



## Gastronomic experiences: Motives, activities, and teleology

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### A B S T R A C T

The notion of gastronomic experiences is often used covertly in the sense that the concept is taken for granted and is, thus, not made explicit. However, as the concept of gastronomy is, in itself, ambiguous and the philosophical ideas conceptualizing experiences are plenty, the compound of gastronomic experiences is facing the possibility of becoming meaningless. Based on empirical data and theoretical argumentation, this paper aims to elucidate how understanding the practice theoretical concepts of motive and teleology, as they relate to activity, could facilitate for positive consumer meals, understood as gastronomic experiences. Ethnographic data on mountain hikers' meals were collected over a three-week period in the Swedish mountains and analysed by reflective thematic analysis. The results indicate that the meal, as a contextual eating event, were understood vis-à-vis the teleology of the practice carried on and motivated by temporal and material aspects pertaining to the hike.

### 1. Introduction

Gastronomic experience as a compound notion is ambiguous in and of itself (Martínez de Albeniz, 2018), that is, it relates to the concept of experience and could thus relate to the process of engaging in gastronomic activity chains, something that is enacted by human beings (Otero, 2018; Seyitoğlu and Atsız, 2022). It could, furthermore, relate to the memory of the lived experience of participation, that is, the perceived resulting experience, in the phenomenological sense, as outcome of such enactment (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; Sundqvist and Walter, 2017). The restaurant dining experience has been conceived of being, e.g., the experienced sum of different aspects pertaining to the meal as context (Gustafsson et al., 2006), more memorable if understood as authentic (Le et al., 2021), rooted in contextually understood eating milieus and taste sensations (Galiñanes Plaza et al., 2022), and largely dependent on the company (Andersson and Mossberg, 2004). However, although the dining experience has been argued as depending on social factors, e.g., personal needs (Kim et al., 2022; Larsen et al., 2021), group configuration of the visitors (Zibarzani et al., 2022) and the perceived importance of restaurant attributes (Iofrida et al., 2022), the social dimensions of the visitors are often treated as static and rooted in socio-demographics rather than being treated as the interactions between food and person as they pertain to the activities the visitors are engaging in, thus, possibly, missing out on explanatory power. These interactions, between humans and food, are in this article treated as structured, indeterminate, activity, *acting in the world*, where the structure, sustaining the chains of activity, is accessible through experiences,

*being in the world*, as features of activities (Schatzki, 2010).

In addition to the concept of experience often being taken for granted, the same often holds true for the notion of gastronomy which is repeatedly used in an implicit manner. However, when gastronomy is explicitly defined it comes to reflect a wide array of concepts, e.g., a business segment within the hospitality industry (García-Henche and Cuesta-Valiño, 2022; Navarro-Dols and González-Pernía, 2020), the cuisine of a defined geographical area (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Durmaz et al., 2022; Kivela and Crofts, 2009; Sthapit, 2019), fine dining (Altarriba Bertan and Wilde, 2017), and knowledge and skills of food and meal design (Nyberg et al., 2022). The notion, furthermore, is given more elaborate definitions, often encompassing multiple of the aforementioned concepts, e.g., “[representing] a field of studies and production activities, organization of environments, service provision, management, product offerings, and performances in the context of food culture, which basically, is centered on cooking and includes products, organizations, establishments, which, in a multi, inter, and trans-disciplinary relationship with these areas” (Koerich and Müller, 2022, p. 1); relating to aspects such as the art of cooking quality food ingredients, culinary traditions representing the communities, grand chefs in Michelin-starred restaurants, eating with pleasure, and being expensive (Ueda and Poulain, 2021); or “a social representation strongly related to culture, feeding, hedonism, sensory aspects and particular methods, techniques and ingredients that are central to food preparation” (Rojas-Rivas et al., 2020, p. 9). With the diverse usage of the word, its meaning risks to be blurred when not defined.

