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Promoting local food products in an urban environment: Exploring farm-to-restaurant relations and supportive urban government roles in the city-region of Groningen

Abstract: In a time of rapidly spreading urban food governance, one stakeholder is often overlooked by academics and practitioners: the urban restaurant. This paper aims to explore the type of urban restaurants engaged in local food procurement, the ways they communicate and maintain relations with their customers on the one hand and their local suppliers on the other, the issues urban restaurants and their local suppliers experience, and their views on roles for urban governments in supporting farm-to-restaurant relations. To achieve this, the author has conducted semi-structured interviews with various urban restaurants and local suppliers in the city-region of Groningen (NL), a content analysis of urban restaurant menus, websites and social media pages, and a focus group with municipal officials involved in food policies and programmes in Groningen. Although the participants are generally satisfied about and experience trust and reciprocity in the farm-to-restaurant relations they are involved in, the case-study also demonstrates that restaurants, suppliers and government officials can have very different needs in, conceptions of and motivations for promoting local food products and that a severe gap can be identified between urban restaurants and the urban municipality with regard to communication and awareness of each other's efforts and activities. The insights presented in this paper may help to cultivate understanding amongst the various stakeholders and encourage urban restaurants and urban governments to join forces in promoting local food products in an urban environment.

Keywords: local food systems (LFS); urban food governance; farm-to-restaurant relations; local food hub network; perceived barriers; trust and reciprocity

1. Introduction

Whereas in the past food was generally regarded as a rural, agricultural issue, academics and practitioners are now calling for more comprehensive food policies that promote short food supply chains and urban-rural partnerships and increase awareness about the ways food issues affect the quality of urban life as well (Jarosz, 2008; Jongerden et al., 2014; Olsson et al., 2016; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; Renting & Wiskerke, 2010; Sonnino, 2009; Van der Schans & Klein-Gebbink, 2014). Urban governments are increasingly responding to these calls; they are embracing food systems planning and policies, for example by creating food departments, food policy councils and food strategies, by

providing incentives and disincentives through legislation and regulation and by establishing links and relationships between different stages and actors of the food chain (Campbell, 2004; Day-Farnsworth et al., 2017; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999; 2000; Sonnino, 2009; Van der Schans & Klein-Gebbink, 2014). Consequently, urban municipalities need to collaborate with both urban, peri-urban and rural stakeholders to move local food systems forward (Sonnino, 2009). This paper asserts that urban restaurant chefs and managers would be relevant stakeholders for urban governments to address in this process, for they can have an important role in bridging between urban and rural, act as opinion leaders - as they are literally tastemakers - and introduce and promote regional products and food traditions to their urban clientele (Aaltojärvi, 2017; Brinkley, 2017; Duram & Cawley, 2015; Inwood et al., 2009; Sharma et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2014; Sims, 2010; Starr et al., 2003).

Therefore, this paper aims to explore the motivations, perceptions and experiences of urban governments, urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors in promoting local food products in an urban environment and the ways in which urban governments can support local farm-to-restaurant relations. Five sub-questions are formulated to guide the inquiry:

1. What motivates urban restaurant chefs and managers to use and promote local food products in their restaurants?
2. What frames and marketing techniques do urban restaurants use to promote local food products to their customers?
3. How do urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors experience trust and reciprocity in the farm-to-restaurant relations they are involved in?
4. What barriers do urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors experience in establishing and maintaining farm-to-restaurant relations?
5. How do urban government officials, urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors construct and value the role of urban governments in supporting farm-to-restaurant relations?

The city-region of Groningen, situated in the north of the Netherlands, is employed as a qualitative case-study. The author has conducted semi-structured interviews with restaurant chefs and managers based in the city of Groningen, and with urban and rural farmers, producers and distributors these restaurants regularly source from. Additional data collection methods include a content analysis of restaurant menus, websites and social media pages and a focus group with officials of the Municipality of Groningen involved in food policies and programmes.

The article is structured as follows. In section two, relevant concepts, considerations, and previous studies on local food systems, farm-to-restaurant relations and the role of the urban government are discussed to provide a proper theoretical background to the formulated sub-questions. Subsequently, in the third section, attention is given to the case-study, the city of Groningen and its surrounding rural region, and the methodological design is outlined and justified. The fourth section encompasses an overview of the outcomes of the empirical analysis structured according to the sub-questions. And finally, the conclusion section contains a recapitulation of the main findings, reflective remarks, and suggestions for future research directions.

2. Background

2.1 Local food movements

Literature on local food movements has evolved considerably over the last few decades. In her paper, Sonnino (2013) reflects on the course of this development, identifying three key-stages that have shaped the research agenda on food relocalizations. In the late 1990s and early 2000s there was a strong normative view on local food as being more environmentally-friendly, more socially embedded and more nutritious. This was followed by a period of increased awareness of and critique on the fuzziness surrounding the assumptions, definitions and implications of local food networks, during which the notion of 'the local trap' was coined. The third stage Sonnino (2013) distinguishes, which we are currently right in the middle of, denotes a focus on food governance, the variety of involved stakeholders, and the role of the state in finding comprehensive solutions for the issues put forward in the prior period. All in all, when considering the term local in the context of food, three key-considerations can be formulated based on the literature that has been produced throughout the key-stages described above:

Local is socially constructed. Studies have encountered that local in the context of food is an ambiguous and stretchable concept. The concept seems to resist precise definition. Consequently, it is used differently by different groups of people according to their needs and ideals, for example along the food chain (Sims, 2010), between retailers (Blake et al., 2010) and across localities (McGirr & Batterbury, 2016). Distances (e.g. within an x km range, within municipal/provincial/national borders, etc.), production methods (e.g. organic, free-range, etc.) and values (e.g. transparency, tradition, etc.) people associate with local hence depend on people's backgrounds, interests and social relations (Aaltojärvi, 2017; Renting et al. 2003; Trivette, 2015). Evidently, local primarily relates to geographical proximity and scale and emphasizes food's rootedness in place (Wald & Hill, 2016). Still, also scale and place are socially constructed concepts. Following the argument of Doreen Massey (1994; 1995; 2004), places should not be understood as fixed, isolated or bounded, but rather as dynamic, relational and open. An example of such a relational approach toward local food systems can be found in the article of Jongerden et al. (2014) who have employed Massey's concept of activity space, defined in Massey (1995, p. 54) as: *"the spatial network of links and activities, of spatial connections and of locations, within which a particular agent operates"* Through their analysis the authors demonstrate how space and place are not external to us, but created in our practices.

