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### ‘Conceptualizing curation: The case of local food in Sweden’

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## **Conceptualizing Curation: The Case of Local Food in Sweden**

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### **Abstract**

What is ‘good food’? Is it fair trade, local, organic or ethically produced? With an ever-expanding array of products and ‘qualities’ to consider, consumers in the global North may find it increasingly difficult and time-consuming to make the ‘right’ choices. As a result, a range of intermediaries, including food apps and collective buying groups, are emerging to support and influence people with their food choices. While intermediation refers to all activities linking producers and consumers, this paper narrows the focus and considers one important, yet poorly understood, intermediary function within the food marketplace: ‘curation’. Although the concept of curation has long been associated with museums and art worlds, curatorial practices are evolving in the contemporary marketplace and are performed by a growing range of actors operating in physical, temporary and virtual spaces. Rather than acting as brokers or gatekeepers, curators interpret, translate and shape the marketplace by sorting, organizing, evaluating and ascribing value(s) to specific products. They also offer general and personalized recommendations to consumers. Although the literature on local food privileges the direct relations between producers and consumers, this paper considers the important role of intermediaries. Drawing on interviews and participant observation in Sweden it contributes to the existing literature on curation by examining the spatial dynamics and nature of curatorial practices, the motivations behind them and the values they create for consumers. The findings demonstrate that a range of activities can be understood as curation and that in order to nuance and extend existing conceptualizations of curation a wider and

more dynamic range of actors (food apps), spaces (blogs) and values such as inspiration, convenience and sense of community need to be considered.

## **1. Introduction**

In the global North even simple food commodities are available in an astonishing range of alternatives. In Sweden, for example, supermarkets offer local milk, local organic milk, Swedish milk, lactose free milk, Swedish organic milk, low-fat milk specifically for sports and organic old-fashioned (3.5% fat) milk. For consumers, who are inundated with products branded as ‘organic,’ ‘local,’ ‘fair trade,’ ‘natural’ and encouraged to evaluate the economic, ethical, health and environmental qualities of each item, making the ‘right’ consumption choices is difficult (Halkier, 2010; Zukin, 2004; Goss, 2006).

Local food has become an increasingly important consideration when sourcing food. Yet, whereas some people try to make sense of what local food is and how it fits into their food-practices on their own, others are getting help from a range of intermediaries, including food apps and collective buying groups. While intermediation refers to all activities linking producers and consumers, this paper narrows the focus and considers one important, yet poorly understood, intermediary function within the food marketplace: ‘curation’. Although the concept of curation has long been associated with art worlds (Becker, 1982), we suggest that it is also a useful lens to study a range of evolving practices and actors in the contemporary food marketplace. In our view, rather than acting as brokers or gatekeepers (Foster et al., 2011), curators interpret, translate and shape the marketplace by sorting, organizing, evaluating and ascribing value(s) to specific products (Shultz, 2015; Hracs et al., 2013; Hracs et al., 2014; Hracs 2015). They also offer general and personalized recommendations to consumers. Through an exploratory case study of food practices in Uppsala, Sweden, this paper aims to contribute to the existing literature on curation and food by addressing a set of interrelated questions: 1) What does the range of curatorial practices

look like? 2) What motivates curators to perform their roles in the market? 3) In what ways does curation create value(s) for consumers? 4) How do the spatial and temporal dynamics (the where and when) of curation influence the form and richness of the information? 5) In what ways does curation shape food practices and perceptions of consumers?

After reviewing the relevant literature and outlining our methodological approach these questions are addressed in turn. The findings demonstrate that a broad range of practices, which occur between production and consumption, can be usefully understood as curation which suggests a need for a more nuanced conceptualization of curation. The findings also highlight the important role that specific spatial and temporal dynamics play in shaping curatorial practices, the level of consumer involvement and ultimately the influence of curation on food choices and practices.

The paper contributes to the recent engagement with curation in economic geography by adding a study of the everyday practice of food consumption to those focusing on creative activities including music, fashion and art (Miele, 2006). In so doing it also contributes to the food-related literature which has, to date, paid little attention to what we call the curation of food and the growing range of intermediaries in the contemporary marketplace for food. Examining food curation is important because it directs attention to the often ignored black box between producers and consumers. Without looking at all actors, practices and processes involved, we are not able to understand today's food market or plan for a more sustainable food system. Our focus on food curation also provides more insight into the individual food practices that in turn make up the collective food patterns (Appadurai, 1996) which structure our food system.

## **2. Background: consumer choice, the quest for good food and curation**

The second part of the twentieth century has arguably included a shift from a society of producers to a society of consumers. Indeed, Bauman (2007) asserts that consumption has reached an unprecedented level of importance and constitutes a major structuring power in our society. Not only has a massive amount and variety of products, services and experiences become available to consumers, symbolic consumption has come to play a crucial role in self-actualisation (Giddens, 1991), distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and identity work (Gronow and Warde, 2001; Zukin, 2004; Bauman, 2013). Therefore, consumption choices should not be understood as stand-alone choices, but rather as part of a larger set of consumption practices that “give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity” (Giddens, 1991: 81). We propose that a paradox is emerging: on the one hand it has never been easier to consume ‘right’ because of the availability of options and access to information, on the other hand negotiating a highly saturated marketplace and making the ‘right’ consumption choices is increasingly difficult. People deal with this challenge in various ways including seeking guidance from curators. Before we elaborate on curation we will describe the ‘quest for good food’ that a growing number of consumers are engaged in, and discuss the relationship between connotations of ‘good’ and ‘local’ food.

For many people, consuming ethically influences their food choices (Clarke et al. 2008) and this paper features terms such as ‘morally good consumer’, ‘consuming right’ and ‘good food’. Scholars have identified media-driven discourses about the ‘morally good consumer’ (Halkier, 2010), that position individual consumers as co-responsible for solving societal and environmental problems (see Christensen et al., 2007). Daily reports in the news about the societal, environmental and health effects of food (production) give consumers constant opinions about what is considered good and bad food.

Explaining exactly what the terms ‘good’ and ‘right’ entail is beyond of the scope of this paper (for a useful discussion of the ethics of food see Clarke et al. 2008). Put simply we use ‘good food’ and moral consumption to point to driving forces and considerations that shape food choices. As Guthman (2008b) points out in her article ‘Bringing good food to others’, however, it is important to acknowledge that ideas about good food are never neutral. As such, these ideas can have consequences for city development and gentrification (Zukin, 2008). Moreover, good food practices are important markers of social distinction for individuals and these processes can contribute to social exclusion (Paddock, 2014; Bourdieu, 1984, Guthman, 2003).

