The impact of culture on the food consumption process

The case of Sweden from a French perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent of which culture influences the food consumption process. More specifically, our research will focus on the consumption process of Swedish consumers, as well as their motivations when buying food products. The overall objective of our research is to analyse the extent of applicability the Swedish model of consumption might possibly have in a country like France with a strong food culture.

To conduct our research, a qualitative method was used along with an interpretivist approach. This was in accordance with the overall aim to highlight social and cultural facts by analysing consumer behaviour. Based on the theoretical framework studied in the report, ten in-depth interviews were conducted on Swedish and French students.

The findings include good insights and advice that retailers and suppliers in the food industry could use to improve the grocery shopping experience and make it a better fit to the consumers’ expectations.

Some limitations could be observed in our research, mainly due to the language barrier, concerning both the research material and the interviews. The results were also influenced by the location of the study and the past experience of the respondents.

Further research can be recommended to investigate the effect of food and culture on larger cities and in different locations. Doing so, the findings could give a more representative overview of the food consumption process. The study could also be expanded on different market niches with different age groups allowing comparisons from different generations. Another idea would be to target consumers with varying levels of incomes, in order to see to what extent income influences the food consumption process.

Keywords: Consumer, consumer behaviour, culture, meanings of culture, culture and society, food, food consumption, food and culture, mass consumption.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

We have had the opportunity as exchange students in Sweden to embrace Swedish culture and to learn more about Swedish behaviour and attitudes towards food consumption.

Eating habits in France and Sweden differ in style and etiquette: Swedes tend to snack throughout the day, whereas the French tend to eat exclusively at breakfast, lunch and dinner. This was even apparent from personal observations made whilst working alongside Swedish students. It would also appear that eating has a different function for Swedish and French people in that the French consider mealtimes as something pleasurable and enjoyable, whereas Swedes consider day-to-day eating more as a functional necessity. There are also noticeable differences in grocery shopping habits in that French people tend to buy many products once or twice a week in supermarkets, whereas Swedish consumers go shopping more regularly but buy less each time. Whilst it is mostly considered burdensome to go grocery shopping in supermarkets in France, this does not seem to be the case in Sweden. For French customers, grocery shopping is considered more a duty than entertainment and to this end efficiency and convenience are key. The difference between the French and the Swedish consumption can even be noted in the layout of stores. French supermarkets have large checkout counters, capable of dealing with customers’ large purchases and special checkouts for customers buying fewer than ten products, whereas in Sweden checkout counters are small and it is common for Swedish consumers to purchase fewer than ten products. One could infer from this observation that Swedish consumers buy more fresh products in supermarkets than French people. French consumers ordinarily tend to go to food markets or directly to the producers to buy fresh produce. Those food markets are local and traditional markets, deeply rooted in French culture and making avail of them is a weekly ritual in most families. This specific type of grocery shopping is considered a pleasure.

There are even differences in the attitudes to mass consumption and distribution. French consumers increasingly have issues trusting the quality of the distribution chain. They have more faith buying directly from the producers in local farmers’ markets. Whereas in Sweden, consumers tend to trust the distribution chain and are comfortable making purchases from it accordingly. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the two countries’ climates. In France, many fresh products can be bought, depending on the seasons, whereas in Sweden, most fresh food is imported.

France is perceived as a country with a strong food culture and identity, and this was emphasized by UNESCO in 2010, when France has been inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The UNESCO experts singled out French gastronomy as a ‘social custom aimed at celebrating the most important moments in the lives of individuals and groups’. The experts also claim that French gastronomic meals strengthen social lives by drawing circles of friends and family (UNESCO, 2010).
1.2 News and facts supporting our observations

Nowadays, French people pay increasingly more attention to factors other than price when buying food. As Bertrand (2016) underlines, there is a shift in the French food consumption and price is not the only criterion anymore to attract consumers. The importance of quality versus quantity has shifted from quantity to quality in recent years. In fact, consumers tend to prefer healthier, natural and quality products. Duriez (2015) claims that French people are willing to pay more for the taste of the product. The French gastronomical culture is strongly related to fine dining and pleasure. Notions of conviviality, sharing and taste matter a great deal, in much the same way as quality and the origin of the products do. Indeed, Lentschner (2015) adds that the meaning of eating well for French people is first (for 63% of them) to have a well-balanced diet and then (for 59% of them) to simply enjoy the food. Even though the content of our plates will remain more or less the same, cultural techniques, industrial processes and the delivery modes are evolving dramatically. In any case, according to Lentschner (2015) expenditure on food is the expense French people are least willing to economise on. Bray (2014) explains that the French food model centres on the idea that people eat first and foremost for pleasure. France is the country where the rate of snacking is the lowest. Indeed, French people attribute huge importance to meal times. In fact, only 53% of them are interested in the efficiency and rapidity of their meals. And most of them, some 84%, attribute much importance to freshness, taste preservation, authenticity as traditional knowledge and local and regional origin of products.

1.3 Theories supporting our observations

There has been a significant amount of research studying the impact culture has on the food consumption process. Studies have shown that health, environment and sustainability from eco-friendly sources are important criteria for Swedish consumers when buying food products. Moreover, comparisons between Southern Europe and Northern Europe consumers’ habits have already been examined by several authors (Bergflødt et al., 2012; Bildtgår, 2013; Hultén & Vanyushyn, 2011). However, not many studies have analysed how and the extent to which it would be possible for the Nordic model of consumption to influence the consumption process of a country like France with its strong food culture and identity. This can be identified as a theoretical gap.

1.3.1 Comparison between Southern and Northern Europe

Northern Europe, comprising of Denmark, Norway Sweden, Finland and Iceland, is considered as a region since they share several characteristics in climate, history and the food culture, called ‘matkultur’. In spite of differences amongst these nations in language, nationality and lifestyles, there is a Nordic identity and it is closely related to food (Bergflødt et al., 2012). By comparison with Southern Europe, where food quality is related to culture, origin, taste and tradition, Northern Europe has another perception of food quality that refers to health, animal welfare, nutrition and hygiene (Bergflødt et al., 2012). These two interpretations of food quality are one factor distinguishing Nordic countries from Southern Europe. The emergence of a Nordic food culture, at the beginning of the 1990s has strengthened the Nordic identity. Afterwards, the concept of ‘food culture’ became more accurate, prominent and popular only to become widespread in the 2000s, when several scientists and politicians started debates on it. (Bergflødt et al., 2012)
1.3.2 The notion of eating well for Swedish and French people

Swedish and French people have different motives when characterising their food culture. In his study, Bildtgår (2013, p.160) asks both Swedish and French people what it means for them to eat well and find out what are the food characteristics and values in each country. As he claims, food culture and the act of eating are part of a country’s institution which will have evolved over time. For Swedish people, eating is a necessity, whereas for French people, eating is the expression of a social and cultural belonging (Bildtgår, 2013, p.175). In France, the rationality of the food origin is linked to local and national tradition and expertise (Bildtgår, 2013, p.173). The importance for French people to have a closer and more authentic relationship to food is linked to their desire to look at their cultural roots and to share culinary traditions that they see as a guarantee of trust. On the other hand, to eat well, Swedes tend to go to distant countries. They go mostly in the Mediterranean region or in Southeast Asia, to find fresh vegetables, fruits and seafood there, products that are not available most of the year in Sweden, and that are considered as healthy and enjoyable (Bildtgår, 2013, p.169). Swedes attribute a significant degree of importance to a nutritionally well-balanced diet and try to combine pleasure and health. Swedish people tend to focus on the freshness as a guarantee of quality, which also means for them that products do not contain any genetic manipulation, hormones, pesticides, fertilizers, refinement and additives. Whereas French people relate freshness to local traditions and natural food from the countryside (Bildtgår, 2013, p.165), also called ‘French terroir’. Thus, food is a broad concept that can have several interpretations. If it is a necessity for Swedes, it is the expression of social and cultural attachment for French people.

1.3.3 The claim of a Swedish food identity: a long and difficult process

As stated by Bergflødt et al. (2012), food was not the main factor under consideration when constructing social, political and symbolic national identities in the Nordic countries. Furthermore, since Sweden is part of the Nordic region, it was hard for the country to claim its own food culture. Solomon et al. (2006, p.620) consider Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) as a unique market because of its cultural similarities. Lifvendal (2012) (cited by Bergflødt et al. (2012)) explains that the Swedish culinary identity arose just before the industrialisation period, with the accomplishment of having overcome poverty and hunger. As Sweden is quite isolated, it was difficult for the country to claim a food identity. As Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén (2001, p.393) underline, food is an important criterion with which to define the culture of a country. This can explain why it has been hard for Sweden to claim its own cultural identity before the industrialisation period. Another reason that thwarted Sweden from developing its own food culture is its immigration history. After the Second World War, a high number of immigrants were settling and establishing restaurants in Sweden (Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén, 2001, p.395). This is the reason why many Greek, Hungarian, Austrian, Turkish, Chinese and Thai restaurants were established in Sweden. At the same time, young people started to travel, trying other countries’ cuisines and thus, bringing the food culture they experienced back home. As Carlsson-Kanyama & Linden (2001, p.395) state, the high number of immigrants coming in Sweden led to some changes in food culture. This phenomenon is called differentiation of cultures, and refers to several food cultures side by side in a nation.
1.3.4 The characteristics of the Swedish consumer

In the Nordic countries, the term ‘political consumption’ is often part of the discussion regarding sustainability (Niva et al., 2014, p.466) and represents a form of consumption that involves ‘social, cultural, animal-related, and environmental concerns that go beyond the immediate self-interests of the individual consumer or household’ (Klintman & Boström, 2006, p.401). As Micheletti states (2003), those consumers tend to focus not only on ‘private virtues’ like price, taste and healthiness of food, but increasingly on ‘public virtues’ that are related to broader social concerns of food production and consumption. Unlike ‘economic’ consumers, ‘political’ consumers ‘choose products, producers and services more on the basis of the politics of the product’ and ‘their choices are informed by political values, virtues, and ethics’ (Micheletti 2003, preface X). To become a political consumer, the person needs to have the adequate information about the social and environmental repercussions of products (Niva et al., 2014, p.466). Niva et al. maintain that the consideration of political consumption has been particularly strong in the Nordic countries since the beginning of the 2000s (2014, p.467).

Education, health, sport and culture are also factors that can influence buyers to become political consumers in Sweden. It is only when people grow and when they compare their cultures with others that they discover their own cultural identity. As Fürst et al. (1985:37) state, food culture is ‘something we are introduced to beginning in childhood, primarily through our mothers. It comprises a set of attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills in relation to food.’ Studies have shown that there was a strong link between food habits and education in Sweden. Spasojević (2015, p.181) points out that the interdependence between education and health can be explained in three main ways. The first one, called ‘productive efficiency’ states that people with more education obtain better health results. The second refers to the ‘allocative efficiency’ and emphasizes the correlation between level of education and higher access to health knowledge. The third one refers to a ‘reverse causality’: healthier people are more likely to pursue further education (Spasojević, 2015, p.181). Another study, run by Bergflödt et al. (2012) has shown that education reduces the probability of unhealthy behaviour in the future. Moreover, Axelsen et al. (2012, p.168) have shown that children with well-educated mothers eat fruits and vegetables more often than children with less-educated mothers. The study also examines the relationship between physical activities and level of education, which resulted in a graphic showing the ‘Intense physical activity, by levels of education, for the period 1990–2010’ underlining the positive correlation between level of education and physical activity (Axelsen et al., 2012, p.173).

1.3.5 A drift in the Swedish food culture

National, regional and local food in Sweden

In Sweden, alternative systems of distribution have been developed towards local systems in order to counter the ongoing globalization process of products and services (Nilsson, 2009, p.348). Tellström (2012) specifies that today Sweden has around 0.5-1% active farmers, one of the lowest rate in Europe. This also explains why Sweden has its food production mixed with importation. In Sweden, the farmer-owned processing industry carries weight with meat, grain and dairy industries that are controlled by farming cooperatives (Swedish Board of Agriculture; 2009, cited by Nilsson, 2009, p.353). Whereas in the UK the notion of local food refers to a distance of 160 km from farm to market, the Swedish definition is broader and includes a distance up to 250 km. It is only at the end of the 20th century that fresh food became more and more popular in Sweden,
and today, Swedish chefs tend to create new types of dishes called ‘a taste of the forest’ inspired by the Swedish countryside, climate and tradition (Tellström, 2012). A few years ago, due to the large dominance of Supermarkets, Swedish consumers and producers had the feeling that they were losing their cultural food identity. To counter that, they expressed their desire to be connected with it again (Nilsson, 2009, p.350). Alternative systems such as local or small supermarkets bring a benefit to consumers by giving them a consumption process different from the current central systems. This experience brings deeper connection, affinity, transparency, with a higher quality, safety and social contact between consumers and producers (Nilsson, 2009, p.351). The author also describes farmers’ markets as a ‘third place’ (2009, p.352), namely a public place that gives the opportunity to people to interact with each other. Eating local and seasonal food enables a production with low energy, less pollution and greenhouse gases than production from a regular and global system (Nilsson, 2009, p.352).

A tendency towards a Swedish food identity

Since 1985, Sweden is living a ‘postmodern and hedonistic’ period, during which the country faced a drastic change in its food culture (Tellström, 2012). As the author explains, over the last 25 years, Sweden has developed a new national food culture based on domestic and foreign products that managed to keep a traditional Swedish taste and texture. The text highlights two driving forces: the evolution of postmodern ideals and Sweden’s membership of the EU since 1995. The latter led the country to leave behind its old defensive doctrine and opened the food culture borders. That is why we can find in Sweden all the different ethnic cuisines from the western world. In the 1980s French cuisine has also had a strong impact on Swedish contemporary food culture. Healthy food awareness also came during this period, and importance was attributed not only to fresh vegetables but also to the consumption of more fresh dairy products. Today, Sweden holds several and different food preferences and what the text identifies as the ‘New Nordic’ and ‘New Scandinavian’ cuisine, a cuisine which has become widely popular over the past five to ten years. Both cuisines manage to combine old flavours with modern tastes, incorporating new artistic techniques with raw and fresh ingredients.