Local does not always equal desirable. When operationalizing local food, one should be attentive of falling into the local trap (Born & Purcell, 2006). The local trap depicts the assumption that local is inherently good. In their paper, Born and Purcell (2006) refute arguments of local being more ecologically sustainable, socially and economically just or fresh and healthy than food produced through other scalar strategies. They argue that there is nothing inherent about any scale, because scale is socially constructed and represents the agenda of the actors empowered by scalar strategies. When not these agendas but the scalar strategy - i.e. localization itself - becomes the goal, means are becoming confused with ends, and other scalar options that might be more effective in achieving a desired outcome become obscured. Moreover, Winter (2003) and Hinrichs (2003) caution for localization being approached defensively, '*emphasizing the boundaries and distinctions between a culturally and socially homogeneous locality needing protection from non-local "others"'* (Hinrichs, 2003, p. 33) This may result in an elitist and exclusionary local food system, in which concerns for diversity, equity and sustainability are eradicated. The analysis of sub-questions 1 and 2 will reflect on the ambiguity and fallacies present in the case-study of Groningen.

Local builds on social relations and trust. Various authors argue that local food movements stand or fall by the strength of social capital among its actors (e.g. Bauermeister, 2016; Glowacki-Dudka et al., 2012). Putnam (1995, p. 67) defines social capital as referring "*to features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.*" Particularly interesting with regards to short food supply chain relations, are the concepts of trust and reciprocity. Thorsøe and Kjeldsen (2016) note that alternative food networks often involve less formal contractual obligations than conventional food systems and rely more on personal interaction, allowing for the consumer to trace the origin of their produce and for the producer to feel esteemed and valued. Trivette (2017) distinguishes three mechanisms by which trustworthiness develops within local food systems: 1) Reliable, positive relationships through clear communication, transparency and consistency; 2) Demonstrations of good will toward one another through mutual accommodation of each other's needs; 3) Recognition of the importance of what others bring to the relationship based on a shared understanding of the value of locally-oriented food. This distinction will be brought into the analysis of sub-question 3.

2.2 Farm-to-restaurant relations

As coined in the introduction, restaurant chefs and managers have been recognized as potentially important partners in efforts to promote local food systems in a number of papers already (Aaltojärvi, 2017; Brinkley, 2017; Inwood et al., 2009; Duram & Cawley, 2015; Sharma et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2014; Sims, 2010; Starr et al., 2003). Inwood et al. (2009) raise that the role of chefs and restaurants in the local food movement is appreciated but not yet well understood and argue for more studies on the intersection of the local food movement and the culinary community. In this section, findings of previous studies on farm-to-restaurant relations and identified motivations for and obstacles to sourcing locally are discussed.

Of these studies, the papers of Duram and Cawley (2015) and Inwood et al. (2009) have the closest resemblance to the objectives of sub-questions 1, 2 and 4 of the research presented in this article; the authors shed light on how chefs define local food and why they use it, the ways chefs promote local food to their clientele, and the existing barriers and limiting factors. In both studies a large variation was found in the use of intermediaries and distributors, such as local butchers and wholesalers, next to direct sales from farms. For this reason, intermediary parties are included in the operationalisation of the case-study presented in this paper. Furthermore, the two studies (Duram & Cawley, 2015; Inwood et al., 2009) found that quality, production standards, distance travelled, supporting local producers, and personal communication play a role in chefs' motivations to source locally. Marketing methods ranged from communication of waiting staff, word of mouth, and reviews, to more controlled signage, such as membership in local food promotional groups, and statements on their menu, website and social media pages. Obstacles the authors found included the willingness of producers to meet special requirements, inadequate supply, lack of convenience, the prices that consumers are willing to pay and the fact that consumers often hold a "foreign is better" view.

Sharma and Strohbehn (Sharma et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2014) have conducted studies on both sides of the farm-to-restaurant relation. For the first paper (Sharma et al., 2012) they conducted interviews with local food producers. Growers expressed a need for increased communication and interaction with restaurant buyers. Moreover,

they noted that farm-to-restaurant relations offer them opportunities to showcase their products, but also require great time inputs. Still, premiums received by growers for these direct market sales were perceived to offset these costs. In their study focussing on restaurant actors, Sharma et al. (2014) found that order processing time and uniqueness of products are the most significant reasons for restaurant managers to purchase local foods. Their findings also suggest that producers who provide promotional materials and/or develop relationships with restaurant owners and staff are more successful in selling to restaurant markets.

2.3 Urban planning and governance

At the start of the 21st century, Pothukuchi and Kaufmann (1999; 2000) noticed how food systems were largely ignored by both urban planning scholars and agencies. A few years later, Campbell (2004) reaches the same conclusion and tries to inspire planning academics and practitioners to contribute to a common food systems planning discourse and engage and participate in community local food system initiatives. More than a decade later, having entered the third stage of the research agenda on food relocalizations distinguished by Sonnino (2013), denoting a focus on food governance and the role of the state, planners seem to have finally awoken and are increasingly seeking access to the food arena. Horst et al. (2011, p. 223), for example, mention in their article on local food hubs that: *'Planners, who have skills in cross-sector thinking, assessment and analysis, and stakeholder engagement, would be natural members of this kind of coordinating body'*.