Tracing the notion back to 1825 and Brillat-Savarin's seminal work *The Physiology of Taste*, gastronomy is defined as “the reasoned

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comprehension of all that relates to the nourishment of man” and its material subject is “everything that can be eaten” (Brillat-Savarin, 1825/2019, p. 32). I would, however, argue that one often overlooked and rarely cited passage relating to the definition of gastronomy is the “experience which finds out the way of turning the whole to the best possible account” (p.32-33). This *turning the whole to the best possible account* I interpret as being how gastronomy takes shape at the end of the chain of knowledge and production, the finished food. However, to argue that something is the best it could be calls for situatedness. For people living under conditions that does not fulfill Maslow’s (1943) basic needs, that is, physiological needs and the need for security, the best shape food could take does not necessarily mirror the best shape food could take for people who are striving to achieve self-actualization, located at the top of the hierarchy. While canned food might be the best shape food could take, e.g., in conditions where the availability of food is scarce and food security is not guaranteed, it would not be understood in the same light in a fine dining setting. Consequently, the physical manifestation of gastronomy, as understood in this article, is food that is understood as the best that it could be in any given situation. Gastronomic experiences are thus treated as features of activity chains incorporating food, which is understood, situationally, as the best it could be. Such activities, or chains of activities, are what we could conceptualize as meals.

The defining quality of the meal has, in the food studies and gastronomy literature been described as, e.g., the material properties of the food served during an eating event (Mäkelä, 2000), energy contribution of the food eaten in the event (Meiselman, 2008), and as a contextual event encompassing numerous abstract features (Edwards and Gustafsson, 2008). The consumption of food and the role it takes in culture and society has often, following what is termed the cultural turn, been elucidated with relation to its symbolic properties and its role in identity formation (see Neuman, 2019). Drivers and motivators of habitual food consumption have, in that gest, been described as, e.g., individual political situated activities (Halkier and Holm, 2008; Niva et al., 2014), social norms relating to, e.g., environmental benefits (Cheah et al., 2020; Hansmann et al., 2020), identity projects (Cherry et al., 2011; Kniazeva and Venkatesh, 2007), cultural beliefs (Shipman and Durmus, 2017), positive attributes rooted in, e.g., ethnocentrism (Bianchi and Mortimer, 2015), and in embodied objectified aspects, e.g., age, economic capital, and household size (Brunner et al., 2010). Following what has been dubbed the practice turn in contemporary theory (Schatzki, 2001), eating and meals, have been conceptualized, often, but not always, drawing from fragmented and ontologically contradictory frameworks, rather than being individual and rational processes, as organized activity and situated actions, related to, e.g., sustainability (Bartoloni et al., 2022; Gobbo et al., 2022), temporally shared contexts (Khanijou et al., 2021; Plessz and Wahlen, 2022), contextually circumscribed consumption contexts (Nyberg et al., 2018; Sundqvist and Bengs, 2021), and eating in general (Warde, 2014, 2016). However, as food, by physiological necessity, is essential for human life and thus also essential for society and civilization, its material function is, by that very fact, an important aspect in understanding its role in social life. Consequently, within this article, the meal is to be understood as a chain of activities pertaining to the consumption of food within a socio-material context, that is, within a social practice.

In this paper I will drive the argument that the meal as a compound of material properties of food and consumption context could take its place in social space in an unreflected manner, by which I mean that the symbolic properties attributed to food through some, individualistic, theoretical streams, does not necessarily reflect the way in which the food as material, in contrast to food as symbol, is contextually consumed. My argument will draw from empirical inquiry into meals contextualised through mountain hiking and social theory in the form of social practice theory. Eating as an activity event, inherent to numerous social practices, that is, socially organized chains of activity, hence, being driven by motives toward goals, does not need to relate to any

understanding of symbolic value of the food itself and could still result in gastronomic experiences.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore how the notions of motive and teleology, as generative of activity, understood from the conceptual apparatus of social practice theory, could be used to conceptualize, and understand gastronomic experiences, and therefore, as tools in the facilitation of positive outcomes of consumer meals.

### 1.1. Social practices

Social practice theories are theories that share the understanding of activity as important to and constitutive of social reality. It is a school of thought that is influenced by and developed from, in large, Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) notion of the habitus. Even though the interest in human activity is shared among contemporary scholars engaging in practice theories, there are fundamental, that is, ontological, differences between many of them, hence, making them incompatible for theoretically informed analysis, e.g., the difference in the perspective on the material arrangements place relative to social practices or the role of routinization as a constituent of social practices (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 1996, 2003, 2019; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2014, 2016). Thus, for theoretical and philosophical coherency, this article builds on the ideas established through the social practice theory of philosopher and social theorist Theodore Schatzki.

Social practices are “open-ended, spatial-temporal sets of organized doings and sayings” Schatzki (2019, p. 28), clarified as being “an open spatial-temporal array of doings and saying that is governed by a largely normative array of understandings, rules, teleologies, and emotions” (p. 35). Doings and saying are modes of objectively manifesting bodily performances in the world, that is, the movement of bodies and their interaction with material arrangements in objective reality. Doings, an activity, that contextually are understood as the doing of something, constitutes actions, something that happens, therefore, in the words of Schatzki (2010, p. xv), “activities are happenings through which states of affairs of a certain sort inherently obtain.”

