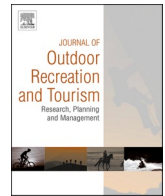




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jort

Research Article

When you walk the trail, you start to fantasize about food, right? Teleologies and understandings of hikers' meal practices while hiking in Arctic Sweden

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Social practice theory
Hiking
Backpacking
Meal practice

ABSTRACT

Food and eating while travelling are important to, and an intrinsic part of, the holistic tourism experience. However, in some tourism contexts, e.g., mountain hiking, groups of tourists import their own food to the destination and thus distance themselves from local food cultures. This study aimed to explore the sensemaking of mountain hikers in Arctic Sweden vis-à-vis their meal practices. Twelve hikers, engaged in medium to long-distance hiking were interviewed at different trailheads along the Kungsleden trail. The interviews were analyzed thematically and interpreted through a practice theoretical lens. Results showed that the eating event were negotiated through two distinct phenomena. Food consumption, as socially motivated, and the physical attributes mediated by the environment. These phenomena were, when interpreted through a social practice theoretical lens, conceived as parts of two, distinct, teleological end-projects structures within the practice. The teleological ends, pursued by the hikers, were that of energizing the body, and that of having an enjoyable experience. How hikers' make sense of their meals could have managerial implications for tourism destination managers and local food entrepreneurs as it provides insight into the contextual drivers of these meals, thus facilitating engagement with a wider market.

Management

- Hikers make sense of their meals based on contextual goal, where the temporal frame of the context varies between the meal and the entire hike.
- Hikers express conflicting understandings of how they make sense of their meals, where the contextual goal of the meal does not necessarily need to correspond to the overall goal of the hike.
- Given the dynamic nature of the contextual meal, destination managers and mountain station managers should try to gain knowledge about the goals the hikers' visiting their area adhere to and try to facilitate meals that suit such goals, rather than trying to construct good meals *a priori*.

1. Introduction

Food and eating are intrinsic, and widely recognized, aspects of the holistic tourism experience while, by nature, being different from habitual eating, often both in terms of food and setting. Pleasing meal experiences positively influence the tourists' image of the destination

(Hsu & Scott, 2020), where positive experiences of meals has been argued as the perceived contextual fitness of the meal (Sundqvist & Bengs, 2021). Meals are, furthermore, evaluative of authenticity (Sims, 2009; Sthapit, 2017), peak experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004), and the general tourist experience (Chang et al., 2011; Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Extraordinary food experiences of tourists have, furthermore, been shown to be driven by a sense of surprise, luxury, and hospitality (Goolaup et al., 2017; Goolaup & Mossberg, 2017). Thus, whether food is supporting the tourism experience, or is the main reason for travelling, it is always present as part of the tourism product and is, as such, an important aspect of local small-scale and artisanal food producers' economic and social sustainability. There are, however, tourist destinations, e.g., in nature-based tourist settings, where the local producers become alienated from the market due to the extensive import of food. One such destination is the Swedish mountains located in the Arctic regions of the country, an area that annually attracts over one million visitors during the summer season (Fjällsäkerhetsrådet, 2018, 2020; Fredman et al., 2014). Engaging in mountain hiking, especially during long distance hikes, that necessitates the carrying of large amounts of equipment, both knowledge and extensive planning are required (Lum

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Received 9 May 2022; Received in revised form 1 November 2022; Accepted 29 November 2022

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et al., 2020). Planning for meals entails special attention as during longer hikes, even on marked trails, food availability is sparse to non-existent. This limitation in availability vis-à-vis the high energy expenditure of mountain hiking, results in the need for hikers to carry, and eat, large amounts of food to be able to uphold energy balance (Chumbley, 2014; Hesterberg & Johnson, 2013; Hill et al., 2008). Consequently, hikers often bring energy dense, freeze-dried, highly processed, mass marketed, food or food prepared and dried by conventional methods at home, with them to their hike. Engaging in contextual eating on the trail, carrying on hiker's meal practices, brings with it modes of eating that are distinct from habitual- and leisure tourism meal practices. Knowledge of the unicity of the hikers' meal practices could assist tourism managers in guiding the tourists towards the discovery and thus the experience of authentic, local, food culture (Mak et al., 2012; Quan & Wang, 2004; Wang, 1999). However, when food is imported, by the tourists, to the destination, as could be the case with the hikers, such managerial aspects are made difficult.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to explore how food and eating, in the context of the Swedish mountains, are understood and made sense of by hikers as part of their tourist meal practice.

1.1. Hiking as a social practice

Hiking within the context of this article is understood as a multi-day endeavour, walking on a marked, unpaved, trail, carrying what is needed to self-sustain for a limited time, e.g., food, cookware, sleeping equipment and a shelter, in a backpack. Hiking experiences are conceived as being driven by factors not necessarily manifest in other touristic experiences, e.g., being a journey of self-discovery occurring within a world of natural beauty and wildlife (Crust et al., 2011), finding solitude and independence (Hitchner et al., 2019), exercise and personal time (Coble et al., 2003), or sense of accomplishment and challenging oneself (den Breejen, 2007). Within the hiking community, as seen in other areas of adventure tourism (Rickly & Vidon, 2017), exists a social segmentation that manifests in materiality, such as the outfits of the through-hikers (Lum et al., 2020), or adhering to certain group-related values (Littlefield & Siudzinski, 2012). Lum et al. (2020) distinguish between two strands of hikers, the purist hikers, and the social hikers, based on the hikers' conceptualization of what constituted legitimate activities. The purist hikers, those who valued the hike itself and stayed on the trail for the duration of the hike, were contrasted against the social hikers, who made the hike into a social affair, building relationships and attending parties. Further segmentation could be argued as founded in the difference between the hard-core leisure participants engaging in through-hiking practices as opposed to the core participants engaging in day, or section, hikes (Scott & McMahan, 2017). These numerous ways of being a hiker and enacting hiking could be theorized as being founded in the social practices carried on by the hikers.