The evolution of the modern food store in Sweden

This period saw the introduction of a Swedish food culture, but also the evolution of the modern food store. After the Second World War in the 1960s, Swedish food producers started, with enthusiasm and optimism, to work on new products (Beckeman, 2006). Consumers, willing to experiment with a breakthrough in the food industry, easily accepted the new products and producers were deciding for themselves what to produce and in what quantity, maintaining low production costs and avoiding waste in production. Nowadays, retailers are the ones introducing innovative food products in Sweden and are thus more informed than producers about the consumers’ habits and preferences. The author also explains that in Sweden, the food sector started to grow after the Second World War and was inspired by the US model. Before that, Sweden was selling most of its food unpacked in specialised stores by weight or volume. What we call modern retailing today started much earlier: in 1899 for the Co-operative (known as COOP today) and in 1917 for ICA. After the war, due to heavy regulations on the market and high importation and exportation costs, most food products were produced inside the country. Also, the author highlights the specific protection present on the Swedish agricultural and food market before it became an EU member.

Since Sweden did not participate in the Second World War, its infrastructures remained intact, which allowed the country to have a good economy, boosted by a great wave of
optimism and an expansion of the food industry. During this period, many modifications occurred in the food sector whilst society was changing, which led to social and cultural innovation into the entire food system. However, those innovations did not impact the way Swedish people were thinking - they were still keenly aware of food wastage and health implications. For Beckeman (2011), Swedes remain very sceptical regarding the processed food technology, because the human touch is missing in some way. For instance, new technologies, product packaging and processes introduced in the country have to pass a number of legal and regulatory hurdles in order to comply with health and safety standards. Before joining the Common Agricultural Policy in 1995, Sweden was meeting difficulties to expand its food industry internationally because of the extensive regulations on the market. However, the country managed to export a consequent innovation: the frozen food concept. Frozen food was allowing better taste, all year round availability and home freezing possibilities. The Swedish frozen food leader Findus, bought by Nestlé later on, is a good illustration of Swedish performance on this count. Since then, the Frozen Food Institute became a catalyst for a network of interested companies and individuals, and the driving forces shifted from producers to retailers, who were now competing with each other. For Beckeman (2011), this new control in the hands of retailers represents the major difference between the past and the present food industry in Sweden. Today, retailers are the ones controlling the entire product chain, from producers to consumers. This power shift from manufacturers to retailers is attributable to two main factors. The first one is the desire from consumers for differentiation, asking for different products, packaging, recipes and delivery shapes. The second one comes from the desire of the supply chain to reduce costs and time for manufacturers. Retailers were now able to better understand the distribution process, consumer needs and wants and accordingly individuals could be empowered. All these changes led to a revolution of the food consumption process that allowed products and concepts to become subjected to internal competition and external globalization.

1.4 Thesis focus

We decided to focus on the food industry because it distinguishes itself from other industrial sectors by having a high integration of the products with the culture (Azar, 2014, p.76). Our research points out the importance of ‘food culture’, which can be defined as ‘distinct habits and consumer patterns in relation to food, which have established themselves over generations, such that they compose an entire tradition which is often different from region to region, from village to city’ (Fürst et al., 1985:43). Our aim is to investigate the cultural aspects influencing the food consumption process, as well as to establish the extent to which the French market could benefit from the Swedish model of consumption. We chose to focus exclusively on Sweden because it is, of the Nordic countries, the one considered as the most careful when consuming food products (Niva et al., 2014, p.475).

1.5 Study purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the consumption process of Swedish consumers, as well as their motivations when buying food products. Moreover, the aim is to examine the extent of applicability the Swedish model of consumption might possibly have in a country like France with a strong food culture. Our study is useful for companies that want to have a better understanding of the Swedish consumption process. Thanks to an analysis of Swedish consumer behaviour, companies could adapt their marketing,
advertising campaigns, as well as their products to the market’s wants and needs. Our research would be especially helpful for companies in Southern Europe or elsewhere, which seek an overview of the Nordic, and specifically the Swedish way of consumption. This would accord with the principle expounded by Hugo Caffarel, founder of the French startup ‘Le Supermarché Idéal’ (Caffarel, 2016), namely that the concept of an ideal supermarket should be built in such a way that it fits the consumers’ needs and expectations, by making them consume in a more eco-responsible and healthier way.

1.6 Research question

As stated before, we seek to identify what aspects of the Swedish consumption process could benefit to the French one. Therefore, our research questions are the following:

To what extent does the culture have an impact on the food consumption process?
How could the Swedish model of food consumption influence the French model?
2. Theoretical review

A theoretical discussion of consumer choice and food consumption regarding cultural background follows in this section. This part will describe how consumer choice is built and derived from cultural practices. After that, the definition of what is commonly called culture is given. A general discussion around the interdependence between culture and food follows, ending the section with the mass food consumption process. After reading this section, the reader will be familiar with the notions of consumer choice, culture, food and mass consumption.

In order to understand the impact of culture on the food consumption process, a couple of important theories have to be studied. To better understand consumer choice influenced by culture, the following theories will be studied; Fits-Like-A-Glove theory and the Consumer Culture Theory. Then, the notion of culture as a continuous learning and adaptive process will be explored, leading in some contexts to social normalization. Afterwards, theories examine the food mass consumption process and the importance of culture in the food consumption. The last theories analyse the interdependence between culture and food is emphasized in a theoretical framework in order to examine cultural selection and consumers.

Academics in the field such as Burton, (2000, p.144) recommend to search publications by keywords in order to give better accuracy to research. Hence, articles addressing the topic have been logically related to subject keywords and phrases. The keywords initially searched were: consumer, consumer behaviour, culture, meanings of culture, culture and society, food, food consumption, food and culture, and mass consumption. Later, the searched keywords were extended to: purchasing process, consumer attitudes and purchasing process, education, health and culture, culture appropriation, meaning of food, Nordic food culture, European culture, food and mass consumption, mass distribution, quality of food, ecological products and mass consumption, sustainability, eco-friendly.

2.1 Definition of culture

Kluckhohn (1985, pp.93-123) managed to give a pot-au-feu of the definition of the culture such as ‘the total way of life of a people’; ‘the social legacy the individual acquires from his group’; ‘a way of thinking, feeling, and believing’; ‘an abstraction from behaviour’; a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; ‘a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems’; ‘learned behavior’; ‘a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour’; ‘a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men’; ‘a precipitate of history’.

As Solomon et al., (2013, p.529) argue, the consumption choices can only be understood in their cultural context. Culture is used as a ‘prism’ through which people view their products and try to define their own and other consumers’ behaviour. The culture in its central core is considered as the collective memory of the society. The accumulated meanings, rituals, norms and traditions shared by the members of an organization or a society, all shaped together, form the culture. Individuals, human community, social organizations as well as political and economic systems are all defined by the culture. Consumers as individuals and as groups are all part of the culture, inside which we can find other organised subsystems. Solomon et al., (2013, p.530) claim that culture is an interpretation scheme used to understand both usual and exceptional processes and practices surrounding us. For instance, the term ‘culture shock’ is a phenomenon that
appears when someone encounters another culture and its differences. Thanks to globalization, people encounter different cultures all the time, both in the virtual and real world. This process allows individuals to discover the importance of their own cultural identity, especially when they realise that others can violate things they were taking for granted. Culture is often a concept appreciated only once individuals face new environments where all their values, habits and ethics do not seem to apply. The process of learning the values of another culture is called ‘enculturation’ (Solomon et al., 2013, p.558).

When defining culture, Storey (2006, p.4) underlines three general categories. The first one refers to ‘the ideal’ one and emphasizes that individuals are in a state of perfection or tend at least to reach it while following various absolute and universal values. The second definition mentioned by the author is called ‘the documentary’ one and underlines the concept of culture as the ‘body of intellectual and imaginative work in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded’. From this definition, the activity of criticism arises, where a particular situation is studied and seeks to be related to the particular traditions and societies in which it appears. The last definition the author mentions is the ‘social’ one. It emphasizes the concept of culture as a ‘description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values, not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour’.

2.2 Consumer’s choice

2.2.1 The Fits-Like-A-Glove choice theory

To understand how the culture impacts the consumer’s behaviour, it is important to look at the characteristics and the factors influencing consumers’ decision-making process. A practical theory developed by Allen (2002, p.515) called the ‘Fits-Like-a-Glove choice theory’ (FLAG) presents a framework of choices consumers face in everyday life. Practical experience is said to be ‘composed of the entire complex of understandings, feelings, and actions evoked in situ’ (Allen, 2002, p.519). The FLAG choice framework deals with the ‘choice experience during which the consumer finds the object of choice to be a perfect fit or to fit like a glove’ (Allen, 2002, p.515). This theory can be compared to some extent with the rational choice and the constructive choice. What matters in the rational choice theory is the maximization of value and utility of the product, whereas in the constructive choice theory the selection process is more subjective and is based on an heuristic selection. Moreover, the rational and constructive choice models involve certain considerations and calculation from individuals to make a choice (Lee et al., 2014, p.286). However, in the FLAG choice theory, the consumer choice is made under socio historical and contextual conditions. Lee et al. (2014, p.286) also add that each consumer choice is influenced by habitus. In other words, the individual’s choice depends on prior social and historical forces that shape his or her experience during the decision-making. Bourdieu (1984,1990) argues that habitus like daily activities are formed under the long-lasting influence of the individual’s social history. Take the example of an athlete who trains on a daily basis before performing his or her actions in a spontaneous and instinctive way. Moreover, the FLAG choice theory emphasizes the role of the body in the perception and comprehension process (Zaltman, 1997).

In his research, Allen (2002, p.519) also highlights the forces that guide consumers’ practice. The habitus is one of them, explaining why practices are socially and historically shaped. This social frame of practices can adopt two forms. The first one
requires a ‘low-involvement socialization of understandings, feelings and actions’, all components of the habitus shared by the members of a collectivity (Allen, 2002, p.519). Inhabitants from a single community are subjected to similar conditions and relations which make them share a common habitus. However, the habitus does not determine consumers’ actions, it distinguishes consumers of a collectivity from other collectivities. A second form of social shaping is derived from external social factors involved in the consumer’s practice, such as parents, peer groups, institutions and mass media. During the consumer’s practice, those two forms interact with each other. Allen (2002, p.520) underlines three different steps in the FLAG framework of choice, considering internal and external factors. External factors are contemporaneous ones, such as historical factors influencing the individual-level of decision-making and internal ones are linked to the consumer himself. The first step in the FLAG framework of choice is called ‘the experience of choice’ and is characterised by ‘the experience of the perfect fit (Allen, 2002, p.520)’. It requires an embodied and holistic perceptual understanding. The second step involves the in situ in which the choice is made, also referred to as the natural environment between the consumer and the object choice. The last step concerns the forces that guide the consumer’s choice, considering social and historical factors, both linked to the consumer and the object of choice and leading to the perfect fit purchase decision.

2.2.2 Consumer Culture Theory - Definition

The Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) allows a better understanding of the interdependency between culture and consumer behaviour. It emphasizes the dynamic of several relationships, such as the one between the consumer’s actions, the marketplace and its cultural meaning (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The CCT is considered less an unified theory than a group of theoretical perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p.868). Even if there are many definitions of the CCT, researches give a common theoretical orientation, considering culture as an homogeneous system sharing meanings, way of life and unifying values shared by people from a community. Consumer culture refers to the relationship between lived culture and social resources, ways of life as well as the resources on which they rely. Consumer culture refers also to an interconnected concept with a system full of images, texts and objects that are commercialized, and overspread in practices, identities and meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p.869). The purpose of this conceptualized system is to create a collective sense of the environment and to connect members’ experiences and lives. In specific social situations, all these purposes and meanings are incorporated and negotiated by consumers under roles and relationships. In other words, consumer culture is a network built on global connections, inside which local cultures are interpreted by mediascape forces like global cultural flows. In essence, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) conceptualises culture and frames consumers’ horizons in what could be a possible action, feeling and thought. The CCT guides consumers through behaviour and sense making interpretations that are more likely to happen.

The many different definitions of culture evidence a plurality of consumption traditions and ways of life. The aim of CCT is to analyse how a consumer culture is manifested, and how historical forces, like the socioeconomic environment, are formed, transformed and shaped. The consumer behaviour study has been accelerated by the CCT, which gives insights about sociocultural processes and structures linked to the 4 Ps (Product, Place, Price, Promotion). In other words, the Consumer Culture Theory is related to consumer identity projects, marketplace culture, socio historical system of consumption,
mass-media ideologies and consumer’s way of adapting strategies. Thus, it is important to insist on the fact that no consumer environment can be studied as a unified, monolithic or entirely rational one (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

The CCT examines contexts in which the consumer acts as an explorer constructing his/her own identity based on market-based resources (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p.381). The authors also argue that consumers can from now on be studied as ‘connected consumers’ or as ‘relational units’ (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p.384). In other words, it is assumed that the consumption practices of a given consumer group are directly linked to a shared collective identity. A consumer identity, the way he or she consumes is bound to socially instituted factors with historical and cultural attributes.

The CCT involves the analysis of consumer’s consumption in a context based on socially, culturally, politically and institutionally aspects. The authors also assert that the individuals inside the collectivity are rarely aware of the prevailing way of thinking.

2.2.3 Consumer Culture Theory - Consumption as practice

When studying consumer culture, many researchers outlined that cultural, societal, economic and political patterns are the ones driving consumers’ desires, intentions and perception of their own actions. It is also crucial to analyse the consumption as a practice in itself.

Askegaard & Linnet (2011, p.392) explain that consumption needs to take into account the individual experience and social constraints. The concept of habitus illustrates this point, stating that social actors follow unconscious social constraints and cultural rules. There is a lack of recognition from consumers regarding the social exchange in which they engage and since social rules are abstract consumers are often unaware as to why they desire a specific outcome. The Consumer Culture Theory pays particular attention to the context in which the practice of consumption occurs. The term ‘context’ did not receive enough attention, but Askegaard & Linnet (2011, p.393) define it as the attributes and aspects surrounding a phenomenon that aim to clarify, apprehend or give meaning to it. When studying consumer behaviour it is important to tackle the context in which the consumer lives. The consumer experience can then be perceived as both text and context: (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011, p.394). What can be viewed first as ‘text’ elements such as the actions, the situation or the interactions in the consumer experience are then transformed into what the author calls the context. The context is built on a non-verbal speech environment, which includes cultural background knowledge, and is then used to create a new situational context for other elements in the same consumer experience.