Renting and Wiskerke (2010) attempt to conceptually frame these shifting roles of the market, state and civil society and capture the rapidly spreading phenomena of sustainable food procurement and urban food strategies. An example of how these developments play out in planning practice is provided by Crivits et al. (2016), who investigate, through a case study in the city of Ghent, how local governments can become facilitators, mediators and innovators in sustainable development by implementing local food strategies. Similarly, Pothukuchi (2009) reflects on best practices of local food initiatives in the United States which are directed at integrating food issues into regular planning functions, strengthening the local or regional economy, safety and health of a region's residents, ecological sustainability, social equity and justice and/or the revitalization of traditional and ethnic food systems. Other authors offer planning practitioners recommendations. For example, Sonnino (2009) argues that urban food strategies of today need to not only take into account the interests of those who live within the city's administrative boundaries, but also the interests and needs of peri-urban and rural farmers. Moreover, Day-Farnsworth and Krome (2017) describe how local food systems are a multi-level undertaking and state that planners should make the most of their toolbox facilitating change both from the grassroots and the grasstops.

The analysis of sub-question 5 will consider how urban restaurant chefs and managers, local farmers, producers and distributors, and urban government officials construct and value this newly arisen role for urban governments in promoting local food products.

3. Methodology

3.1 Case study

Groningen is a mid-sized city (approximately 200.000 inhabitants) situated in the north of the Netherlands. Because of its positioning in the middle of three predominantly rural provinces - Drenthe, Friesland and Groningen - which comprise a wide variety of soil and landscape types and sustain a range of agricultural activities (Steel, 2010), and its relative proximity to the Wadden Sea area, the city's inhabitants and visitors are able to enjoy a wide variety of local food products. Well-known products and food traditions of Groningen are among others potatoes, mustard, dried sausage and spiced cake.

In 2011, Groningen was proclaimed '*Hoofdstad van de Smaak*' (Capital of Taste). This title gave the city and its region impetus to raise its profile in relation to food (Steel, 2010). After 2011, Groningen initiated a follow-up programme in collaboration with the city of Assen, called '*Regio van de Smaak*' (Region of Taste), accompanied by a marketing campaign with the slogan '*De Oogst van Groningen*' (The Harvest of Groningen). Other activities included the establishment of a monthly local-products-only market, called the '*Ommelander Markt*' (Hinterland Market), the drawing up of a municipal food vision under the name '*Groningen groeit gezond*' (Groningen grows healthy) in 2012, and several projects that were initiated by the Nature and Environment Federations of Groningen and Drenthe and partners, among which alliance '*De Voedselagenda*' (The Food Agenda) and urban gardening project 'Eetbare Stad' (Eatable City). Moreover, several bottom-up initiatives and networks have emerged at the local and regional level, including '*Puur Noord-Nederland*' (Pure Northern-Netherlands), '*Lokaal & Lekker*' (Local & Tasty) and '*De Streekboer*' (The Regional Farmer). Restaurants in the city of Groningen are also increasingly responding to local food trends, but to varying degrees and often not affiliated with the collaboration networks or programmes described here.

The Municipality of Groningen is currently involved in three large programmes with a connection to local food, and hence relevant to mention in this study: 1) City Deal '*Voedsel op de Stedelijke Agenda*' (Food on the Urban Agenda), a knowledge platform on safe, healthy, ecologically sustainable, robust and accessible food systems in and around cities, 2) Green Deal '*Verduurzaming Voedselconsumptie*' (Making Food Consumption More Sustainable) in collaboration with 'Dutch Cuisine', a partnership focused on changing the eating pattern of the Dutch through restaurants[1], retail and education, and 3) 'REFRAME: Towards a regional food frame', an international research project on shortening food supply chains and improving food system employment opportunities.

As part of REFRAME, the Municipality of Groningen is, at the time of writing, exploring possibilities for creating a local food hub network (Buijs & Braaksma, 2017). Local food hubs serve as coordinating intermediaries between regional food actors who join hands for the production, distribution and marketing of local agricultural products (Horst et al., 2011; Kerselaers et al, 2017). Food hubs can have various functions, purposes and organisation structures (for typologies see Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Horst et al., 2011; Kerselaers et al., 2017); generally, they are targeted at lowering entry barriers and improving infrastructure to expand regional food markets by creating joint assembly points. As a food hub network can be seen as strategy for urban governments to support farm-to-restaurant relations (sub-question 5), particular attention was placed on this development during the interviews.

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[1] Restaurants in the city of Groningen not yet approached at the time of the interviews.

The city-region of Groningen hence constitutes a truly pioneering case-study in the field of local food systems and urban food governance and offers plenty of material that can help illustrate theoretical notions and ideas, but also identify bottlenecks and areas for improvement.

3.2 Research design

This study employs a qualitative approach in order to explore the motivations, perceptions and experiences of urban government officials, urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors in promoting local food products in an urban environment and the ways in which urban governments can support local farm-to-restaurant relations. The data-collection consisted of four consecutive stages, each employing different methods to allow for data-triangulation:

Content analysis. First, based on an extensive internet search of independent (i.e. non-chain) restaurants based in the city of Groningen twenty-two restaurants were identified which explicitly promote the use of local food in their kitchens on their websites. A limitation of this method of sampling is that restaurants that do use local products, but do not publicly advertise this or only advertise this offline are not included in the sample. However, as the research specifically focusses on *promoting* local food products, the author decided to stick with the twenty-two restaurants identified online. Subsequently, a content-analysis was performed on the websites, menus (if provided on website) and social media pages (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) of these restaurants. All textual references to local food products and local food suppliers were duplicated into a created document with a marker of the sub-page title under which the reference was found (e.g. 'about us' or 'news'). Particular attention was placed on the phrases and adjectives used to clarify something as local (e.g. 'from Groningen' or 'straight from the farm of …') and the phrases and adjectives that accompanied these claims (e.g. 'sustainable' or 'unique').