Doings and sayings, as activities, form open-ended sets that are constitutive of practices. This open-endedness regards the quantitative aspects of practices, that is, practices can evolve through the incorporation of new sets of activities, doings generative of actions unfolding in objective spacetime, and material arrangements into current practices (Schatzki, 2019). As such, the basic principle of a practice is that it is an organized, enduring, set of embodied actions distributed in objective space through objective time.

Of consequence for the understanding of the practical intelligibility of activity are the concepts of understandings and teleoaffective structures as organizing aspects of social practices. The concept of understandings is divided into two separate forms of understandings, which are, practical and general. Understandings of the practical sort encompass the recognition of activities as constituents of specific actions and the knowledge of how to perform and respond to such actions (Schatzki, 2002). General understandings, in contrast, are understandings of phenomena more abstract than actions, e.g., the “abstract senses” of aesthetics (Schatzki, 2012, p. 16), or the “ethoses or general senses of things” (Schatzki, 2019, p. 30).

The teleoaffective structure, as suggested by the very notion, encompasses a teleological and an affective aspect. The teleological dimension contains hierarchical sets of normative, and within the practice acceptable, end-project-activity combinations, while the affective dimension encompasses normative emotions (Schatzki, 2012). Within the structure, ends are understood to be the teleological ends of practices, which is to say the normative structures that restrict the carrier’s acceptable activities enacted through specific projects that aims towards some state of being.

Ponder meal practices in the context of visiting a restaurant during a weekend away from home. Within the teleoaffective structure could be the end of strengthening the relationship with a loved one, this end then

generates projects such as finding suitable restaurants for a night out, inquiring about the menu options, or booking a weekend at a hotel in a nearby city, those projects are in turn made up of actions, informed by practical understandings, such as searching online, asking questions to restaurant staff, and calling the reception of the hotel. General understandings on the practice encompass, e.g., aesthetic judgements of what constitute an appropriate venue for the event (Schatzki, 2014). As such, the practice is spatially-temporally dispersed, in objective space and through objective time, and enacted throughout the entirety of the process. Space and time are, furthermore, albeit differently, inherent aspects of activity.

## 1.2. Activity timespace

While objective spacetime is observable, the timespace of activity is considered as the abstract spatial and temporal dimensions of the activity, that is, the spatial dimension of timespace encompasses abstract places and paths that anchor activities in objective space; whereas the temporal dimension of activity, rather than being conceived of as being the sequential ordering of events, which is the way time is conceptualized in contemporary western thought, is regarded as past or present state of affairs motivating activity towards some teleological goal (Schatzki, 2009, 2010). Activity spaces are, consequently, places to perform some specific sort of activity, these spaces are, furthermore, connected with other spaces through activity paths. Within the context of the described night out at a restaurant, a desk with a computer could be conceived of as the place to inquire about availability and menu option, a hotel in a city a place to prepare for a visit to the restaurant, whereas airports, roads, foyers, and corridors could be the paths between such, and other, places of activity. Places, thus, become reflective and determinative of activities, restaurants are places to eat, because people eat there, and people eat at restaurants because they are places to eat. Restaurants are, however, not the only objective spaces where the activity place of eating is anchored, dining halls, kitchens, hot-dog stands, the summit of a mountain, or someone's backyard could all share the activity place of eating. Accordingly, practices, and thus social life, is conceptualized as being organized at the level of activities through their inherent quality to weave together with other activities, as activities paths and places anchor in shared objective spaces with other activities paths and places (Schatzki, 2009).

Restaurants anchor during the evening to activity places such as, a place to spend time with a loved one, a place to eat, or a place to experience new food, while, during the morning and early afternoon, the objective space of the restaurant is instead anchoring with activity places of a place to earn ones living, or a place to develop new items for the menu. The performance of activities and the resulting actions, furthermore, aggregate through coordination and forming chains of actions, thus, when performed by persons sharing understandings and teleoaffectivities, constitute practices. Meal practices are, consequently, the aggregate of actions pertaining to specific activities performed in activity timespace anchored in objective spacetime circumscribed by shared rules, understandings, and teleoaffectivities.

