about the subject in this way: *"It has been also quite important that it's not a tourist restaurant...we aim for the locals...we try to please the local market. Because the tourists, they don't want a tourist restaurant. They want to go somewhere to eat where the locals also want to eat...The tourist mentality it's becoming like that. People sit and ask, what is local?"*. They also acknowledge the interest of tourists in trying local food, specifically the reindeer. Henceforward, throughout the interview was clear to me that they know very well their role in tourism, their interactions with the tourists, and how they influenced their food experience in Tromsø.

Once again, coinciding with the previous two restaurants, **Restaurant 3** agrees that its main focus is local customers, nevertheless, they also recognized the increasing amount of tourist interest they have received, specifically because of the high rank they usually have on Tripadvisor. But because they usually are fully booked in advance for even months, it's not easy for any tourist in town to just get a table with them. This also has lead for their tourist clientele to be culinary tourists highly interested, and specifically travelling with the purpose of visiting their restaurant. They specifically responded, *"I think the role of the restaurant is probably that is the only restaurant (in Tromsø) that is well known outside of Norway and I think that attracts a lot of people"*.

Lastly, the role in tourism for **Restaurant 4** comes with high interest. She points out their location and local food offering, together with a menu that fits all cravings, as the advantages for attracting tourists. Specifically, she asserted *"Since we have such a good view, we are one of the go-to places...because you can really have the typical view of Tromsø here. Since you see the cathedral and the bridge, it is like the typical thing you also see in the postcards"*. Their interest in growing in the tourism industry was clear when she also mentioned that they were working together with Visit Tromsø regarding advertisement (the official tourist information office in town). What is more, **Restaurant 4** even created a menu called *"Northern Lights Menu"* specifically intending to target tourists by offering Norwegian and local dishes at a really food affordable price. The menu worked very well and tourists liked it a lot, acknowledging this way, the interest of tourists in local food.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Local food and food networks

Since the beginning, **Restaurant 1** genuinely stated that the restaurant was in fact "*founded on the idea of making Arctic food based on local culture, seafood, and local food*". However, later in the interview, and to my surprise, I sensed that for **Restaurant 1** local food was initially hard to describe when he repeatedly responded that it was "*the same as in the rest of the world*". I thought he might have not understood my question, so I persisted by reformulating it in three different ways.

Eventually, **Restaurant 1** started explaining his perception that for instance, "*50 years back, you didn't find beef steaks in the same amount as you do today... so local food has changed as well as the taste has changed*". So in his perception, nowadays you find kind of the same type of food in almost every country but at the same time, time and globalization have also changed Northern Norwegian patterns of food and eating. Later on, he continued giving specific examples of seafood and how seasonality comes hand-in-hand with the availability of local products. Nevertheless, he also pointed out that "*to present local food is to present the identity of the North of Norway*". This way, he is also noticing the geographical feeling of Northern Norway as local. Moreover, he acknowledges the influence that having foreign chefs have in the preparation of Norwegian dishes, so they try to instruct them in local food. All in all, I would perceive that **Restaurant 1** has a definition of local food based on geography, nature and its seasonality.

On the subject of local food Networks, **Restaurant 1** mentioned NHO as a way to connect producers and restaurants or simply people in the industry. But he also mentioned the Taste of the North network project which sadly didn't succeed. He attributed the failure to mainly the fact that restaurants don't have the time and money to spend on networking and attending meetings.

Passing on to **Restaurant 2** regarding local food, similar to Restaurant 1, they provided a brief historical line of thoughts on how the traditional way of preparing Norwegian or local dishes has changed over time. They expressed it as "*If you do the same thing as you did 30 years ago, in 20 years, that dish is going to disappear. But if you take it and evolve it, or do something else, it's going to stay*". This thought goes in line, and it is impregnated in the concept of the restaurant itself, which involves the use of as many local ingredients as possible, traditional dishes with a twist of modernity, and, to make a fusion of local ingredients with inspiration from other cuisines from around the world. They continued explaining how they see traditional

practices such as drying, salting, or smoking being used on the ingredients and meats they buy, so the traditional practice is there, "*but inside the kitchen, we try to use it differently*". They also claimed to be a restaurant "*quite Norwegian-based in the way they think about it, or the way they think about food*". Overall, the most important thing for them was to get and work with as many local ingredients as possible, and also they would have to be good quality.

On the subject of local food networks, **Restaurant 2** pointed out two different things. One would be the supply chain system when it comes to buying for example beverages, which usually comes through big wholesale companies from the South of Norway and the other thing was an organization called Tromsø Sentrum that helps all small businesses located in the city center to bring for example concerns to the municipality. However, this last one is not a network that would specifically help to connect producers and restaurants.

Passing now to **Restaurant 3** regarding local food, they responded that they like to use as many local ingredients as possible and are proud to say that around 90% of their produce and ingredients are local. Moreover, they work closely with the farms to have as fresh ingredients as possible, even when it is not their season. They continue saying that local food "*has something to say. There is a difference because of the climate, of course. So a carrot from our farmer (the local one they buy from) will taste very different from a carrot from Oslo...because of the sun and the cold climate (here)*". And even when they prepare the food with diverse and new techniques, they express "*the flavors will be local*". **Restaurant 3** additionally said to keep using traditional ways of preparing food by sometimes curing, salting, or smoking the meats themselves. They also acknowledge that tourists are looking for food that is "*hyper-local, as local as possible*".