Although informed by this literature, we use the term ‘good food’ differently. We use the notion of the quest for good food as an umbrella category for all the work done by consumers to establish what good food entails for them. As such, good food is not solely based on nutritional values; it is the food that people find not only good to eat but also “good to think” (Lévi-Strauss in Harris, 1998: 15). In other words, food bears symbolic meanings that people wish to identify themselves with and as such is used for distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; Paddock, 2014). People may have very different ideas of good food depending on societal cultures (Harris, 1988), but also based on individual habitus and group cultures. For example, individual members of ‘Weight Watchers’ may have different ideas about good food than a person interested in ethnic cuisines, who in turn may differ from a person that aims to source his or her food as locally as possible. An example of different food cultures comes from Guthman (2008b) who describes how her predominantly white students have very different perceptions of good food from the ethnic communities that they visit in California (see also Slocum, 2008).

Importantly, choosing good food is far from an individual and rational prioritisation of values based on unbiased information (Caruana, 2007; Adams and Raisborough, 2008;

Barnett et al., 2005). Instead, choices take shape against the social complexity of everyday life. Indeed, food choices need to fit this complexity and in this respect a search for convenience has been identified as a structuring force for food choice (Blake 2010; Jackson, 2006; Joosse, forthcoming). This search for convenience forms an important background for the increased importance of curators, which we will turn to later in this section.

Food choice is not only a result of reflexivity, but is instead entwined with routinisation. Few people constantly reflect on each (food) choice in everyday life (Wilk, 2009). Instead, as put forward by American Pragmatists (Gross, 2009), social practices such as food choice are mainly built on habits. Habits here are understood as “acquired predisposition[s] to ways or modes of response” (Dewey, 1922: 42 in Gross, 2009: 366). When people feel that these habits are no longer able to address the situation at hand, reflexivity comes into play and people creatively come up with a new action which may result in new routine behaviour. Thus, the influence of different forms of curation depends on their potential for the routinisation of food practices as we will argue below.

‘Good food’ is a fluid concept that is constantly being socially negotiated. Combined with the variety of existing perspectives and (e.g. moral) demands of private consumption, finding ‘good food’ results in situations in which old habits may no longer work, and consumers look for new ways of evaluating and practicing food choice (Barnett 2013) and against this backdrop a range of intermediaries have emerged to offer guidance.

As both intermediation and food are very broad and complex topics, our study focuses more narrowly on the curation of local food. Over the last decade, local food has received much attention and critique in the literature. Several scholars have pointed out that local food is an open concept without a clear and fixed meaning (Connell et al., 2008; Blake et al., 2010; Wittman et al., 2012; Joosse, forthcoming). Moreover, local food is susceptible to the ‘local trap’, which is the assumption that local food is inherently good (healthy, sustainable and just

- for more on ‘the local trap’ see Hinrichs, 2003; Weatherell et al., 2003; Born and Purcell, 2006). In this paper we use local food as the background and the rationale for selecting cases. Rather than creating our own definition of local food in advance we explore the meanings and practices of individuals and groups who engage with local good.

Curation and local food might seem like a paradoxical combination: many consumers, researchers and planners understand local food as food sourced more directly from producers, yet curation is an intermediary function. However, as local food often entails extra work for consumers to find, evaluate and use new food sourcing arrangements, we will argue that curators are crucial in helping consumers to not only find products but also to create new ways of food sourcing. In the next section we review the roles that intermediaries play in the marketplace and develop the concept of curation.

With respect to guiding food choices, curation has been important since at least the first half of the twentieth century. In many countries, including Sweden and the U.S., consumers could get advice from friends and family, shop owners, cookbooks, government institutions and consumer organizations. As argued, what is different today is the range and variety of products available and the importance that ‘consuming right’ plays in societies (Zukin, 2004). With the development of mass production and globally integrated markets and distribution networks, products have become abundant, affordable and accessible for a growing group of consumers<sup>1</sup>, and this has increased the importance of curation in the marketplace. Yet, as Beck et al. (1994) argue, in the modern era traditional institutions such as families and church groups are losing their trusted positions and, especially in the past decade, internet and social media-based sources are emerging to fill the void. To highlight the availability of food-related curation on the internet, a simple Google search for ‘local food blog’ produced over 65 million results and ‘local food app’ yielded 59 million.

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<sup>1</sup> This growing group of consumers is not representative of all socio-economic groups in society. Indeed, scholars argue that local-food choices may be financially, culturally and spatially inaccessible for ‘less well-off people’ (Paddock, 2014, p. 15 referring to the Welsh Assembly Government, and from a USA context: Guthman, 2008a and b)

Curation is an intermediary function (Foster et al., 2011; Hracz et al., 2013). The word ‘curate’ is derived from the Latin verb ‘curare’, which means taking care and it has traditionally been used in relation to the curation of museum or art collections. In these fields the concept has been used to highlight the importance of intermediaries in the construction, evaluation and preservation of art (Bourdieu, 1993; O’Neill, 2007). More recently, the concept has been extended and applied to curators in other fields such as music, fashion and craft (Hracz et al., 2013; Arthur and Hracz, 2015; Leslie et al., in press; Shultz, 2015). Based on this literature we understand curation to involve the interpreting, translating and shaping of the marketplace through the practice of sorting, organizing, evaluating and ascribing value(s) to specific products. Curation may be based on specialized information that the curators have access to or their ability to interpret widely available information. Importantly, curation must be considered in context as it may take different forms and emphasize different activities in different industries, locations and scales. For example, whereas the ‘archiving’ and conservation of historical objects is a central practice for curators working in museums and art galleries, it is less relevant to those working with food.

To our knowledge, the concept of food curation has not been used in the literature. However, several studies describe processes and activities that we would classify as the curation of food. Examples include studies of celebrity chefs as “lifestyle mediators who educate viewers about how to use food as an expressive lifestyle practice” (Hollows and Jones, 2010: 308; Hollows, 2003), studies about the formation of norms and practices through collective buying groups (Fonte 2011; Brunori et al. 2012) and studies of intermediaries who construct and transfer food-related meanings and knowledge (Hassler and Franz 2013). Overall, we assert that curation is a useful lens to consider the black box between producers and consumers and to examine how intermediaries help consumers to navigate complex markets and the quest for good food in particular.

We suggest that recently, and alongside processes of modernisation and deinstitutionalisation, a range of curators have emerged (or re-emerged) in the marketplace for food. These include TV chefs, collective buying groups and food bag services as well as curators linked to the development of the internet, digital technologies and e-commerce such as food bloggers and food ‘apps’. As these and other curators continue to populate the middle spaces between producers and consumers, it is important to consider their influence on the market and how much power and autonomy consumers have retained – a question we will return to in the discussion.

