

## PhD Project: Culinary Spaces in Northern Sweden and its implications for regional sustainable development

### **Introduction**

Food and gastronomy has been identified as a tool for creating new futures in rural areas all over the Western world, by contributing to economic, social and environmental sustainability and at the same time increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of places (Rinaldi, 2017). In its resolution from 2016, the United Nations General Assembly underlines the importance of food and gastronomy in sustainable development, proclaiming that the world needs to attend to the importance of sustainable gastronomy in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A word of mouth is that no course is better than its' crude material; thus, restaurants with high ambitions are dependent on delivery from food suppliers who can deliver products with high quality in a sufficient quantity for the given business. As noted in the Eat Lancet report (Willet et al, 2019), *"culinary experiences of different regions provide many opportunities to learn new ways of preparing diets that are healthy and enjoyable"*. Willet et al (2019) underlines the importance of taste and cultural acceptance and the role that chefs have in the dietary shift. Chefs with high competence in gastronomy have an important part to play in the transition to sustainable diets; they have the skills to make healthy, sustainable diets the attractive and tasty alternative; transforming a simple carrot and its peel into delicious gourmet foods. We suggest chefs and restaurants can function as ambassadors for new, sustainable, tasty diets and inspire innovative ways to prepare key ingredients such as beans and lentils, vegetables, or even in the near future, make insects into fine dining. This is one of many reasons to why it is relevant to study food production in relation to gastronomy.

Surrounding the chefs and fine dining restaurants, naturally there need to be a network of food suppliers. Previous research has indicated that in locations with higher number of small-scale food producers, there is a significantly higher number of gourmet restaurants (Johansson & Pettersson 2014). Experiencing local gastronomy may create a demand from consumers that allows food producers to expand sales of their products also to other customers than partner gourmet restaurant.

Little research has looked into the reasons to why chefs use local foods, and in what way this is done. Among those who did, Inwood et al (2016) had similar research questions to ours, looking into the demographic characteristics of restaurants and chefs using local foods in Ohio, the chefs' role as opinion leader, their engagement in food networks and the structural conditions for food supply, as well as motivations in early adopters utilizing local foods. They found a surprising absence of ideological rhetoric, and a pragmatic view regarding use of synthetic inputs in the food. Price was not of concern to the chefs but can be of importance to customer adopters. Moreover, they emphasize the potential of chefs as opinion leaders with the potential to influence both customers at the restaurant as well as farmers, and highlight the value of digging further into the motivations and assumptions chefs have regarding use of local food. They conclude that taste is a highly valued quality in

local foods, while production standards were of less importance to the chefs who had mixed attitudes towards this. Chefs also had a strong deference and trust in local farmers.

From this USA-based research, this PhD-project moves on to dig deeper into the “why” and the “how” of using local foods, place and terroir in restaurants; this time in a Swedish context, and in an era where sustainability is the word on every one’s mouth. Data collection for the qualitative part will begin autumn 2019. The aim of the project is to understand the implications of fine dining restaurants for regional development, sustainable food production and gain knowledge of restaurant’s roles in the establishment of linkages between rural food producers and consumers. In this project, we will present a new concept, *Culinary spaces*, to elicit a relational network surrounding a mutual interest in food and gastronomy. The concept involves three types of actors: 1) the *gourmet restaurant* where guest may experience the regional gastronomy and products) the *regional producers* who supply the restaurant with their products, and 3) the *guest* at the restaurant who may come from near or far, with the sole purpose of experiencing fine dining, or as a tourist in the region with a need to eat; leaving with a meal experience in their backpack. Our project will focus on the relationship and perspectives of the restaurateur and the producers.

Our projects strive to answer questions regarding how fine dining restaurants in the northern part of Sweden is linked to food producers: What are the motives behind the frequent use of regional produce in fine dining restaurants -is it the sensory quality of the product, or other values such as storytelling or production standards? How is the place with its traditions, resources and characteristics (simply put, its *terroir*) used in the restaurant concept? What are the obstacles that hinder the use of regional produce, and in the case where these relationships are successful, what is the recipe for success?

These questions will guide a qualitative inquiry with chefs and restaurateurs in a sample of restaurants in the northern part of Sweden. The project will also explore how the restaurants’ suppliers assess these relations. What do these relations mean for their possibility to thrive in rural areas of Sweden? How does it affect the producer’s possibility to reach wider markets?

## **Methods**

The project was commenced by pursuing the question regarding the spatial diffusion of fine dining restaurants in Sweden with a Geographic information system analysis, using neighborhood statistics and restaurants listed in the Swedish restaurant guidebook White guide (see [whiteguide.com](http://whiteguide.com)). This procedure allows us to assess characteristics of locations who have survived over time, and those that are discontinued. Preliminary results show that fine dining restaurants are increasingly establishing in rural areas of Sweden.

In the next step, unstructured interviews and observations will be used to explore how chefs and restaurateurs’ use local products, and how their restaurant concept relates to the places’ characteristics and resources. We will then use a method called “fridge stories” (see Joosse 2014) to examine the networks and relationships between the restaurant and local/regional food producers from the restaurant’s perspective. In this method the informant is asked to guide the researcher through the restaurants’ food storages. The food products will be used as a dialogical tool to stimulate conversation about, and map the

origin, of the food. Lastly, the perspective will shift from the restaurant to the producers' perspective. A sample of the restaurants' suppliers will be interviewed with semi-structured interviews followed by observations at their locations.

### **Expected contributions**

The study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the how and why fine dining restaurants use local/regional foods and how terroir is used in restaurant concepts. Furthermore, the project will highlight relational networks between restaurants, food producers and consumers, and the reasons and obstacles for using local/regional products. We hope the project will provide the restaurant industry as well as food producers with information that can inspire and help them in developing their business linkages, as well as inform policy makers about the prerequisites for food entrepreneurs in rural areas.

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