Regarding local food networks, **Restaurant 3** mentioned Rekoringen -a sales local channel for local food in Norway- as a platform for small local producers in which they have found mutual help and have tried to create win-win situations. However, they also mentioned that there have been other attempts of networks, but they have stopped working at some point. And they said it would be nice to have networks connecting farms and producers with the restaurants as well as to try to bring together the restaurants' needs and orders to buy from and help sustain local farms and producers.

Lastly, concerning local food, **Restaurant 4** did not specifically describe what local food was for her, but she remarked that their menu had local food "*because it has reindeer, it has stockfish*

and it has cloudberry. So it has all three typical Norwegian things". From this response, I can see that the perception of local food would be on the ingredients used, and on national dishes. But later on, when Restaurant 4 gave an example of how a local producer grew so much that had to move out of town, she referred to it as no longer being local anymore. This can be perceived as her vision of local food based on a geographical element specific to Tromsø, and that is differently perceived from the other 3 restaurants that geographically take all of Northern Norway as a geographical area for local food. This does not mean one is right or wrong. It simply shows the reality that is actually discussed in the literature about the complexity and ambiguity of defining local food and how everyone will have a different perception (Boniface, 2003; Stalmirska, 2021). Lastly, regarding local food networks, **Restaurant 4** mentioned none and that there might not be a need for one.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Variables and elements encountered in the relationships.

4.3.3.1 Common values

Generally, **Restaurant 1** didn't express specific common values encountered in his relationship with producers, but he features to have a very long experience in the restaurant business. This makes him very knowledgeable in the know-how of the restaurant industry, therefore, to get along and be known by the people in it. Consequently, this has led to friendly and well-intended relationships.

For **Restaurant 2**, common values in the interactions with their providers were expressed as *"we have mutual respect for each other. They know what quality we want. We know what quality they have. And we are quite loyal to each other. And often it is the suppliers that decide what we have on the menu. Because we call them, okay, what do you have now for a month that you know that you are going to have fresh"*. From this, the elements of respect and loyalty can be denoted. And it also shows the level of reliability that they have in their producers as well as the acknowledgement of the seasonality and way of work from the producers' side. This understanding can help develop a smoother run of the working line and a better company's performance as I will justify in the next discussion chapter.

Now, when **Restaurant 3** was asked about the values encountered in the relationship, they answered *"It's more about the connection between us and the common respect of each other...It is nice to get to know the small producers here, because in a way they live like we do. It is what*

they do, it's what they have dreamt of doing". Later in the interview they exclaimed "*I wish that all the restaurants would use local producers...to support them, to help them*". And at the end of the interview, they even speak out their appreciation feelings by saying "*without the local producers, we couldn't have done what we do...we never be where we are...so we are happy to have them*". This line of thoughts manifests mutual respect, connection and appreciation as well as their willing to support and care about each other business.

Lastly, with **Restaurant 4**, common values in their relationship with local producers were not explicitly mentioned, but from the overall interview, I could recognize that the mutual interest in sustaining both businesses, the good service, and attention was something she could find with the small local producers in common. More examples to justify this finding would come in the next two variables.

4.3.3.2 Communication

Restaurant 1 expressed that communication with suppliers is "*...simple. Is not hard. It's just like we take a phone or we send an email to the suppliers and we communicate with them like they should be guests or companions*". Which denotes a friendly and functional relationship.

Moreover, **Restaurant 1** is highly aware of how things work on the local producer's side as well, thus he tries to avoid availability problems by setting a menu for a long time and communicating this with their suppliers. At the same time, he expressed that the menu depends on what you can get from the local producers. So it sounds like he knows that communication and preparation are crucial for a smooth business running functionalities.

Now, **Restaurant 2** responded to their communication with suppliers as "*you talk to them like you are a friend. You can make jokes and that's kind of the tone we have with them*". Later on they also said "*It's the kind of guys that we can call on a Friday afternoon, say that we ran out of meat and they will drive here and bring us*". These thoughts show again the reliability they have on their suppliers, but also the good response on the producers' side.

For **Restaurant 3**, communication also comes frequent, easy and simple with the closest suppliers but not so much with the others. When it comes to supply chain ordering issues, they said "*Normally the local food producers tell us what they have*" and they work the menu around that the same way as Restaurants 1 and 2. They also said that they are in constant communication with them to help them plan their production, especially if it is a product made only for them.

Lastly, for **Restaurant 4**, she finds communication very easy, good, and attentive with local producers but not that good with the big suppliers. To exemplify this, she explained that with a certain local producer, "it was 100,000 times better service than with another big supplier, but that's also because they (the local one) are very close". She also continued to say how it is easier to get last-minute deliveries with local suppliers, as well as more personalized attention and better organization.

4.3.3.3 Trust and commitment

Regarding **Restaurant 1** commitment and trust variables in their relationship with producers, these were not explicitly mentioned during the interview. But from the analysis of the entire interview, I could denote the commitment towards maintaining a good relationship by the way he simply manages the restaurant connections for the restaurant to function and run smoothly. For example, the setting up of menus, the frequent communication with suppliers and employees as well as the restaurant's mission of providing good local food. Along with this, the trust element can be denoted by the attention he brought to the fact that because of the time the restaurant has been standing, everyone knows them, and they know everyone. So the familiarity and long-time work relationships seems to have created an underlying sense of trust.

Similarly to **Restaurant 1**, **Restaurant 2** did not specifically mention commitment and trust, but this can be seen through the reliability they have in, for instance, the producers helping them doing their menus. This alone shows the level of trust they have in them since it is impacting straight forward to their own restaurant business. Later, they also mentioned how producers try to make it easy for them whether with deliveries or the way they need certain products to be made or handled.