## 2. Method

While studying social practices, drawing from a theoretical background that, ontologically, is anti-individualistic, that is, it does not adhere to the idea of the individual as constitutive, per se, of social reality, it leads to a methodological approach where the social phenomenon studied is de-subjectified and where persons, rather than being conceived of as wilfully acting agents, are treated as carriers of social practices acting within the social space the social practice demarcates. As practices are organized activity and where only the enactment of practices, that is, the doings and sayings, could be observed, the organizational features of practices need to be uncovered by other means than just direct experience, observation, through the implementation of

interaction with the carriers (Schatzki, 2012).

### 2.1. Data collection

As a consequence of methodological consideration, data for the study were gathered by the author during ethnographic fieldwork over a three-week period, late summer of 2021, along the Kungsleden trail, stretching 440 km through the Swedish counties of Västerbotten and Norrbotten. Ethnographic data in the form of observations, interviews, and a field diary, capturing autoethnographic data and observational notes, were gathered. The sites for the interviews were concentrated to two section heads of the trail, Jäkkvik and Kvikkjokk, with the exception of one interview that was conducted out on the trail. As a criterion of inclusion, the respondent had to be, at the time, engaged in mountain hiking and fluent in Swedish or English. Twelve hikers, five women and seven men, were interviewed utilizing a well-established semi-structured interview format (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). The interviewees represented a wide range of age and occupational backgrounds (Table 1). The participants hiked routes varying in length between 73 km and 1300 km, planning to stay out on the trail between five days to two months. Capturing the organizing aspects of the hikers' meal practices, as propositional knowledge, was the goal of the interviews.

Each interview session began by presenting the participants with a short summary of the project idea and a brief information on how the notion of meals would be used throughout the interview, that is, meals understood as contextual eating events. Informed consent to participate in the study were collected from all participants. For the first three interviews, the question used to initiate the dialogue was: *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.* When the conversation, naturally, did not touched upon the central aspects of the meal, that is, when, where, what, and with whom, the interviewer guided the conversation through those themes. The interview sessions, that 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 in relation to 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, and a thick description (Geertz, 1994), to which the interview data was related during the analytical process for this article. The rationale behind this procedure

**Table 1**

List of interviewees (anonymized).

| Interviewee | Gender | Age | Occupation         | Trail Hiked           |
|-------------|--------|-----|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Maria       | Female | 34  | Hotel receptionist | Kungsleden            |
| Wilhelm     | Male   | 25  | Programmer         | Kungsleden            |
| Jonas       | Male   | 51  | Insurance sales    | Kungsleden            |
| Emil        | Male   | 38  | Programmer         | Kungsleden            |
| Mattias     | Male   | 31  | PhD Student        | Section of Kungsleden |
| Berit       | Female | 27  | Physician          | Green ribbon          |
| Gunnar      | Male   | 66  | Retired            | Kungsleden            |
| Thomas      | Male   | 43  | IT consultant      | Kungsleden            |
| Sofia       | Female | 38  | Translator         | Section of Kungsleden |
| Kajsa       | Female | 36  | Business developer | Padjelantaleden       |
| Annci       | Female | 62  | Midwife            | Kungsleden            |
| Björn       | Male   | 32  | Physician          | Green ribbon          |

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 in their capacity of being nothing but indeterminate 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.

## 2.2. Data analysis

The interviews were analysed by the application reflective thematic analysis (TA), adhering to commonly used and established guidelines (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2021b; Braun et al., 2016), and following explicit recommendation to establish trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). The purpose of reflective TA is to generate interpretative and theoretically informed themes across datasets rather analysing every datapoint (interview) by itself, and, as such is applicable when searching for inter-subjective phenomena, e.g., social practices. The reflective dimension of reflective TA aims to describe the analysis process as firmly connected to the researcher as subject, in contrast with coding reliability approaches or codebook approaches to TA, hence the wording of themes being generated rather than found or emerging (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Thus, after the familiarization with the data, moving back and forth between the interview data, the observational data, and the ongoing analysis, all interviews were coded and codes were then controlled for coherency, that is, if the codes, by themselves, could be argued to represent the data they labelled. After the initial and open coding, codes were broadly sorted into the domain they represented as to facilitate the abstracting procedure of generating themes. At this point of the analysis the interview transcripts were put aside, and the codes were sorted into sub-themes representing higher levels of abstract meaning. The same process was then repeated, sorting sub-themes into themes. The themes and higher-level sub-themes were then, to verify the empirical rigor of the analysis, compared against the interview transcript and the observational data. This check back furthermore filled the role of controlling for the coherence of data representation of the themes.