Restaurant interviews. Secondly, these twenty-two restaurants were all emailed a request to participate in an interview of approximately 45 minutes addressed to the restaurant owner(s), manager(s) and/or chef(s), i.e. the key decision-makers in sourcing food products. A week later they were sent a reminder email. Due to a lack of responses to the emails, the author decided to visit all restaurants to recruit the restaurant participants in person. Many key decision-makers stated they were too busy. In other cases they were not present at the restaurant and attempts of staff to pass on the request were unsuccessful. In the end, eight restaurants agreed to participate in an interview (see Table 3.1, in the following sections the participants will be referred to as R1, R2, etc). These eight participants were very interested, talkative, and took the time to answer all of my questions. It is possible and important to consider that restaurants that refused to participate in an interview might have given different answers. A pilot interview was conducted with R1 to see if the interview guide was complete and resulted in a smooth conversation. Only minor adaptions were made, so the author decided to include the transcript of the pilot interview in the data analysis. The interview guide focussed on the restaurant profile and largely followed the five sub-questions formulated in the introduction. In the middle of each interview, a list was made together with the participant of the local suppliers the restaurant regularly sourced local food products from and the participant was asked to answer a set of questions about

each relation. Additionally, the findings of the content analysis formed input for the interviews; participants were asked to explain their motivations behind certain word choices and marketing techniques.

Table 3.1: Restaurant interviews

#	Sex	Position	**Restaurant information** (size, type of services, average opening times)
R1	female	all	Small-sized, sit-down and take-away, 12:00-18:00
R2	male	all	Medium-sized, sit-down, delivery and take-away, 13:00-21:00
R3	male	all	Small-sized, sit-down, 18:00-00:00
R4	male	manager	Large-sized, sit-down, 17:30-21:30
R5	male	owner	Large-sized, sit-down, 11:00-23:00
R6	female	all	Medium-sized, sit-down, 10:00-22:00
R7	male	all	Small-sized, sit-down, 17:00-23:00
R8	male	chef	Medium-sized, sit-down, 15:00-23:00

Supplier interviews. Thirdly, to also gain insights into the perspectives of the supply side of the farm-to-restaurant relations, a sample was drawn from the list of suppliers that were mentioned in the restaurant interviews. Ten supplier participants were purposefully selected by the author, so as to gather a diverse sample of suppliers, i.e. selling different types of products (e.g. vegetables, meat, dairy, or a wide range of products) and having different types of roles (e.g. farmer, manufacturer, distributor or multiple roles in one). One supplier declined the request, because of peak season of their produce. Consequently, nine supplier interviews were conducted (see Table 3.2, in the following sections the participants will be referred to as S1, S2, etc). The topics discussed were similar to the interview guide of the restaurant interviews (i.e. based on the sub-questions), but briefer and formulated to fit the perspective of the restaurant supplier. Because the participants owned quite different types of businesses the interviews varied quite a lot in time, tone and setting, but the author considers this enriching and insightful, rather than hindering. The interviews with the local suppliers took approximately 30 minutes.

Table 3.2: Supplier interviews

#	Sex	Role in food supply chain	Type of products
S1	female	farmer and market vendor	vegetables
S2	male	regional independent catering wholesaler	variety of products (mainly local)
S3	female	butcher, market vendor and distributor	meat
S4[3]	male	manufacturer and entrepreneur	coffee

S5[2]	male	distributor	fruit and vegetables
S6	male	butcher and caterer	venison
S7	male	Manufacturer and distributor	fish
S8	male	farmer and market vendor	meat and cheese
S9	male	international chain catering wholesaler	variety of products (small share local)

Municipality focus group. Finally, after all interviews were transcribed and analysed, the data collection was rounded off by conducting a focus group with four municipal officials involved in food policies and programmes (see Table 3.3, in the following sections the participants will be referred to as M1, M2, etc.). This has three objectives: First, to gain insight into the municipality's current and planned activities with regards to promoting local food products. Secondly, to better understand how the municipality views its own role in relation to other stakeholders in the local food system. And thirdly, to provide the municipality with direct input from the urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors and other insights from the conducted study. The focus group interview consisted of questions directed at individual participants, where the other participants had to wait for their turn, as well as questions directed at the group, which allowed for more open interaction. The interview took longer than expected, so unfortunately there was only little time for showing quotes from the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Table 3.3: Municipality group interview

#	Sex	Position
M1	female	Policy officer, involved in Reframe and City Deal
M2	female	Policy officer, involved in Municipal Food Vision, Eatable City, and Fairtrade Municipality
M3	female	Account manager hotels, restaurants and cafes ('*horeca*' in Dutch)
M4	female	Account manager healthy ageing

4. Results

4.1 Perceptions, attitudes and motivations

To give a proper answer to the first sub-question, 'What motivates urban restaurant chefs and managers to use and promote local food products in their restaurants?', it is necessary to start with gaining insight into what the participants perceive as local food products. One of the first questions in all interviews concerned the participant's conception of local, i.e. when the participant considers a food product to be a local food product. This triggered various answers. Most participants - restaurant, supplier, and municipality interviewees - give some sort of geographical demarcation, such as the province of Groningen, the Northern provinces, or a max. km range, ranging from 20 to 80 km. Others

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[2] The interviews of S4 and S5 could not be fully transcribed because of inaudible recordings; notes were taken

feel that local is a stretchable concept, something that should be agreed upon and/or depends on the context or the product. S6, who gets his wild boar from Germany, for example, gives the following explanation of the meaning of local depending on the product:

> S6: *"Wild boar we do not have here of course. So you need to find the best, from as nearby as possible. If you buy a bottle of wine - well Dutch wine is undrinkable of course - so you buy a bottle of wine from France, or Germany, or Austria, or Spain, Italy. That is nearby, relatively nearby for a bottle of wine. But not from Australia or Chili, that is ridiculous, that doesn't make sense at all. Let them drink that themselves."*

A number of participants mention that it is important that the ingredients that are being used for manufactured products should also be locally-sourced, for example the grain for a locally-brewed beer. R5 feels that *"you need to maintain a small circle, so the entire food chain should be local."* Besides geographical demarcations, the two most common associations with local (mentioned by among others S4, S6, S9 R3, R4, and R7) are that the farming or entrepreneurship activities should be small-scale and include some type of artisanal craftmanship. So for these participants products from large food industry factories or fields do not feel local; even if they are produced nearby.

