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**Sustainable Recovery
in Post-Pandemic Era**

Green Economy Challenges

Organized by: Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical
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PREFACE

Instigated by a desire to contribute to the societal endeavours to cope with the challenges of the pandemic and with hope for domestic and international sustainable recovery with regards to each relevant functional area, the two oldest social science institutes in North Macedonia and Serbia - the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization organized the online international scientific conference *Sustainable Recovery in Post-pandemic Era: Green Economy Challenges* on 7 – 8 December 2021. This issue represents the Conference Proceedings following said Conference.

The Conference gained weight because of the significant attendance level of 119 authors from 20 countries, presenting 59 papers. As well, this scientific weight was due to the level of sophistication of the well-elaborated presentations on topics related to pressing contemporary issues regarding circular economy and development, geo-economics, labour market and green jobs, policy and governance, geo-politics, security, socio-demographics, education and public health.

Namely, the Conference aim to bring together scholars and researchers to discuss the issues of post-pandemic environmentally-sustainable economic recovery from the economic, social, public policy and legal standpoint was fully met. In the dawn of the pandemic crisis, the European Union launched the proposal of the Environmental European Law (2020) setting a legal framework to achieve the 2050 climate neutrality goal, only a year after the introduction of the European Green Deal (2019). The interconnection of climate action and environmental protection activities, dealing with social and political challenges and inclusive COVID-19 recovery was the central theme for critical consideration from both, theoretical and practical perspectives, creating the forum for holistic and integrative approaches' identification and development.

During the pandemic, governance and media practice have been changed as well.

The empowerment of the European Union industry and business, boosting the circular economy, particularly, the waste control and management as well as building the new Just Transition concept of workers and community adaptation to green jobs, alongside with introducing respective educational practices were the core focal issues of the Conference participants.

The public health crisis called for strong responses based on solidarity, co-operation and responsibility. That required the identification of current challenges find new paths to support key international and national actors in their efforts to “repair” and “transform” societies by tackling the inequities and, stimulating the growth.

The considerable research in these areas manifested in the particular works of the authors which were subsumed to vigilant double-blind peer review process, with assignment of two

field-related reviewers per paper, proceeded by detailed deliberation of separate Editors as well as by joint Editors' conferral. Each author accounted for the linguistic adequacy.

Finally, this issue of Conference Proceedings entails 15 papers, divided in two major sections: the first being titled *Politics and Society in Post-Pandemic Era* and the second is *Sustainable Recovery – Green Policy Levers*.

Both the Editors and the organizing entities are deeply grateful for the contribution to the Conference to all participants, to the authors for the quality of their papers and cooperation, to the committed reviewers, as well as to all assisting subjects in the process.

There are high hopes that the entirety of the ideas, through this issue, will be communicated to the policy makers, researchers and the broader public, thus contributing to the improvement of contemporary societal processes.

The Editors

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POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN POST-PANDEMIC ERA

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

This paper deals with one aspect of sustainable food consumption, i.e. consumption of locally grown and produced food. Review of literature indicates that locally produced food has positive impact on the environment and positive effects on local economy. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has caused logistics disruptions in global food supply chains, affecting food prices and availability in retail stores. In light of these obstacles, consumption of locally produced food has been recognized as a measure to combat eventual future disasters. Building upon the Theory of planned behavior (TPB) and systematic review of literature on consumers' motives to purchase sustainable food, published between 2000 and 2021, this study proposes a conceptual model of the determinants of consumer behavioral intentions towards locally grown and produced food. Implications of the study are discussed and limitations and future research directions are noted.

Keywords: sustainable food consumption, locally produced food, Theory of planned behaviour (TPB), food supply chains, Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

In 2007 New Oxford English Dictionary added a word ‘locavore’, indicating a person who prefers local food and the popularity of local food has started to rise (Adams & Salois, 2010). Nowadays consumption of locally produced food is recognized as one of the fastest growing trends, particularly in developed economies (Skallerud & Wien, 2019; Kim & Huang, 2021; Kumar et al., 2021). Recent research has suggested greater importance of local food movement in comparison with other 21st century trends, such as consumption of organic and fair trade food (Memery et al., 2015). Buying locally produced food has become closely associated with sustainable consumption, due to environmental and ethical benefits of buying local food, such as reduced food miles, animal welfare, support for local producers and local communities (Megicks et al., 2012). Support for local economy and community has been recognized as an even more significant driver of buying locally produced food than quality of local food items (Memery et al., 2015).