At another point in the interview, **Restaurant 2** also described how they advertise the local food producer on their menus when they use their ingredients, which turns out to be a good word of mouth for the producer. And they not only do it to advertise local products but also in a way to show respect and help the local producer. They claimed, "*We are proud of having meat from that farm (as an example). And it is nice for the guests to know*". And continued saying "*If they (the customers) see that they like what they are eating, and they see it is from here, maybe they think twice when they go to the store and choose the one from here... You have to support. Export the local... If you want people to still be farmers here, then you have to use that*". All of this exposes and embodies the commitment to keep continuously a good and friendly relationship.

Restaurant 3, as with **Restaurants 1** and **2**, didn't specifically cite the words commitment and trust, but this could be clear to me when they expressed their feelings in regard to supporting local farms and food producers. That indicates the commitment they have to support each other and to maintain good relationships. During the interview, they also said their relationship with them is very friendly to the point the local producers deliver personally to them every time and that was perceived from the restaurant as something nice and good. So with this, I can also perceive the commitment on the producers' side to the Restaurant. When it comes to trust specifically, I found it hard to interpret because, from the way they described the relationship with their closest suppliers, it can be discerned that trust exists from both sides due to the same reasons I have been given before of Restaurant 3, but when it comes to their other suppliers, it seems they would not have it that much.

Lastly, when asked about commitment and trust, **Restaurant 4** points out that with local producers *"is a lot more reliable in general"*. Because the local producer companies usually *"have one person you can rely on, and that person sometimes is the owner so it stands with his name"*. She continued with an example: *"If they are sold out of something, he would contact me right away, personally, rather than with a bigger supplier who would probably send an email if we are lucky, but sometimes they don't even do that. They just don't deliver it...so you have to be very careful that they don't put something on the bill that you orders but didn't get...So, yeah it's a little bit trickier with the bigger the company, the better the price, but also the worse the communication"*. She also perceives that the local producers *"really want to take care of the customers they have"*, what makes her trust in them.

4.3.3.4 Cooperation/competition/WoM/other variables

During the interview, **Restaurant 1** claimed *"There is no competition between us and the suppliers...it is a good cooperation, a friendly cooperation. So whether it comes to prices or values and whether we are satisfied with what they deliver or not, we just call them and if we are not satisfied, they take it back...so the relation is very good"*. This answered come from an understanding of competition between Restaurant-Supplier, so I didn't get their insight in a matter of Restaurant-Restaurant.

For **Restaurant 2**, the way they described and gave examples of their relationship with the producers, it can be implied that cooperation is a big, good element where there is willingness to help each other out. Additionally, word of mouth has been implied to be an element existing

when they advertise the local food producers on their menus as I mentioned it on the previous section of commitment and trust.

Now, for **Restaurant 3**, They clearly expressed that "*We don't have any competitors in Northern Norway. We have friends that run good restaurants but it's not competitors*". They also expressed their perception that many restaurants in Northern Norway are not caring about quality, they only care about quantity and money, and that would actually be the main problem they see in the north.

Lastly, during the interview with **Restaurant 4**, which was shorter than with the other restaurants, only the variable of cooperation arose when she explained the cooperation regarding advertising with Visit Tromsø.

This findings chapter will now end here so we can pass straight to the results and discussion chapter where I will assess and present the results of these findings and seek to discover what and how is influencing the final dish from the relationship interactions between local food producers and the restaurants in this study. And, later on, to the last chapter of this thesis, the conclusion chapter.

5 Results and Discussion

In this section, I will present the results alongside a discussion of the previously presented findings of this research study. This will be presented by theme following the order as in the findings chapter, but here there is no segmentation of clusters since the objective is to analyze the interactions in the relationship between both clusters and, hence, discover what or how it is impacting the final food offering that arrives at the tourists' tables. Henceforth, the participants will not be displayed in bold letters as before. Ultimately, this chapter will conclude with a summary of these impacts.

5.1 Theme 1: Role in the tourism industry

When it comes to their role in the tourism industry the producers seem to be far from the final customer which is the tourist; however, they are just at the beginning or in the middle of the supply chain that ends with the tourist savouring the dish made with their products at the restaurant's table. Findings showed this closeness by the awareness they showed of it.

The three producers coincide in acknowledging very well their role in the tourist industry in town, and their link to the tourism industry in the Tromsø region. The three also replied positively when asked about their interest in growing business, production, or their brand through tourism. And the three of them know their impact and influence on what lands at the tourist's paladar. Each of them has tried their ways to enter and grow in the tourism industry while recognizing how tourism impacts their sales as well as the tourists' interest in local food.

I was surprised to find that the local producers would be so well aware of their role and influence on the food experience that tourists have in the restaurants since the tourists are not the direct customers of the producers. But from the interview analysis, it can be observed that this acknowledgment is helping them to, for example, forecast better amounts for the tourists' high season, prepare themselves better by knowing what tourists usually look for, and create new products specifically targeting the tourist market. It was clear in the interviews that they are interested in getting to know the final customer that will eat the final dish, which in our case, is the tourist.

On the opposing cluster, it can be perceived that Restaurants' role in the tourism industry comes naturally, whether due to their location, pure necessity to eat, or because the tourist exclusively

pursues to eat local dishes. Thereupon, coming naturally as well, the tourist becomes a direct customer of the restaurant and with this, direct service, contact, knowledge, and value are co-created throughout the whole chain (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, & Gruber, 2011).