1.2. Social practices

Practice theories are often, if not always, described as being inspired by the texts of Pierre Bourdieu, relating to both the *habitus* and practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). The writings of Bourdieu could be argued to have influenced a number of scholars into each conceptualizing their own theory of practice (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2014, 2016), however, this article is, for the purpose of philosophical consistency, framed in the social practice theory conceived by social theorist Theodore Schatzki.

Schatzki (2019, p. 28) states that "practices are open-ended, spatial-temporal sets of organized doings and sayings". In this article though, we are, from Schatzki's short definition, primarily interested in the notion of *organization*. Doings and sayings, what persons do and say, hang together by, hence are organized through, rules, practical and general understandings, and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2002). The concept of practical understandings encompasses the know-how of

how specific tasks within the practice are to be performed, and the ability to recognize such performances (Schatzki, 2012, 2019). In short, this means that practical understandings govern the contextual fitness of specific doings as well as the contextual knowledge of what those doings mean. Activity informed by such practical understandings could within a hiking context be pitching your tent in a secluded area during a mountain hike as to signal to other hikers that you want to be alone or pitching the tent with the appropriate side facing the direction of the wind signalling experience. However, for these actions to have any effect, the understandings must be shared with other carriers of the same practice. That is, other hikers need to understand, practically, what pitching the tent in a secluded area means. General understandings are understood as "the general sense of things," where things could be abstract notions like authenticity or the contextual appropriateness of certain products (Schatzki, 2019). Within a tourism context the general understanding, embedded in the practice, is a main component of what drives the tourism experience as well as the decision-making process. Within the context of hiking this could be the understanding of what is understood as fit to eat on the trail or what it means to be a through-hiker. The most elusive part of organization of practice is the teleoaffective structure. This structure, Schatzki (2012, p. 16) explains, is "a set of teleological hierarchies that are enjoined or acceptable in a given practice". By this he means that the practice encompasses a set of acceptable actions and feelings that should or could be acted out and expressed by the carriers of the practice to reach, and are thus governed by, a normative outcome. Such actions could be, within the context of hiking, informed by and the acting in accordance with the principle of *leave no trace*, or feeling upset when someone, in fact, left a trace.

Practices are as the notion suggests practiced and are thus enacted in the world, consequently being dependent of the materiality of the world. Schatzki (2019, p. 34) states that "the practice plenum is the total nexus of practices and material arrangements", making up the entirety of the social world. Material arrangements, he states, are to be understood as the arrangement of humans, organisms, artefacts, and natural phenomena. That means that practices carried on are not separated, albeit being distinct, from the arrangements. Instead, practices are entangled with materiality in a practice-material mesh, in which practices are both dependent on as well as determinative of the arrangements (Schatzki, 2005). The practice-material mesh is, thus, what contextually governs doings and sayings in physical reality. These meshes are then bundled together with other overlapping meshes, forming larger nets of practice-arrangements, e.g., meal practices and camping practices carried on in the context of the Swedish mountains could bundle together with other practices, forming hiking practices. In this example, the Swedish mountains takes the shape of the activity place space (Schatzki, 1996), a place where certain activities embedded in the practice take place, that is, a place to hike, to camp, to prepare meals, to engage in conversation, etc.

The study of practices leads to the de-subjectification of social phenomena where persons, instead of being wilfully acting agents, are conceptualized as carriers of practice bundles acting within the frame that the practice permits. What people eat during certain situations, e.g., weekdays, weekends, holidays, or birthdays could, as such, be said to be founded in the meal practices carried on.

1.3. Meals

The meal could be conceptualized as being constructed out of three central, abstract, aspects: a physical environment, a social environment, and the food and drinks (Gustafsson et al., 2006, 2009). Each aspect weighing in on the holistic experience of the meal for the consumer. As such, a certain dish eaten in a familiar setting would not result in the same experience as if the same dish were eaten in a different environment.

Engaging in meals, understood as contextual eating, is a socially complex phenomenon linking together the nutritional, cultural and

social domains of human existence. Meals are rarely conceived as belonging to just one of those domains but are instead conceptualized as located in the intersection of them. This is something that Maslow (1943) related to, albeit not explicitly, in his hierarchy of needs; where food and eating does fit on multiple levels rather than exclusively as a physiological need. There are, furthermore, ideas about what foods are healthy to eat, established through a socially informed understanding of the food rather than the nutritional values *per se* (Ditlevsen et al., 2019; Hagen, 2021; Mollen et al., 2013), and ideas about how certain foods are more temporally fit in specific cultural contexts than others (Fjellström, 2004; Holm et al., 2015; Mäkelä, 2000; Mäkelä et al., 1999; Soler & Plazas, 2012). On a more abstract level, there are ideas about which types of foods are fit to eat for certain social hierarchies, in certain social context, and in specific physical settings (Baumann et al., 2019; Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas, 1972). Consequently, the meal becomes an intrinsic part of the individuals self-perceived identity (Chuck et al., 2016; Fischler, 1988; Sundqvist et al., 2020), even in the scope of practice theory (Schatzki, 1996).