There is no widely accepted definition of local food. However, locally produced food is generally described as food produced within a radius of 100 miles from the point of purchase, or within a state boundary (Adams & Salois, 2010; Printezis et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2021). At the outset of local food movement the popularity of locally produced food did not stem from a growing demand of consumers, but was led by governmental initiatives to support small-scale local farmers and national production, whereas later it was driven by consumer demand for transparency and information on product origin, due to a number of food related scandals (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015) and rising customer awareness of environmental and health-related consequences of food consumption (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Giampietri et al., 2018). Many consumers were driven to local food as a response to globalized food production and distribution (Adams & Salois, 2010; Dukeshire et al., 2011; González-Azcárate et al., 2021; Verain et al., 2021). Together with organic and fair trade, locally produced food is considered sustainably produced food (Gracia et al., 2012).

Local food is closely associated with local food systems and shorter supply chains. Shorter food supply chains imply limited number of intermediaries and geographical proximity between producers and consumers (Vittersø et al., 2019). There are different dimensions of sustainability with regard to food supply chains and they may not necessarily be complementary. Economic sustainability implies lower price for consumers and at the same time value added for producers, environmental sustainability implies lower greenhouse gas emissions, usage of natural resources and generation of waste along supply chains, whereas social sustainability implies strengthening local identity, supporting local production of food, increasing knowledge and trust among supply chain actors. Studying short food supply chains (SFSCs) from six European countries (France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland and the UK), from the perspective of consumers, producers and retailers, Vittersø et al.’s (2019) findings indicate the agreement among respondents in terms of the contribution of SFSCs to social sustainability, whereas the findings were inconclusive regarding the contribution of SFSCs to environmental and economic sustainability.

Whereas some authors support local (national) branding initiatives as a means of developing secure markets for local producers (Mugera et al., 2016) or argue for locally grown food and farmers markets as opportunities for enhancing food system sustainability (Conner et al., 2010), other perspectives should also be acknowledged. Whereas some authors associate SFSCs with sustainability, mainly due to their allegedly lower contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in comparison with global supply chains, SFSCs are not necessarily more sustainable than global food supply chains, but there are factors which contribute to greater sustainability of local food systems (Kiss et al., 2019). Edwards-Jones et al. (2008) and Stein and Santini (2021) claim that locally produced food, in terms of carbon footprint and environmental impact, does not necessarily imply more sustainable option in comparison with imported food items, as transportation is not the only source of greenhouse gas emissions. According to Stein and Santini (2021), even if one excludes environmental aspect of local food system's sustainability, these systems cannot ensure food security and resilience, although they provide new employment, contribute to community development and can enable local producers to charge a better price.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic has raised the issue of sustainability of global food systems. The crisis has made weaknesses of just-in-time approach of global food systems to be more obvious (Hobbs, 2020; Blay-Palmer et al., 2021). Bottlenecks in transportation and international trade restrictions with the aim to ensure domestic supply, made food at some markets less available and more expensive. According to Nemes et al.'s (2021) comparative study including 13 countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, South Korea, Spain, and the UK) alternative and local food systems (ALFSs) reacted more readily to major social issues caused by the crisis, such as food security and food justice. The authors further argue that, even though severe food shortages did not occur and long food chains displayed ability to withstand the crisis, ALFSs showed higher level of resilience, flexibility, capability for innovation and rapid adaptation, which reinforced the interest of policy-makers into local food and its potential for sustainable food system transition. Taking into account China's response to ensure food supply at the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, Fei et al. (2020) argue for local food production and short food supply chains for building more resilient and sustainable food systems. In a similar vein, González-Azcárate et al. (2021) claim that "COVID-19 has stressed the importance of SFSCs, as these chains can be a dam for food security and nutrition during uncertain economic times"(p.911). According to Hobbs (2020), the emergence of Covid-19 crisis might have shaken customer confidence into global food system, and the author further emphasizes that "It seems likely that interest in the local food movement will grow, at least in the short to medium term post-COVID-19, and that food security and a desire to support local businesses may well become more important as motivations for patronizing local food supply chains" (p.5).