Restaurants 1, 2, and 3 strongly said that their main focus and interest is in local people and not tourists, nevertheless, they also recognize how tourism and the high tourism season have grown their sales. Restaurant 4 is noticed as being the most focused on attracting tourists.

The four restaurants interviewed are very much aware of their role in the tourism industry. Specifically, they acknowledge the tourists' desire, active search for local food, and what tourists look for most. The four restaurants acknowledge how tourism has grown in the city and how it has brought them good economic growth as well. Two of the restaurants even described historically how tourism has changed over the last years and the difference they see with it.

The tourists are the customers whom both clusters have in common, seeing it from a marketing channel perspective, and in which the importance of the producer knowing the final customer's demands is crucial in the creation of those products that will meet or exceed those demands (Lee & Lee, 2009).

So it is precisely, through these connections between the actors in the chain, that we can see the knowledge transmission and how crucial it is to create better products, improve service, and enhance satisfaction, leading to mutually successful relationships and business (J. Murphy & Smith, 2009).

Having both clusters acknowledge their role in tourism, and what their mutual end customer looks for, along with having that sharing of feedback and knowledge, creates a smoother way to perform managerial and operational tasks that lead to an easier and smoother way to interact in the relationship as well. This analysis can be sustained under the fundamental idea that awareness of the industry you are in, is crucial for a company's ability to adapt and succeed (Levitt, 1984). Likewise, a market-oriented company has a higher market performance (Narver & Slater, 1990).

5.2 Theme 2: Local food and local food networks

The three producers concur in seeing and defining local food from a geographical point of view as local food being from Northern Norway. Whether they have got all ingredients from this geographical region or not, the whole or most of the preparation has taken place in their facilities located in this area, or/and ingredients have passed through traditional or local ways of cooking. Producer 1 and 2 also highlighted the process and skills particularly from the north that the food goes through in their facilities. The latter also denotes the cultural element of local food (Boniface, 2003; Stalmirska, 2021).

On the other side, with the restaurant cluster, I found the overall interview and talk constantly shifting focus towards local food, the use of local ingredients, and the perception, satisfaction, and experience of tourists on local or generally Norwegian food. Consequently, the information concerning this theme resulted in a bigger chunk than with the producers.

Restaurant 1, 2 and 3 has a definition of local food based on Northern Norway's geography, its nature and its seasonality; as well as the awareness of traditional practices done in their ingredients from the producers' side or done by themselves in the kitchen. Restaurant 4 senses local food as both, ingredients produced in Tromsø, or as Norwegian dishes. Overall, all four restaurants define local food by a geographical element which would be weather Northern Norway, Tromsø or Norway. Additionally, three of them also defined it by a cultural element which is evidenced by the traditional practices, skills and knowledge that food goes through.

By the overall perceptions of local food in the interview analysis, it can be implied that what genuinely unites local food producers not only among them but also with the restaurants, are in fact the mutual feelings, vision, and connection to local food. This was also evidenced by the comparison that some of the producers made regarding the sourcing and appreciation of local food from the restaurants compared to the hotels. This, at the same time, gives a deeper understanding and a wider picture of their feelings when it comes to the relationships in the whole culinary system within the food tourism industry in the city.

Because of the environment and weather conditions so unique to this part of the planet so high up north, all producers acknowledge the hardships and challenges that this creates for growing or getting all raw materials and ingredients from here. And this must be the main reason why the perception of what is local food coincides so strongly.

Further, the dimensions of geography and culture in the perception of local food coincide with that of the food tourism literature explained by Stalmirska (2021) where the geographic dimension refers to distance and proximity, and the cultural dimension refers to the location's climate, and soil or is embedded in skills and knowledge. Moreover, these characteristics add value to the local food and dish (C Michael Hall & Mitchell, 2000; Lucy M Long, 2004). And value is a powerful driver of a client's intention to return to a restaurant (Oh, 2000 as cited in (Young, Clark, & McIntyre, 2007).

Another point to discuss here is the changes that Restaurants 1 and 2 described that food and the way of eating in the north have changed over time. This actually can be justified by the globalization effects on food discussed in the food tourism literature. For instance, C Michael Hall and Mitchell (2000p. 31), talk about how food is now "characterized by a wild dialectic of globalism within the local and localism within the global" as can be exemplify with multicultural cuisine. Yet, since eating food takes place in a specific location, localism is an inevitable present element (C Michael Hall & Mitchell, 2000).

I found it important to gain insights from both clusters regarding local food because of its relevance to understanding what food entails to tourists in this new experience economy era where customers seek to experience beyond just the products and instead seek to engage in memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Food in tourism has become highly experiential (Mitchell & Hall, 2004), and a multidimensional cultural artefact that serves as a vehicle to connect the tourist to the place, its traditions, stories and symbols (Ellis et al., 2018; Everett, 2008). For Ellis et al. (2018, p.253) "food tourism lies in the physical embodied and sensual experience itself", and that is how is grounded on the experience economy and value co-creation (Ellis et al., 2018).

Finally, on the subject of local food networks, I originally decided to ask about it because of my engagement at that moment with a local food project I was working in with Innovation Norway, and I also thought it would give me answers and a lot more in-depth knowledge of the relationship interactions and networks. But the findings did not show these, most of the results turn into just mentioning networks that are not totally food related and with some examples of networks that have failed overtime. Next are briefly those results.

On the Producers cluster, Producer 1 did not mention a specific network but he would like to see more of it. Producer 2 mentioned NHO as a way to connect restaurants and hotels. And Producer 3 said they don't belong to any network.