Through the application of the practice theoretical notions of understandings, teleoaffective structures and the practice-material mesh to the context of hikers' meals, meals eaten in an environment where food is not widely available and the means of cooking are limited, we strive to further the knowledge of how those meals are made sense of and understood by hikers.

2. Method

The data for this study were gathered during a three-week period, stretching between the middle of July and the beginning of August of 2021, on the 440 km long Kungsleden trail, located in the counties of Västerbotten and Norrbotten in the northernmost part of Sweden. Ethnographic data, in the form of observations and interviews, were gathered during the field work. Observations were conducted in settings where hikers were engaged in meals and autoethnographic data focused on eating and meals were gathered related to hiking the entire trail. The interviewees were approached at the major gathering spots in Jäkkvik and Kvikkjokk, whilst one interview was conducted on the trail. Inclusion criteria for participation were that the interviewees at the point of the interview were engaging in mountain hiking and that they spoke either Swedish or English. All names used throughout the paper, referencing the interviewees, are pseudonyms. The sampling, regarding to sample size, followed the recommendations commonly accepted within research utilizing reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2016, 2021) as well as being theoretically informed by the constituents of a social practice (Schatzki, 2012, 2019). No criteria were set reflecting the length of the trail hiked or previous experience of hiking in the mountains.

Semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014, p. 3; Rubin & Rubin, 2012) were conducted with twelve hikers, out of which five were female and seven male, reflecting a variety of ages and occupational backgrounds (Table 1). The ranges of the hikes undertaken by the

respondents varied in length between 73 km and 1300 km, with the planned time expectancy of 5 days to 2 months. The interviews aimed to capture the hikers' lived experiences of engaging in meals while being out on the trail to gather a theoretically driven understanding of how the meals were practiced and organized. Before the formal interviews were initiated the interviewees were presented with a succinct summary of the idea of the project as well as information on how the notion of meals were conceptualized as being the holistic eating event and not just the food. Informed consent to participate in the study was collected and recorded from all interviewees before the first interview question was asked. Initially, for the first three interviews, the question used to initiate the dialogue with the interviewees were: *Could you, with your own words and as detailed as possible, describe the most recent meal you had out on the trail.* This question was reformulated after three interviews as to elicit longer and more narrate initial responses from the interviewees, albeit capturing the same phenomenon, to: *Could you, with your own words and as detailed as possible, describe the most memorable meal you had out on the trail.* The primary purpose of the initial question was to establish a starting point for the interview and to motivate the interviewee to tell their story. However, after the initial response, and when the flow of the dialogue did not occur naturally, the interview was guided through themes established in an interview guide. The interview themes, that were constructed to capture the hikers' general engagement in meals, were: positive and negative experiences vis-à-vis the physical environment and material configuration of meals as context, compositions of the meals' social environments, positive and negative experiences from different social contexts of meals, food choice, food preparation, eating throughout the day, and temporality. As such, even after changing the opening question of the interview, we could capture the normalcy of the meals rather than peak meal experiences. The interview sessions, which were digitally recorded lasted between 30 and 60 min. The interview recordings were later transcribed verbatim in the CAQDAS package MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI software, 2019).

Observational data in the form of video recordings, photographs and fieldnotes, together with the autoethnographical data, filled the primary function of contextualizing and informing the data analysis of the interviews, and to facilitate the credibility of the analysis due to prolonged engagement with the field (Nowell et al., 2017), as this data were also gathered vis-à-vis the context of meals on the trails. This, informing, data were not systematically analysed but did rather fill the purpose of acting as an objectified frame of reference to which the interview data was related during the analytical process for this paper. The rationale behind this was theoretically motivated. Schatzki (2012) argues that researchers may gain propositional knowledge about social practices through interviews and could, also, be able to observe indeterminate activities *qua* activities. However, he further argues that, to understand the meaning of those activities, as actions, that is, what the activities do, the researcher needs to get immersed in the practice through participation. Through participation the researcher will, in addition to acquire the propositional knowledge embedded in the practice, also approach the procedural knowledge of and in the practice.

2.1. Data analysis

The interviews were analysed by the means of reflective thematic analysis (TA) following the currently widely used and established guidelines (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). To establish trustworthiness, generally accepted guidelines relating to TA have been adhered to throughout the process (Nowell et al., 2017). The purpose of TA is to generate theoretically informed themes across datasets rather than analysing every datapoint by itself. The process was conducted through the engagement with the six analytical steps of reflexive thematic analysis. The first step was to get familiarized with the data. This was done in two steps, as the author conducted and transcribed all the interviews, familiarization was part of the data processing. However, before coding started the transcribed material was read through in its

Table 1

List of interviewees (The names used here are pseudonyms).