Subsequently, the interview participants were asked why they used or thought it was important to promote local food products. To gain insight into the relations between the various motivations restaurants can have, the restaurant participants were asked to state the importance of the six aspects presented in Box 4.1 - compiled by the author based on recurring themes and expressions in the literature (see section 2.2) - in their motivation to source locally. They were also asked whether they felt there were aspects missing. This led to a couple of additions: Three participants note that food trends and the growing consumer demand for local products also play a role. Furthermore, two participants mention that in some cases products from local suppliers are cheaper than products from wholesalers, so price can also play a role in motivation. And finally, one participant feels the desire to be innovative, unique and to create a certain experience is still missing in the six aspects presented in Box 4.1.

Box 4.1: Six recurring aspects in the literature regarding motivation to source locally.

> 1. Taste and quality
> 2. Production methods and practices
> 3. Food miles and transportation
> 4. Supporting the local economy and local community
> 5. Authenticity and preserving regional food culture and food traditions
> 6. Transparency and short lines of communication

The restaurant participants consider most of the aspects important, although some more than others. Taste and quality constitutes a particular category, because almost all interviewees stress that quality is their number one criterium when sourcing products. However, at the same time some participants also indicate that local products are not necessarily of better quality than products produced elsewhere, e.g. R6: *"It is nice that we get our tomatoes from the province of Friesland, but they are not as tasty as tomatoes from Spain of course."* Instead of with local, participants rather relate taste and quality to the production conditions or methods used (e.g. organic) and the love and

attention devoted to the product. This indicates that the restaurant chefs and managers seem to be, at least to a certain extent, aware of the local trap (Born & Purcell, 2006). This awareness is also illustrated in the following words of R3:

> R3: *"Stating that a piece of meat is from a Groningen meadow cow does not say anything about whether it is good meat. [...] If a cow is not raised well, or slaughtered well, if the animal has experienced stress, the meat will not be of good quality."*

Another illustration of slight awareness of the local trap is that two participants mention that they are aware that local products are often less efficient regarding transport than more mass-produced products from further away. However, even with this information, it just "feels" better for them to source products from nearby. For most participants the food miles point relates to maintaining a low carbon footprint, working with seasonal products, and improving animal welfare. Regarding authenticity and food traditions, restaurant chefs and managers are most divided: Some restaurants like serving dishes which are typical for the region, others want to play with traditions by serving local dishes with a twist, but for some participants sticking to your regional identity and cuisine feels restrictive.

The fourth and sixth category gave rise to many rich and confirming examples and anecdotes. Key-words within the category on supporting the local economy are *'gunnen'* (a Dutch verb which does not have a direct English translation; it denotes wishing, allowing or granting someone something because you feel he/she deserves it) and reciprocity, which is nicely illustrated by the quotes of participants R5, *"What goes around comes around I always say",* and R4, *"that you help each other with earning money, building a name, generating buzz.".* Furthermore, the restaurant participants really appreciate the possibility to have personal contact with and receive tailor-made services from local suppliers. It becomes clear from the interviews that restaurants and suppliers need to communicate with each other a lot. R4 explains how this interaction also creates transparency: *"Transparency increases as something is more local, it becomes more tangible, because you can visit the place."* R4 furthermore notes that when something is local he is better able to create a bond with and tell something about the product and why it is made. Many restaurant participants mention that being able to tell the story behind a product is something they, and also their customers, really appreciate and that this is also a reason for them to use local products. R6 summarizes the sixth category nicely*:*

> R6: *"It is just very nice to have such personal contact with everybody; they really think along, and also say 'hey, maybe you should look at this or organise a little workshop. We can also come and explain your employees about where the products exactly come from.' The same goes for our butcher; we can always come and visit to look at the cows. [...] Also the cheese ladies will tell you exactly where the cheeses come from, what you can do with them and which wines go nicely with them."*

4.2 Framing and marketing

Besides being part of the motivation to source locally, the ability to tell the story behind a local food product also reappears in the frames and marketing techniques urban restaurants use to promote local food products to their customers and the outside world (sub-question 2). Still, most restaurants only state on their website that, and sometimes also why, they like to work with local products and suppliers, but do not, or only on their menu, mention the suppliers or places their products are from. Three of the twenty-two restaurants form an exception; they employ their websites to extensively introduce their local suppliers, the places they are situated, their objectives, and often also a link to their websites. The restaurants often seem to want to show on their website how they are responsible,

conscious and concerned about food, agriculture and the environment and how they select suppliers who share their objectives and attitude. Furthermore, it is noticeable that restaurants almost always stress the taste, quality and freshness of the products they use, often in combination with mentioning that the products are organically, passionately and/or traditionally produced.

The restaurant menus required a close look, for most of the menus do not explicitly mention local products in general, but only include implicit references to places, farms or brands. Four restaurants did not have their menu on their website because it changes every day or week. On the menu, dishes are often presented by stating the name of the dish or the main ingredient, followed by the (other) ingredients. In some cases the dish is presented as from Groningen, e.g. *"Groninger mustard soup"* or *"Groninger Poffert"*, and in other cases a specific ingredient is followed by "from place x and/or farm x", e.g. *"with machemat brie from Zevenhuizen".* Especially with meat and cheese the place and/or farm is mentioned. Moreover, drinks, for example beer, coffee, or water, are often also presented as being locally sourced. However, the menus do certainly not name all products the restaurants source from local suppliers. In six of the eighteen analysed menus references to local products are even entirely absent. Finally, the social media pages of the twenty-two restaurants were analysed. Twelve restaurants promote their use of local food products on social media. They especially use social media to highlight certain seasonal dishes (at the time of the analysis it was asparagus season). Four restaurants had shared their visits to local suppliers on social media. One restaurant, for example, had posted pictures on Facebook of the tour they had received at the business of S7.

In the interviews, marketing strategies were also discussed. Besides their website, menu and social media, participants mention the use of a periodic news letter to regular customers, promotional materials from their suppliers, e.g. posters or business cards, and above all they mention simply telling their customers at the table about the products or when they ask about it. R2, for example, explains that *"there are many people who are interested, and if they ask, I tell them where the meat comes from. There are also people then who, for example, go to the farm. Because I tell them, you can also get meat there yourself."* Especially farmers and manufacturers (S1, S4 and S8) appreciate the efforts of restaurants in promoting their products to their customers. S1 explains that she is very proud to be mentioned on the menu and website of one restaurant in Groningen and would like to have more of these types of collaborations in the city. However, a lot of the restaurant participants state that they are not very fond of overly pushy marketing strategies focussed on *"dissecting the origin of each and every ingredient on the menu"* (R5) and "*shouting from the rooftops"* (R7) that everything is 100% local or organic. They perceive restaurants who do this as too trendy and less trustworthy.