Although consumer behaviour related to locally produced food has been somewhat studied thus far, extant literature mainly pertains to the U.S. and western European economies, whereas studies stemming from developing economies are relatively sparse (Zhang et al., 2020). In particular, factors which shape customers' attitudes towards local food have received limited academic attention (Kumar et al., 2021). Although local food has frequently

been associated with sustainable food, majority of empirical studies related to sustainable food pertain to green, eco-friendly or organic food. Vast majority of them supported predictive validity of the Theory of planned behaviour in explaining consumer food-related behaviour (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; Dowd & Burke, 2013; Paul et al., 2016; Singh & Verma, 2017; Qi & Ploeger, 2019; Elhoushy, 2020) and this approach has been used as a pillar of the present study, which aims to propose a conceptual model of the drivers of customer intentions to purchase locally produced food. The paper is organized as follows: The following section describes methodology. This is followed by the review of literature and the proposal of a conceptual framework. Results of the study, including its limitations and directions for future research are presented subsequently.

2. Methods

We performed a systematic review of scientific literature available in the following electronic databases: ScienceDirect, Emerald, ProQuest, Wiley Online Library and searched through the reference lists of selected papers. Our focus was on studies published in English language, between January 2000 and December 2021, using the following keywords: “local food”, “sustainable food”, “behavioral intentions”, “Theory of planned behavior”. We searched for the papers using the aforementioned keywords in titles or abstracts. One database only, ScienceDirect, yielded more than 1100 results. However, studies related to tourists’ and restaurant diners’ behavioural intentions, consumer behavior related to online delivery apps, consumption values, food wasting, market segmentation were excluded from further analysis, which resulted in less than 10% of initially pooled items which were further processed.

3. Review of literature and the proposal of conceptual framework

Theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) has been extensively applied in previous studies as a theoretical framework to explore the determinants of consumer behavioural intentions and behaviour. According to this theory, attitudes, social (subjective) norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) influence consumer intentions. Attitudes refer to a degree of favourable or unfavourable evaluation of a behavior. Subjective norms refer to a perceived social pressure to perform certain behaviour, whereas PBC refers to customer perceptions of easiness of performing certain behaviour. Behavioural, normative and control beliefs affect attitudes, subjective norms and PBC. Behavioral intentions refer to consumers’ expectations or plans related to a future action. They are regarded as a proxy of future behavior (Paul et al., 2016).

TPB emerged as a useful framework in explaining consumer behavioural intentions towards locally grown and/or sustainably produced food (Robinson & Smith, 2002; Nurse et al., 2012; Kumar & Smith, 2017). Lim and An (2021) supported the applicability of TPB framework in explaining Korean consumers’ purchase intentions towards national well-

being food. According to their study's findings, attitudes, social norms and PBC emerged as significant determinants of consumers' purchase intentions.

In Vermeir and Verbeke's (2008) study, attitudes towards sustainable products emerged as the most significant determinant of consumer purchase intentions. A number of previous studies reported a positive influence of consumers' attitude towards sustainable food on their behavioural intentions (Robinson & Smith, 2002; Nurse et al., 2012; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Paul et al., 2016; Kumar & Smith, 2017. Shin et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2018; Qi & Ploeger, 2019). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Attitudes towards local food will positively influence consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

In addition to attitudes, previous studies indicate significant impact of social influences on consumers' behavioral intentions. Social influences emerged as significant predictor of Spanish consumers' willingness to pay more for locally produced lamb meat (Gracia et al., 2012). According to Giampietri et al.'s (2018) findings from Italy, social influences determine customers' intentions to purchase food from SFSCs. Qi and Ploeger's (2019) study revealed significant impact of the opinion of relevant others on Chinese customers' intentions to purchase organic food. Recent research has also indicated significant impact of relevant others' opinion on customers' attitudes related to the purchase of green products (Paul et al., 2016) and actual buying behaviour related to green food (Singh & Verma, 2017). Based on previous studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Subjective norms will positively influence consumer purchase intentions related to local food.

H3: Subjective norms will positively influence consumer attitudes related to the purchase of local food.