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Occupation	Trail Hiked
Tova	Female	34	Hotel receptionist	Kungsleden
Leopold	Male	25	Programmer	Kungsleden
Adian	Male	51	Insurance sales	Kungsleden
Ossian	Male	38	Programmer	Kungsleden
Alexander	Male	31	PhD Student	Section of Kungsleden
Susanna	Female	27	Physician	Green ribbon
Artur	Male	66	Retired	Kungsleden
Bengt	Male	43	IT consultant	Kungsleden
Madeleine	Female	38	Translator	Section of Kungsleden
Idun	Female	36	Business developer	Padjelantaleden
Linnea	Female	62	Midwife	Kungsleden
Claes	Male	32	Physician	Green ribbon

entirety. The second step was the generation of initial codes. This process was conducted in two, temporally separated, phases where the interviews were coded and codes were controlled for coherency, that is, the codes were checked to see if they, by themselves, could be argued to represent the data they labelled. The third step, the generation of initial themes, began with the process of broadly sorting codes into domains they represented as to facilitate the sorting procedure of generating themes. At this point of the analysis of the data, interview transcripts were put aside, and the codes were sorted into sub-themes representing higher levels of abstracted meaning. The same process was then repeated, sorting sub-themes into themes.

In the fourth step, the themes were reviewed, that is, they were, to verify the empirical rigor of the analysis, compared against the interview transcripts. This check back furthermore filled the role of controlling for the coherence of data representation facilitated by the themes. The fifth step was to name the themes, labelling them in accordance with the phenomenon they were to represent. The last, sixth, step was writing the report. When writing, and thus putting words to the themes as part of a coherent story, some adjustments were made as it became clear that one sub-theme did not belong at the same level of abstraction as the other sub-themes.

2.2. Ethical considerations

The study was formulated with the ethical guidelines established by the Swedish Research Council in mind. However, as interviews regarding food and meals could easily capture data related to the interviewee’s health, such as allergies or medical diets, and as such would constitute sensitive personal information as formulated in Article 9 of the General Data Protection Regulation, ethical approval was sought through the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Reg. 2021-01679) who had no ethical objections to the study. Furthermore, as the interviewees were out on the trail during their vacation, special consideration was employed when participants were recruited. Potential candidates were only approached when they were already resting and never approached and asked to stop while walking on the trail.

3. Results

The TA resulted in the construction of two themes relating to the overarching theme of negotiating the eating event (Table 2.). Each of these themes were constructed by the abstraction and linkage of related subthemes.

3.1. Food consumption motivation

A large part of the interviewees sensemaking regarding meals on the trail concerned how various aspects of them physically being out on a hike contextually motivated and unmotivated the consumption of food. Examples of such aspects were e.g., the evening experience of physical exhaustion, continuous snacking to maintain the energy needed for hiking long stretches, mental barriers towards eating due to extended repetition, or the understanding of poor food still being contextually fit for consumption in the mountains. The theme of *food consumption motivation* was analytically conceptualized as being an aggregate of five

Table 2
Themes and sub-themes relating to the overarching theme: Negotiating the eating event.

Themes	Food consumption motivation	The acceptable setting
Subthemes	The body as an enabler and inhibitor (Dis)taste as a (de)motivator Contextual hedonic evaluation Asceticism Enabler of social interaction	Engaging with the sublime Physical space as a provider

subthemes: *the body as an enabler and inhibitor, (dis)taste as a (de)motivator, contextual hedonic evaluation, asceticism, and enabler of social interaction.*

Being out hiking in the mountains is a physically and mentally challenging endeavour requiring a large amount of energy of the hiker. Part of this challenge comes from the weight the hikers are carrying in their backpacks, as increased weight requires more effort to move through the terrain. As such, the more physically fit hikers could facilitate what was conceived as better food for themselves as they could manage the carrying of the extra weight fresh food imposed. This activity was discussed in opposite to the commonly consumed dehydrated food pouches as described by Ossian:

Some of that I also cook at home, but then often when I am in a rush or going for work or whatever. But yeah. But it is definitely ... I try to take fresh food for maybe one or two days or maybe even three days. And those would be things that I may cook at home and then it is followed by the dehydrated food and stuff like that.

For Alexander though, who did not carry any fresh food due to the weight of it, the body became an inhibitor of tasty meals on the trail. Even if he at times during the interview mentioned hunger as the best spice, he still conceived of the food he brought as lacking in taste. He expressed the feeling of the first post-hike meal vis-à-vis his experiences of being out on the trail as:

To have eaten the freeze-dried food or this regular hiking food and then come to place where you could have something very, very, tasty. Something that you could not carry with you. I know that the last time I was out I stopped at a fast-food restaurant and bought a hamburger, and the best thing about this burger were the tomato and the cucumber. To be able to eat something that was fresh, crispy and did not taste of cardboard.

It was not just fresh food that was understood and valued in relation to the extra weight however, alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer, and rum were also explicitly mentioned as items which were worth their weight. Those comfort items, as well as the evening meals, were conceptualized as being a reward for a day well hiked when the camp was set for the night. Eating after setting camp were in some cases experienced as being something extraordinary due to being physically exhausted and related to emotions of gratefulness, as Tova reasons:

Well, it is just so damn tasty, because you are so awfully tired, ehm because you go from being ... ehm ... you are like super hungry because you’ve hiked for so long and when you get to rest, and the weather is nice it is just so nice to sit down ... and the water is so amazingly good.

A contrast to the conveyed understanding of food as something that should be tasty and enjoyable to eat was the understanding of food as being something which main purpose was to fuel the body and thus facilitating continued movement but also to hinder weight loss due to prolonged caloric deficiency. This understanding also led to that the hikers consumed what they perceived to be less than enjoyable food. Leopold expressed his relation to having to eat, even though he did not really feel hungry, as such:

It has happened a lot of times that I had to throw food away because, well, I start to gag. That is of course rather irritating. But what I mean when I say it [forcing oneself to eat] works is that maybe I don’t feel hungry, but I feel that I need energy. I need something. Else I might hike for too long without eating. It is a huge balance between eating, drinking, and resting when you hike. That is something I am still in the process of learning.