In every culture it is possible to draw a domain of action in which people expect to understand, manipulate and become accustomed to their own fate. In that context, Askegaard & Linnet (2011, p.397) talk about the consumption practice as an attempt to conduct the relationship between the particular and the universal. In a consumption context, each individual relates the experience to a situation with the others, and as Askegaard & Linnet argue (2011), this is how ‘we-relationships’ arise.

2.3 Culture, a constantly changing concept

2.3.1 Culture, a continuous learning and adaptive process

Culture is moulded by a process of teaching and learning from generation to generation and is by no means innate. As Van Vracem & Janssens-Umflat (1994, p.258) underline,
culture does not belong to individual’s biological background like gender or hair colour. No one, when born knows what is forbidden and what is allowed in a society. Culture is more the result of a learning process made possible by social environment. Values, beliefs and customs are taught at a very young age by different agents such as family, school, religion, etc. Even if family is the main factor bringing culture to children, other institutions also have a big influence on the individual’s life and consumption. Culture benefits people since its role is to satisfy the individuals’ embracing it (Van Vracem & Janssens-Umflat, 1994, p.259). Culture offers models of behaviour that adhere to physiological and psychological needs. It helps for instance to guide individuals on what to wear, what to cook, how to cook, and so on.

It is interesting to study the impact of culture on young people since they are the next wave of consumers (Wicks & Warren, 2014, p.738). As the authors (2014, p.739) underline, media and social networks tend to empower youth to become political consumers. The young generation are the ones who can change the way things are perceived and consumed. They have always lived with the mass consumption system and have never experienced any other alternatives. However, if a change has to occur, it has to be initiated or followed by the young generation. Nowadays, online media allows teens in particular to obtain more information about companies’ practices and how they are aligned with consumers’ beliefs and attitudes (Wicks & Warren, 2014, p.739). Thus, youth also have the information to make their own choice regarding their consumption.

It is especially relevant to study young people and their consumption process while analysing their culture since they are highly mobile and well travelled individuals. Indeed, they enculture many different cultures by travelling, studying abroad and meeting international young people. Some cultural differences can easily be pointed out by looking at the way people eat. Indeed, if in Asian countries, most people eat with sticks, it is not common in Europe, where most people use forks and knives. Moreover, the length of a meal or its composition can differ quite a lot among cultures. The culture is embedded into individuals’ behaviour, while changing and evolving at the same pace as the society.

2.3.2 Social normalization in the buying process

A belief, a value or a practice is cultural only when it is shared by a significant part of the society. Social interactions allow the learning process to advance. The spread of cultural traits tends to create homogeneity in the behaviours among a society. This process of normalization in consumption behaviours enables the success of the current mass consumption system (Van Vracem & Janssens-Umflat, 1994, p.259).

Rettie et al. (2013, p.9) define ‘normal’ in a descriptive way, referring to it as ‘what most people generally do’. They also argue that consumers are more disposed to adopt normal behaviours, or behaviours considered as normal, since the perception of normality changes over time (Rettie et al., 2013, p.10). Today, there is a process of ‘social normalisation’ in each culture where ideas, products and behaviours, initially not considered as part of normality, become progressively normal and integrate the daily life (Rettie et al., 2013, p.9). The authors state that social changes and commonness of attitudes and practices are factors that justify the birth of the term ‘normalisation’ (Rettie et al., 2013, p.10). In general, socially shared practices establish and outline individuals’ actions, whereas social change translates the evolution of practices. The normalisation process follows a cyclical model of social changes where new norms and ideals pass through four processes: communication, implementation, public engagement and
discussion. The concept of normalisation is especially relevant when dealing with the Labelling Theory, a theory that examines behaviours with automatic responses, resulting in labelling people based on their definition of normalisation (Scheff, 2010, p.2). The author underlines that if what is normal is prescriptive, what is not normal may be deviant. The shame that can arise from the label ‘deviant’ may encourage and comfort members of the ‘deviant group’ to adopt out-group ideals..

Rettie et al. (2013) explain that normalisation has also implications for behaviour change theories. As a result, the character of the normality that shapes behaviours can be seen as another factor within behaviour models of attitudes (Rettie et al., 2013, p.13). In other words, the normality concept constrains behaviour into a conformity process and into what most people do. Then, each culture holds its own moral values that are associated to vital norms. According to Van Vracem & Janssens-Umflat (1994, p.249-250), individuals use values in order to determine what is recommended or not. Those values create a link between fundamental needs of the individual and the social structure in which he/she is embedded. However it is important to note that what can be considered as an unethical behaviour in one country is not considered the same way in another country or was not always considered like this through the society history.

2.3.3 The importance of culture in the food consumption process

Food consumption is a universal process people experience all the time and food culture is a well-known concept, even if its meaning differs from one culture to another (Bergflödt et al., 2012). The concept of food culture is composed of two words: ‘food’ and ‘culture’. As stated by Bergflödt et al. (2012), food has two meanings: the first one concerns the concrete product itself, that is grown, produced, sold, prepared and eaten, the second one relates the social aspect that surrounds the product. On the other side, culture is ‘the collective programming of mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another’ (Hofstede, 2001, p.10) that is visualized in symbols, rituals, and values. Thus, food culture can be defined as ‘distinct habits and consumer patterns in relation to food, which have established themselves over generations, such that they compose an entire tradition which is often different from region to region, from village to city’ (Fürst et al., 1985 : 43).

As Bergflödt et al. (2012) underline, food culture has not only the role of bearing social values, but it also grasps social change. Apart from being closely linked to social values and change, food culture is also a bearer of meaning and identity. Moreover, even if food culture is based on traditional pillars, it is constantly evolving. Indeed, political, economical interests and social changes occurring with the exchange between individuals are factors influencing food culture. As Barth underlines (1969), the evolution of the food culture is based on relation, adaption, exclusion and incorporation. Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén (2001, p.393) emphasize that food cultures do not remain stable: they change over time and influence each other on account of travel, education and information processes. In other words, food culture can evolve due to inhabitants travelling and experiencing cuisines abroad and also due to the increase in migration, where the cultural habits migrate as well.

As explained before, food culture is a concept in constant evolution gathering an assortment of values that people are aware of and that help them define their identities (Bergflödt et al., 2012). Moreover, those values are expressed by a distinct language related to the role and the place the food holds in a culture.
2.3.4 Hard process for culture to open up to new approaches

Today, 59 percent of worldwide consumers are feeling concerned by climate change, thereby allowing a new marketing approach where greener consumers want to be seen as ‘normal’ rather than ‘green’ (Rettie et al., 2013). For Rettie et al. (2013, p.10), the green marketing did not manage to convince consumers to adopt a more sustainable behaviour and consumption. Actually, this innovative practice brought disappointment and led to ‘greenophobia’: criticism and cynicism where consumers see green products as less effective but more expensive that are only for ‘weird’ people. If 30 percent of people worldwide are feeling concerned by the environment, there is an attitude-behaviour called ‘green gap’ to describe people who did not transcribe their concerns into green purchase behaviour (2013, p.10). These gaps are also supported by the fact that even if consumers feel concerned, it does not mean that their purchase behaviour will be affected by ethical concerns. Rettie et al. (2013, p.10) claim that even very ethically consumers remain unpredictable in their ethical purchase behaviour.

The culture conformity of buying underlines the role of norms in shaping attitude, intentions and consumer behaviour. The norm can be defined in two senses: the norm as average, meaning what people must do and norm as normative, or what people ought to do. In fact, the ‘most people do this’ also becomes ‘people should do this’ (Rettie et al., 2013, p.10). The social norms approach (SNA) combines both meanings of norms and tempts to influence behaviour by reporting information about what the majority of people do or what they think people should do. The authors also claim that the SNA can be transcribed into a traditional approach where the norm of buying behaviour for an individual is compared with others that are similar. The SNA’s studies mostly focus on green behaviours including recycling, conservation, energy consumption and food waste.

2.4 The interdependence between culture and food

2.4.1 Food, a key aspect of the cultural identity

Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén (2001) argue that food is an important criterion for cultural identity, and as the ethno botanist Nabhan (2004, p.140) claims, we are what our ancestors ate and drank. Civitello (2011) also explains that humans have given meaning to everything that is linked to food since the prehistoric period: from who is allowed to fish, farm, to what utensils and tools to use, as well as rules regarding how long people should be seated for the meal, in what order should the food be served, etc. Consequently, the author concludes that no food can be perceived or consumed the same way on Earth. As previously mentioned, Civitello (2011, p.8) argues that the identity and the religion, no matter if they are ethnic or national, are deeply linked to food. Food can be used as a differentiator for groups to define themselves: some, with their religion, ethnic identity or countries’ cuisines and eating habits. The Publishers Weekly (2016) also adds that food is not only a fuel to stay alive, it is entirely part of the cultural heritage and is related to ease, satisfaction, security and festivity.

2.4.2 Cultural selection

Several researchers have pointed out that culture is not a static system, and is constantly changing (Clifford, 1973; Harris, 1971). It is constantly changing, linking new ideas and traditions. The cultural system is, for the authors, comprised of three areas: the ecology, or how an organization can manage to adapt to its environment, the social structure or how the organization of social life is conserved (with the implementation of domestic and
political groups), and the ideology, or the way people are connected to their social groups and habitats. That is why every culture is different from another. In that sense Venkatesh et al. (2013, p.109) highlight the concept of ethno consumerism that allows the comparison of different behaviours across various cultures. The point of this approach is to understand what the consumer is doing while being aware of his or her cultural background. The activity cannot be taken in itself without considering its representation. As Venkatesh et al. underline, ‘ethno consumerism encourages the researcher to study culture not merely as providing the context for the study of consumption practices but to study consumption itself as culturally constituted behaviour’ (Venkatesh et al., 2013, p.109). For example, to drink a cup of coffee does not have the same meaning in all the cultures (Weiss, 1996).

2.4.3 Culture and consumer behaviour

Douglas & Isherwood (1996), two pioneers exploring the relationship between consumption and culture, have underlined that goods are used as social markers. They act as social markers not only by exposing a social status but also by the environment in which they are bought: time, mood and social relationships. These social marks are accomplished through several daily and not-so-daily consumption rituals. The important aspect is that any consumption action must be understood in its own cultural context. The importance given to different activities and products is determined by the consumer’s culture. This environment also determines the success or failure of particular products and services. The acceptance of a specific product on the marketplace at a particular time is set regarding the consumer’s desire through a certain culture. Then, the relationship between consumer behaviour and culture is a two-way street. The chance for products or services to be accepted by consumers is higher when they match with the culture. At the same time, the creation and the success of new and innovative products provide a good overview of the dominant cultural ideals on that specific period.

Moreover, shopping habits of customers vary from one culture to another. Indeed, shoppers have different goals and desire different outcomes according to their culture. Liang et al. (2012, p.352) argue that the values, the assumptions and the meanings based on the act of shopping are all culture specific. As the authors note, an act is almost never only an act. An act is rooted in and inextricably bound with many cultural beliefs. Briley & Aaker (2006, p.395) underline that automatic and reflexive consumer’s persuasive forces are influenced by the sociocultural norms in which the purchase is made. That is why it is important to understand the conditions under which consumers are acting. Indeed, the authors also express that sociocultural norms are the basis of the cultural ideals. A consumer will tend to be more attracted and will more understand a message if it is compatible with his or her values, shaped within his/her cultural area (Briley & Aaker, 2006, p.396). The sociocultural background of a consumer will directly influence his or her judgment, values and ideals. Even if the behaviour of consumers with the same sociocultural background can vary because of personal life experiences, the authors argue that cultural knowledge remains largely shared by the members of the same society. Thus, these people will share common knowledge and a set of beliefs, values and attitudes which together will construct the same base to interpret different purchasing environments. Cultural knowledge also shapes the rules and the guidelines of a consumer’s social reality and such rules and guidelines are also reinforced by interactions with others. As a result, the purchasing process will be either aligned with or removed from the consumer normative expectations, depending on his or her cultural background (Briley & Aaker, 2006, p.397).
3. Methodology

In this chapter, our motivations for focusing on this subject are highlighted, followed by the methodology used when conducting our research. For this study, we have chosen to conduct a qualitative study and design semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted on five French and five Swedish students, all enrolled at Umeå University in Sweden.

As Master’s students from the Marketing program at Umeå school of Business and Economics, we wanted to explore a business administration subject that concerns the food consumption process on the Swedish market. Since we both previously studied Consumer Behaviour courses, we wanted to explore the factors influencing the purchase decision as well as the habits of Swedish consumers. Another reason that made us choose this subject is the interview we got with Hugo Caffarel, founder of ‘Le Supermarché Idéal’ (The ideal supermarket), a start-up that wants to build an Ideal Supermarket for consumers, by understanding the needs and wants of the consumer. Hugo Caffarel worked during several years for major companies in the food industry, the experience of which led him to believe that something had to change in the way French people consume food. For him, the history of France and its attachment to gastronomy and terroir raises a number of issues in the food mass consumption process. That is where his idea to create an ‘Ideal Supermarket’ comes from. The aim of this ‘Ideal Supermarket’ would be to combine the epicurean way French people consume with a more sustainable way of producing and consuming food. To do so, the entrepreneur Hugo Caffarel wants to reconcile the modernity of supermarkets with the French culture of specialized stores and markets. As he argues, finding alternatives to a worldwide consumption system is a real challenge since they need to satisfy consumers, encourage local production and develop both production and consumption in biological and ecological ways. This ‘Ideal Supermarket’ would also be a lively place, where buying food would be more personal and that would involve more interactions between the supermarket and the consumers.

During meeting with Hugo Caffarel, we all agreed that there were some differences between the French and the Swedish food market, mainly in relation to consumer habits. As students, we noticed it by living in Sweden for one year when shopping for groceries there and discussing with peers. The founder of ‘Le Supermarché Idéal’ made his observations after careful and precise analysis of different markets all over Europe. Moreover, as marketing students, we wanted to know the origin of these food consumption differences. This informs the aim of our research, which is to analyse the extent to which food and culture are linked, as well as to examine how deep is the impact the culture has on individuals’ consumption.

3.1 Research approach

When it comes to the research approach, two main approaches can be used: the deductive one and the inductive one. A deductive research concerns the development of a conceptual and theoretical structure, that is then tested by empirical observations (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.7). The inductive approach involves the development of a theory after analysing empirical data. Inductive approach goes from individual observations to general patterns (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.7). For our methodological assumption, we have chosen the inductive approach. Our starting point was the theory about the food culture that emphasizes the importance of background in the habitus. As stated before, the habitus can come either from the current environment people are in, or from their
cultural, social and historical background. From this point of departure we decided to run a qualitative research interview so as to better understand the perception and behaviours of Swedish and French students in matters relating to food culture and consumption. Those interviews enabled us to collect data as well as interpret them, in order to better understand their position vis à vis respective food cultures (Appendix 1 & 2).