According to Kneafsey et al. (2013), high consumer interest into locally produced food does not universally translate into purchase behaviour, as consumers may not know where to buy local food or have limited financial resources to perform the purchase. Availability of locally produced food, convenience, price, food labelling have been the most frequently highlighted contextual factors which can exert positive or negative influence on consumer behaviour (Penney & Prior, 2014; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Printezis & Grebitus, 2018). In the context of traditional well-being Korean food, Lim and An's (2021) study indicated consumers' perceptions of the ease of purchasing traditional food as the strongest predictor of their purchase intentions. In a similar vein, availability of local food during various seasons emerged as a significant predictor of Canadian customers' propensity

to buy locally produced food (Dukeshire et al., 2011). Perceived behavioural control also emerged as a significant determinant of customers' intentions to purchase food from SFSCs in Giampietri et al.'s (2018) research performed in Italy. Taking into consideration the aforementioned, the following hypotheses can be proposed:

H4: Perceived behavioral control will positively influence consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

High level of customer trust in SFSCs and customer willingness to support local production have been revealed by recent research (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Vittersø et al., 2019). SFSCs contribute to close interaction and the promotion of trust between consumers and producers (Kneafsey et al., 2013). According to Stein and Santini (2021), customers are willing to pay more for products distributed via SFSCs, as they trust them. The importance of trust in food providers as a driving force of customers' purchase intentions has been emphasized by Lim and An (2021). Giampietri et al.'s (2018) research findings from Italy indicate that customer trust in SFSCs leads to their intentions to purchase food from SFSCs. Trust in fair trade label significantly influences consumer willingness to buy and willingness to pay for fair trade food, according to research findings from Turkey (Konuk, 2019). Similarly, trust in private organic labels emerged as a significant predictor of customer intentions to purchase organic food (Konuk, 2018). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H5: Trust in local food suppliers will positively affect consumer intentions towards purchasing local food.

In food consumption it has become evident that consumers purchase products not only expecting benefits for themselves, but also considering altruistic reasons (Ozonaka et al., 2010; Gracia et al., 2012; Memery et al., 2015; Birch et al., 2018; Byrd et al., 2018; Skallerud & Wien, 2019). According to Zhang et al. (2020) consumers can be motivated to consume locally produced food considering benefits for themselves, such as freshness, superior taste and quality, transparency related to the origin of products, and by considering benefits for environment, local community and local economy. This stance was also supported by Nurse et al.'s (2012) study, which indicated concern for environment, local economy and social fairness as significant predictors of consumers' willingness to pay more for locally grown products. Consumer concern for environment and local economy were also supported by Grebitus et al.'s (2013) experimental auctions which revealed that consumers' WTP was falling with the increase of food miles. Kumar and Smith's (2017) study supported the relevance of consumers' concern for environment and support to local economy as the determinants of their attitudes towards local food consumption. A large body of literature has indicated consumers' perceptions of locally produced food as environmentally friendly, better tasting, i.e. having natural taste, healthier, free from chemicals, preservatives and

fresher than imported products, with positive impact on local economy, fair returns to farmers and fair treatment of farm labour and as a means of preserving local heritage and tradition (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009; Adams & Salois, 2010; Ozonaka et al., 2010; Dukeshire et al., 2011; Penney & Prior, 2014; Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015; Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Memery et al., 2015; Wägeli et al., 2016; Berg & Preston, 2017; Birch et al., 2018; Fan et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2021). According to the TPB theory, behavior is a function of attitudes towards the behaviour, which are shaped by behavioural beliefs (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). Consumers' beliefs in local origin of food have been shown to positively affect their attitudes towards food (Dentoni et al., 2009). According to Feldmann and Hamm (2015), consumer knowledge of local food influences their attitudes and further leads to purchase intentions related to local food. In Skallerud and Wien's (2019) study performed in Norway, emphatic and social concern for local producers emerged as significant determinants of consumers' attitudes towards the consumption of locally produced food. Empirical results from China and Denmark provided evidence of significant contribution of beliefs regarding superior taste of locally produced food and support for local economy towards consumers' positive attitudes related to the consumption of local food (Zhang et al., 2020). According to Kumar et al. (2021) customers' values and beliefs related to local food positively affect their attitude towards local food. In light of the above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H6a: Customer beliefs related to self-interest of consuming local food positively affect their attitudes towards local food;

H6b: Customer beliefs related to environmental benefits of consuming local food positively affect customer attitudes towards local food;

H6c: Customer beliefs related to the benefits for local economy and local community positively affect their attitudes towards local food.