## 2.3. 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 hiking.

## 3. Results

The TA resulted in the construction of two themes relating to the overarching theme of meal events as situated processes (Table 2.). Each of these themes were constructed by the abstraction and linkage of reliable subthemes.

### 3.1. Contextual food negotiation and evaluation

The first theme constructed during the analysis is an abstract of how

**Table 2**

Themes relating to the over-arching theme of: Meal experiences as situated processes.

| Theme      | Contextual food negotiation and evaluation                            | Socio-geographical spaces                                              |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sub-themes | Fuel versus experience dichotomy<br>Temporality of consumption events | Meal spaces as social enablers<br>(Dis)comfort as temporal demarcation |

hikers negotiated the food choices in the meal events in which they partook. The theme was generated out of two sub-themes, namely, *fuel versus experience dichotomy* and *temporality of consumption events*.

Hiking in the mountains is a physical demanding endeavor and is, as such, understood by the hikers as a context in which food as energy becomes important. The idea of eating nutritionally balanced, energy dense, and preferably light weight food were expressed as ideal in certain contexts, e.g., when the hiker wanted to complete a through-hike in a short time. Potential weight loss and physical exhaustion were mentioned as potential outcomes of not eating, in what was perceived as, the correct way. When food was understood as energy, hunger did not play a necessary role in the instigation of the eating event or the resulting, contextual, food choice and evaluation, rather the adherence to a paradigm of mechanical and clock-time initiated eating was adopted. That is, energy dense, quick to prepare, often freeze-dried, food or snacks were consumed whether the hiker, treating food as fuel, felt hungry or not. Sofia expressed this as:

Well, it's usually been like, now we must eat. It's not been relating to the sense of hunger. But you realize that if you don't eat, it won't work, we won't be able to continue, we won't be able to do anything.

In contrast, however, were those eating events where food, rather than energy, was treated as a means of facilitation for good experiences, that is, the food was perceived as an integral part of the hiking experience rather than something external, fueling the hiker through the hike. This was expressed through the preparation of fresh, often heavyweight, food when the opportunity was presented to purchase it. Here the hikers' physique was often considered as the limiting factor as fresh food is less energy dense than the freeze-dried food often consumed and, thus, much heavier. The lack of chilled storage was another factor which was considered as fresh food, e.g., meat and some dairy products, could spoil, given that food outlets were up to a week apart, out on the trail during warmer days. I wrote the following in my field notes regarding one such encounter with fresh food, the location was roughly two days hike from the closest food outlet:

Today was the third time I met Emil. I had just finished my lunch in the Sjunltjie shelter and were packing up my things when he entered through the door. [...] After he had assembled his gas stove and presented a pot and a pan, he started to unload his bag. A squeeze bottle containing what looked like olive oil, a salt and a pepper shaker, pork chops, and a package of couscous. When he saw me eyeing his food, he happily offered me one of the two pork chops he had put on the table. I declined. He started to cook his pork in the cramped space, grease was spurting all over the steel covered table and the scent of fried meat engulfed the cabin. When I proceeded to ask him about how much weight he was carrying and how he handled the weight of fresh food, he replied that, "Good food is really important for morale and lets you enjoy the hike even more". [...] When Emil was in the middle of packing up his things, a third hiker entered the shelter, he froze in the door and expressed, surprisingly: "It smells like a restaurant in here". [...] While we were leaving, the newly arrived hiker started to prepare his instant noodles.

Emil, during a formalized interview about one week after the excerpt cited above followed up on the same theme by stating that: "[The food] that you have been dreaming about during the hike and the luxury is

because it's heavy and you carried it so it's like expensive in a way." The idea of fresh food being worth carrying due to its sensory richness when compared to the freeze-dried food was expressed even by those who only carried with them the lightweight food.

Food was, however, undergoing continuous evaluation, that is, whether it was brought for its experiential value or its energy density, prolonged exposure to the same food over an extended period of time influenced the effect the food *qua* material had on the eating event. Being exposed to the repetition of the same taste profile and the same textures made the food produced a sense of aversion. This aversion, however, instituted a conflict in the food negotiation as overwhelming hunger was conceived as making anything taste good, even things that ordinarily were understood to taste bad, as expressed by Jonas, who in general hiked on a diet consisting of instant mashed potatoes and salami, with some freeze-dried meals added in the mix:

Yes. Well, I mean. I think these bags [of freeze-dried food], they are pretty nice, at least for the first few days. But, like, for every consecutive day you eat them, they become less, and less, tasty. That's what I think.