Not feeling hungry, at least during hiking hours, was a common sensation expressed by the interviewees who mostly hiked faster than they had planned and thus ending up with an abundance of the food that was prepared in advance. Susanna, who when I interviewed her were

nine days ahead of schedule while hiking the green ribbon, expressed this vis-à-vis consuming food that was not planned, i.e., visiting restaurants or cafés along the trail:

I really meant to leave room to be able to buy some food on the hike, and I guess I have. Some days I have been eating one and a half [pre-prepared portion of dried food] for lunch and one and a half for dinner to get through the stock that is building up. Because I need to get those calories in me. I guess I really should eat as much as I possibly could manage. But it is really, really, hard.

As such, the body as an enabler or inhibitor of diverse kinds of eating events in many ways related to the physiological abilities and needs of the hikers. Needs that at times drove the engagement with eating to the point of it manifesting conflicts with the hikers' preferences. This led to the hiker facing the possibility of having to eat food perceived than less than tasty in order to resupply the body with energy to be able to carry on moving on the trail. In the same way that food was considered fuel for the body, it was considered, when tasting good, to be fuel for the mind as well. As such, food consumption was also driven by the perceived taste. Ossian expresses this in relation to why he chooses to carry several days' worth of fresh food even though the weight carried is energy consuming:

For me, the meal is very important. It is a big thing to lift morale on the trail and also makes you, or enables you, to do it for a longer time without getting sick of the food and just quit because you don't want to eat the dehydrated food anymore.

Artur, who hiked Kungleden at a slower pace than the other interviewees expressed that perceived taste was the most important aspect motivating him to engage in eating. Having prepared food to be able to be out for roughly six weeks on the trail, he stated that:

The food must taste! There are those who hike on just pemmican [a mixture of tallow and dried minced meat] for both themselves and their dogs. I have a feeling that it would not work for me. I have prepared and dried a lot of food at home. Garlic, feta cheese, olives, and those kinds of tasty things that you like to eat when you are at home.

While both Artur and Ossian exemplified taste as a motivator to engage in the eating event, the opposite could also hold true. Aversion against a certain food or product could demotivate engagement or cut it short as the disapproval the hiker feels becomes stronger than the sense of the need for energy or even hunger. Leopold expressed the reality of this in relation to a freeze-dried stew he bought but that he never had tried before setting out on the trail:

I had to throw it away, I know that, and instead I had to eat some of the snack sausages I had packed. It relates to a time a few years ago while hiking with a couple of friends. We had planned to lunch on couscous, salami, and soft cheese for a week. But after five to six days, we were so tired of it that we just threw the cheese away.

This quote illustrates the need for perceived taste to match the preferences of the hikers to motivate eating and that when a mismatch occur less than optimal *ad hoc* solutions are adopted to fill the physiological needs. It does, furthermore, illustrate an aspect of contextual food evaluation, the negative impact of prolonged repetition. Hikers' hedonic experiences of their food are understood as declining when the same courses are repeated over an extended timeframe. As it took five to six days before Leopold's aversion towards the cheese to manifest, the food in the earlier stages of the hike did suit his taste. Eating re-hydrated freeze-dried meals also came with the exposure to a specific texture profile, thus, even though the hikers might have had an abundance of dishes with different taste profiles, the texture profile would often have been the same. Claes reflected on this when asked why he did make purchases in villages or in huts even though he carries all the food he needs for energy sustenance:

[I buy food] partly for variation. So that you get things that have been in the oven or things that have retained some sort of chewiness and not just this water-soaked freeze-dried stuff, and then it also brings joy. ... When I have bought food, it has been at campsites or at grocery stores and more often than not I've bought hamburgers. Things that were fat and greasy, that was what I craved. Unfortunately, I have not checked out the offerings of local foods.

The repetitive consumption of the same textures motivated Claes to seek out opportunities to purchase something with a contrasting texture profile vis-à-vis the mushy texture often associated with the re-hydrated freeze-dried food pouches. He also sought out food that he was comfortable with and had a relation to rather than engaging in food exploration of the local cuisine. The hamburger meals offered the richness in both energy and salt often sought by hikers while at the same time being offered in a recognized format, thus facilitating a sense of food security. Adian was more explicit when he spoke about this sense of value loss vis-à-vis the taste experience, due to repetition:

I try to mix it up a bit and since I eat everything, I can vary a lot. Sometimes pasta, sometimes rice, and at other time potatoes. I usually think that if I had pasta today maybe I will eat something else tomorrow. However, I mean, I think these bags are ok for the first few days. But after that they start to get less and less tasty for every day that passes. That is my take on it.

Susanna, on the other hand, who stated that: *I eat the same food on repeat all the time, which gets quite boring*, also reflected about it in another sense when she said: *Even though everything tastes about the same, and the texture of everything is about the same I can still enjoy the food after all these weeks*. She conceptualized the meals as contextual where the repeated eating became part of the hiking experience, and consequently she enjoyed the food *qua* food, and not the food as the sum of its sensory properties. This enjoyment, that dissonated with the ideas of the boring food, could be seen in the data as relatable to the contextual evaluation of the meals related to the place-space in which they occurred. Susanna continued:

After a two hour long rise where I had just crossed the ridge and were going to sit down to have something to eat. It was warm yet windy, and the breeze kept the mosquitos away, and I had this stew which I carry a lot of, so I was somewhat tired of it already. But there, and at that moment, everything was just perfect. It does not matter how good the food is at home, it will never be as good as that.