And on the Restaurants clusters, Restaurant 1 mentioned NHO as connecting people in the industry, and the Taste of the North which didn't succeed. Restaurant 2 mentioned the wholesalers of beverages and Tromsø Sentrum. Restaurant 3 mentioned Rekorningen as a platform for small local producers. Restaurant 4 expressed that there is no need for it.

Overall from the interviews, it could be perceived that beyond NHO or Rekorningen, there are no local food networks existing today that can help bring together the local producers and buyers, whether they are restaurants, hotels or tour operators. Moreover, even though some of the interviewees stated that they don't have the time or resources to attend meetings or such, at the same time and precisely due to it, they would like to see and get more help on networking and growing their business. This is a subject and request that I actually hear a lot during my work with the local food project in Northern Norway.

All in all, I considered it vital for achieving my research objectives and answering my research question, to first gain knowledge, the views and perceptions of both clusters concerning tourism. Because the way they see, feel and stand in relation to the tourism industry, would help me understand the way they act in it and consequently if this is influencing the final dish consumed by tourists and in which ways. This way, theme 1 and 2, assisted me to achieve research objective 1 and 2, that would eventually lead me to also achieve objective 3 and answer the research question.

5.3 Theme 3: Variables and elements encountered in the relationships.

In general, the three producers and the four restaurants expressed mostly and commonly friendly and good relationships with their buyers and suppliers respectively. Nevertheless, some challenges were expected to be found since dealing with the intricate and ever-changing interconnections between different functions in a B2B relationship can be demanding (Henneberg et al., 2009 as cited in Lambert & Enz, 2012).

5.3.1 Common values

To begin this section on common and shared values, I would like to start by citing Powell and Swart (2010, p.437) when, in their study to map the values in B2B relationships, they said, "the management of an enduring relationship between provider and supplier has at its heart an implicit interaction between the valuation systems of the counterparts". By values, they mean the set of attributes emerging from their interactions and each company may value different attributes. This way, for instance, one company can value the sharing of knowledge while the other company values prompt payment.

I found it interesting that for the interviewees, the question about the values encountered in their relationship with the others seemed hard to understand. And so I tried to give examples of elements of it. Yet, they would just weather simply agree with a yes or they would even elaborate with examples. Usually from this question, the conversation would follow to communication and trust or other elements they thought important to bring up as common values. So I think the first question regarding values, set the pavement for the following ones and this allowed me to extract more information and dig deeper into the answers. Besides this, I also found myself finding most of the things related to common values in other parts of the conversations. With this in mind, I will unfold the results for this common values section.

On the Producers cluster, Producer 1 based the good connection with chefs on sharing the same interests in valuing local food, to be valued by the hard work they put into making them, and the reliability of goodwill and integrity showcased from both sides. Producer 2 perceived them as the common appreciation for quality products and quality production work. Producer 3 also expressed common values as the mutual feeling and respect for local products and local culture.

On the Restaurants cluster, Restaurant 1 only pointed at relationships being friendly and well-intended. Restaurant 2 appreciated the mutual quality value, loyalty, and respect. Restaurant 3 also remarked on the mutual respect, the willingness to support, and the mutual connection and appreciation. Lastly, Restaurant 4 perceived common values with the local producers on the mutual good service, attention and business practice.

Considering both clusters' perspectives, mutual respect and shared interest in local food came as the strongest common values, followed by integrity, reliability, appreciation, loyalty, quality products and attentive service.

Here I want to bring up to the discussion the managerial implications raised by Powell and Swart (2010) who say that it is demanding and challenging for managers to understand and empathize with the value systems of others. And this can be perceived from for example Producer 3 when they remark that as a small business, they don't have the time and resources to go visit the restaurants or have a closer relationship. Which this lack of time and resources are also justified in studies such as the one of J. Murphy and Smith (2009).

Nonetheless, getting to know what the other value is gaining knowledge and in the interactions inside the relationship, there is knowledge exchange, thus co-creation of knowledge, which becomes critical to succeed (Powell & Swart, 2010). Similarly, Lambert and Enz (2012) callout that interactions between managers are necessary for generating value co-creation since those interactions provide the knowledge to collaboratively develop mutually beneficial value propositions.

Moreover, it has been proved that by sharing values and objectives among the actors in tourism business relationships proactiveness can be developed (Hurtado-Palomino, García-Villaverde, Ruiz-Ortega, & De La Gala-Velásquez, 2022). Likewise, it has also been proven that the higher the perception and the willingness to practice ethical management, the higher the positive effects on a company's trust in doing B2B transactions (Fei, Kwon, & Jin, 2021).

On another note, for the producers and restaurants that have been focusing on quality, we can find in the study comparison of casual dining experiences, that food quality has a bigger impact on satisfaction among customers in chain restaurants but not in independent restaurants, in which the server responsiveness is a higher driver of satisfaction among customers because they expect more individualized attention from servers. However, studies also have shown that food quality is the main reason to select a restaurant (Young et al., 2007).

All things considered, sharing value systems results in positive effects on the relationships, the production line, the delivery, and the work inside the kitchen and consequently, it influences the final dish. For instance, if both companies value local food, there will be a higher willingness to offer it from the producers' side and to buy it from the restaurant's side. Thence, it will result in more local food being used in the kitchen and offered on the menu. Which, therefore, can be perceived as the common value affecting more and directly the final dish.