It was, nevertheless, understood that even though this aversion manifested itself, this was the way to eat when out on a hike, a way that was accepted and adhered to by those attempting their through-hikes. As a hiker, the attitude, understood as normal, *vis-à-vis* food was in many cases almost ascetic in its form, a self-denial of pleasure and an adherence to utilitarian properties, even though, the food was also conceived of as something that should be tasty and enjoyable. In contrast, a common counter to this expressed boredom and aversion, was the bringing of something conceived of as a little extra or a reward for a day well hiked, like, e.g., chocolate, wine, rum, or candy.

As such the meal had the function of defining: (1) temporal context, e.g., the end of the day, through the consumption of specific material, e.g., rum; (2) the objective temporality, the flow of time; and (3) the situated appropriateness of certain food. In the same manner that efficiency was sought after in the weight of the food, temporal efficiency was also of concern. Time management was an important aspect expressed in relation to the hikers' practices, that is, food understood as something that, preferably, should be quick to prepare and easy to consume, as portrayed by Wilhelm:

I boil six deciliters of water. That is two cups of coffee and then water for my porridge. It's really quick. The preparation only takes as much time as it takes to boil the water. I just pour hot water into the bag and eat straight out of it. It's as quick as it can get. It's also the whole idea, to be quick.

In contrast to Wilhelm, who stopped for his meals, the temporal dimension of food choice was expressed through the consumption of food, e.g., nuts and energy bars, that enabled the hiker to eat while walking, thus, incorporating the eating event as an integral part of walking.

### 3.2. Socio-geographical spaces

The second theme constructed during the analysis is an abstract of how hikers, socially, understood the objective spaces of the meal events in which they partook. The theme was generated out of two sub-themes, namely, *meal spaces as social enablers* and *(Dis)comfort as temporal demarcation*.

Although some sections of Kungsleden are popular to hike while other sections are nothing but desolate the opportunity for social interaction is unpredictable. As such, the places understood as meal spaces within the hiking practices were, furthermore, understood as social spaces, that is, spaces which facilitated social interaction between hikers. Those spaces were, similarly, understood as spaces to socialize for those hikers who hiked in groups as the physical process of walking in the mountains, as it is physically demanding, especially in windy

conditions, did not produce the opportunity for much conversation. While eating events occurred everywhere on the trail, some spaces, e.g., cabins, shelters, organized resting sites with benches, and areas close to streams of water, were better understood as social spaces than others, e.g., forest areas, summits, or at the side of the trail. Furthermore, the meal spaces were also places at which the hikers, when cell phone reception permitted it, could engage in social exchange with friends and family outside of the trail.

This social dimension was, at times, understood as taking precedence over other aspects carried on in the practice, Jonas, who hiked at a quick pace, eating repetitive and effective food, stated that:

I don't think [that the social interaction is temporally problematic]. As I hike by myself, if I want to spend an extra thirty minutes, or even an hour, I can do that. I just hike that extra time during the evening instead.

The social eating event did, moreover, enable the formation of temporary communities, that is, hikers who met during a meal, would at times, bond together and hike as a group for the rest of the day.

Even though the understanding of the constituents of places as meal spaces were stable, *per se*, the temporal dimension of the understanding was influenced by the prevalent material properties, that is, the understanding of how long a place were considered a meal space was relative to present material conditions. Places that were closer to water sources were considered as being meal spaces for longer durations than those who were not. Shelters stopped being meal places when they got crowded, due to the possibility of getting infected with CoViD-19. The number of mosquitos, likewise, encroached on the stability of the temporal dimension of meal spaces, thus, windy conditions could, in specific cases, through removing the mosquitos, be understood as stabilizing the place as a meal space. However, when the wind increased to the point of being chilling it had the same negative effect on the temporal stability of the meal space as the mosquitos. Mattias remembers when he hiked the same route a few years ago:

The rain poured down and there was quite a bit of wet snow where I hiked. But I was really hungry, so I stopped at a place and boiled my water and poured it into the food pouch, but I couldn't sit there and eat, I froze too much. So, I used the food pouch as a hand warmer and ate out of it at the same time as I walked.

In contrast, sunny conditions and warm weather stabilized the temporality of outdoor meal spaces and extended the understanding of which places were considered as being meal spaces. Thus, the understanding of how meal spaces anchored to geographical places was related to materialities other than the geographical location itself.