There was an understanding that the physical environment, the place-space of the meal, motivated food consumption and functioned as an aspect in the holistic evaluation of the eating event. Food, which after weeks of consumption left the hiker wishing for more would still be evaluated as contextually good when consumed in the mountains on the trail. Artur was explicit about this, when he in the interview suggested that: *even the porridge I have for breakfasts taste better when I can eat it outside*. The physical environment of the meal, furthermore, functioned as a facilitator for the solo hiker to engage in a social environment when the place was natural meeting spot for hikers, such as cabins or safety huts. Leopold, when asked about how much time he spent on his meals during the hike, elaborated:

I never specifically allocate time for my meals. They could be twenty minutes, but they could also go on for two hours, it does not really matter to me. For me being in a social environment is the most important thing. If I am alone maybe I just stop to eat and adjust my backpack and then move on.

For Tova, in contrast, the social aspects of the cabins, inhibited her from stopping and having a meal on the trail, thus acted as a demotivator. She rationalized this as:

I am on this hike to, preferably, be alone. But, like here, at a mountain station, there are more people and it at places like these

where I go to get some social exchange. But, as my goal was to be alone on this trip, I also want to eat alone. It usually solves itself, as I just sit down when I find a nice location. Social eating is something different. Eating alone is meditative for me and I can reflect on myself, this is something I cannot do when eating with others. They distract me.

She understood the meal in relation to her purpose of undertaking the hike. When the purpose of the hike was social, the social could consequently have functioned as an initiator of meals, as described by Ossian when he remembered a meal he had with friends while out hiking in the Alps:

When you walk the trail, you start to fantasize about food, right? And we started to fantasize about schnitzel with French fries. So, we decided that we were going to get that at the supermarket in the next village, as we could not get it in any of the huts. I do not think you could have done this alone. You need to carry the oil and stuff and that is a lot of weight. It was somebody having this stupid idea, and everyone was like, yeah let's do it, and then we hyped it up.

The social aspect he described not only motivated a spectacular meal event with food that could be considered as being contextually out of place, but it also functioned as the enabling factor for it in a physical sense as it took a communal effort to realize it. Carrying food up to a mountain summit to prepare it as part of a meal is more than a physical, energy consuming, endeavour it is also a time consuming one.

3.2. The acceptable setting

The theme of the acceptable setting was constructed around the materiality of the meal setting; how the setting, as physical space, informed the hikers' understanding of it as an acceptable setting to engage in meals in. However, the theme was furthermore constructed with the hikers' holistic interpretation of the environment, as it is built up by *physical space as a provider* and *engaging with the sublime*. Within the theoretical backdrop against which this analysis is understood, materiality concerns all things physical in a very objective sense. That is, materiality shapes understandings and guides activity but is distinct from these phenomena.

The physical environment was, in the case of accessibility to water, a true prerequisite for the eating event to be able to occur. When hiking in the Swedish mountains clean water is readily available in the abundance of water streams scattered throughout the mountain range. This, then, often led to hikers carrying insignificant amounts of water often not enough to be able to both re-hydrating food as well as drinking. As such the streams then tend to become understood as a foundational aspect intrinsic to the site of an acceptable setting for meals, that is, the place-space of meals. Idun was explicit about this in her interview when she noted:

Often, I stay in close vicinity to water. Because, if I am going to have some coffee I need it, and I usually need to refill my water bottle as well. If I am going to have this bagged porridge, I also need water for that.

Like Idun, Leopold also found water to be one of the major aspects he considered when choosing a spot for his meals. As a hiker carrying a minimal, ultralight, loadout, he consequently minimized the amount of water carried on the trail, making the availability of water even more important. He elaborated on this as:

I had hoped that I would find water there. There were some, a little, but not the best. I usually think that all I need is a shelter so I can get away from the wind and the mosquitos, but then the thought that I need water usually hits me. I usually do not hike with any water, or well, I am usually out of water. Then, sometimes, when I reach those shelters there are no water, and then I am in deep shit.

While he considered water to be an important aspect in relation to finding a suitable spot for his meals, he also touched on several distinct aspects of materiality in his statement. Cabins *qua* buildings was one of those aspects, and as a material aspect it distinguishes itself from the aforementioned understanding of cabins, or shelters, as social gathering spots. The shelters' primary function, as material, is to provide the hiker with protection from other material aspects, like weather. Intense winds have the potential to make spots without protection to be considered as inappropriate for meals or resting in general, as Idun depicted it:

Ehm, well, it is miserable when the weather is so bad that you really cannot even sit down and rest. Then you just have to eat while walking. When you get hit by snow from the side and almost get knocked over or you feel like, ok, if I sit down here, I am going to catch a cold. When I encounter that, I just march on, even though I really do not have the energy to do so.