### **3. Research design**

The analysis presented in this paper is based on data collected through qualitative methods. As the project was exploratory in nature - seeking to investigate a poorly understood phenomenon and to identify unknown variables and relationships - the use of open-ended interviews and participant observation was an appropriate and effective methodological choice (Baxter and Eyles, 1997; Wolfe and Gertler, 2004; Brink and Svendsen, 2013). In total we conducted 30 in-depth interviews with 28 individuals in Uppsala, Sweden. Of these we identified 13 interviewees as curators and 15 as consumers. Three were follow-up interviews after two years in order to follow changes in consumption patterns, and one interview was conducted with two informants. Our sampling strategy aimed to ensure that a broad range of curators, who work with local food, were included in the study. These curators were food bloggers, collective buying groups, a food box delivery service, a farmers’ market and food app. We introduce these curators in more detail in section 4. The consumers were contacted through these curators where possible. Moreover, we made use of snowball sampling. The main rationale behind contacting interviewees was that they made use of curation or were

involved in the curation of local food. However, we did aim to get a varied sample where possible in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. For example, of the 28 respondents 8 lived in the country and 20 in the city; 13 were male and 15 female; 7 respondents were between 20-30 years of age, 10 between 30-40, 6 between 40-50 and 5 between 50-70. The group included administrators, academics, cashiers, cultural workers, cooks, farmers, food entrepreneurs, journalists, professional home-carers, IT-specialists, unemployed and students. Of the 13 interviewees with curators 7 were men and 6 were women and the majority of the group had a university degree.

The semi-structured interviews lasted 90 minutes on average. Of the 30 interviews the last 15 included a mapping exercise of the places of food sourcing and ‘fridge stories’ during which interviewees talk about the content of their fridge and how and why they source the food. Each interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim and coded according to dominant themes. Throughout this paper, we include verbatim quotations to demonstrate how participants expressed meanings and experiences in their own words. The quotes we include were chosen because they express or capture a specific theme concretely or illustrate the variety of ideas.

To complement and contextualize the interview data we conducted several rounds of participant observation. Sites visited for this research include: a farmers’ market (taking part in buying and selling), a farm shop (buying and selling), a farmers’ food festival, a harvest party from a collective buying group and allotment association, a food study circle (with members of the collective buying group) and delicatessen shops. We also studied the policy documents of one of the collective buying groups. Moreover, we tried out two different food bag businesses to experience the service that this type of curator supplies and to enhance our ability to understand and evaluate this form of curatorial practice.

It is important to note that this study on curators is part of a larger study on local food and agriculture in Sweden and regional products in Europe, and an ongoing study on curation in the music marketplace. As these studies include over 55 interviews and additional participant observation, the analysis in this paper has been informed by and triangulated through a broader engagement with these themes.

The locus of this study is Uppsala. With a population of 140,000 it is Sweden's fourth largest city. Like many cities in Scandinavia and other industrialized countries, Uppsala is home to a growing group of middle-class consumers who are interested in local food. Indeed, for these consumers, practices such as growing your own food, cooking from scratch and sourcing directly from producers are becoming more important (Joosee, forthcoming). It should be noted that while we are concerned with the ways spatial dynamics shape curation, we are not interested, at least for this paper, in how food-related curation in Uppsala may be shaped by broader cultural, economic or institutional factors and whether our findings are transferable to other countries or regions. In line with our exploratory aims, the case study aims to deepen the limited understanding of the nature and spatial dynamics of food-related curators.

#### **4. Introducing the curators**

In order to unpack and nuance our understanding of curation we examined a range of food-related curatorial practices. For the purpose of selection we grouped existing curators and made a typology. Our grouping exercise resulted in five types of curators: individuals, communities, businesses, spaces and technologies. We assume that each type forms a specific locus for the (co-)construction of good food. We also hypothesise that different spatial and temporal dynamics will shape the level of consumer involvement, richness of information and

influence on food-related practices. For geographers, the notion that ‘space matters’ may appear self-evident but given the dearth of empirical engagement with curatorial practices in the existing literature we aim to contribute some evidence from our study.

*Table 1. Typology of curators in the study*

<b>Type of curator</b>	<b>Case and data</b>
Individual	Two food bloggers
Community	Two collective buying groups
Business	One food bag service
Space	One farmers’ market
Technology	Two food apps

The inclusion of space and technology as curators requires some explanation. Although they are not conventionally regarded as actors, in our cases we find that the curatorial practices that they perform cannot be reduced to the human actors that created these spaces and technologies in the first place. Indeed, the curation contained within a food app cannot be reduced to the person that designed that app, nor can the farmers’ market be reduced to singular interactions between producers and consumers. We refer to spaces instead of places because we are primarily interested in the spaces of display or interaction where curation occurs, at a food market for example, rather than the places, which contain these activities. Moreover, we discuss technology rather than technological devices. The food app is accessed through a device, but it is the interaction with the technology, which offers the curation. Thus, curation is located in the specific spatial and temporal dynamics of the app.

To highlight the characteristics of each type we present some illustrative examples drawn from our fieldwork (see Table 1). All of these curators have recently entered the marketplace: while the first farmers’ market in Sweden started in 2000 (in 2010 in Uppsala), the other curators were established after 2010. What unites them is that they have all emerged

in reaction to the growing consumer demand for guidance in good (local) food. In the following sections we introduce each of the five curators.

**4.1 Curator 1: Individuals – the food blogger.** Scholars have observed the growing importance of individuals, such as celebrity chefs, for imparting influential opinions on consumers (see e.g. Slocum et al., 2011; Hollows and Jones, 2010; Hollows, 2003). Recently, food bloggers have joined these more established individuals in guiding consumer food choice. Characterised as ‘do-it-yourself’ journalism, blogs are distributed more widely and facilitate a much higher degree of interaction through comments and feedback (Mendoza, 2010; Lee et al., 2014) compared to curation by celebrity chefs. Although celebrities write blogs, our focus is on ‘regular’ people who were not famous before they started a blog. In this paper we draw on research from two small food blogs. The first blog we studied has around 10,000 views each month. Its author writes about his personal food choices and recipes, food sourcing and how he gets food without intermediation from supermarkets. The second blog has a smaller reach with around 2,350 views per month. It features recipes and discussions about making local and fair-trade food choices. These two small blogs are not comparable in outreach to popular blogs such as e.g. Goop.com that may have over 300,000 views each month. Still, they may have considerable effect on the group of people visiting the blog as we will argue.

**4.2 Curator 2: Communities - Collective buying group.** Although curators are often understood to be individuals, networks of individuals who share common values, i.e. communities, are also important intermediaries in the marketplace for food. Collective buying groups – i.e. a community of consumers who discuss, evaluate, select, source and buy food collectively - also perform curation. Indeed, by deciding what kind of food to purchase these

communities develop and disseminate values about food choice. We studied two collective buying groups in Uppsala established in 2010 and 2012. While one group is based on a group of friends, and friends of friends (around 60 people), the other is based on a neighbourhood and includes over 100 members. As buying groups in Sweden may register officially as associations many groups are not registered and remain hidden in personal networks. Therefore, measuring how many of these organisations exist in Sweden is difficult.