5.3.2 Communication

Communication is a variable that came naturally into my thoughts when I started to think and design this research study about relationships, due to my previous work experiences in supply chain positions. Additionally, it also became crucial as I was advancing in the literature review and the theory research. Plus, since it also became so highly relevant in the interviews, I recognized its importance and decided to show it as a variable within theme 3.

On the Producers' cluster, Producer 1 found communication awful, dreadful, and a huge challenge, however, gets to be friendly and he tries to adapt to its customer needs. Producer 2 said it was good, usually easy and he tried to adapt as well. Producer 3 said not to have direct communication with most of its customers, but they do try their best with the close local restaurants in the area.

Producers 1 and 2 also pointed out at the lack of understanding from the restaurant's side concerning supply chain issues faced by them. Nevertheless, the adaptability of **Producers 1 and 2** to enhance communication is supported by the suggestion of Vargo and Lusch (2004, as cited in M. Murphy & Sashi, 2018, p. 3) that "individuals in buyer and seller organizations must interact and adapt to each other and co-creation takes place through these interactions".

On the Restaurants' cluster, Restaurant 1 said it is simple. Restaurant 2 said it is good, reliable and friendly. Restaurant 3 said that is frequent, easy and simple with the closest suppliers but not so much with others. Similarly to the latter, Restaurant 4 finds it easy, good and attentive with the local ones.

The section on communication for the restaurants can keep reflecting the importance of personal and close communication in B2B relationships, especially because when the customer is satisfied is willing to keep purchasing from the same firm as pointed out by M. Murphy and Sashi (2018).

Altogether, pertaining to the communication variable, I can discern that is probably the variable impacting the most on the final dish offered on the tourist's menu. With no communication, the production, the stock, all preparations, and work on the supply chain simply don't run smoothly, consequently directly affecting the availability and delivery of ingredients and food. Not having a frequent back and forth on what will be needed, how much, how long, and when, simply jeopardizes both businesses' successful work, and consequently, it affects directly what the restaurants can and cannot get and buy, therefore, what they can and not offer on their menus.

This can be one of the reasons for hearing **Producer 1** resulting in saying "*They are stuck with my season*". The lack of bidirectional communication has been proven to become damaging and unsustainable to the relationship and the business outcomes; and vice versa, a frequency in two-way communication is indicative of mutual understanding, endorsement and shared meaning (M. Murphy & Sashi, 2018, p. 4).

In this communication section, it was also brought back the perception of the lack of time and resources from both clusters which generates problems in the relationship and production. Where again, it is precisely because of the lack of time from chefs and the hectic work environment of the kitchens that Strohbehn and Gregoire (2003, as cited in J. Murphy & Smith, 2009, p. 213) identified that purchasing for the chefs "has to be efficient and effective, and integrated with other responsibilities". However, local producers usually have tight budgets and need to protect themselves. So understanding both parties' needs leads to mutual benefits (J. Murphy & Smith, 2009). As also stated by J. Murphy and Smith (2009), the exchange of both, goods and information, such as availability, when, where, and how are they produced, among the stakeholders is vital for any culinary destination to succeed.

5.3.3 Trust and commitment

On the Producer cluster, Producer 1 showed trust and commitment through its professionalism, friendly relationships, and support and solving skills to its customers. Producer 2 based its mutual trust on the long-time relationships they have had as well due to its expertise. Producer 3 described commitment through its ambassador program and reciprocity feelings, and trust through loyalty and the mutual value of local culture. Nevertheless, the three producers expressed unreliability when it comes to the fluctuation of personnel in the kitchen and bars.

On the Restaurant cluster, Restaurant 1 showed commitment through its management practices sustaining smooth and running relationships, and trust was described by the familiarity and long-time working/customer relationships. Restaurant 2 showed trust through the openness and reliability of letting producers get involved in their menu and the commitment was shown as respect, admiration and advertising of the producers' brands. Restaurant's 3 commitment was shown to support to local farms and trust has been better developed with the closest suppliers due to mutual local food and culture views and feelings. Lastly, Restaurant 4 pointed out the reliability, trust and commitment to local producers' more personal and attentive service.

Overall, the restaurants expressed high levels of trust and reliability with their local food producers, especially compared to the wholesalers. Which is contrary to studies such as that of Dougherty, Brown, and Green (2013) which found 84% of restaurants in their sample had less reliability on local food producers compared to big food service distributors.

All in all, commitment and trust stand out as two vital variables to sustain a good, productive, and friendly relationship between the local food producers and the restaurants. Trust and commitment have been proven to be key drivers to relationship marketing success. In the food tourism context, it has also been proven that trust is developed by the social embeddedness and reciprocity among stakeholders (Roy et al., 2017), therefore the importance of seeing the relationships in the supply chain from a social context as well.

Another good point to stand out in the discussion is that of J. Murphy and Smith (2009, p. 213) study, where they highlight that “Restaurants place particular emphasis on the reliability of supply, consistency, quality, and price – all of which relate to the concept of supply chain management”. Which also justifies and describes how all of these interactions and elements pertain to the supply chain.

5.3.4 Cooperation, competition, or other variables

Finally, for other variables that were weather directly asked, or arose from the interviews, findings threw variables such as cooperation, competition and Word of Mouth (WoM). In this section, I will discuss the results by variable encountered.

The cooperation variable came across several times at different points of the interviews or when asked directly. Even though it was not mentioned directly, it can be perceived in other ways when they described the collaboration and support given. For instance, Producer 2 mentioned the special baby goat project, which I already justified in the findings chapter about how this project shows that collaboration in the supply chain can result in competitive advantages and higher profits, just as this project did. Restaurant 1 stated to have friendly cooperation. Restaurant 2 implied cooperation to be a big element of their relationships. Restaurant 3 implied cooperation by the several examples of mutual support with local producers and farms. Restaurant 4 stated cooperation with the tourism agency of the city.