In contrast to what she described as the weather, fierce winds, and low temperatures, assuming the function as an inhibitor of breaks, other weather, clearly, facilitated breaks and were thus perceived as relating to the material aspect of the acceptable spot as Bengt mentioned:

When it rains, I usually eat inside of my tent. Else I use to, if the weather allows and the mosquitos allows, eat outside, because it is obviously nicer to watch the view or a forest than the inside of your tent. I usually chose to stop at spots where there is water available and as few mosquitos as possible. I mean, you want to eat without having to remove your mosquito net for each bite.

Weather thus, in combination with the number of mosquitos, facilitated the possibility of a site to be considered as an acceptable setting for the meal. Mosquitos then, were in themselves a factor that influenced the understanding of the setting and part of the material aspects that hikers encountered and thus needed to account for during their hikes. Bengt mentioned the view as a factor influencing his meals in the sense that it did make his meal experiences better. This understanding of the materiality as sublime, rather than being part of the value judgement of the meal in a holistic sense, was also an aspect of what was found to be an acceptable spot for eating. Susanna elaborated on how she perceived the landscape as being important for her stops:

You want to stop at a really nice place and especially during lunch when you want to sit down and rest for an hour, and it tends to be quite nice places. Because it feels important because when you are in a dense thicket and all you see is the forest and you have the mosquitos surrounding you, that moment is not very nice. It does not matter how tasty your food is, it is not that nice anyway. You want the nice views. Well, making a stop just when you pass a ridge is the best.

The nice views were an aspect that the interviewees tended to come back to, also as a reason for being out in the mountains in the first place. However, even though this factor seemed important, looking at the dataset, there are no mentions of planning stops in relation to where the views are, e.g., at summits or ridges. The sensemaking relating to the place at which breaks were had was instead understood as an *ad hoc* decision, whereas other factors were clearly planned.

4. Discussion

Two themes were generated from the data vis-à-vis the organizing features, that is, the teleoaffective structure and understandings, of the negotiation of meals as part of hikers' meal practices. The first theme conceptualized the motivators which were generative of the hikers' food choice. The second theme were generated based on the understood importance of features of places as consumption-spaces. Within the data two overarching concepts were expressed, and adhered to, by the hikers, the first concept was that of efficiency which had a strong connection with the outcome of the meal and where food generally was perceived as

a source of energy; the second concept, in contrast, was that of hedonics which were related to the meal as a process and expressed as a focus on enjoyable experiences. These overarching concepts fit well within the acceptable end-project-action combinations within the teleoffective structure as an organizing feature of practices (Schatzki, 2019). As reflected in the results, the different ends generate different sets of projects and subsequent feelings and incorporate different understandings of the materiality of meals (Table 3.).

When hikers engaged in projects related to the end of *energizing the body* efficiency encompassed most of the meal, thus making it a utilitarian, and at times ascetic, enterprise. The focus on efficiency differentiated the energizing meals from earlier conceptualizations of tourism meals, where eating is often perceived as touristic engagement with local culture (Chang et al., 2011; Mak et al., 2012; Müller & Pettersson, 2001; Quan & Wang, 2004; Sims, 2009), it did, furthermore, contrast against the understanding of the habitual meal as social (Fischler, 2011; Holm et al., 2019; Kahma et al., 2014), structured (Lund et al., 2017; Lund & Gronow, 2019), cooked (Holm et al., 2012; Kahma et al., 2014), and founded in socio-economic dispositions (Baumann et al., 2019; Bourdieu, 1984). Instead, materiality was understood as the primary foundation of the meal, energy density and weight were factors of the food that held priority over hedonic sensory aspects. The hiker's endurance and body strength were also considered vis-à-vis the weight of the food as traversing the landscape of the mountains provided a challenging task. The repetitive nature of the efficient meal progressively resulted in sensory-specific satiety and aversion, which, however, did not motivate any change in the hikers' dietary activities. As such, following the idea of the normativity of social practices (Schatzki, 2012), it appears as if aversion is part of the affective dimension of the teleoffective structure, an acceptable feeling embedded in hikers' meal practices. Therefore, engaging in the activity of the efficient meal often meant acting in contradiction with everyday preferences, putting the meal at the lowest order of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), as a physiological need, neglecting the self-actualization aspect at the highest order. However, when the meal practices of hikers are contextualized within the broader nexus of hiking practices, where an acceptable end would be to through-hike the trail, the food's function as fuel for the hiker would facilitate self-actualization, as it is an indispensable material component of the practice-material mesh.

When the meal, as a project, instead served the purpose of facilitating the end of *having an enjoyable experience* the sensemaking expressed were different from that of the efficient meals. Eating food that was perceived to taste good was understood through a sense of normalcy, as food that were recognized as being part of the habitual meal practices. Feelings of desire were expressed regarding the possibility to have cooked meals, containing different textures, based on fresh ingredients; where hedonic values held priority over efficiency, and the overall taste sensation was highly valued. The organization of the hedonic meals were exceedingly dependent, in addition to the bodily condition of the hikers and sensory qualities of the food, on the material conditions of the trail. Fresh food was only available at trailheads, which were located roughly 80–100 km apart, and given its propensity to spoil and the lack of available methods of cooling, only a limited amount was viable for the hikers to carry. However, other activities, temporally located before the hike, were also

engaged in as to organize the hedonic meals. Food cooked and dried at home, then packed into bags and sent off to the mountain stations for later pick-up by the hikers, functioned to elude the freeze-dried options available on the market, consequently increasing the possibilities of having enjoyable meal experiences for the hikers.