**4.3 Curator 3: Businesses – food bags.** Individuals and communities may perform curation for a range of motivations, which we discuss later, but businesses typically perform curation for profit or to stand out from competitors. And while the marketplace features many examples of these curators, including the ‘Good Store’ or delicatessens offering local and organic food, we focus on a relatively new curator - food bags. Typically, these bags are delivered to a family once a week and include all ingredients and recipes for five dinners<sup>2</sup>. Thus, unlike vegetable boxes (Clarke et al. 2008), which provide produce directly from farms, businesses selling food bags perform curation by selecting complete meals from a variety of producers. Food bags are said to be a Swedish invention<sup>3</sup>, dating from 2007, and are very popular in Sweden. For example, 36% of the 1199 respondents in a recent consumer study reported buying a food bag in 2013 (Svensk Digital Handel, 2014). We studied a food bag service established in 2011 that is marketed as the “[locality]’s own food bag, organic and local”. A typical weekly subscription to a food bag, for a family of four, costs around 800 SEK (88 Euro or 120 US dollars). By 2012 the firm had amassed 200 regular customers and in 2014 it was bought by one of the larger food-bag services in Sweden.

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<sup>2</sup> In this study we focus on a food bag marketing itself as organic and local. Different companies offer different food bags of different sizes at different prices. There are, for example, basic food bags (which most likely would feed a family of four for five days), food bags for families with children (quick recipes with food often liked by children), vegetarian food bags, food bags for two, food bags for three days, food bags for cooking inspiration, organic food bags, but also a food bag with prepared meals marketed directly at fathers. Interestingly, but outside the scope of this paper, some of these food bags are thus firmly based on stereotypical ideas of families.

<sup>3</sup> The National Museum of Science and Technology made an exhibition in 2012 about the 100 most important innovations of all times based on a poll among Swedish citizens. Among the wheel, internet and antibiotics, a food bag was exhibited and it was claimed as a Swedish invention.

**4.4 Curator 4: Space - farmers' market.** Smithers et al. (2008) suggest that farmer's markets are spaces constructed to facilitate interaction between 'enlightened food producers' and 'concerned consumers' to express and develop ideas and values concerning local food. Yet, beyond serving as the mere location where individuals meet, we argue that the farmers' market is a curator in its own right. Much like food labels acting to select and single out fair, organic or Swedish products, the farmers' market serves as a 'quality stamp': items that are included within the confines of the farmer's market are assumed to be fresh, local and from small-scale farms. Therefore, the market curates food choices by limiting the available options, and helping consumers with their food choices even if they don't interact with producers. To consider the concept of 'space as curator', which to date has been largely ignored, we studied the Swedish farmers' market. Since 2000 23 farmers' markets have been set up throughout Sweden. The curation of the Swedish farmers' market is officially based on two rules: 1) only products produced within 250 kilometres from the market may be sold; and, 2) the producers themselves have to participate in the market and sell their products. These rules are comparable to farmers' markets in other countries.

**4.5 Curator 5: Technology – cell phone 'apps'.** Digital technologies have intensified and accelerated the exchange of information about food and food practices (Lee et al., 2014). Yet, beyond enhancing the ability of curators, including food bloggers, and consumers to share and search for information and advice, specific technological agents such as apps on mobile devices are also performing curation in their own right. With respect to shaping local-food choice Volpentesta and Della Gala (2013) classify mobile services in 5 types: 1) virtual farm tours; 2) traceability and product related information services; 3) geospatial services on where to source local or regional food; 4) dietary and health services; 5) social networking services,

enabling interactive learning through uploading of photo's or feedback on food. We studied two apps that help consumers find local food: an app from the second category, namely 'Bondepåköpet' (freely translated as 'farmer included in the bargain') and an app from the third category namely 'Mathantverk' (freely translated as 'food craftsmanship').

Bondepåköpet is a free Swedish app. With your smartphone you scan a product and the app categorises it either as Swedish (showing a thumb up) or not Swedish (showing a thumb down). If something is produced by Swedish farmers the food is - according to the app - fair for nature and animals, safe to eat, and smart because it keeps Swedish agriculture viable. Between its introduction in April 2013 and May 2014 the app has been downloaded 92,000 times. The free app Mathantverk was launched in 2012 and helps consumers to find farm shops and artisanal food and provides them with information on the food offered and the producers.

## **5. Analysing curation**

**5.1 Analysis 1: Why Curate?** What motivates these actors to perform curation? For businesses, an important aim is to generate direct economic profits by providing a service that consumers are interested in: curation. The food bag service in our study was set up by an Internet marketer who told us he recognised it as a business opportunity and thought people would be willing to pay for his curation of local and organic food. Illustrating his lack of other motivations, he said he does not subscribe to the service himself because he considered it too expensive. Conversely, some curators aim to generate indirect financial rewards by enhancing the value or reputation of a brand, or producer (local or regional) of food. For example, the organisation of the farmers' market may be non-profit but the market was established for economic reasons - namely as a platform for producers to market their products and sell directly to consumers without middlemen. In a similar vein, the food apps are free and have

been developed by non-profit organisations but are meant to economically support producers' livelihoods by promoting their products.

In addition to these direct and indirect economic motivations, our interviews suggest that a range of societal and environmental considerations motivate curators. For example, the aim of the farmer's market - to reduce food miles, preserve regional products and give visitors the chance to learn about cultivation and livestock farming (Bondens egen marknad, 2014) - is underpinned by the motivation to use curation to improve animal welfare and environmental sustainability. The collective buying group is also driven by environmental motivations and aims to provide food that is organic and local. As a member of a collective buying group explained:

Agriculture is doped. It is not sustainable in the long run, with all pesticides and fertilizer. And also the transport is crazy. Food comes from the other side of the earth and the other side of Sweden. I eat that which we can grow here.

The food blogger shares this idea and decided he no longer wanted to be part of such a food system and through his blog he aims to inspire other people into similar choices. In other cases, bloggers aim to 'educate' consumers about local food and recipes with cultural significance.

As Table 2 summarises, a range of factors motivates the five curators. This finding is important because it reminds us that actors in the marketplace for food may be guided by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Indeed, Bourdieu identified a subfield of restricted cultural production in opposition to the mass market in which the pursuit of economic profit is typically disavowed in favour of symbolic profit (Bourdieu, 1993; see also Crewe et al., 2003). The finding that curators are driven by a range of motivations reinforces the idea that social, cultural and economic factors are tightly interwoven (Granovetter, 1985), that morality and markets implicate one another, and that economic activities are structured by moral dispositions and norms (see e.g. Jackson et al., 2009: 13).