Most of the literature and sources used to construct this thesis were gathered through Umeå University's library database. Google and the Google Scholar search database were similarly used to collect articles that were not obtainable on the university’s database, especially when dealing with French sources.

3.2. Ontological assumption

Ontology involves the nature of reality (Saunders et al, 2009, p.110) and can be divided into two distinct positions: objectivism and constructivism. Objectivism is linked to the positivist approach and states that there is only one reality and everyone has the same. Whereas subjectivism is related to the interpretivist approach and underlines that everyone has its own sense of reality (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 47). Concerning the ontological stance, our study fits best with the constructivism approach. We believe that customers’ perceptions regarding food culture and consumption are constructed and subjected to many social influences and interactions. As stated by Saunders et al., (2009, p.111) subjectivism is the understanding of meanings that individuals attach to social phenomena. Subjectivism is often associated with social constructionism, which states that reality is socially constructed. Social actors, like customers in our case, might have different interpretations of the situation in which they find themselves. Depending their vision of the world, customers will perceive different situations in varying ways (Saunders et al., 2009, p.111). That is why when choosing and interviewing our subjects, it was crucial to understand the subjective reality of the interviewed customers. The difference between subjectivism and objectivism was already pointed out by Smircich (1983), who explained that objectivists would tend to see the culture of an organisation as something the organisation ‘has’, whereas subjectivists would view culture as a complex and changing concept that the organisation ‘is’. Our research will focus on the second perception of culture.

3.3 Epistemological assumption

When conducting research, it is necessary to look at the philosophical framework that guides how the scientific research should be conducted, also called ‘paradigm’ (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.43). There are two main paradigms: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism, also known as realism was developed by theorists such as Comte and Durkheim (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.44). Positivism is concerned with the belief that reality is independent of us and everything can be analysed under scientific explanation. However, many criticisms have been made of the positivism paradigm, and from those, interpretivism was developed. This is the paradigm that is going to be useful for our present purposes. Interpretivism is based on the belief that social reality is shaped by our perception, and it is therefore highly subjective. Unlike the positivism paradigm, interpretivism emphasizes the necessity to understand people in their social context and examine their perceptions to better understand them (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 45).

Since our research is dealing with the consumers’ perception about culture and food consumption, our study was framed following an interpretivist approach. Food culture is a concept that cannot be studied in the absence of its full context and connected
subjectivity. The perception the consumers have about their own culture and other people’s culture is entirely subjective. Indeed, perception is a concept highly linked to subjectivity. The perception a person has about something cannot be detached from his or her own historical, cultural and socio-economic background.

An epistemological assumption is concerned with what is acceptable as valid knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 47). As mentioned previously, the most relevant approach for our research is the interpretivist one. Smith (1983, pp.10-11) argues that ‘in quantitative research facts act to constrain our beliefs; while in interpretivist research beliefs determine what should count as facts’. As researchers, whilst interacting with the phenomena under study it was necessary to take into account the subjectivity of the participants, and thus adopt an interpretivist approach. The idea behind that is not only to have answers to our interview questions, but also to analyse the reasons why respondents answer in a specific way, as well as to take into account their cultural, historical, economic and social background. Their answers are not going to be analysed as facts and figures, but more as a representation of who the interviewees are. In that sense, interpretivism is the most suitable approach, since the aim is to understand the distinct cultural and social factors that impact students in their decision-making.

3.4 Interview questions design

The interview questions were designed in accordance with the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter. Former studies have focused on different factors influencing the consumer behaviour and the impact culture has on it. To ensure that the respondents had a complete understanding of the interview questions, the interview included a brief introduction with which to introduce ourselves, explain the purpose of the study and the privacy issues. Even if age and names were asked before the interview, respondents were told their identity would remain anonymous. Only the age would be mentioned in the thesis in order to explain what the target group was. Presenting ourselves, asking for their names and age was aiming to create a nice atmosphere in which respondents would feel comfortable and free to answer the questions and discuss. In the introductory part, the term ‘food’ was not mentioned on purpose. The aim was to see if during the first question about Swedish and French culture respondents would bring the word food by themselves. The interview questions were divided into five main parts. (Appendix 1 & 2).

The first part was about the influence culture has on their food consumption, a relationship that was strongly underlined in the theoretical part. The questions included in this part were thus oriented towards the concept of ethno consumerism and enculturation. Thus, respondents were first asked about what symbolises French and Swedish culture for them. The goal, as stated before, was to see if they would relate food to culture by themselves. The next question concerned stereotypes about the other culture. In the theoretical part, it was assumed that consumers were aware of their cultural environment, thus the goal was to check if respondents were aware of their cultural environment and their belongingness to one culture. As stated in the previous chapter, when labelling people individuals have a tendency to compare their usual environment with that of others. Moreover, the notion of enculturation has been examined in the previous chapter and interviewees were asked about their grocery shopping when being abroad. The idea was to see if the respondent was adapting his or her grocery shopping to the country he/she was visiting or if he/she was keeping his/her cultural food background to buy and
cook food. The first part of the interview was quite general in order to make the respondent feel more confident and comfortable with the interview afterwards.

The second part of the survey was related to the Consumer Culture Theory and aimed at examining the interdependency between culture and consumer behaviour. Thus, questions were designed to analyse the relationships between consumer actions, marketplace and cultural meaning. To better understand those connections, respondents were asked about a universal activity, considered as subjective and often unconscious: eating a meal. Therefore, they were asked their definition of a ‘good meal’ with the following question: ‘After having a meal, what characteristics will make you say ‘It was a good meal’?’. The term ‘good meal’ was carefully chosen. Indeed, if the notions of ‘eating well’, ‘eating healthy’ are often understood by people the same way, the term ‘good meal’ is quite subjective. Before designing the survey, a test was made on native English speakers, to analyse the exact meaning of ‘good meal’ and it came out that answers differed greatly between people. For some, the turn of phrase ‘good meal’ was linked to health, whereas for others it was related to quality, for others still it meant to be full and surrounded by good company. As stated in the previous chapter, French people are epicurean consumers who associate the act of eating with pleasure and entertainment, whereas Swedish people focus rather on the utility inherent in the act of eating. The next two questions aimed to examine if there was a tendency in France and/or in Sweden to go back to local, specialised food stores. That is why the following question examined the respondents’ buying habits and the next one specifically addressed their attitudes and inclinations in relation to fresh products. The aim was to see if the interviewees differentiated their consumption process when buying processed food as opposed to fresh food.

The third part was designed along with the FLAG choice theory, which underlines the importance of habitus and external factors in the consumer buying experience. Moreover, the questions aimed to analyse to what extent customers are aware of their cultural background. This part was divided into two subparts. One concerning the consumer and his/her buying experience inside the store, and one more general about the respondents’ vision of an ‘Ideal supermarket’. The aim was to analyse respondents’ consumption behaviours, as well as the extent to which they are conscious of their buying environment. The layout of supermarkets was also addressed, and we also questioned the extent to which the values, beliefs and wants of consumers’ culture in both countries. The aim was also to examine if their cultural values, morals and beliefs were not lost when dealing with mass consumption. Thus, questions about their perception and opinion on mass consumption were also asked. Further questions in the survey were specifically oriented to enable the respondent’s imagination by asking an open question, namely what their ‘ideal supermarket’ would be. Respondents were also asked about technological aspects of the desired ‘ideal supermarket’. If innovations have already appeared in supermarkets to involve technology in the consumer buying experience, a lot more could be done. We wanted to see to what extent respondents would think of technology as a helpful and playful tool making grocery shopping more enjoyable. Moreover, interviewees were asked about what extra information on products they would like to have.

The fourth section was more subjective, dealing with the respondents’ point of view about their own cultural habits, as well as the difference between the French and the Swedish consumption habits and supermarkets. Since we have chosen an interpretivist approach, we also aimed at analysing the perception and experience of our respondents in
both countries. However, this question could be asked only if the respondent had spent time in both countries.

The fifth and last part was linked to the social normalisation process and the ‘greenophobia’ phenomenon. In Europe, there is a trend for buying and consuming bio, ecological and eco friendly products. However, as stated in the previous chapter, those consumers, in France at least, are deemed abnormal and the green marketing did not manage to convince consumers to adopt a more sustainable behaviour and consumption (Rettie et al., 2013, p.10). This part of the interview questions was designed to examine why those values are absent in the French culture, whereas it is prevalent in Sweden. Thus, respondents were asked about the factors, apart from price, influencing their purchase decision and their motivations for choosing this factor.

3.5 Pre-test

Before interviewing people, the interview questions should be checked by specialists to ensure the quality of the language (Saunders et al., 2009, p.394). Since the interview questions were written in English, we had few people checking the language and the meaning of it: a native English speaker student as well as our supervisor. In addition, to ensure that the questions would be understandable to the respondents and successful in collecting data, we designed a pre-test of the survey before running the final one. Thus, one French and one Swedish student were selected to answer the pre-test version. During the pre-test version, no student had any difficulties understanding or answering our questions. However, we noticed that some changes needed to be made regarding the order in which the questions were presented. After those few changes, the interview questions got redesigned and the interviews were ready to be conducted.

3.6 Sampling in Qualitative research

In this qualitative research, French and Swedish students currently enrolled at Umeå University were interviewed. Our choice to focus on students comes from the fact that they are really mobile consumers, often travelling and studying abroad. Umeå University is an especially relevant place since the university has many partnerships with schools all around the world. Thus, it is easier to meet students who have previously studied abroad. It is definitely the case of French students that were interviewed since they are currently living in Sweden. Moreover, most studies about food culture focused on adults or people in general and were not targeting students specifically. Interview only students allowed us to target a certain range of young people who can be considered as quite open-minded regarding other cultures, such as the ones they have previously faced in their lives. Another reason why we choose students for our sample was their living conditions. Studying and living abroad forces students to be totally autonomous, responsible and therefore conscious about their food consumption. Even if students normally do not have the same financial support than adults, they do grocery shopping by themselves and buy specific products according to their beliefs, values, needs and preferences.

What we aim in our study is to examine the influence culture has on the food consumption of Swedish people, as well as their motivations when buying food. Our objective is to analyse if culture is embedded or if it can change and adapt itself according to the person’s environment. Another objective is to examine if consumers’ behaviour tend to vary when in environments other than his or her natural habitus. Moreover, the point of the study is to underline the different perceptions consumers have about the French and the Swedish food culture. Given that an interpretivist approach was
adopted, the research data was neither to test an hypothesis nor to lead to a
generalization. It was to provide an interpretive understanding of a social phenomenon
within a particular context (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 44).

For the data collection, a non-random sample technique was used, called natural sampling
and also referred to as convenience sample (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 132). The natural
sampling method is characterised by no prior judgement of the researchers in the sample
composition and is often down to the availability of the participants. The sample was
comprised of interviews with five Swedish students and five French students, all enrolled
at Umeå University, in Umeå Sweden. The respondents’ age range was between 21 and
28 years old. In order to make the students feel comfortable when answering the
questions, we first asked them when they were available and announced it was going to
last 20 to 30 minutes. Thus, several students we knew were asked if they had Swedish or
French contacts ready to answer our interview questions. Some interviews took place at
Umeå University and others at the subject’s residence. By moving to their place, we
made sure they were in a familiar place that allowed them to answer freely for an open
discussion. The interviews were between 17’13 and 30’51 long (Appendix 3). To perform
them, both of us had the interview questions and one was conducting the interview by
asking the questions. The other one was the co writer, writing down main ideas or
interpretation of respondents’ answers. Also, by being two, we could think more of other
questions to ask to respondents, to guide them. For practical purpose, interviews were
recorded in agreement with the interviewees. Our interviews were semi-structured in
order to encourage the exploration of the main topics of interest and allow the
development of other questions (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 133). With semi-structured
interviews, questions are written down but can evolve as the interviewer and interviewee
interact with each other. For the structure of our interviews, we created open questions,
since it would require respondents to develop longer and more interesting answers than
basics ‘yes’ and ‘no’. It allowed us also to analyse and interpret their answers in order to
assess their perceptions.

When running interviews, an indicator used to establish the completion is the data
saturation limit. Data saturation is reached when no new information can be obtained
through additional interviews (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 345). When commencing the
interviews, it can be difficult to predict when the theoretical saturation is going to be
reached. After collecting 10 interviews’ transcriptions, we noticed there was a trend in
the respondents’ answers and thus, we knew a saturation point was reached, where no
additional respondents would have provided any additional information.

3.6.1 Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation is one of the most important ethical aspects when conducting
research (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.32). It has to be ensured that no force is used to make
respondents participate to the interviews. Also, offering financial or other material
rewards should be avoided, since it might bias the results. The participants should be
given information about what is required if they agree to take part and how much time it
will take. Also, when running interviews, a balance must be found between giving
sufficient information to enable informed consent and avoid jeopardizing the purpose of
the research. During the research process, all the principles listed above were considered
and respected. The respondents were not forced to do the interview; they were contacted
beforehand to book an interview time to ensure that they were disturbed as little as
possible. They were also informed about the time it would take before agreeing to do the
interview and no rewards were offered to the respondents. Also, the issue of finding the
balance between giving enough information and making sure not to jeopardize the purpose of the research was met when designing the interview questions. As the first question examined whether the respondents would relate culture to food by themselves, the notion of food was not mentioned in the introductory part of the interview questions. However, respondents were informed about the general theme of the interview.

### 3.7 General Analytical procedure

To analyse qualitative data, Miles & Huberman (1994, p.9) have identified several steps to manage and control the large volume of data. A general analytical procedure involves three steps: data reduction, data display and conclusions. It is also necessary to verify the validity of these conclusions. These activities must take place simultaneously. It is important as well, to record the interviews and transcript the responses exactly, so that the data can be easily accessible when needed. Moreover, when collecting the data, it is important to add own thoughts and reflexions about the interviews, also called ‘memos’. In order to frame the different trends in the responses, we created an Excel file with the main keywords for each question. This was the way we choose to code the data from the interviews. After reporting the main keywords, we found trends in the responses, although it was not sufficient to analyse the data properly.