Even though the ends, *energizing the body* and *having enjoyable meals*, qua ends are conceptualized in binary opposition; engaging in activities for the sake of generating one end, might also generate the experience of the other end, that, however, results from a contextual outcome rather than achieving that other end. Even after repetitive eating, for extended periods of time, the exhaustion generated by hiking the mountains could make the experience of the food hugely enjoyable, even if the project engaged in was that of the efficient meal. The materiality of the trail could also impose such effects on the experience of the meal, e.g., the perceived beauty of the place-space could elevate the experiential dimension of the utilitarian meal, much in line with what is proposed in the literature from culinary arts and meal science (Edwards & Gustafsson, 2008; Gustafsson et al., 2006), where the central aspects each weighing in on the holistic meal experience.

The idea of what aspects of the physical environment that constitutes an acceptable setting for the meal activity was shared between the hikers and is thus conceptualized here as a general understanding, adhering to Schatzki's (2019) idea of the general understanding as "the general sense of things", rather than a fragment of the teleoffective structure. Accessibility to water, protection from wind and rain, and a minimal number of mosquitos were conceived favourable and as the fundamentals for an acceptable setting, whereas sublime views and pleasant weather, meaning warm and sunny, made the setting to be understood as preferable rather than acceptable. Although the hikers were unable to foresee most aspects of the physical space, streams of water are marked on maps of the trail and could have functioned as a foundation for planning the meals, stops were solely based on *ad hoc* decisions rather than being planned, unless the stop involved a cabin or a shelter.

The understanding of the social dimension as important, and as an integral aspect of the meal (Gustafsson, 2006), was likewise shared among hikers approaching different ends. The experience of engaging in social contexts, though, were contextually evaluated vis-à-vis the sought end. When solitude was expressed as a general motive for the hike, absence of other people within the meal were held as important, thus contrasting against much of the literature that conceive of the meal as a social affair *par excellence* (Edwards & Gustafsson, 2008; Fischler, 2011). Baudrillard (1989, p. 15) went as far as to write that "sadder than the beggar is the man who eats alone in public." Yet, the hikers seeking solitude also engaged in social meals when it suited them, elucidating the complexity of the social aspect of eating, and hiking, which has also been seen on the John Muir Trail (Hitchner et al., 2019). Hikers taking pride in being efficient, carrying light loadouts and hiking for long distances each day, still valued the social dimension of meals as important, spending more time in the meal context, thus being less effective, when other hikers were present. The presence of other hikers, as important for the meal, extended beyond the temporal context of the eating situation, as conversations about eating and food were common topics along the trail, thus in a concrete way linking hikers' meal practices with the broader bundle of hiking practices.

While hikers' meal practices do not necessarily fit within the current conceptualization of tourists' meals, as being means of engagement or being explorative, they do fit within the conceptualization of hiking as leisure, being part of a sense of accomplishment and self-discovery (den Breejen, 2007; Crust et al., 2011).

While the data gathered were useful in the conceptualization of hikers' meal practices and the interpretation of the teleological end-project-action structure, one limitation, within the sample, was that it left out day hikers' and section hikers on shorter trails. It is possible that other acceptable teleological ends, and feelings, could be generated through data gathered in such contexts. Consequently, the reliable applicability of the study, to other contexts than through-hiking in the

Table 3

Teleological ends and related projects, feelings, and materiality of the hikers' meals.

End	Project	Feelings	Material
Energizing the body	Engaging in efficient meals	Aversion	Energy dense
Having an enjoyable experience	Organizing hedonic meals	Desire	Sensory richness

Swedish mountains, is currently uncertain. Furthermore, the study does not inquire, explicitly, about food preferences or hedonic valuation of sensory attributes. As such, it is suggested that further research is conducted to broaden the sample of hikers and to gain deeper understanding of how the food *qua* product is sensory evaluated *in-situ*. Those aspects would further a holistic perspective on the hikers' meal practices, thus helping destination managers and rural food entrepreneurs to better adapt their offering towards hikers, helping them to have better meal experiences.

5. Conclusions

The results indicate that there is a problem conceptualizing the good touristic meal experience as an *a priori* construct vis-à-vis how mountain hikers understand and make sense of their meals while engaging in long-distance mountain hiking. Their meals could instead be understood as contextually negotiated adhering to both situated project ends and the over all end the hikers strive to reach by carrying on the practice motivated by past or present state of affairs and the configuration of the physical environment.

The present study, moreover, elucidates the need for a contextual approach towards hikers' meals, where the context extends in time to encompass the goals the hikers aiming to achieve with the hiking project, and are thus located outside of the immediate reach of destination managers. This need for the contextual approach becomes visible through the conflicts expressed in the sensemaking of meals where the overall goal of the hike was not reflected in the situated goal of the meal, e.g., when there was a social context available for solo through-hikers to engage in. Consequently, knowledge about the teleological structure and the understandings organizing hikers' meal practices, as part of the hiking practice bundle, has meaningful managerial implications as it brings awareness for destination managers and rural food entrepreneurs about the contextual drivers of the meals of the hikers, as potential customers. Thus, the possession of such knowledge could benefit the promotion of food products catered to satisfy the aspects of meals in the mountains valued by hikers.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Joachim Sundqvist: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Visualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Acknowledgements

I wish to sincerely thank the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments which helped in enhancing the article. I would furthermore like to thank Sofia Rapo and Annica Långvall for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of the manuscript.

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