Table 2. Motivations of curators in our study

	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Societal</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
<b>Food blogger</b>	No economic motivation <sup>4</sup>	To inspire other consumers	To contribute to a smaller imprint on the natural environment
<b>Collective buying group</b>	To get access to cheaper organic and local food	To create a community around food	To reduce ecological footprint
<b>Food bag</b>	Curation is a business opportunity	Seemingly absent in our case	Seemingly absent in our case
<b>Farmers' market</b>	To provide primary producers an opportunity to market their products	To enable visitors to learn about food  To preserve food with a cultural value, e.g. linked to a specific region.	To reduce food miles
<b>Food apps</b>	To promote products that support producers' livelihoods	To help consumers find 'fair, secure and smart food'  To preserve food with a cultural value, e.g. linked to a specific region.	Not available

## 5.2 Analysis 2: Creating Value(s)

In what ways do curators create value for consumers? The most obvious benefit to consumers is a curated selection from an overwhelming range of options. Yet, beyond filtering the options and providing recommendations about how to select, source, buy and prepare food, curators provide other benefits. Our interviews revealed that even when consumers felt confident about making their own food choices, they turned to curators to save valuable time

<sup>4</sup> Whereas the bloggers in our study did not receive any financial gain and stated they had no economic motivation for their blog, many bloggers do get paid or receive free products or experiences such as trips or meals to review.

and energy. Curators were also said to inspire consumers by encouraging them to try new food products, recipes or sourcing places and by providing new ideas about evaluating food. In many cases this goes beyond mere inspirational ideas to include giving a set of clear instructions on how to go about choosing good local food. Moreover, curators were able to stage valuable food-related experiences and opportunities to engage with people and communities. Thus, the decision by consumers to interact with curators, including the specific type and the time, place and frequency of these interactions is highly personalized and based on habitus.

**Curated selection.** Each curator in our study helps consumers with their ‘good food choices’. However, the relative involvement of consumers and the importance of the curator in shaping consumers’ food choice vary. Some respondents, for example, assumed everything from the farmer’s market to be locally produced and of high quality, and therefore did not feel a critical evaluation of the products on offer was necessary. In other cases, such as the collective buying group, consumers engaged in an intensive dialogue with other members of the collective buying group through which they co-created an understanding of ‘good food’. As one member explained:

There was a big conflict about whether the co-op should support animal products or not. [...] the vegans said we don't want this and then...we had long meetings in order to discuss this.

In the end the members who wanted to buy animal products started a separate buying group specifically for animal products which were not covered by the original buying group.

While many took an active role in these discussions, other members of the collective buying groups chose to remain passive. They still trusted the food choices because they were based on a set of norms and values to which they adhered. This could be termed ‘outsourcing of

reflexivity'. One respondent explained that although he lives close to a good farmer's market it was more practical to buy via the collective buying group:

I know [the main buyer] and her values. She takes the responsibility for choosing off my shoulders... At the farmers' market you probably can buy the same things, but she does the selection for me and decides the assortment. I trust her and do not have to think.

The food bag service caters to people who want even more help by delivering a selection of good food to their doorstep, in this case local and organic food, and a thoughtfully designed weekly menu and recipes. For example, one respondent described how he used to spend a lot of time figuring out which food to buy, weighing environmental and health considerations and found that the food bag helped him in his quest: "So, I think a lot about that [food choice]: I want to have the right food that has been produced in the right way and transported in the right way. So, if they do that work for me I am happy." Though food bags and the collective buying groups differ in various respects they both offer an 'outsourcing of reflexivity'.

**Convenience.** As mentioned in section 2 the search for convenience can influence food choices and consumption practices (see also Blake et al. 2010; Jackson et al. 2006). Some of our respondents take pride in the amount of time and energy they invest in their quest for good food. One couple, for instance, tried several food bags but ultimately preferred not to let the curators 'take over,' because they said: "We think it is fun to plan and do groceries." However, many other respondents recognised convenience as a value of curation. For instance the food app allows you to merely scan a product label and get a 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' to know whether it was Swedish (which this app consequently states is local and good) instead of reading the information about brands and production process. Similarly, consumers appreciated the convenience of having food bags delivered directly to their doorsteps each week. As one respondent put it:

It was a lot less work. It takes quite a lot of time to plan a whole week and buy groceries etc.; so we thought with small children you do not have so much time to cook, so the advantage with their recipes is that cooking often went quite quick - half an hour or so.

**Inspiration.** By exposing consumers to new recipes and new kinds of food, curators can inspire people to change their food practices. Several respondents explained that when shopping you can fall into certain routines but yielding control to the curator lets people experience new foods and recipes, which inspire new food perceptions and practices. Both of the collective buying groups also provide inspiration for its members. One offered organized weekly meals ‘Vegetarian Mondays’ during which recipes and food choices were discussed and the other created a study circle about local food. One member of the collective group who participates in the study group explained that the experience...

[...] inspired me to find out more about food. [...] It is strange. I had not thought about which vegetables come from Sweden. Those that you find in the shop are not Swedish. I had not thought about that, but now after the food circle I know more.

While some curators provide inspiration as an add-on, it is the central motivation for one of the food bloggers in our study and a source of value for his followers. Even though the blog posts do provide practical advice to get people started and describes where and how food can be purchased and prepared, the focus, and main attractiveness for readers, is the idea of consuming differently and to not shop at supermarkets. As the blogger puts it:

People in general today are completely, 100% sure that society has made bad choices about food. People know it and they feel a little bit helpless because they only know where the closest supermarket is and they do not know any alternatives. [...] They want to do something but they don't know what to do and then suddenly they see a person doing it 100% and also without any effort. [...] And I think it is a big eye-opener for people to realise that it seems to be very easy.

**Experience.** Although the daily necessity of obtaining and preparing food can be considered a burden, several interviewees saw it as a rewarding experience. Our research suggests that food-related experiences help consumers to construct and display lifestyles and pursue self-actualization through learning, doing, trying and making (Boggs, 2009; Lorentzen and

Hansen, 2009). It is interesting to observe that the staging of experiences – an increasingly popular way for producers to add distinction and value to their goods and services (Arthur and Hrac 2015) – is adopted by curators as well. As Smithers et al. (2008: 340) note, beyond providing opportunities to interact with producers and buy ‘good food’, farmers’ markets offer a pleasant experience related to “novelty, freshness, quality and the opportunity for shopping with friends in a friendly atmosphere” which is being commodified. Indeed, many of our respondents regard shopping in farmer’s markets as a fun thing to do:

I like the farmers’ market [located at the train station]. My husband commutes. So then I go down to the station and meet my husband there and then we shop. There is some really good smoked chicken fillet from Ockelbo. And cheeses that we buy and vegetables of course. It is fantastic. We go there nearly every Friday. We check out the food and then go home.