## 4. Discussion

Arguing that gastronomic experiences are features of activity chains, enacted within social practices, pertaining to the consumption of food, which is understood as the best it could be within a socio-material context, is to argue that gastronomic experiences could occur in any setting involving eating. The results indicate that such experiences could arise in situations where the food filled a purpose within a series of projects relating to the social practice of mountain hiking.

The goal the hikers expressed with their hike, teleologies accepted within the hiking practice (Schatzki, 2019), organized the eating projects while out on the trail in a way that were understood to make sense under the given conditions. Such projects were e.g., to re-hydrate and eat food that is light-weight and energy dense, when the goal was to finish the hikes as quick as possible or cooking and eating freshly pan-fried pork chops because it brought enjoyment and luxury to the hike. Consequently, different food, as material arrangements, would bundle with different activities and give rise to different generally understood gastronomic experiences, depending on which of the practice's goals were to be achieved. This, furthermore, leads to the

mentioned, situational, take on gastronomy having to incorporate the teleological end of the practice organizing the activity out of which gastronomic experiences are had. That is, the situation is more than a physical configuration. It does, however, hold true in the results that situational ends, the teleology of activity timespace, could change through, e.g., shifting material properties like the addition of other hikers to the eating context or altering weather conditions, thus generate new activities, giving rise to new experiences. Those contextual emerging ends did not, however, affect the goal organizing the overall hike. Schatzki (2010, p.114) describes this as “[t]he notion of practical intelligibility [the phenomenon of its making sense to someone to perform an action] captures the sense that animates or informs the frequent redirections and restarts that mark the flow of conduct, including those redirections and restarts that are not consciously thought about or explicitly grasped”. While the practical intelligibility describes the driving force behind acting towards the future in sequential time, it always, furthermore, is a result of past or present state of affairs, its motivation (Schatzki, 2009, 2010).

The material configuration of the trail, encompassing aspects such as geography, human bodies, food, hiking equipment and buildings, comparable to the milieu of restaurants (Galiñanes Plaza et al., 2022) or the restaurant meal in its capacity of being food (Le et al., 2021), motivated the hikers’ activities, thus, motivated the emergence of gastronomic experiences. What is more, the dynamic nature of the material configuration, e.g., changing weather or amassing of mosquitos, informed the chains of activity, that is, the anchoring of activity spaces to objective places were conditioned by material arrangements. A flat area close to a stream of water, or a summit, would be considered under some conditions, e.g., the non-presence of mosquitos or in sunny and warm weather, as a temporally stable place to anchor meal activity spaces. However, in other conditions, e.g., high winds or heavy rain, the temporal stability would change, that is, the place might be a place to anchor meal spaces to for a shorter duration of time, if the anchorage occurred at all. As such, a location in objective space, whether it was a shelter on the Kungsleden trail, the inside of someone tent, or a fine dining restaurant, could at times be understood as the activity place for having gastronomic experiences and, at other times, not, depending on the present state of affairs. The material configuration of the human body, likewise, drove activities out of which gastronomic experiences were had, e.g., through hunger, fatigue, or comfortableness.

Performances of bodily movements, generated by motives, and driven towards a teleological end, which are contextually recognized as being actions of some kind, form chains that are conceived of as projects (Schatzki, 2002, 2019), e.g., the project of engaging in a meal on the trail, or the project of visiting a restaurant in order to entertain colleagues (Sundqvist and Bengs, 2021), eating specific foods to signal a political position (Halkier and Holm, 2008; Niva et al., 2014), or cooking certain food as a means of upholding class distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). These meal projects, the experiences contained in the configuration of activity, and the motives driving the actions, located within the meal practices of mountain hikers and the material arrangements they encountered in the field could, in summary be described as: The teleologic goal of quickly and efficiently completing a through-hike, generated projects, related to food, that strived to maximize efficiency, e.g., buying or preparing energy-dense light weight food, minimizing the time spent in eating situations, using light weight stoves and pots, and eating snacks instead of lunch, driven by the motives of carrying a light backpack and hiking at a quick pace. On the other hand, the goal of having an enjoyable through-hike, generated projects, related to food, that strived to maximize the immersion in sublime environments through, e.g., buying and preparing fresh food, using heavier, but more flexible, cooking equipment, and spending more time within the context of the meal, driven by the motives of, e.g., eating sensory rich foods, enjoying the company of other hikers, and realizing fantasies. Consequently, the best the food could be understood as being within those end-project-activity structures contrasted, which accordingly led to

different foundations for gastronomic experiences.