4.3 Trust and reciprocity

It is exactly this trustworthiness that is central to the third sub-question: 'How do urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors experience trust and reciprocity in the farm-to-restaurant relations they are involved in?' The three mechanisms along which trust develops, distinguished by Trivette (2017), will lead the analysis of this sub-question. These mechanisms were, however, not discussed with the participants. They were only asked whether they felt there was a trust relation between the restaurant and the local supplier and what aspects contributed to or hampered these trust relations. Still, the mechanisms of Trivette (2017) came up rather naturally.

Mechanism 1. Aspects of the first mechanism – to establish reliable, positive relationships through clear communication, transparency and consistency – are also often mentioned first. For many of the participants trust simply starts with honouring agreements and sustaining constant orders and deliveries; the other party first needs to demonstrate that it is a reliable partner. As trust increases, partners seem to accept more from each other and act less by the book. For example, R6 mentions: *"Sometimes someone forgets the debit card and then they just say, ah, you can pay the next time."* For R7, reliability has even reached the point where he trusts two of his local suppliers with the key of his restaurant.

What becomes clear from the interviews is that restaurants very regularly communicate, both formally and informally, with their local suppliers. The participants especially stress the informal part; through face-to-face visits restaurant and supplier actors get to know each other, each other's employees, or even family members. Even the deliverers become acquaintances, as is stressed by S2: *"We do not work with parcel deliverers. We work with chauffeurs. Nine out of 10 times our client is visited by the same driver. He knows you through and through, at the door, and this creates a bond."* Because of these informal relations, the participants explain, they would never hesitate to call or inform somebody when they are experiencing problems.

An interesting case is the business of S5. With no website or traceable e-mail address the small wholesaler's PR relies solely upon phone calls, face-to-face contact during deliveries and word-of-mouth of chefs. This, he explains, is only possible because of his long-standing and loyal client relations. As local farms and businesses often heavily rely on weather conditions, seasons and/or market developments loyalty is very important for them. R2 acknowledges this: *"I am in for durable relationships. For ten cents less, I will not at once go to somebody else."* R4 agrees that trust grows with time; however, he feels it is also difficult to establish long-term relations with local suppliers, for the produce of small businesses and farms is often limited, temporary or unpredictable. S2 notes that many restaurants, even highly renowned ones, cheat (an interesting and recurring metaphor) on their local supplier when a cheaper deal is offered somewhere else.

Mechanism 2. The second mechanism - to demonstrate good will toward one another through mutual accommodation of each other's needs - is visible within the personalised services and agreements that exist between restaurants and local suppliers. A nice example is given by R1: *"He knows that it doesn't matter for me if the asparagus are broken and then he has a cheaper batch in the back for me so I can make asparagus soup early in the season."* Restaurant participants appreciate the spontaneity and tailor-made services of local suppliers, as opposed to the more standardised services large wholesalers offer. They often point out that their local partners know exactly how they like their products and also pro-actively act on this knowledge, as can be seen in the example of the broken asparagus. R6 gives another example of a supplier demonstrating good will:

R6: "At first, we went there to pick up our produce, but then they said, we can also deliver it if you want? I think the owner just cycles by our place after work. I think that is very sympathetic of them."

A remark of S6 about one of his restaurants relations demonstrates how pro-actively acting on awareness of each other needs also functions the other way around. A restaurant he regularly sells to often says to him that: *"if you have something you need to get rid of, just call me and I will make something nice with it."* Finally, the mutual

accommodation of each other's needs is of course also reflected in restaurants and suppliers promoting each other's businesses to their customers.

Mechanism 3. Following Trivette (2017), the third mechanism - to recognise the importance of what others bring to the relationship based on a shared understanding of the value of locally-oriented food - is constructed upon two aspects: 1) the extent to which food system participants hold shared goals and values, and 2) their ability to demonstrate competence regarding what they themselves are doing but also in what their trading partners are doing. Excerpts of suppliers S1 and S3 nicely demonstrate the first aspect:

> S1: *"The most important is that a restaurant wants to work with local products out of own conviction, from the hart, because then you see their appreciation and they are more willing to pay for it."*
>
> S3: *"We could not work with people that do not share our ideas, who only want to sit in the front row for a dime [Dutch saying] and support mass production instead of fairness."*

Vice versa, restaurant participants often state on their websites (as was also mentioned in section 4.2) or mention in the interviews that they only source from producers of whom they know share the same principles, for example producers who care about animal welfare. They learn about their producers' goals and values both in formal, e.g. Fairtrade or organic certification, and informal ways, e.g. having visited the farm or talked with the producers.

The second aspect, demonstrating competence, is more about understanding and appreciating each other's industries, pressures and needs. In the research paper of Trivette (2017), flexibility is a key-word within this category; however, this is less true within this case-study. Participants do demonstrate that they understand their partners' flaws or struggles, but this is almost always followed by a 'but' rather than a 'so'. At this point, conflicts arise or partnerships are even ended, e.g. when a supplier's offer is too dynamic or a restaurant's demands are too high, as will be more extensively discussed in the next paragraph on perceived barriers. Still, there are also positive examples of the second aspect; for example a remark of R5 about the local cheese shop: *"Now and then I send one of my boys from the kitchen there with a list full of things, and then he comes back with something completely different. I love that."* Clearly, R5 knows how the cheese shop operates and trusts in the competence of the shop owner in providing him with the right products. With the same partner, R5 has meetings when he is creating a new menu on which wines and products to serve with the cheeses. Providing advice regarding which products are good when and how to serve them is an important service that local suppliers offer, and is very much appreciated by restaurants. It is a good example of a way in which suppliers can demonstrate their competence regarding both their own and the restaurant industry.