Consumers are drawn to these experiences because they are considered more authentic and inspiring than visiting supermarkets (Zukin, 2004; 2008). Beyond authenticity, however, consumers also desire experiences that facilitate active engagement, creativity and self-actualization that result in a ‘story’ which, in turn, can be converted into social and cultural capital (Gilmore and Pine, 2007; Boggs, 2009; Lorentzen and Hansen, 2009; Arthur and Hrac 2015). For example, while restaurants give consumers a night out, food bags encourage and facilitate the more active, rewarding and valuable experience of learning and making a new meal alone or with family and friends.

The collective buying group, for example, uses its connections with local farmers to arrange engaging experiences for its members. Beyond farm tours, which offer opportunities to listen to and interact with farmers, more active experiences such as ‘working on the farm’ provide even higher levels of value for consumers (Arthur and Hrac 2015). Indeed, one respondent recalled an ‘amazing experience’ when 10 of the group members were invited to help on the farm.

**Connecting and Community.** Getting together to discuss, prepare and consume food is an act in itself which may have value for consumers. People may interact with curators and other consumers to learn but also to demonstrate their own food knowledge and skills. These collective food practices form a vehicle for people to display the cultural capital they embody (Bourdieu, 1986) and thus construct their self-identity (Giddens, 1991).

Moreover, people may be attracted to being part of a community of like-minded individuals, sharing norms and values, and being confirmed and inspired in food practices and ideas. When it comes to connecting and community, our five curators occupy different positions along the spectrum. Whereas the food bag offers few opportunities for feedback or active shaping of product decisions, interaction and solidarity is the outspoken foundation of the collective buying group. For example, the collective buying group explicitly states in their internal policy document that it is:

Not just an alternative way of acquiring locally produced products but also a platform for the (local) community to share experiences, make connections to local farmers and build a local network, to reconnect to the products we consume and develop and discover ideas to contribute to a more sustainable way of living.

The collective buying groups may be understood as communities of practice - groups of people who share a set of problems, or a concern about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002: 4).

Although interactions typically occur in face-to-face meetings, Grabher and Ibert (2014) demonstrate that such communities are also built and sustained online through virtual channels. Indeed, a growing number of consumers enjoy posting feedback, experiences and advice in response to blog posts and online queries. In this way, the food bloggers may also contribute to a community of practice.

In sum, each consumer may be interested in a specific mix of values which different curators can provide (see Table 3). These values can be seen to either simplify or to intensify

the quest for good food. The values ‘curated selection’ and ‘convenience’ may both simplify consumers’ food choice and practices. The values ‘inspiration’, ‘experience’ and ‘connecting and community’ may lead to an intensified engagement in the quest for good food.

Table 3. Values created by the curators in our study

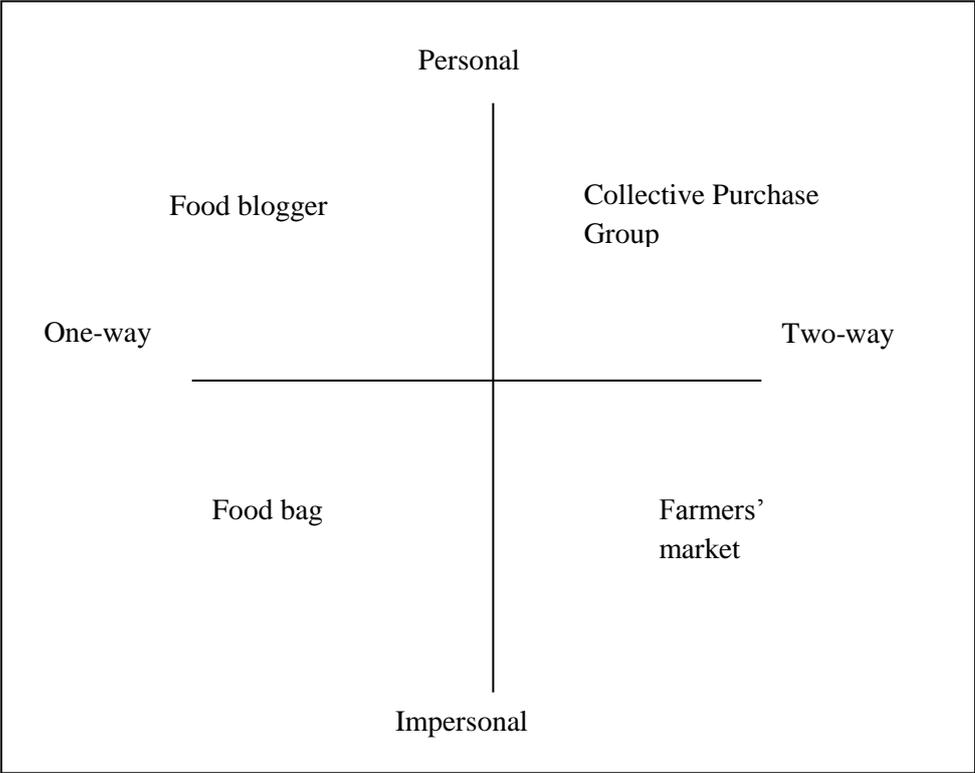
	<b>Curated selection</b>	<b>Convenience</b>	<b>Inspiration</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Connecting &amp; community</b>
<b>Food blogger</b>	X		X		X
<b>Collective buying group</b>	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Food bag</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Farmers’ market</b>	X	Yes or No depending on the proximity of each consumer	X	X	X
<b>Mobile services</b>	X	X	X	X	

**5.3 Analysis 3: The spatial dynamics of curation and consumer interaction**

As the quest for good food intensifies, the number of curators in the marketplace increases. By extension, curation is being performed in a growing range of physical, temporary and virtual spaces. In addition to for instance local butcher shops where consumers have traditionally engaged in face-to-face interactions and trusting relationships with curators, curation occurs in homes (collective buyers’ group meetings), third spaces (farmer’s markets) and virtual spaces (blogs, online forums, apps). These spaces feature unique spatial and temporal dynamics which facilitate different forms of interaction and levels of trust. Therefore, an important, yet currently understudied, question is how these spatial dynamics influence the form, richness and outcomes of curation. To help make sense of the spectrum

we have developed a schematic (see Figure 1). It plots each curator based on the nature of the interaction (personal vs. impersonal and one-way vs. two-way).

Figure 1. Nature of interaction



The space used by the food blogger is virtual and the nature of interaction is personal and one-way. By describing his everyday life, his personal food ideas and including bits and pieces of his private life, the blogger in our study creates an intimate and relatable account of his quest for good food. Although consumers may never meet the blogger the posts are very personal and consumers are encouraged to share their own personal experiences and opinions with the entire group of readers. Importantly, the personal nature of the blogger’s accounts make it easy for readers to imagine and adopt similar food practices. Over time this form of interaction can generate high levels of trust and familiarity which allows members of virtual networks to exchange even tacit knowledge in an on-demand way (Grabher and Ibert, 2014). Interestingly, Mendoza (2010) argues that the image of a blogger as a regular person, and the

personal and intimate nature of the exchanges mean that bloggers are often considered highly trustworthy. A food blogger in our study explained that readers leave him messages to tell him how they got inspired by his blogs to change their food choices. Thus, with no face-to-face interaction, the food blogger is considered a highly trustworthy curator by his followers, which allows him to influence many of them.