Therefore, a summary and interoperation of the answers of each respondent was made, including quotes. Their answers were gathered in specific themes, the same also present in the interview: (1) the association of food and culture, (2) their perception of eating good, (3) their grocery shopping experience, (4) their perception of the current food consumption system, and (5) their vision of an ideal supermarket. Our previous analytical work allowed us to have an overview of the responses for each theme, helping later when discussing and formulating conclusions. Afterwards, a set of generalisations linked to the existing theoretical knowledge could be developed. All these former steps enabled us to draw definite conclusions and answer the research questions.

Another point that needs to be discussed is the inter reliability of the research. This concerns the degree of agreement among raters and its consistency; the raters referring to the researchers conducting the interviews. Being two researchers could have skewed the interpretation of the findings. However, before designing and conducting the interview questions, we both agreed on the number of participants, the place to conduct the interviews as well as the person who would conduct them. Therefore, we made sure there was an homogeneity and consensus while conducting the interviews and interpreting the results. Before conducting the interviews, we also rehearsed interview questions aloud to make sure we would perform them in a similar way afterwards. However, inter reliability has to be considered carefully since interpretation and subjectivism are always present when doing qualitative research.

### 3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations need to be carefully considered when conducting research. They refer to the moral values, principles that frame the basis of a code of conduct (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.30). Research ethics regard ‘the manner in which research is conducted and how the results and findings are reported’ (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.30). As underlined by Bell and Bryman (2007), there are different principles to look at and to respect when conducting research. First, there should be no harm made to participants. Harm should be avoided during the research process and the researchers need to ensure the physical or psychological well being of the research participants and everyone
involved. For this reason, it was ensured that no harm was made to respondents. The fact that the interviews were semi structured helped in that way, since they could evolve as the participants were answering. Another important point underlined by the authors is dignity. In business research, dignity refers to the respect of the research participants. The interview was designed specifically to avoid discomfort and anxiety, with an explanatory introduction and general questions at the beginning to make the respondents feel more comfortable. Moreover, while running the interviews, the fully informed consent of participants was insured. Also, the protection of privacy of the research subjects was insured, as well as the respect of privacy. That is why only names and ages were asked, to create a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Another point highlighted by Bell and Bryman (2007) concerns the research data confidentiality. This was insured and explained to respondents in the introduction. Names and ages were asked to make everyone on an equal footing and make the interviews trustworthier. However, interviewees were specifically told their identity would be kept anonymous. The other points underlined by the authors regarding deception, affiliation, honesty and transparency, reciprocity and misrepresentation were also respected.

There are many ethical considerations, and all of them were insured during the whole research process. However, main ethical considerations are going to be presented in the following part.

3.8.1 Anonymity and confidentiality

The research process should offer anonymity and confidentiality to all participants. Stating to the participants that their identity would remain anonymous assured them they would not be identified with any opinion they express (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.33). Running interviews in this manner favours higher freedom of expression and more open responses. That is the reason why respondents were specifically told their names would not be used and their personal information would remain anonymous.

3.8.2 Informed consent

Even if it is ethical to inform participants about the purpose of the research before they agree to participate, this can orientate the respondents’ answers and present some issues in obtaining valid responses (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.34). For instance, if the participants would have been told the research was on food consumption, it would have oriented their answer to the first question, that was ‘What symbolises French/Swedish culture for you?’. Since the point was to see if participants would bring the term food by themselves, it was important not to mention the word before, in order to not orientate their answers in any way.

3.8.3 Dignity

The principle of dignity underlined by Collis and Hussey (2014, p.34) states that it would not be ethical to embarrass or ridicule participants. In some cases, respondents might see the researchers as persons having knowledge they do not specifically have themselves. Thus, it is important to remain courteous, understanding during the whole interview not to make the respondents feel uncomfortable. The dignity principle was respected as far as possible.
3.8.4 Publications

An unethical behaviour in the publication of a thesis would be to invent data, falsify the results or plagiarise. Also, it is unethical to exaggerate or omit results to present a more favourable picture (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.34). That is another reason why all the interviews were transcribed word for word, trying to translate as truthfully as possible the respondents’ answers, mood and subjectivity when answering the different questions.
4. Results and Findings

This part concerns the empirical findings from our qualitative study. We organised the findings in five main parts regarding the following themes: (1) the association of food and culture, (2) their perception of eating well, (3) their grocery shopping experience, (4) their perception of the current food consumption system and (5) their vision of an ideal supermarket. After presenting what has been underlined by the interviewees, we will analyse the data while considering the theories described in the theoretical part.

Some comparison might be underlined between the French and the Swedish respondents. Thus, the reader should retain that respondents 1, 2, 3, 4 and 9 represent the French interviewees, whereas Swedish respondents are the 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

4.1 The association of food and culture

Initially, to understand what culture meant to our respondents we asked about their perception of both French and Swedish culture. When mentioning French culture, 8 interviewees out of 10 related it to food, and among them, four mentioned food as the first thing that comes to their mind: ‘food because the French food is something that everyone in the world knows’ (1); ‘Mostly food, it is the country of the food around the world.’ (10), ‘food, Gourmet food.’ (9). Two of them mentioned the French culture with ‘Cuisine of course’ (2), or symbolized it with ‘Gastronomy’ (3). Moreover, three of the respondents mentioned wine, cheese and bread as a symbol of the French culture ‘they eat bread a lot and like cheese’ (5), ‘France is a lot assimilated with the wine culture’ (1).

The second notion mentioned by half of our respondents is the history of France and its attachment to traditions. Interviewee (1) said ‘the history of France because it is also something important for us’, (2) ‘the historical heritage’, (4) ‘patrimoine and museums’, (6) ‘feel like maybe a little bit old’, (8) ‘more traditional and nationalistic overall’.

To describe French people, the respondents mentioned they were ‘fancy people’ (1), ‘emotional’ (7), ‘who are focused on the family’ (10), and who act in ‘a cosy way’ (6). French people are also ‘less welcoming to strangers, or people who don’t speak French’ (8) and that ‘don’t like to speak English’ for respondent (6).

For both Swedish and French respondents, it seems that food, history and traditions are deeply linked to their definition of the French culture.

When the same question was asked regarding the Swedish culture, 6 respondents out of 10 mentioned a glossary of words related to environment and nature. ‘is a Nordic country, it is very cold here’ (1), ‘more about nature, and ecological things’ (2), ‘reindeers, snow, a lot of thing around the winter’ (10), ‘wideness, the forest, the sunshine and the summer days.’ (5), ‘mid summer’ (6), and ‘being able to go and walk in the nature, go around wherever you want’ (9).

Apart from their unique environment, respondents also underlined the characteristics of Swedish people. For interviewee (2), they are ‘less emotional’, interviewee 8 thinks they are ‘individual inwards’ and interviewee (7) explained that ‘they are personal and hard to get to know’.

When French respondents were asked about Swedish culture, they all mentioned societal phenomena. For instance, interviewee (1) underlined that Sweden was ‘a country where
women and men are more equal’, and interviewee (4) mentioned the ‘educational system, the well being and the sport’.

Unlike the French one, Swedish culture is not at first characterised by food; it is rather linked to nature and freedom due to the Swedish weather and landscapes. From the French respondents’ perspective, Swedish culture is symbolized as egalitarian, neutral and healthier people.

Stereotypes

To see the vision respondents had about the other culture, they were asked about the stereotypes when thinking about the country.

French students all mentioned that physically, the Swedish stereotype was blond, tall with blue eyes. Regarding the behaviour, Swedish people are labelled as ‘cold and not talkative’ (1), ‘mysterious’ (2), ‘difficult to approach’ (1) as ‘tough to talk to’ (10) and they have ‘hard time to show their emotions’ (2). Another trend highlighted by 3 out of 5 respondents is that the Swedish individual ‘eats healthy’ (2); (3); (4), ‘practices a lot of sport’ (3) and ‘takes care of himself’ (2).

For the Swedish respondents, the French is stereotyped as someone who likes food: ‘he eats baguette’ (6), and ‘loves cheese’ (9). Regarding their behaviour, French people are stereotyped as ‘emotional, intense and very expressing’ (7), ‘creative’ (6), ‘welcome to other French people’(8), and ‘proud of their historical background and heritage’ (8).

From those stereotypes, it can be stated that French and Swedish are not perceived the same way. French people seem to be more associated to food, well being and history. Whereas Swedish people more to distance, individuality, welfare and sport.

French and Swedish culture

In order to know how French and Swedish people feel embedded into their culture we asked them if each country has a food culture. Doing so we also wanted to see if food and culture were linked for both countries.

For French respondents, it seemed obvious that France had a food culture. ‘French food is something that everyone in the world knows’ (1), ‘Of course. You can’t think about France without thinking about French cuisine. Like every person you can meet, especially in an exchange program context, can tell you about French cuisine and French specialties’ (2), ‘Of course. You can’t think about France without thinking about French cuisine. Everyone you meet especially in an exchange program context they can tell you about French cuisine and French specialties’ (10). Those answers express the perception French people have about their strong food culture that is known from everybody according to them.

All the Swedish interviewees also agreed on the fact that France has a food culture. They mentioned it with ‘bread and baguette’ (6) and through ‘passion, romantic diner’ (5) and ‘delicacy’ (7).

Moreover, if two French students argued that Sweden has a food culture, they underlined that ‘it’s not the same food that you can find here compared to France’ (1), ‘which is totally the opposite of France’ (2). Among the French respondents, some were definitely thinking that the Swedish culture was missing. This is the case of respondents (2) and (3) who ‘feel that they eat because they have to eat basically’ (2), ‘No. It seems that they just eat to feed themselves but it’s not something really tasty’ (3). ‘I don’t really know but for me they don’t have a big food identity.’ (4), ‘They are more
focused on healthy things and basic dishes’ (4), ‘Yes, meatball, reindeer, potatoes and salmon. They only have this kind of product here. And also lingonberries’ (10).

On the other hand, all the Swedish respondents agreed that they have a food culture even if the concept did not seem well defined. ‘Yes, we have things that are typical Swedish, but that you eat for special occasions’ (6), ‘Yes much things that come from the woods, moose meat and such things.’ (7), ‘Yes some kind of food culture. I am not sure it is more about big holidays where we have standard food and specialties’ (9). The lack of clarity among the answers can be justified by the influence of other food cultures from across the world: ‘we also have a lot of food that come from Asia or other place that we eat’ (6), ‘But now I would say that Swedish culture is much more influenced by international cuisine’ (7), ‘But now we eat a lot of different food, like Italian food, in everyday life it is not that we always eat Swedish food’ (9), ‘it is gone nowadays. I think that Sweden used to eat specific food before, but nowadays this is more a mixed culture’ (5).

On one hand, food culture seems to appear obvious and as part of their daily culture for French people. On the other hand, they do not consider that Sweden has a strong cultural identity of food, they rather see it as something vital for them. Swedish people are aware that their food culture is influenced by international flows, and consider their food identity more regarding special events and natural aspects.

4.2 Perception of a good meal

The second part of the interview was regarding their definition of a good meal, their grocery shopping habits and characteristics when buying or cooking nice meals. Thus, the following question was asked to the interviewees: ‘After having a meal, what characteristics would make you say ‘That was a good meal’?’. As specified before, the term ‘good meal’ was carefully chosen to see what aspects of food the respondents would come up with. The criterion that was mentioned the most was the taste: ‘something that I love’ (2), ‘first the taste and then probably the proportion’ (4), ‘The taste, and if I am full’ (10), ‘If it taste goods, if it looks good, and if it smells good’ (6); ‘Mmmmh… well it should taste good’ (9). The taste was brought both by Swedish and French respondents.

However, a clear distinction could be noticed between how French and Swedes perceive a good meal in general. If French students often mentioned they had to feel full and enjoy a meal to characterise it as good, Swedish students seemed to relate a good meal more to its efficiency, health aspect and energy giving. As a French respondent stated, ‘I will privilege the enjoyment of my meal rather than the good healthy aspect’ (2). On the other hand, for Swedes, a good meal is ‘A coffee. After a good meal you take a cup of coffee and then you go back to work. Efficient I would say’ (5), ‘For me good is lot of food with much energy, that’s it.’ (8). However, respondent (8) explained he was always making the distinction himself ‘between eating for just getting full and eating because it is an experience, it is tasteful or it looks good on the plate’.

The notion of being full was also brought by many respondents. However, its definition seemed to differ between French and Swedish respondents. French respondents linked being full to enjoyment and pleasure of a good meal: ‘First of all, I have to feel full, not be hungry anymore, and then something that I love’ (2), ‘if I am full, If I ate the plate entirely it’s that I enjoyed the meal’ (10).

Overall, although all respondents brought the importance of taste, it felt that French respondents preferred food for pleasure and experience whereas Swedish respondents related food to fresh, health and energy aspects.
Afterwards, respondents were asked where would they go shopping to cook a nice meal. Among the French students, all respondents made the distinction between daily shopping (butcher, bakery, fisherman, etc) and basic shopping experience in Supermarkets: ‘in my parents house I will go to little and/or specialised shops because I know the people who are working there and then I am sure about the quality’ (2), ‘if there are some specific products that I want to buy I go to the epiceries fines (Delicatessen shops) and sometimes, if I want some good vegetable I go to the French marché’ (3), ‘when I try to be healthier and all this I try to go to specialised shops, little supermarkets’ (4), ‘if I want good product I will go to the fruits shops, the greengrocers to have good quality’ (10).

On the other side, all Swedish respondents mentioned ICA and big supermarkets in their answers. Respondent (8) explained why he was favouring big supermarkets like ICA MAXI ‘we usually go to these larger supermarkets stores, like ICA Maxi, or city growth, those really large ones [...] they normally have these fresh daily dishes where you can buy fresh fish or fresh meat’.

Even if all Swedish students mentioned ICA and large supermarkets, some of them expressed their desire to experience new things that would make their grocery shopping nice and more enjoyable: ‘Normally at ICA, everything there, but it could be nice if I could go to some delicacy shops or some specialized shops, it could be more fun, but it is not so much common here in Sweden’ (9), ‘My favourite store is ICA but in the summer they have like shops downtown in squares like markets where you can get fresh tomatoes and it is very nice’ (7).