## 5. Conclusions

Placing the gastronomic experience outside of the control of the hospitality industry might seem like a provocative move, especially when arguing that the notion already is at risk of losing its meaning. I would, in contrast, argue that the gastronomic experience needs to be released to and abstracted as a feature of all food related activities in order to reclaim its meaning.

The results elucidate the problem of interpreting the engagement in, and thus, gastronomic experiences of, meals as free from the understanding about the context the person, engaging in the meal, is acting in relation to, that is, in the case of the current study, the state of affairs as motives (what is the case) and the teleology (for the sake of a way of being). The two themes constructed from the data, when put in dialogue with a social practice theoretical framework, show that, in the case of engaging in meals while hiking in the Swedish mountains, the eating event is performed, contextually, through dynamic material arrangements, current state of affairs, and shifting, situational, teleologies. In other terms, what made sense for the hikers to do in relation to their food and eating on the trail shifted over time. However, while the teleologies of eating events as projects, that is, chains of intelligible actions, could contextually deviate from the teleologies of the larger projects, hiking Kungsleden, the teleology of the larger project did seem to be stable. In contrast to Sundqvist and Bengs (2021) who conceptualized contextual action, which I understand as intelligible activity, as always relating to the practice’s teleoaffective structure, I argue that even though the goal of the practice is present, situated intelligible practical activity, what in certain situations make sense to do for the carrier of practices, does not immediately need to reflect the end of the chain of activities that constitute the practice. Like having gastronomic experiences as a result of fatigue and hunger while eating freeze-dried food, even though the teleological end adhered to might be having an enjoyable hike through sublime environments eating fresh and well-prepared food.

The temporal dimension of the eating event was socially negotiated, that is, when the eating event happened at locations in which other persons also engaged in eating, a state of affairs, activities, chained into projects, were generated, thus made sense, to achieve distinct outcomes, e.g., taking time and socializing with other hikers when the goal was to have a pleasant time, or, eating fast and leaving when the goal was to avoid the possibility of getting infected with CoViD-19. Thus, even though the contexts of the meals were extraordinary, in the sense of the setting and format being distinct in relation to habitual meals, they were still motivated by the normativity manifest in those habitual meals, that is, the understanding of the meal as a context for social interaction was still present (Holm et al., 2019). As a consequence, having positive, or negative, experiences of contextual eating events depend on the relation between current state of affairs and teleologies, as they are causing activity by way of its making sense. In the words of (Schatzki, 2014, p. 29) “[e]xperiences are not arbitrary, random, or spontaneous. They are tied to the action people perform and the practices they carry out as well as to the material arrangements [...] in relation to which they proceed.”

Accordingly, I argue that producers and providers of material arrangements, contextualised as sites for eating events, e.g., restaurants and dining halls, who desire to facilitate enjoyable gastronomic experiences, could only do so by supplying a situation in which it makes sense to have such experiences vis-à-vis the way of being the consumer aims to achieve. Having knowledge of such sought-after ways of being, or teleological goals, embedded in the organisation of social practices, would benefit producers in that they could then manifest a material arrangement in which state of affairs, beneficial for the consumers practices, obtains, thus, facilitating for activities in which enjoyable, gastronomic, experiences are a feature.

### 5.1. Strengths and limitations

The strength of this study lies in that it was conducted in-situ, drawing from the stories of experiences by persons carrying on the practice that was enacted in the field, and being, analytically, backed up by ethnographic data collected in the field, within the same temporal framing as the interviews. However, as the study was conducted at one site, Kungsleden, during a limited timeframe, end of summer, there may be dimensions of the end-project-action structure that was not captured, e.g., how meals are enacted in winter conditions or how hikers engaged with the restaurants that occupy spaces in the mountain stations. The CoViD-19 pandemic, furthermore, limited the number of foreign visitors in the region and could thus have limited the diversity of activity chains pertaining to the studied practice.

### Implications for gastronomy

The present study suggests the benefit for the gastronomic industry of approaching customers as carriers of practices, engaged in intelligible activity chains, rather than solely understanding them as either rational subjects or as aggregated into socio-demographic clusters. Having knowledge about, and being able to modify, the materiality of the eating context vis-à-vis the normative goals located in the structuring of social practices could facilitate for positive outcomes of meals.

### Author statement

Joachim Sundqvist: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing – Original Draft.

### Declaration of competing interest

The author declares no conflict of interests.

### Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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