The space used by the collective buying group is mostly physical, though social media is also used. The nature of interaction is personal and two-way. The groups typically meet in members' homes or a neighbourhood community building once a month on 'pick up day', i.e. when the ordered products can be fetched. Moreover, as these collective buying groups include friends often living in the same neighbourhood the collective buying group is also talked about outside official meeting times. The pick-up days, members' meetings and other events such as 'Vegetarian Monday' and 'Thursday Café' (a café organised for and by the group) as well as exchanges through email and social media (blogs and Facebook) establish and reinforce trust within the communities and facilitate an on-going collective discussion of what good food entails. These collective buying groups are thus often well-embedded in people's everyday life (e.g. in the neighbourhood, in social media and social networks).

The food bag is brought into the physical space of the home and the nature of interaction is impersonal and one-way. Although the delivery of a curated food bag to your doorstep seems intimate, the process is actually quite generic and prescriptive. The bags are ordered online and there is little opportunity for customization. There is no social interaction when the bags are delivered and the main source of information on the content of the bag comes in the form of a leaflet, which explains the choices of products and specific recipes for the week. There is a section on the website for consumers to provide comments and feedback about the quality of the food bag but in practice this appears to be rarely used. Thus, this form of curation entails little direct input from consumers. Rather than the strength of personal ties

or shared experience, the subscription to the service is based on whether the consumer finds the service satisfactory. Trust and loyalty is therefore created through the quality of the service which consumers constantly evaluate. After testing several food bags, for example, this family did not find a suitable food bag:

They were too expensive and most are not organic enough. And XX [a vegetarian food bag] did not suit us either. We like vegetarian, but then we want to eat beans, lentils, cheese and mushrooms as protein, not soy sausages and tofu and a great deal of strange things that are supposed to look like meat but do not taste good. And there was too much of that in the food bags, we thought. And then they also choose your fruit, which did not always work out so well.

The food bag is convenient to order and use and equally easy to cancel. However, during the subscription period the food bags have considerable impact on the food practices and ideas of consumers as exemplified in the following quote about a meat-loving family who now includes vegetarian food in their diet:

You get a nudge: ‘you can also cook this way.’ They had a recipe with pasta and lentils. My husband refuses vegetarian food. He wants meat and potatoes, or rather sausages and potatoes. So, this day when it was the lentils [in the food bag], he said, ‘I won’t eat that!’ I said, ‘You have to, this is the food we cook today’... And he thought it was delicious. You open yourself – we had not chosen it ourselves, but that food turned out to be what we bought. And it was so tasty that we have cooked it several times since.

The food bag is special in that it makes everyday life confirm to the food bag. Consumers begin to shape their shopping and cooking practices around the food that is delivered to their door and the menu that is provided. Thus, by encouraging direct engagement with local food (seeing the food, cooking the food and eating the food) the food bag encourages the first steps of routinisation and may be a more transformative experience than simply discussing local food or reading about it.

The farmers’ market is a physical yet temporary space and the nature of interaction is rather impersonal and two-way. In Uppsala it takes place between 2pm and 6pm right in front of the Uppsala train station on 5 Fridays in spring and 11 Fridays in the fall. Crucially, this intermittence makes it difficult to routinise the farmers’ market. As one respondent put it:

I keep on forgetting that it is there. I have to remember that it is and I have to make the time to go there. Sometimes I work on Friday in the student organisation. Then I may start working at 2:00 so then you do not always manage to get to the farmers' market. And now it is apparently summer and they do not have a market before sometime in the fall. So then it does not work.

In the literature, farmers' markets are often praised as a platform for producer-consumer interaction which leads to social learning. Although the Market offers many possibilities for interaction, several studies also point out that this interaction is often superficial (Milestad et al., 2010; Åsebø et al., 2007). Rather than engaging in deep discussions about food-related values and practices, many discussions do not go beyond information about price and the exchange of money. The limited social exchange and learning may be explained by our assertion that, as a space, the farmer's market curates 'good food' and consumers simply trust this curation and do not require any more information to convince them. As one of the interviewees stated: "The farmers' market is good to find products that really are locally produced. [...] I trust that it [the products bought at the farmers' market] is good." The literature supports the notion that products are assumed to be of quality because they come from farmer' markets (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000) or farm shops (Eden et al., 2008). Indeed, Eden et al. (2008: 1050) remark that "the shop space rather than the product itself demarcated trust". In fact, we suggest that some consumers may be more critical and inquisitive when they shop in a regular supermarket (for example, many of our interviewees read the information on product packages) than in the farmers' market, as the farmers' market has pre-curated the options. Thus, if consumers view the farmers' market as a trustworthy curator of good food the opportunities for interaction, learning and engagement discussed in food literature may be reduced (see also Mount, 2012).

The food app is virtual and the nature of interaction is impersonal and one-way. Located within a cell phone, and thus likely to be accessible at all times, the food app is extremely convenient for consumers seeking simple forms of curation. However, the nature of apps

precludes interaction, the ability to verify and to ask questions about what exactly is being curated and thus also the formation of trust. Our research suggests that consumers are not really sure what they are getting, especially with the Bondepåköpet app, and remain critical of its usefulness. As one respondent explained:

I can usually find information [myself] about whether the food is Swedish or not and I think it is too coarse of a division: not everything Swedish is good and not everything non-Swedish is bad. [...] I need to know more about the product than just exactly that and other things come into play for me, such as if the products are organic or fair. Truly local food is more interesting for me (than the sweeping ‘Swedish’) and I would like to be able to check this in the store, but the app does not help with that.

Most of our interviewees thus found the app too superficial and would not rely on the app for their food choices.

In summary, ‘the where and when’ of curation has important implications for the form and richness of the information provided. Moreover, these dynamics produce different forms of consumer involvement and varying levels of influence on food choice and practices. Tables 4, 5 and 6 describe the five curators from our study based on these themes.

*Table 4. The form and richness of communication*

	<b>Form and richness of communication</b>
<b>Food blogger</b>	Rich description of personal food choice and practices, available for browsing anytime.
<b>Collective buying group</b>	Rich and continual discussions within the network of friends and neighbours that the collective buying group is based on.
<b>Food bag</b>	Limited information in written form, but significant potential for learning through embodied practices of preparing curated meals.
<b>Farmers’ Market</b>	Provides lots of information evidence that the FM forms a locus for rich discussions on good food is lacking.
<b>Food apps</b>	Product information is given, and more information can be found if the consumer is interested.