4.4 Perceived barriers

The barriers urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors experience in establishing and maintaining farm-to-restaurant relations (sub-question 4), ranging from specific issues with particular partners to more systemic problems, are reducible to three categories:

Time and effort. First of all, the restaurant and supplier participants encounter issues regarding logistics. Restaurant participants explain that sourcing locally requires effort, because you need to communicate and make arrangements

with many different suppliers instead of one wholesaler. An illustration can be found in an excerpt of R6: *"My colleague who does the administration, keeps complaining about the fact that we have so many different receipts all the time."* The restaurant participants also explain that they struggle with needing to purchase at unsuitable times or places and finding time to establish new relationships. R7 for example states: *"Preferably I would spend half of my time with purchase, driving around and making contacts, but well, I also need to cook, and that occupies most of my time."* Furthermore, when restaurants order products from local farmers or producers the delivery time is generally longer than with big wholesalers. R6: *"So I can only do it if I plan well ahead, as most of the times only on Sunday I think of what to put on the menu for next Tuesday."* Suppliers also mention that administration and logistics takes up much of their time and that this does not always feel balanced against the rather small amounts restaurants purchase.

Lack of continuity. The following excerpts demonstrate how restaurants and catering wholesalers long for consistency in availability and quality from their local suppliers, but do not always experience this:

R4: *"You are a business, and you have customers. So, you need to be able to deliver a certain standard and consistency, and they are not always able to do so. What happens a lot is that you collaborate with someone two or three times, and then they do not manage to pursue, it lingers, they do not take the next step."*

S9: *"It needs to be constantly available. [...] There can be no fluctuations in quality. If a chef designs a menu, it is often for three months, so then I need to be sure that I have these products for the next three months, because they have big posters and menus. If we are out of goat cheese you cannot cross the goat cheese from the list. Or if you say you have a goat cheese from a specific farm, it cannot be a different one."*

It is a reason for the restaurant of R4 to disclose from communicating their local producers and products on their website; the availability of ingredients is simply too dynamic. Sometimes farm-to-restaurant partnerships are ended because of this, e.g. in the case of R6: *"We used to go to the cheese lady on the market, but she often did not have certain things. Her offer changes too much, so that does not work for us, because we like to purchase the same things again and again."* Vice-versa, local suppliers also experience barriers related to continuity; a number of participants mention their dependence on and the quick changes in chefs. When a chef leaves a restaurant, the relationship with that restaurant often fades, as it is often the chef who is passionate about using local products and who they have contact with. At the same time, career moves of chefs can also work out well for them, when chefs start sourcing from them again at their new restaurants.

Knowledge and discourse gap. The third category denotes barriers regarding unfamiliarity with each other's businesses and is hence related to the third trust mechanism discussed in section 4.3. R3 describes them as language differences, which especially seem to become apparent in order agreements and price negotiations:

R3: *"I have spoken to a fisherman from Lauwersoog once, but well, we just do not speak the same language. I can't just ... he talk fisherman's language, he thinks in way larger numbers of kilos, and thinks, 'what I catch, you will just buy' or whatever."*

Conversely, suppliers are annoyed when their restaurant clients do not seem to understand or respect their production process, e.g. when restaurants purchase only small amounts, but still demand low prices, when they order products which are out of season and then afterwards complain about the quality, or when restaurants expect that they can place

last minute orders for products that require time to grow or prepare. S1 said in her interview: *"You notice how restaurants are quite used to ordering from big catering wholesalers. [...] If restaurants want to place big orders I need to know a few weeks in advance. That is difficult for me to make them understand."* S6 explains that he has had mostly negative experiences with restaurants and feels that most restaurants only use the term local as a marketing story, and fail to really commit to their local partners. He forms an exception; the other participants were, despite the encountered issues mentioned in this paragraph, fairly positive about their relations with restaurants. Also the restaurants were generally very satisfied.

4.5 Role Municipality of Groningen

With regard to the final sub-question, 'How do urban governments, urban restaurant chefs and managers, and local farmers, producers and distributors construct and value the role of urban governments in supporting farm-to-restaurant relations?', it is striking how most restaurants, farmers and producers have no clue about the municipality's current efforts and role within the food system. Only the two catering wholesalers, S2 and S9, are in regular contact with the municipality and aware of or involved in the programmes mentioned in section 3.1. S9 participates in a knowledge exchange and collaboration network on food initiated by the municipality, called the '*Ketentafel Voedsel Stad en Ommeland*' (Chain Table Food City and Hinterland)*,* which joins about 100 organisations with an interest in food. Notably, one of the municipal participants notes that restaurants are quite difficult to approach for this network. The other wholesaler, S2, provides the catering within the municipality's canteens and feels that: *"A municipality needs to act as a role model, and the municipality is doing that very well."* In the focus group, the municipal officials affirm that this practice-as-you-preach attitude is a conscious strategy. There are also critical remarks. For example, R5 appreciates the municipality's actions regarding local food procurement, but also sees policies which contradict this objective:

> R5: *"a number of large magnates have made their entrance in the city [mentions examples of chain restaurants], and that is being stimulated by the municipality [...], because they are o so happy that such big chains want to come to Groningen, because that will really put Groningen on the map. But who is waiting for this? They will not source anything from our local suppliers you know? Who says A, must also say B. There can be no double standards."*

Although the restaurant and supplier participants' awareness of the municipality's current activities is low, they do enjoy to brainstorm about possible roles for the municipality. Some ideas that came up are:

> R5: *"Set up an advertising campaign for example. They have a very nice slogan, which I fully support: 'Nothing tops Groningen'. Amazing, but why not make something like this to present some of your local suppliers?"*
> S3: *"It would be nice if there was an app, that people can see where they can get their local food."*
> S7: *"What I think is important with regard to local products, is that it is formally checked that the produce that is being delivered is really local. There lies a task for the government."*