The next question was similar but more oriented towards fresh food. Once again, most French respondents mentioned specialised stores and market: ‘The market [...] you know that those products are of an high quality’ (1), ‘if I really want good meat for a special event I would go to butcher’ (2), ‘Specific shops and marché’ (3), ‘My family goes to a specialised supermarket [...] When I was consuming alone, I tried to go to little shops for vegetables, like greengrocers’ (4).

Among Swedish respondents, they, once again, all mentioned ICA as the place for buying fresh products: ‘I also go to supermarkets because normally the turnover of their food is better so they have delivery everyday’ (8). Since respondent (8) has lived in France, he also underlined the difference of shopping habits among the two countries: ‘in France you went to these markets, or you went to these specific shops like the butcher, or you went to the fish store, to the bread store, and you went to the specialists. While here, I would say you go to these general ones that have everything’.

This part underlined a tendency towards fresh and local products, specialised shop and markets. All the respondents expressed that they would enjoy more their buying experience in such a place.

4.3 Grocery shopping experience

Supermarkets do not seem to be a place where consumers enjoy spending their time. Both Swedish and French respondents spend little time inside supermarkets, varying from 10 to 30 minutes. [I spend] ‘less time possible, because I feel depressed’ (2), ‘I stay only in supermarkets as long as I need to’ (10).

However, from the responses, it seems that the time spent in grocery shops could increase if supermarkets were offering more services, or at least better ones. When asked what could make them stay longer and enjoy more their buying experience, their answers were: ‘Mood, good music, well organized products, things that attract my eyes ‘ (1), ‘Some kind
of events’ (2), ‘if people inside are welcoming’ (3), ‘I can spend a lot of time in the books space’ (4). More interactions with consumers was also mentioned as a mean that could keep consumers inside supermarkets: ‘free tasting stuff’ (3) and ‘On Friday they have a woman that cook and then you can try food, so I stay longer’ (6).

Overall, both French and Swedish interviewees described their current buying experience in supermarkets as unpleasant. To better understand how this could be improved, we asked respondents what elements they dislike and which ones were missing in their current buying experience.

If the definition of food culture differs from one country to another, French and Swedish respondents mostly agreed on what they dislike regarding supermarkets. The first thing they mentioned was the waste of time. It can be due to the environment and external factors: ‘You can wait for a long time’ (2), ‘The crowd’ (10), ‘The queue when it is long’ (5), ‘Too many people, if it is crowded’ (7), but also to internal ones: ‘Don’t find products, when it’s not well indicated’ (1), ‘not find what you need’ (2), ‘I can’t find what I need or if it not fresh’ (7). Overall, time wasting is what consumers dislike the most.

Regarding what the supermarkets could bring to improve the consumer’s experience, all respondents mentioned the current lack of information: ‘More information about products, to be more informed about the product, like the origin’ (1), ‘Some indication about the products, as some information about the origin or some recipes’ (4), ‘Maybe some inspiration, like this product goes well with this product, use it like this or store it like this to make it stay longer.’ (8). Respondents also underlined that the atmosphere of the store could be improved, as well as the customer relationship ‘I wouldn’t buy the all package and also I think it brings a nice atmosphere in stores overall’ (8), ‘many stores where they have a more cosy and homelike environment, I’d say that would enhance my experience’ (9), ‘People more welcoming probably’ (3), ‘Like tasting areas, where they have people, a staff of course which let you try out things’ (9), ‘I like to go grocery shopping in other countries… I can go to little shops as markets and it seems more personal and more fresh’ (6). By stating ‘I don’t think that we need to add some things but it will be better to improve the way we shop, self service could be a good idea’, respondent (10) highlighted that consumers do not necessary want more quantity, but they would like to find more personal and close relationships inside the store, with both products and people.

4.4 Perception of the current food consumption system

When we asked respondents if mass consumption was compatible with quality and freshness of the products, the idea was first to examine if those criteria were important to them and then, if they could think of alternatives.

All respondents, with no exception linked mass consumption with pejorative aspects, especially when dealing with fresh products. ‘If you are looking for some special fruits and vegetables it is not good to have mass consumption’ (1), ‘I mean, as long as you put mass consumption in a sentence you cannot link it with high quality products because products with high quality are more rare and more expensive so they do not adapt well to mass consumption’ (2), ‘They want to produce in big quantities but not with the quality.’ (3), ‘don’t respect the season’ (3), ‘Maybe it is not like so fresh if you have a lot of products’ (6), ‘Mass production is more cans and everything, it is not fresh’ (7), ‘big stores equate to cheap prices, and cheap prices usually means cutting corners in quality’ (8). For our respondents, quality does not seem compatible with mass consumption, especially in regards to fresh products.
When mentioning quality and respect of freshness, students referred more to specialized shops. ‘That is why I prefer to go to specific shops as La ruche qui dit oui because I know that products are fresh and without pesticides.’ (3), ‘If it is a specialized shop it is fresh, [...] big stores mean that you need more quantity because there are a lot of people who are coming to buy products’ (6), ‘fresh for me means local’ (7), ‘Abroad I would probably say that smaller stores are better quality due to their craftsmanship that cares more about the products, maybe they are more specialised’ (8).

Students are totally aware of what quality and freshness mean for them. They all know what is important for them and find mass consumption to be unsatisfactory in the way they consume fresh products. Quality is associated to rarity for students, and in that sense specialized shops seem to symbolize quality and fresh products for them. Specialized shops seem to symbolize quality and freshness, and students associate rarity with quality. Moreover, having personal interaction with the grocery’s staff is also a sign of respect towards both products and consumers. However, some respondents mentioned that these methods of consumption were not a problem regarding basic products ‘if you are looking for basic things that you can find everywhere this is can be a good way and this will not change’ (1).

Mass consumption and mass distribution, a sustainable system?

After analysing if the current consumption system fitted consumers’ expectations, we wanted to examine what respondents could come up with in terms of alternatives to our current way of consuming.

Some respondents consider that mass consumption will last over time because of its convenience, cheap price allowance and the lack of conscience from consumers, ‘bring the most money for the companies’ (1), ‘people are lazy and it is convenient to go to supermarkets and buy things cheaply and in a easy way’ (7), ‘I think you’ll have some people who don’t care much like they just want cheap price and they don’t care, they go to bigger stores which are growing bigger because economy of scales and everything’ (8).

Although some respondents think it will last, this system is becoming obsolete. Consumers are becoming aware that changes are required: ‘And everyone needs to make some effort in their consumption’ (4), ‘People think more sustainably to the environment. Now people what to buy what they want to buy and not what mass consumption asked them to buy.’ (10), ‘I think that we are becoming more aware of where it comes from, and it will be better to create smaller places if they are really good at some products. People know more about it now’ (7), ‘you are like at a diverging point where you have these stores, the big stores become bigger but also there would be people who are more concerned’ (8).

Respondents underlined that nowadays consumers were thinking more and more this way because they ‘think that is something not respectful for the earth [...] in some countries the workforce is not well treated and not well paid’ (3) and because they pay more and more attention to ‘where the food comes from, if it is locally produce, like animal safety, like how well they are treated and so on’ (8).

Most of our respondents, when asking about alternatives, mentioned specialized stores, because they attach more importance to fresh and local products. ‘Markets are a good solution to attract people close to where they live and provide them some local products of things that they know are good and fresh products’ (1), ‘Local shops can be, because it is good for the economy of specific regions. In local shops you will only consume what
you need to’ (2), ‘you can have the ideal supermarket, as a regular supermarket but with local products fresh products will be local’ (3), ‘I think that big supermarkets could stay, but the products will have to be changed’ (4), ‘Cooperatives shops because people know that hypermarkets make a huge amount of profits on real workers as farmers. So local market could share our traditions and help farmers to be more awarded to their work’ (10), ‘it is easier now to have a store which can sell small quantity but with more quality, local for example’ (6), ‘go to maybe specialised stores to buy these more specialised items’ (8). Respondents mostly agreed on small and local stores as alternatives to big supermarkets. Small and local stores can boost regional economies and provide the consumer with fresher and higher quality products. Thanks to those stores, traditions can be shared and consumers can support local farmers. They would also be a solution to less waste and transportation.

Overall, this part allowed us to see that in consumers’ mind, supermarkets do not appear as the unique way to consume food anymore. However, it remains the cheapest and the most convenient way to buy food. Moreover, respondents highlighted that their surroundings were increasingly concerned about environmental issues. Also, all respondents defended the same interests and values regarding food quality and freshness.

However, mass consumption seems to be highly rooted and, in order to remain realistic, the interviewees try to combine specialised shops and big supermarkets to create their own sustainable system.

Differences between the French and Swedish consumption habits inside the supermarkets

In order to highlight the difference of consumption between French and Swedish consumers, respondents were asked about their consumption habits.

French respondents tend to see Swedish people as healthier consumers, more aware of sustainable subjects who try to make an effort in their consumption: ‘Swedish people usually eat healthier food than us in France’ (1), ‘I think Swedish people are more aware that mass consumption is not possible anymore and they are making an effort to change’ (2), ‘They buy day by day’ (10), ‘I think that here in Sweden they pay more attention to the quality, if the vegetables are fresh or not’ (10).

Another interesting point is that, from the French respondents’ answers, this specific way of consumption seems to be embedded into Swedish consumers’ minds: ‘Compared to France, when you say that you are vegan sometimes it’s not well perceived by people. So maybe this can be something: to try to change this behaviour’ (1), ‘they are making effort to change it. They are trying to make it normal in people minds’ (2).

Unlike Swedish consumers, French people do not seem to be considered eco-friendly consumers. ‘In France people are only becoming aware of it, and it is more difficult... and it is definitely linked to the food culture: here they are more aware of what they eat and how to eat healthy and not to waste food. For French people it is labelled as eco-friendly. Swedish people are advanced in this way of thinking’ (2), ‘in France, people are used to go big supermarkets [...] once a week whereas here people go more often in small shops.’ (3)

Swedish respondents also argued they feel like responsible consumers: ‘I mean like here [Sweden] everything has these labels like this is green, this is eco-friendly, this is no GMO, this is this, this is that, everywhere, all the products. Everyone tries to front that they are about that [...] we have the environmental friendly thing, usually very expensive and now it’s a little bit cheaper’ (8). On the other side, Swedish respondents perceive French consumers as less environmentally friendly consumers who tend to focus more on
the price and who would rather go day to day shopping, associating specialised shop with quality: ‘It feels like it is less environmentally conscious in France [...] in France it was more like super cheap price’ (8), ‘I think that there are more specialized shops. Maybe it is more places where you can buy bread or food’ (9).

This comparison between the Swedish way of consumption and the French one allowed us to point out some important elements. Swedish consumers tend to go to supermarkets on a daily basis to buy fresh products, whereas French consumers buy larger amount of products in supermarkets only once every two weeks. This difference can be explained by the fact that French consumers tend to go to specialized stores to buy specifically fresh products. However, both French and Swedish respondents pointed out that sustainable and eco-friendly behaviours were embedded into Swedish culture, whereas it still remains pointed out in France.

4.5 Vision of an ideal supermarket

In this part of the interview, respondents were asked about their perception of an ideal supermarket. We noticed that it was actually quite hard for the respondents to think of an ideal supermarket and design it. It seemed to be linked to the fact that consumers in general do not think much about their buying environment.

One improvement respondents would like concerns the efficiency offered by supermarkets: ‘with large aisles, when you are not blocked by other people and when you can find easily what you are looking for’ (1), ‘with not so many people’ (3), ‘the perfect shop is just get what I want, fairly quickly in a sort of nice environment’ (8).

Apart from that, respondents pointed out the current lack of information and interactions inside the stores: ‘get some advice from the sellers inside if you are looking for a specific product or if you just don’t know what to eat or how to cook this thing maybe they can give you advice if you want’ (1), ‘would like also more indications about products’ (3).

Several respondents also highlighted their wish for a more pleasant atmosphere: ‘[…] and when it is pleasant to be in there, like to spend time, maybe to talk to some people you know’ (1), ‘To be in a shop with quiet music with some smells, because when you go into supermarkets it smells of nothing’ (3), ‘with some more products to be tasted. […] more welcoming and beautiful’ (4). Respondent (9) also mentioned that it would be better to have ‘like one section for meat, one for fish’.

Overall, it looks like our respondents would like to change the way big supermarkets are organised and go back to a more traditional layout.

Afterwards, we asked respondents if they would include technology in this ideal supermarket. Most interviewees could only think about what already exists: online stores, automatic checkouts, and so on. However, when discussing deeper about what technology could bring to customers, they were a lot more imaginative: it could be ‘Some screen with information on it’ (1), ‘have some I-pads for example and then have some information about the products and see maybe some recipes or pictures about the product when it is cooked’ (3), ‘everything that is on the labels, nutritional labels, would be displayed easier […] or with your phone you could have more information about the products, like the components of it and the nutritional intakes […] a video on how it is produced’ (4), ‘if you could use your phone, you could use it to have some filters and to learn about what you want to know about it, and then not to lose information’ (7).

Overall, in their Ideal supermarkets most of the respondent saw technology as a tool to get more information about the products and ideas about how to cook them, with some
recipes for instance. Moreover, respondent (7) mentioned that technology could be used to ‘connect in somehow your home and the supermarket to be sure you don’t buy something you already have’. Respondent (2) thought about a time saving tool technology could also bring ‘a GPS for example, to locate and then lead me to product that I am looking for’.

Although our respondents were enthusiastically coming up with new ideas, their current experience with technology in Supermarkets does not please them: ‘At ICA you can use scan but I’d rather go to cashier because you have relationship with people even if you have to wait longer’ (6), ‘I think technology would be part of it, but I don’t like it personally’ (5). Overall, respondents were often associating the current use of technology in supermarkets with impersonality and inefficiency. Respondents do not seem to pay much attention to their buying environment. However, they were still in favour for experiencing something better, with nice atmosphere, relationships with people, and so on.

With regards to the information consumers would like to have about products, respondents mostly stated they were interested in the origin of the product, its composition and its nutritional components. Apart from those, many respondents mentioned they would be interested in having recipes with the products they buy: ‘know the way to cook it [...] to know with what kind of wine it is good [...] leave some comments about the product [...] To have an interaction between consumers’ (3).