The competition variable was mentioned by Producer 2. Also, Restaurant 1 said there was no competition between them and suppliers. Restaurant 3 mentioned not having competitors on the same restaurant business.

For WoM, Producer 1, mentioned it as the voice passing from chef to chef or others in town recommending his local products. Producer 2 mentioned WoM as generated from the tourists sharing pictures of their products in social media. And Producer 3 also mentioned as an important element for them to get to know their products. Restaurant 2 also implied WoM as a positive result from advertising the produces name or brand on their menus. Word of Mouth has been proven to be an integral key in linking farmers and restaurants, and in forming and maintaining relationships in food tourism networks (Dougherty & Green, 2011)

A variable that arose that only Producer 2 mentioned was politics and regulations. Even though it was expected for governmental issues to arise in the conversations, only here was mentioned.

All in all, it can be perceived that cooperation is a big element encountered in the relationship, because if well not explicitly mentioned as such in the interviews, it can be implied in numerous times during the interviews and in the many examples that both clusters gave of mutual support and care for each other businesses.

This can be justified by Watkins and Bell (2002) study, which revealed that by working together, sharing information, and engaging in joint activities, cooperation stimulated more business. What is more, Wilke et al. (2019, p.340) found that inter-organizational cooperation in tourism nurtures the companies' internal capabilities to absorb, innovate, and adapt, consequently creating competitive advantage and higher performance. Moreover, is vital to understand that collective efforts are needed to create food experiences (Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen, 2017).

5.4 Conclusion

The findings, results and discussion that this research study threw show that in one way or another, at different degrees, each element encountered in the relationship between local food producers and restaurants impacts or influences the final food offering and/or the final dish arriving at the tourist restaurant's menu and table. I will follow by summarizing these impacts by theme.

First, the awareness of both clusters, the producers and the restaurants in the tourism industry results in them acknowledging the final customer, the tourist. Therefore, they can meet and

even exceed the customer's needs. Being aware of the industry you belong or sell to has been proved by the marketing theories and the discussion stated before.

Secondly, the way they perceive local food impacts directly the food offered that ends in the tourist's paladar. Precisely because of the multiple perceptions and definitions surrounding local food, what the producer, the chef or the manager thinks is local food, it is what will end up being cooked in the kitchen, advertised by the menu and communicated through the waiters.

Moreover, if well I first intended for the first two themes -role in the tourism industry and local food and networks- to set the background for the main analysis, the two themes threw evidence of being elements impacting the final food offered to tourists. Hence, the relevance and justification of having the first two themes in the analysis.

Lastly, with the third theme of the variables assessed, I discerned that communication is the variable impacting the most on the final dish as justified in the discussion. But each of them has a different impact on the final dish.

Regarding the common values, they all enhanced positively the interactions among the actors resulting in better or easier performances, therefore influencing the products and preparation of the dish. Moreover, among the common values expressed, the one found as directly affecting the final dish is the mutual feeling of local food.

Concerning communication, overall is good and friendly communication but it also has its challenges. Communication was found as the variable that impacts the most to the food offered at the restaurant, even going all the way until the dish arrives at the tourist's tables.

Coming next, commitment and trust proved to be drivers to sustain good and long-lasting relationships among the actors. The variables influence the relationship in ways that determine the supplier selection and the continuing purchasing of the producer they trust more or feel mutual commitment. Consequently influences what ends up in the restaurant's menu.

Coming last, regarding other variables, the one perceived as influencing more the final dish, is cooperation. Working together has been proven in this study to be positive in both business performance and results.

Lastly, it should be remarked that managerial implications can follow the gained knowledge and mutual understanding of needs and challenges to improve supply chain practices and the

delivery of the final dish offer. As stated by Mwesiumo and Halpern (2016, p. p. 268) “efficient and effective interfirm coordination is critical for value creation in the tourism industry”.

Following Everett (2019), I will conclude this chapter by emphasizing that food has been used in this research study as a theoretical tool that given its multifaceted characteristics able to define place and identity, helps us illustrate and navigate the complexity and necessary links between production and consumption in food tourism in a globalized world.

6 Conclusion

The relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway from a food tourism perspective is a vital aspect that contributes significantly to the overall tourism experience in the region. Local food plays a crucial role not only in attracting tourists and make memorable experiences but also in enhancing the local economy and its community. Moreover, Northern Norway has been experiencing rapid and substantial tourism growth in the last few years. Therefore, understanding the pivotal role of local producers and restaurants is crucial for contributing to the growth of food tourism in Tromsø.

This master thesis research aimed to explore the relationship between local food producers and restaurants in Tromsø, Norway, and how this might impact the final food or dish offering arriving at the tourist restaurant's table. The research was supported by a supply chain conceptual context presented in the literature review, followed by a theoretical framework that includes relationship marketing theory, and commitment and trust theory as the two major theories, which were described in the theory chapter.

The research methodology of this study followed qualitative research methods in which data collection came from semi-structured interviews and ethnography. By narrative and thematic analysis, three main themes were identified: 1) Role in tourism, 2) Local food and local food networks, and 3) Variables encountered in the relationship. In this last theme, four variables were categorized: common values, communication, commitment and trust, and the last category was a mix of cooperation, competition, word of mouth and others that could have arisen.