Furthermore, establishing a local market stall, supermarket or food hall and organising events are often mentioned in the interviews, which all touch upon the food hub idea the municipality is presently working on. When the food hub plans were explained to the participants, they were very interested, e.g. R7: *"I cannot drive around the entire province*

every day to pick up my produce, but if there would be a place in the city centre, which provides a certain amount and range, I would definitely go there." However, some also had doubts, or said that there are already businesses (e.g. wholesalers) and initiatives (e.g. *De Streekboer*) working within this market, e.g. S7: *"I think that they should just talk with businesses about this, because there are already a lot of things, paths and entry points there. And then you can look at how to improve these of course."* The conditions under which the interviewees would be interested to participate in such a food hub network are good quality, structural availability, reasonable price, convenience (i.e. that produce is picked up at the producers and delivered at the restaurants or sold at a central place), and that logistics and marketing experts are involved in the mediation. S6 warns the municipality: *"I think it will be difficult to get all noses into the same direction.* [Dutch saying]*"* R4 adds: *"You really need to engage people, you have to make it their thing."*

In the focus group several of these ideas and conditions put forward by the restaurants and local restaurant suppliers were discussed. The municipality officials agreed that most were relevant points and good ideas, but it was clear that they see more of a facilitative role for themselves. M4 for example mentions that: *"We need market parties and organisations to join; we cannot do it alone."* And M1 and M2 discuss how their role lies mainly in connecting local stakeholders:

> M1: *"The actual implementation we cannot do, but we can…* (M2: *…bring people together) … We know a lot of people of course. Once, you were in the canteen with the brewers…* (M2: *…the cider club) …and I was with the urban gardeners of [local initiative], and I said, o well, and then they immediately decided to sit together."*

The municipality participants discuss that they want to change their image from being perceived as an imposer of rules and regulation, to a municipality which solves problems and connects people. Furthermore, they stress the importance of health education; all four participants agree that people, especially the younger generations, need to learn how food is grown or produced, how to cook with fresh products, and how to keep a healthy and varied diet, and that the local food discourse can help stimulate these educative purposes. Finally, the municipality is more and more aware that the city cannot prosper without its surrounding areas and is increasingly networking outside of its municipal borders.

5. Conclusion

This paper has enhanced insight into the motivations and strategies of urban restaurants to promote their use of local food products, the positive and negative experiences of urban restaurants and local restaurant suppliers in establishing and maintaining farm-to-restaurant relations, and the views on roles for urban governments in supporting these relations of local food procurement. In the case-study of Groningen – and most likely in many other cities – a severe gap can be identified between urban restaurants and the urban municipality. While both sectors actively propagate the local food discourse, restaurants are largely unaware of the food policies and programmes their municipality is involved in and the municipality is experiencing difficulties to get in touch with urban restaurants. As this research has revealed that both parties certainly possess the willingness to brainstorm and take action, the insights presented in this paper can help to cultivate understanding amongst the various stakeholders, raise ideas and solutions, and encourage fruitful collaborations in the future, e.g. in the form of a Dutch Cuisine deal (see section 3.1) or local food hub network (Berti & Mulligan, 2016; Horst et al., 2011; Kerselaers et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the case-study has demonstrated how restaurants, suppliers and government officials can hold very different conceptions of and motivations for promoting local food products. In a recently published article, Albrecht and Smithers (2018) show how producers and consumers participating in direct-selling operations of meat also frame the value of local food procurement in different ways. The authors primarily ascribe these differences to self-interested concerns: profitability and control for producers and health for consumers. This study on farm-to-restaurant relations does not support such a claim; rather, it argues that the values and motivations underlying local food procurement are more complex, as the empirical data collected in this study include numerous indications of restaurants chefs and managers, farmers, producers and distributors, and government officials referring to selfless concerns and principles, such as reciprocity and loyalty, health education, reducing one's ecological footprint, and supporting the region economically.

Self-interest does become apparent in the barriers restaurants and their suppliers experience. Regardless of their selfless values and motivations, urban restaurants often hold a set of strict demands regarding logistics, quality and continuity, which local restaurant suppliers are not always able to or do not want to meet. At this point, external parties, such as an urban government, may come in to mediate. However, as some of the participants pointed out, such a party should know the ropes and be realistic about its intended outcomes. Here, Albrecht and Smithers (2018) advance an insightful remark: *"...reconnection is not a binary or unified process or experience. Its purpose and benefits play out site-by-site, person-by-person. Perhaps most importantly, its fluidity means that it can be continually negotiated and re-negotiated as participants share and learn more about each other and about the governance of individual farm-scale operations."* They point out that the food system is built on flexible relationships. If new more convenient arrangements become available, such as a local food hub network, some stakeholders will be eager to adapt, while others will prefer to remain loyal to their traditional ways. In the author's opinion, this variety in attitudes may well denote the charm of the local food movement.

It is important to note that the findings of this study are based on a qualitative single case-study analysis, and thus situated within a Dutch medium-sized city context and food culture. Additionally, all data was collected and analysed by one researcher; if a co-researcher had helped to conduct and analyse the interviews, other points and interpretations might have arisen. To compensate, the author has discussed her/his research process and findings with her/his supervisor, peers and participants to gather feedback whenever possible. Another factor which may have influenced the results is the low response-rate of urban restaurants; it is possible that the restaurant actors who are willing to talk about their choices and experiences with local food procurement denote a specific type of restaurants, and that the restaurants who have declined the interview invitation may have different reasons for and experiences with local food procurement. Finally, with five relatively independent sub-questions the scope of this paper was rather big, which forced the author to be brief and concise in elaborating on the various points. Still, the explorative nature of the inquiry and the comprehensive range of topics that was covered in the interviews have led to an interesting overview for academics and practitioners alike, and various starting points for more in-depth follow-up research. Future research could for example look further into the intentional and unintentional continuation of reasonings infected by the local trap (Born & Purcell, 2006), determine statistical interrelations between feelings of (mis)trust in food system relations and several of the factors put forward in section 4.3, or evaluate best-practices of various types

of food hub systems by incorporating the barriers and conditions advanced in sections 4.4 and 4.5. Above all, research that introduces and (re)connects new or neglected food system stakeholders should be greatly encouraged.

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