Summary

Overall, respondents’ answers allowed us to emit some trends. The first one is that Swedish consumers are more health, sport and well being oriented, whereas French consumers are more associated with food, history and well-living. The second one regards the food culture in both countries: France is considered as having a strong food culture, and Sweden as having a more healthy and natural relation to food. The third aspect that came out concerns how deep the mass consumption is rooted in our lives. If all respondents were aware behaviours had to evolve, they could not easily come up with alternatives to big supermarkets and mass production. The only alternatives they could think of were small and specialised stores. Also, respondents often mentioned their wish for recipes on products, more interaction with people inside supermarkets and nicer atmosphere in general. The last point we noticed is the difference of perception Swedish and French consumers have about eco friendly, bio and vegan products for instance. They seem rooted in the Swedish culture, whereas those consumption behaviours are labelled in France.
5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter the empirical findings are analysed and put through the theoretical framework. The empirical material guides the chapter and the analysis will be provided with running discussions.

The procedure to analyse qualitative data is rather free and, compared to quantitative analysis, does not include so many rules (Ritchie & Lewis 2003, p. 200). The content analysis will be interpreted while following the structure of the empirical findings. The concept of culture and food consumption from both Swedish and French perspective, the keystone of our thesis, will be analysed by bringing together different relations: (1) the association of food and culture, (2) their perception of eating well, (3) their grocery shopping experience, (4) their perception of the current food consumption system (5) their vision of an ideal supermarket. The aim is to analyse the data while considering the theories described in the theoretical part.

5.1 The association of food and culture

5.1.1 Culture as a marker of identity

In the empirical material, culture was defined as an homogeneous system where meanings, way of life and unifying values are shared by the people from a community. This definition emerged again while interviewing our respondents. Indeed, only by analysing the respondents’ answers, it was noticeable that Swedish and French respondents had two totally different cultural environment. For instance, in France, people have almost always a three-course meal, whereas it is not common in Sweden to do so. Sometimes, as mentioned by respondent (5), they have only a sandwich and a coffee as their whole meal. Culture is also referred to as an interconnected concept with a system full of images, texts and objects, overspread in practices, identities and meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p.869). The answers brought by respondents regarding stereotypes highlighted this aspect of culture. All the French respondents brought the same description of the Swedish stereotype and so did the Swedish respondents with the French stereotype. Hence, the process of stereotyping people is based on shared meanings and interconnected concepts that both French and Swedish people experience, without being aware of it.

Moreover, the process of enculturation (Solomon et al., 2013, p.558) allows individuals to discover the importance of their own cultural identity. During the interviews, respondents were comparing their culture with the other one and thus, were able to point out more precisely their cultural identity and its components. This process also made them aware that it was not possible to take for granted the elements that shape one's cultural identity.

5.1.2 Culture is linked to food

When describing the French culture, respondents brought many different aspects: food, wine, history, romance, fashion, and so on. It seemed quite easy for both Swedish and French respondents to come up with aspects of the French culture. However, respondents were more hesitant when describing the Swedish culture and the responses varied from one another. With those answers, it could be inferred that France had a strong cultural identity. Moreover, most respondents mentioned food, wine, baguette, and so on. It can be assumed that food is an important aspect of the French culture. Actually, as Carlsson-
Kanyama & Lindén (2001) state, food is an important criterion for cultural identity. This seems to well illustrate the French case. However, when asked about the Swedish culture, answers were more disparate. As Civitello claims (2011), no food can be perceived or consumed the same way on Earth. Respondents were assimilating more the Swedish food culture to practices, way of consuming, rather than food in itself. Indeed, Swedish respondents often mentioned their traditional events and holidays to refer to Swedish food specialties. This emphasizes the idea that food is related to ease, satisfaction and festivity, all part of the cultural heritage.

5.1.3 Cultural selection

When the respondents were describing the French and the Swedish culture, it seemed that those two were quite different. As Clifford (1973) and Harris (1971) underlined, every culture is different from another, because it constantly changes and links new ideas to tradition. Respondents were actually able to discuss other cultures thanks to ethno consumerism, which consists of analysing its own culture from the inside. The cultural selection of French consumers is more attached to local and specialised stores because of their daily life consumption of fresh products, such as bread. Many respondents from both nationalities mentioned the bakery, where French consumers go almost everyday to buy their fresh bread. The way respondents mentioned specialised stores differed from one culture to another. If for French respondents, it is strongly linked to their food culture, Swedish respondents expressed their wish to have those specialised stores or markets, that would make them enjoy more doing grocery shopping.

5.2 The perception of eating well

5.2.1 The notion of eating well depends on the culture

The notion of a good meal varies from Swedish to French respondents. As mentioned earlier, since French and Swedish people do not share the same culture, they do not share the same meanings and values as well. Therefore, with no surprise, their definition of a good meal differed. French respondents linked good meal with pleasure, enjoyment, taste, and being full, whereas Swedish respondents related it more to efficiency, energy giving, taste and health characteristics. It seems that for the French respondents, eating well is related to ‘well living’, which is actually in accordance with their epicurean way of life. On the other hand, Swedish respondents attach more importance to the ‘well being’ in what food can provide them.

5.2.2 Food identity influence consumption behaviours

Liang et al. (2012, p.352) argue that the values, assumptions and meanings included in the act of shopping are all bound by the culture. From the previous empirical material it has been ensured that French consumers link food to pleasure and abundance. On the other side, the cultural food identity of Swedish consumers is more health and well being oriented. As Briley & Aaker (2006, p.395) underlined, the act of consuming is rooted and inextricably bound with many cultural beliefs. This can actually justify why French consumers are looking for more personal and traditional way of consuming food. According to several respondents, this is is due to the French food history, with markets, food exchange, and so on.
5.3 The grocery shopping experience

5.3.1 Consumer behaviour is unconscious

As previously mentioned, respondents did not seem fully conscious about the reasons for making their purchase decisions. That is why we tried to identify the context in which respondents were doing their grocery shopping. It was important as well to identify the context in which the consumers live, thus, we tried to take into account as much as possible the difference of environment for French and Swedish respondents. The consumer behaviour practice is strongly linked to the process of learning a culture. Indeed, analysing the way people consume can help in understanding the culture they are living in. However, each respondent seemed to have its own consumer practice, shaped in a specific way. This consumer practice is unconscious until it faces external actors going against what the consumer was taking for granted.

5.3.2 The consumer is influenced by habitus

As mentioned in the theoretical part, the consumer choice is influenced by the habitus. Meaning that the individual’s choice depends on prior social and historical forces that shape his or her experience during the decision-making (Lee et al., 2014, p.286). When asking our respondents about their ideal buying experience, we had to reformulate and explain deeper what we were referring to. This highlights that students probably never thought about their buying environment before, since they are just used to it. Moreover, from the respondents’ answers, it can be underlined that consumer behaviour is shaped by prior and historical forces. Indeed, to buy fresh products, Swedish students go more to supermarkets and French students to specialised stores. This phenomena is strongly related to the consumer’s habitus. This was illustrated by respondents saying ‘I don’t know, This is the way I am used to do’.

Even if Swedish and French respondents’ answers differed in many ways, they sometimes were quite similar. This was the case when asking what could make them stay longer in supermarkets. All the respondents were thinking similarly, talking about free sample to taste, better atmosphere inside the store, and so on. Thus, they all share the same ‘low-involvement socialization of understandings, feelings and actions’ (Allen, 2002, p.519).

However, their habitus allows them to distinguish their collectivity from others. Several respondents argued that they were buying these specific products because of what they heard on TV, or what they are studying, and so on. In that case, it is the social environment that teaches the consumer how to act, through different agents.

As every consumer, our respondents follow unconscious social constraints and cultural continuities consumption rules. From the French respondents’ point of view, it is obvious that Swedish consumers are eco-friendlier and more aware of sustainable issues. If all respondents mentioned that mass consumption was not going to last over time because of ethical issues, none of the French interviewees said they were going to change their consumption. This can be explained by the fact that the French culture does not provide the same environment of consumption than the Swedish one. The Swedish culture is already strongly linked to health, eco-friendly, bio products, whereas in France, consumers buying this way are more labelled.
5.3.3 Consumption as a practice

In every culture it is possible to draw a domain of action where people expect to understand, manipulate and get the hang of their own fate. In that context, many students talked about their shopping experience as a fully-fledged practice, with habits and rules. Some of the respondents have a list and follow an established route inside the supermarket in order to only go through products they have interest in. Some others do their grocery shopping only according to discounts and are ready to go to several shops just to find the best price. Other respondents mentioned that going shopping for them meant to hang out in the supermarket and buy what please them to cook or what attract them. Other respondents wished there were more tasting products to discover new recipes or tastes. Those ones are more attracted to ‘tasting days’, where they are sure to find interactions with staff, who could also advise them. This is how ‘we-relationships’ arise, when an individual relates an experience to the situation with the others. The consumption practice is by consequences an attempt to conduct the relationship between the particular and the universal (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011,p.397).

5.4 The perception of the current food system

5.4.1 A general trend

From our respondents’ answers, it seems as though the current food system does not satisfy most of them. The mass consumption, used extensively with big supermarkets is the core of the problem. It was apparent from the interviews that the production of food does not comply with the customers’ expectations anymore. For the respondents, consumers attach more and more importance to the quality of products, even if price remains their first criterion when buying food. Indeed, the quality is often related to expensive products, because of the rarity of production. Mass consumption also brings impersonal relationships between consumers and supermarkets. Respondents expressed their wish to have closer relationships in shops, by receiving advice or tips from the sellers for example. To make it possible, specialists in different fields would be required. French respondents mentioned their experience in local and specialised stores, and Swedish respondents talked about what they experienced or saw in other cities or abroad.

Mass consumption does not appear to be sustainable for both French and Swedish respondents, and considered unethical as well. Most of the time, because of mass consumption, labour forces, workers and animals’ welfare are not respected. Seasons and authenticity of products neither. For most of our respondents, profit is the main priority of supermarkets. However, the current system seems hard to change, and because of the low price and the convenience of the system, it might be hard for consumers to change their minds in favour of ecological reasons.

5.4.2 Distinction between French and Swedish consumers

The buying frequency differs from one country to another. If French consumers spend more than one hour buying large amount of product to avoid going back to supermarket many times, Swedish consumers apparently do not mind to buy only few items on a daily basis. This trend can be explained by the fact that French consumers do not assimilate supermarkets with freshness and tradition. Thus, they tend more to buy fresh products like bread, fish and meat to local producers only on the day they want to eat it. French consumers seem very attached to their regions, and to their local economy. It is very common in France for consumers to go to specialised shops to buy cheese, vegetables or
fruits. Doing so, consumers are sure to be considered as individuals and not as just part of the consumer mass. By having a close relationship with producers, French consumers develop a trust in the quality and the freshness of the products. It does not seem that Swedish respondents feel the need of a close relationship with producers, even if they expressed they would enjoy it. Swedish consumers seem to have more trust in the quality and the freshness of products sold in supermarkets. Moreover, they cannot be so demanding regarding the origin of the products because many of the fresh products available in supermarkets are imported. Also, Supermarkets in Sweden seem to defend ecological and biological ethics, whereas in France, it remains difficult to make consumers change their consumption habits. During the interview, French respondents were aware that food production needed to change to be more sustainable. However, consumers buying ecological or biological products in France are the ‘unusual ones’. The normalisation process regarding products quality and freshness goes by buying local or directly to producers or farmers. The label ecological/biological is not embedded into the French consumption culture. By consequences, consumers buying this type of food are labelled by other consumers as ‘not normal’. Besides changing consumers’ awareness, the perception of what is normal in general needs to change as well.

Even if both Swedish and French respondents agreed on defining quality and freshness as important factors when buying food, they do not have the same perception of those two criteria. For Swedish consumers, quality and freshness go alongside with no GMO, no pesticides, less transportation and healthy nutritive attributes. For French consumers, quality and freshness refer more to the origin of the product, the traditional know-how and the expertise of local producers. Historical factors from both countries can explain these differences. It sounds like French consumers want to defend their identity, historical background and regional activities.

5.5 The vision of the ideal supermarket

5.5.1 The layout

When asking respondents how they imagined their ideal buying experience, they all mentioned the layout of the stores first. Both French and Swedish respondents visualised a structure based on what they already know. Therefore, being able to find everything in one place is essential for them, which is currently the case under the mass consumption system. From what the respondents told us, an ideal supermarket would be one with specific and specialised spaces, with fresh products on one side and processed food on another side. Fresh products should be well identified and separated into bakery, butcher, delicatessen and greengrocery. Respondents got their inspiration from markets and local stores. The consumer route should also be clear and easy to access. Respondents emphasised that they dislike when they cannot find a product or a price.

Respondents also mentioned self-service, and this for two distinct reasons. The first one regards the management of the quantity: to have products without any packaging would allow them to pick the exact amount they need. The second reason concerns environmental issues and specifically the excessive amount of plastic used.

5.5.2 The atmosphere

The store’s atmosphere is an element that has often been mentioned by the respondents. They currently do not feel any pleasure in being in supermarkets: the atmosphere is cold and very impersonal. In order to overcome this harsh environment, respondents thought
of having some music, fragrance diffusers or interactions with products. They want to make supermarkets a place where spending time could be enjoyable. Indeed, the society nowadays counts three distinct living places: the home sphere referring to the private one, the working sphere and the third place library. A fourth one could be the supermarket. As we noticed from our previous results, food is crucial in consumers’ culture. Consumers’ behaviour and way of life are shaped through their food identity. That is why a real gap can be identified between the current consumption situation and the consumers’ expectation.

Respondents stated they would like to have more individual relationships by receiving advice and tips from qualified people inside the store. Nowadays, sellers in supermarket are seen more as labour force rather than specialists who care about what fill the displays. The aesthetic aspect seems to be the most important inside the supermarket, failing to provide closer and personalised relationships. Consumers enter the store as one among thousands and go out with the same label.

The technology would also be part of their ideal supermarket and would allow them to get more information about products like their origin or to connect this fourth living space with the first one, by making sure for instance not to buy products consumers already have at home.

5.5.3 The products

In addition to the structure and the atmosphere, respondents mentioned what products they would like to have inside supermarkets. First consumers would like to be able to pick the quantity they want. Moreover, being offered higher quality products seems to be a real concern for them. Even if quality is not defined the same way for both nationalities, ecological and local aspects of products generate a common agreement. Inspired by daily shops and markets, consumers want to be able to buy what they really want and not what the supermarket tells them to buy. Moreover, because consuming locally is growing in importance, consumers prefer more information about the products. Especially regarding their origin and nutritional information. On the same trend, consumers would like to have more playful interactions inside supermarkets. For instance, consumers thought about technology as a tool that could provide them with recipes, tips regarding the product storage or even information about the brand or the producer. Technical information such as the time of transportation, the time spent under film plastic, have also been mentioned by respondents.
6. Conclusion and Contributions

This chapter presents answers to the research questions and discusses the theoretical, practical, societal and managerial contributions. Moreover, the research process is evaluated and ideas of future research presented.