This study found that:

1. Awareness of the role that both clusters play in the tourism industry is vital for its performance and success in it; and influences positively the final food and dish offered to tourists.
2. Perceptions of local food have a big impact on the final food and dish arriving at the restaurants' tables. This impact can be positive or negative depending on the views and feelings around it by each of both clusters.
3. Common values enhanced positively the relationship interactions and performances. Mutual respect and appreciation for local food impacts the most the final dish offering. Other values that followed were integrity, reliability, appreciation, loyalty, quality products and attentive service.

4. Communication was found as the variable that impacts the most the final food offering. Because it affects the most the whole supply chain. Its impacts can be positive or negative depending on the optimization or lack of it.
5. Commitment and trust taken as one category of variables, were found to influence the relationship positively or negatively, depending on the perception. Therefore it influences buying intentions or supply stock, impacting the final food offered.
6. Other variables arose during the interviews such as cooperation, competition, word of mouth, and politics. The one impacting positively the most the final food offering was cooperation.

On these grounds, through the interviews and their subsequent narrative and thematic analysis. this study achieved objective number one aiming to examine the perspectives, thoughts, ideas, and desires of local food producers and restaurants about themselves, each other, and the tourism industry.

Research objective number two aiming to identify the variables involved in the relationship between these two actors. was achieved as well by the narrative and thematic analysis that ran the interview findings and results.

Research objective number three aiming to assess how these variables could be influencing or impacting the food offerings presented to tourists, was achieved as a result of the interview's analysis, its respective findings, results and discussion. These impacts are shown in the conclusion section of the Results and Discussion chapter.

This master's thesis research study hopes to contribute to broadening the multidisciplinary approach needed in the food tourism literature to understand the complex and multifaceted dynamics that form the tourism industry. Which is also why this master's thesis research study was based on a constructivist perspective that can be justified by the statement "The only way to understand reality is as a social construction that can be articulated as a result of human sensemaking activities"(Walsham 1993 as cited in Edvardsson et al., 2011, p. 329).

This study also contributes to expanding the research in food tourism made in Northern Norway, specifically in Tromsø, which given the significant rise in tourism growth that the city has experienced in recent times, becomes valuable for the stakeholders in the tourism industry.

Herewith, this study's purpose is to improve the understanding of the communities that were examined and to have a beneficial impact on those areas.

However, despite the contributions of the findings in the research study, limitations were present. It is not possible to generalize the results of this study due to the number of participants which was restricted to those who were contacted and limited by whom decided to participate in the interviews. Moreover, the present study does not take into account all the potential existing variables and factors that could be affecting the relationship between local food producers and restaurants. Additionally, having designed an exploratory research question resulted in a lot of information and several variables were attempted to analyze. Consequently, it is possible that the results may be more meticulous if the question was narrowed down and made more specific. It is precisely with research that can be conducted in the future that I will proceed next.

6.1 Further research

Given the multifaceted and multidimensional features of tourism, and inspired by Everett (2019, p. 9) encouraging scholars to look beyond disciplinary borders and embrace different theoretical and empirical elements so that food tourism can question social relationships and interactions, future research can be proposed in multiple ways.

For instance, to include a major number of participants to improve the representation of the area and deepen the findings. Differently, further research can take only one or two variables that will narrow down the interactions, thus deeper in detail the findings. Alternatively, further and deeper research with some of the other variables revealed by this study can be carried on, such as word of mouth or the governmental and political impacts.

Another point to consider for further research is that this study explored the relationship between the local food and beverage producers with the restaurants, but it did not explore the interactions with the final actor, the tourists. So a study including the three actors would broaden and deepen the culinary supply chain and food tourism literature. Likewise, further research about the type of food tourists in Tromsø, their behavior, desires, perceptions or experiences with local food can be undertaken.

In the same way, research regarding what is influencing tourists' consumption of local food such as that made by Sengel et al. (2015) studying the factors affecting the local food consumption by tourists could be replicated or similarly done in Tromsø to broaden the understanding of factors affecting the final food offered in town and the whole food tourism experience in Tromsø.

Furthermore, conducting future research about branding local food in Tromsø holds great promise considering the economic growth that has been proven to bring in restaurants and local producers (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2005). The pursuit of tourists for exotic and local food in the area, as shown in the results of this study, alongside the unique characteristics of the region, make of Tromsø a promising destination to use local food such as reindeer to give a unique sense of place.

Last but not less important, further research to investigate the environmental impact and sustainability issues concerning local food and tourism, specifically in Tromsø as an Arctic region, would be of high value if carried on.

In this line and to conclude, as stated by C. Michael Hall (2020) the recipe for food tourism needs a new menu, and this includes broadening to a more socially constructed view, as well as looking at the supply chain to understand where the tourist meal is coming from since food tourism contributes to destinations, people and its sustainability. Over and above, food tourism should also “be concerned with getting bread on everyone’s table” (p.287).

6.2 Final thoughts and acknowledgements

From the time I started this master's degree until the day I finished, I have lived through the most challenging situations that consequently affected my capacity to work and the time to deliver this master’s thesis. Little did I know that after 1 year into the master’s program, my life would take a turn to the hardest and yet most magical journey of my life. From my father’s loss, a lonely and far away grieving process, to getting pregnant, becoming a single mom from the start, raising my daughter alone, and creating a home from absolute zero in a foreign country with no family and few people I barely knew. To get broke, to knock on every single door I could to get help, and to continue ahead with my little girl. I can finally say now that I am glad I did not give up my master's thesis.

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