*Table 5. Consumer involvement*

<b>Consumer involvement</b>	
<b>Food blogger</b>	Mostly one-way, though some discussions take place in the comments section of the blog.
<b>Collective buying group</b>	High degree of involvement because it is based on a network of friends and neighbours, but also because of regular official meetings and a democratic approach.
<b>Food bag</b>	Little consumer involvement in the construction of good food.
<b>Farmers' market</b>	Consumers may give feedback to producers we lack evidence that this is common.
<b>Food apps</b>	No evidence of involvement.

*Table 6. Effect on food choice*

<b>Effect on food choice</b>	
<b>Food blogger</b>	High potential impact because of the rich and concrete description of personal food choice and practices.
<b>Collective buying group</b>	High potential impact as it is based on a network of trusted friends and family.
<b>Food bag</b>	The embodied practice and the frequent delivery have great potential for habitualisation.
<b>Farmers' market</b>	If the farmers' market with its limited opening hours can be fit in into everyday routines, it could influence food choice.
<b>Food apps</b>	Our interviewees were little interested in the narrow idea of good food of this specific app. Otherwise an app could have quite some impact as it is always there and could easily become habitualised.

## **6 Discussion: who gets to construct good food?**

Discourses on local food and alternative food systems often include the idea that it is crucial to 'cut out the middlemen' or eliminate profit-taking intermediaries (Mount, 2012) and 'rebuild' a direct relationship between producers and consumers (as in Farm to school programs described by Allen and Guthman, 2006; or farmers' markets and community

supported agriculture as described by Guthman et al., 2006). However, our research suggests that one group of intermediaries, specifically curators, play an increasingly important role in the 'quest for good food.' In this section, we discuss the different roles curators play in the construction of good food and consider power relations and the potential for learning about food system sustainability.

Put simply, curation may both simplify and intensify the quest for good food. After scanning the label of a food product, for example, the food app provides an extremely simplified symbol of 'good' and 'bad' – 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down.' Yet, curators also offer possibilities to intensify consumer engagement in their food choice. By inspiring readers to look for good food in their local neighbourhoods, the food blogger may raise the level of consumer awareness and engagement. Likewise, collective buying groups encourage members to perform active roles in the development of the group (such as actively participating in discussions and decisions about which products to buy and from which source), its social activities and through that the collective construction of good food.

Whereas simplifying reduces the consumer's role in constructing good food, intensifying invites more involvement and awareness from consumers. Interestingly, values associated with intensification such as inspiration and connecting receive the most attention in literature. However, our study shows that curators that simplify, through offering a curated selection and convenience, can also have considerable impact on the construction of good food, and importantly on food habits.

Thus, rather than viewing consumers as autonomous individuals that reflexively and rationally decide on their good food choices, (as critiqued by for instance Caruana, 2007; Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Barnett et al., 2005) we argue that food choice is a process in which moments of reflexivity alternate with routinised practices. In addition to facilitating reflexivity, curators also play an important role in this routinisation process. In fact, they offer

a routinisation or even ‘outsourcing’ of reflexivity (see also Halkier on routinisation of reflexivity, 2010). Indeed, once sufficient trust has been established, even highly critical and engaged consumers may hand over the responsibility for finding good food and consuming reflexively to curators.

However popular farmers’ markets have become, our respondents are not committed farmers’ market customers. Several of them state that the farmers’ market is not part of their food routines because of its irregular occurrence and - for them - impractical location. Thus, the impact on practices and perceptions is hampered because people have difficulty including the farmers’ market into their food sourcing routines and everyday life. By contrast, the prescriptive food bag delivered to the doorstep influences food habits directly. It ‘imposes’ the embodied practice of cooking and eating on the consumer. In so doing, it literally offers the consumer the first step in habit-building, in this case performing the activity of cooking the food bags. This leaves curating through food bags with enormous potential for influencing consumer food choice.

As the influence of some curators increases it is important to consider the power relations between curators and consumers. In the case of the food bag, the curator is assumed to be deciding what good food is, but are they? In the end the consumer ultimately decides to make use of a curator or not. Moreover, consumers possess the power to enlist the services of a range of curators based on their individual needs and preferences and construct their own food-related ideas, values and practices.

Interestingly, many curators, especially bloggers, curate other curators as depicted in figure 2 - from a food blog discussing the quality of a food bag highlights. Indeed, bloggers commonly refer to and evaluate other curators and thus introduce new curators to their readers.

*Figure 2. A picture from a food and fashion blog accompanying a food bag evaluation (Photo by Anna von Porat)*



## 7. Conclusion

By examining a range of curators in the food marketplace this paper explored the ways in which intermediaries influence the food-related practices of consumers. The specific findings nuance existing conceptualizations of curation in several ways. They indicate that curators are not motivated solely by economic profit but rather a range of economic, societal and environmental considerations and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Moreover, by questioning why consumers turn to curators for help the paper revealed a wider set of values created through curation including: 1) a curated selection; 2) inspiration for the adoption of new food practices and ideas; 3) convenience by saving consumers time and energy; 4) a sense of community through performing food practices together and developing common values, and 5) an experience, by enabling and guiding consumers to experiment with new food practices.

The paper also identified a range of spaces used for curation, including understudied virtual spaces such as blogs, and highlighted the vital role that specific spatial and temporal dynamics play in shaping the form and outcomes of curation. Despite the tendency to characterize face-to-face interactions and exchanges of information as richer and more trustworthy, the findings suggest that sustained interaction online can also be personal, rich and influential. Different spatial and temporal dynamics were also shown to facilitate and encourage varying levels of consumer involvement in the construction of ‘good (in this case local) food’, and influence on consumer food practices. Interestingly, once a trusted relationship with a curator was established even very critical consumers in our study were happy to ‘outsource’ their own reflexivity and quest for good food. Thus, although discourses on alternative food traditionally emphasize the importance of reflexive food practices by consumers, we argued that the power of curators in routinising food practices should not be underestimated. To cite one example, through its potential for habitualisation, the food bag service in our study may exert a considerable impact on the food-related practices of its subscribers. Overall, the paper highlighted the role that curation plays in reflexivity and routinisation and suggested that it may serve to both simplify and intensify the quest for good food.

Crucially, however, as more curators enter the marketplace to ‘help’ consumers, their conflicting voices may only be heard as a cacophony and consumers may struggle to sort and select the best form of curation let alone specific goods, services and experiences. As this paper represents an initial exploration of food-related curation there are many avenues for future research. To suggest but a few we believe it would be useful to consider how curators differentiate themselves in the marketplace and how consumers negotiate their curatorial options. There is also a need to consider the synergies, tensions and conflicts between curators, consumers, producers and institutions. Finally, it is important to investigate how

curation drives food system change from a food justice perspective and in particular the extent to which specific socio-economic groups are being served or excluded by curators and why this may be the case.

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