Hypothesized relationships are graphically displayed in Figure 1.

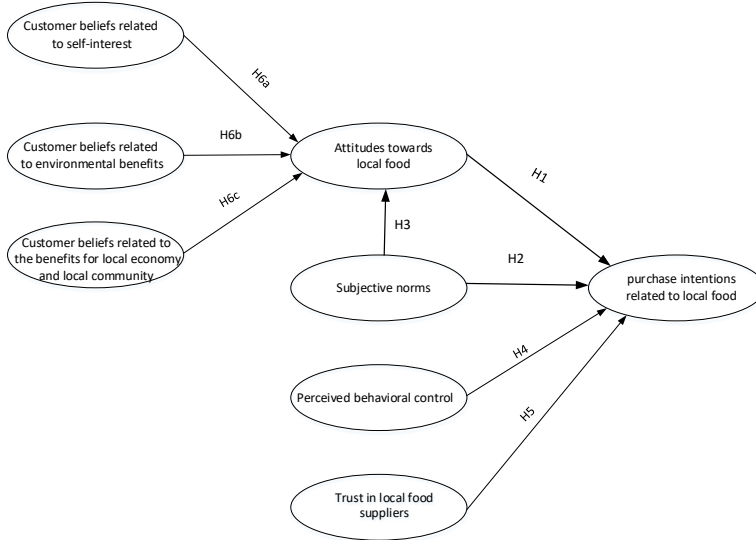


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

4. Discussion and conclusions

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused logistics disruptions in global food supply chains, has contributed to the rising interest in local food movement. Although some major disruptions in food supply have not been recorded, locally produced food has been recognized as a solution to ensure sustainable food systems, in case of eventual future market disruptions.

Building upon recent research on the driving factors of sustainable, and primarily organic, food movement, this study aimed to propose a conceptual framework of the determinants of customer purchase intentions related to locally grown and produced food. Extant research on sustainable consumption of final consumers and their behavioral intentions points out to the pertinence of Ajzen's Theory of planned behavior in explaining consumer future intentions. In addition to attitudes, subjective norms and PBC in explaining purchase intentions, recent studies have pointed out to the relevance of consumer trust in goods suppliers as a direct determinant of purchase intentions, whereas customer beliefs related to the benefits for themselves stemming from local food consumption, benefits for the environment and local community and economy have been proposed as indirect determinants of customer future intentions, which impact is mediated via customer attitudes related to the consumptions of local food.

Knowing the factors which motivate consumers to purchase locally sourced food is important for marketers and policy-makers who want to promote the consumption of

locally produced food, as it provides them with useful information for developing effective marketing strategies. To what extent attitudes towards consuming local food, social pressure from significant others, perceived ease or difficulty of buying local food and trust in local producers determine consumers' purchase intentions would be important information for policy-makers in their promotional campaigns oriented towards stimulating consumers' interest and positive behavior towards locally produced food. Previous research has shown that consumers ascribe different value to "locally produced" depending on a product category (Printezis et al., 2019) and that significance of the components of TPB theory in predicting consumer intentions varies between categories of locally produced/grown products (Nurse et al., 2012). Therefore, empirical examinations of proposed conceptual model in different product categories would be fruitful avenues for further research. According to Zhang et al. (2020), consumer behaviour related to locally produced food has been somewhat studied thus far, however, empirical studies stemming from developing economies are relatively sparse. Therefore, an examination of proposed model in a developing economy would close existing gap in the literature and equip policy-makers and marketers of local food with valuable knowledge for improving market position of local food. Recent research has also highlighted the mediating role of TPB variables in the relationship between environmental concern and purchase intentions related to green food products. Future examinations of the determinants of local food demand could be enhanced by the inclusion of this variable.

In spite of its positives, this study is not without limitations. The number of studies we included in the analysis is limited by our search criteria. Although we aimed to collect sufficient number and quality of literature sources, we took into consideration only journal articles published in English language, which excluded potentially valuable information and constructs which could have enhanced proposed conceptual framework. Also it would be beneficial for further research to extend the pool of keywords, including e.g. expressions such as "regional food", as review of literature has indicated frequent associations of local food with regional food items, due to the absence of exact definition of local food.

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