6.1 Conclusion

Our study aimed to examine the extent to which culture has an impact on the food consumption process. More specifically, our research questions were oriented towards French and Swedish culture and were stated as follow: ‘To what extent does the culture have an impact on the food consumption process?’ and ‘How could the Swedish model of food consumption influence the French model?’ Our objective was to point out the cultural aspects influencing the food consumption process, as well as to establish the extent to which the French market could benefit from the Swedish model of consumption.

This study managed to give insights about the interdependence between food and culture. Indeed, both terms appeared as strongly related both ways. Under the theoretical framework and through the respondents’ answers, it was clear that food identity is an essential criterion to define the culture of a country. Moreover, the culture of a country is the foundation of a food identity. This is one of the reasons explaining disparities among different countries.

From this study, it came out that Swedish and French consumers had different perception of food and food consumption. Having two different cultural backgrounds make the two countries quite different in their relation to food. If there seems to be a tendency towards a change in consumption behaviour from both countries, the acceptance and feasibility are not the same. The Swedish way of consuming seem more advanced than the French one regarding environmental and health concerns. However, the French specific model of specialised stores and markets seems to please consumers from both nationalities. The specific Swedish model of consumption could be adopted by the French market only if the minds evolve. In that sense, retailers and suppliers’ mind should evolve and try not to give consumers the feeling that supermarkets are only associated with profit. Consumers’ minds should evolve as well and cease stigmatising behaviour that do not appear as normal. Overall, an ideal supermarket seems to be for everyone one with a nice atmosphere, that would make consumers feel at home, with fresh products in diverse areas and sellers guiding the consumer, by giving more information or advice on the products, such as recipes to make with this product.

and if supermarkets adapt themselves to the consumers’ needs and wants. An ideal supermarket for everyone seem to be one with a nice atmosphere, that would make consumers feel at home, with fresh products in diverse areas and sellers guiding the consumer, by giving more information or advice on the products, such as possible recipes to do with this product.

6.2 Contribution

This study has contributed with several insights that can be of value for several stakeholders. These insights are now presented and discussed.
6.2.1 Theoretical contribution
This paper examined the relationship between food and culture, and the way they influence each other. This study contributed to explore this aspect from a new point of view, that of students. Interviewing students was a choice justified by the fact that they were seen as more travelled, open-minded and as the next wave of customers.

Moreover, our study underlined the difficulty of analysing cultural aspects in the consumption process. Indeed, culture is not only something that can be expressed with words. Most of the time, to carefully examine a culture, the behaviour of the consumers has to be analysed. Not only what the consumers express, but also the way they express it, and relate it to other subjects.

Our study allowed a better understanding about historical and social forces that shape the consumer’s purchase decision, as well as to underline the interdependence between consumer behaviour and his/her culture. More specifically, our study enabled to highlight the impact culture has on the consumption practices as well as to emphasize the idea that food culture is embedded into one’s identity. Moreover, theoretical framework and interviews underlined that consumers from a same culture share a collective identity.

6.2.2 Practical contribution
From a practical point of view, we would recommend commercial brands to reconsider the way their supermarkets are shaped and perceived and adapt to the needs and wants of customers for a more local, personal and pleasant experience. By changing the structure of the supermarkets, informing consumers more and installing some interactivity in the stores, both consumers and supermarkets would benefit.

However, supermarkets should keep in mind that the culture is very important when creating a new experience. If consumers are ready to change their mind, making this change will be difficult. As underlined by French respondents, for them, there are two types of shops: specialised ones to find fresh and quality products, and supermarkets, more linked to mass consumption. If both French and Swedish consumers would like to see an evolution or a transformation of the supermarkets, it is not sure that it would work directly.

6.2.3 Societal contribution
On a broader aspect, French and Swedish society could benefit from our study since it examines the consumer behaviour and future trends. The positive association from consumers with producers or farmers, as well as their desire to improve supermarkets could also be beneficial.

A society evolves as its people evolve. Our study focuses on one of the main points, gathering a collectivity and emphasizing the desire of French and Swedish consumers to have a mix of the two models of consumption, creating the perfect buying experience.

6.2.4 Managerial contribution
As mentioned before, our study is relevant for any company willing to understand the impact of culture on consumer behaviour. Moreover, our research showed that even if large companies try and want to control everything, they cannot. Consumers’ needs and trends are not always brought by marketing practices and sometimes, companies are too late in keeping pace with what consumers want.
Moreover, our study deals with the specific case of Swedish consumption from a French point of view. Thus, any person interested in knowing more about the similarities, disparities and possible benefit from the two could use our research.

6.3 Truth criteria

_When conducting a study, researchers have to evaluate the quality of their work. In this section, we will draw a parallel between the standards for quality and our research. Therefore, we will outline the characteristics of quality in a qualitative research in order to evaluate the truth criteria of our study._

Reliability and validity are universal concepts which play a key role in the evaluation of rigor in research (Nunnally, 1978). Collis and Hussey (2014, p.47) argue that qualitative theories dedicate much attention to high degree of validity, referring to the extent to which the study reflects the phenomena under examination. The four terms: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are used as alternative terms to translate the concept of reliability and validity (Rudolf, 2009).

6.3.1 Credibility

Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 390) define credibility as a ‘good match between researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas they develop’. In order for the results to be credible, researchers must conduct their research in accordance with the good practice aspects and submit their results to respondents for them to support that the researchers correctly understood the answers. Since we conducted semi-structured interviews, it enabled us to discuss with the interviewees, to adapt further questions regarding the respondent's’ answers, and by consequences, to reach the credibility of the study.

6.3.2 Transferability

Transferability depends on the degree to which salient conditions overlap or match. The qualitative research enhances transferability by doing a ‘transfer’ of the results into a different context and then judge how sensible the transfer is. Bryman & Bell (2011, p. 390) link transferability to ‘the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings’. For qualitative research, the results cannot be generalized to other configurations, and the conclusion might be different depending on several factors. Regarding our research, the results are not necessarily transferable to other cities, niche markets and countries. Some reasons appeared as reluctant, like the fact that interviewees were all talking about one small city. However, participants were selected according to their student status and were aged from 21 to 28 years old. They all came from Sweden and France, with various cultures and way of thinking, which allowed our span research to be enlarged.

6.3.3 Confirmability

The confirmability makes sure that collected data and their interpretation do not come from the imagination of the researcher and are assembled in a logical and coherent way (Gauhi, 2004). It is also to be certain that the researcher goes through the collection of data in a complete objectivity and acts in a good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 392). Manipulations such as respondents’ prejudice have been avoided and we also tried to avoid any personal opinion and stay focus to remain the more objective possible.
6.3.4 Dependability
Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 392) define the last criterion of trustworthiness as ‘ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process in an accessible manner’. The dependability of our research is built around several points: ‘problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions...’ (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 392). In order to justify our theoretical conclusions, we kept all the information used during the research process. Such as interview guideline, vocal records, transcription of the interviews and results of our analysis.

The issue of validity is highlighted by Kirk and Miller (1986) when saying that validity is a question of ‘whether the researcher sees what he or she thinks or thinks what he or she sees’. Thus also have the information that clearly outline how the data were construed.

6.4 Further research
This study was very interesting to cover, both theoretically and practically. We can say that during this process, we learnt a lot about food identity and the different way of consumption thanks to the interviews. We believe that the quality of the study is emphasized by the fact that we were two researchers present while conducting the interviews. In that sense, we managed to have a questioner and a co-writer. We also took the time to discuss with our respondents, something essential when investigating. This research area is full of interesting aspects that are evolving while the society is moving. By consequences many investigations could be performed in the future.

Further research can be recommended to investigate the effect of food and culture on bigger cities and in different locations. Doing so, the findings could give more generalized data and higher scales trends. The study could also be expanded on different market niches with different age groups. This could allow to compare different generations. Another idea would be to investigate consumers with different incomes, to see how far the income influences the food consumption process.

Moreover, a mixed method could be used, to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative study could have given better insights on the technical aspects of an ‘ideal supermarket’, as the layout and aisles of the supermarket, the stands’ positioning and organization.

6.5 Limitations
English being the mother tongue of none of our respondents, it is possible that some of them did not really feel at ease to express themselves. The language was also a limit for us in a way that, for our research, we found newspapers, societal trends, articles both in Swedish and French, although we could only read the one in our mother tongue. This can be considered as an unbalanced limit and therefore, it can be very difficult to deeper investigate the culture of a country without speaking the language.

Another thing we can consider as a limit is that we only based our research on a small city. Things should be different in a capital for instance where the buying experience probably differ from small cities.

Moreover, our research has focused specifically on high-educated students, and the findings could change from another perspective. Indeed, to have a broader overview of the market, it could have been interesting to focus also on other customers, such as adults.
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Appendix 1 - Survey for French students

Introduction
Hello, my name is XXX and together with my partner we are conducting a study for our Master Thesis in Marketing from the Umeå School of Business and Economics. First of all, many thanks for taking the time to support this crucial part of our degree project. The study has ethical approval from the Umeå University. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary; you can withdraw from the interview at any point of time without giving reason and without implications for yourself. We need to interview Swedish and French students. The topic of our research is the impact of culture on consumer behaviour. We will ensure that your name and data is kept anonymously and your information will be held confidentially. Please consider that there is no wrong or right answer and feel free to act as in a daily life conversation manner. If you want to know more about the subject, please ask questions after the entire interview. Also, is it ok to record the interview? It is for practical and ethical reasons, as well as to ensure the accuracy of your answers.

I. The preliminary questions were to used see if they related food to culture by themselves, without mentioning food
A. What symbolises French culture for you? And what about Swedish culture?
B. What is the Swedish stereotype for you?
C. Do you consider France to have a food culture? And Sweden?
D. Now that you are living in Sweden, have you changed your grocery shopping habits and has Swedish culture had an impact on your grocery shopping and on what you eat? Or do you try to find products that you are used to eating, similar to those from your home country?

II. Definition of eating well for them
A. After having a meal, what characteristics would make you say ‘That was a good meal’?
B. In your hometown/country, if you wanted to cook a nice meal, where would you go shopping?
C. If you wanted to buy fresh food and vegetables, where would you go?

III. Ideal buying experience (move from supermarkets to local producers, a general trend for both French and Swedish consumers?)
1. Inside the shop
   A. When doing your grocery shopping, how long do you stay in the shop (approximately)?
   B. What would make you stay longer?
   C. What do you dislike when doing your grocery shopping? What do you think is missing in the current buying experience in Supermarkets?
2. General about their vision of an ‘ideal Supermarket’
D. What would be your ideal buying experience?

E. For you, is mass consumption compatible with quality and freshness of products?

F. Do you think that mass consumption and mass distribution is a system that will last over the years? Could you see alternatives to big supermarkets? What would it look like?
   a. In this ‘Ideal supermarket’, would technology be part of it? Like interactivity inside the shop, more playful? Also use technology to know more about the products (not only what is written on the packaging).
   b. If you had the opportunity to know more about the product, what would you like to know about it? (where it comes from, or about the company, how it is produced or things like this…)

IV. Distinction between French and Swedish People

   A. Did you notice any differences between the French and the Swedish consumption habits/Supermarkets?

V. Reasons for buying local/bio/ecological products

   A. Apart from price, what are the main factors you consider when buying fresh products? Could you develop a bit more the reasons for your choice?
Appendix 2 - Survey for Swedish students

Introduction

Hello, my name is XXX and together with my partner we are conducting a study for our Master Thesis in Marketing from the Umeå School of Business and Economics. First of all, many thanks for taking the time to support this crucial part of our degree project. The study has ethical approval from the Umeå University. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary; you can withdraw from the interview at any point of time without giving reason and without implications for yourself. We need to interview Swedish and French students. The topic of our research is the impact of culture on consumer behaviour. We will ensure that your name and data is kept anonymously and your information will be held confidentially. Please consider that there is no wrong or right answer and feel free to act as in a daily life conversation manner. If you want to know more about the subject, please ask questions after the entire interview. Also, is it ok to record the interview? It is for practical and ethical reasons, as well as to ensure the accuracy of your answers.

I. The preliminary questions were to used see if they related food to culture by themselves, without mentioning food
   A. What symbolises Swedish culture for you? And what about French culture?
   B. What is the French stereotype for you?
   C. Do you consider Sweden to have a food culture? And France?
   D. When you are abroad, do you change your grocery shopping habits? Does the culture you are in have an impact on your grocery shopping and on what you eat? Or do you try to find products that you are used to eating at home, in your home country?

II. Definition of eating well for them
   A. After having a meal, what characteristics would make you say ‘That was a good meal’?
   B. In your hometown/country, if you wanted to cook a nice meal, where would you go shopping?
   C. If you wanted to buy fresh food and vegetables, where would you go?

III. Ideal buying experience (move from supermarkets to local producers, a general trend for both French and Swedish consumers?)

   1. Inside the shop
      A. When doing your grocery shopping, how long do you stay in the shop (approximately)?
      B. What would make you stay longer?
      C. What do you dislike when doing your grocery shopping? What do you think is missing in the current buying experience in Supermarkets?

   2. General about their vision of an ‘ideal Supermarket’
D. What would be your ideal buying experience?

E. For you, is mass consumption compatible with quality and freshness of products?

F. Do you think that mass consumption and mass distribution is a system that will last over the years? Could you see alternatives to big supermarkets? What would it look like?
   a. In this ‘Ideal supermarket’, would technology be part of it? Like interactivity inside the shop, more playful? Also use technology to know more about the products (not only what is written on the packaging).
   b. If you had the opportunity to know more about the product, what would you like to know about it? (where it comes from, or about the company, how it is produced or things like this…)

IV. Distinction between French and Swedish People

   A. Have you ever been to France? Did you notice any differences between the French and the Swedish consumption habits/Supermarkets?

V. Reasons for buying local/bio/ecological products

   A. Apart from price, what are the main factors you consider when buying fresh products? Could you develop a bit more the reasons for your choice?
### Appendix 3 - Interviews information

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<tr>
<th>Number of the interview</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Length</th>
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