

# What fires up my cooking? The choice for a sustainable cuisine: passion and self-transcendence in the restaurant business

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**ABSTRACT:** The restaurant business is highly unsustainable and the sector contributes to a large extent to environmental pollution. However, some restaurateurs have chosen a more sustainable cuisine. As food sustainability is a contested issue, we have considered several descriptions of food sustainability and have assessed how these are influenced by a passion for hospitality. Theoretically, the choice for sustainable food can be based on a passion for the hospitality business and a passion for sustainability. Surveys were used to gather data that were analysed using logistic and linear regression models. Findings suggest that some entrepreneurs claim to serve sustainable food, but do not. Others serve only one type of sustainable food, but not the other types. Interestingly, these groups also differ in their motivations for starting their restaurants. The choice to serve sustainable food is negatively influenced by entrepreneurial passion and positively by sustainability passion. Conventional restaurants have a passion for the hospitality industry, while the restaurants that serve sustainable food do not share that hospitality passion, but rather a passion for sustainability. Our research adds to the academic debate on the tensions that restaurateurs and entrepreneurs in general face in their different motivations.

**Keywords:** food sustainability, emotions, entrepreneurial passion, quantitative, sustainable entrepreneurship, values

## Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industry is one of the least sustainable economic sectors in the world. The negative effect of this sector has become a concern worldwide (Gössling, Hall & Weaver, 2009; Mac Con Iomaire, 2016). Environmentally conscious consumers demand more sustainable products and services, while in the restaurant sector more effort is made to become more environmentally friendly (Mac Con Iomaire, 2016; Xu & Jeong, forthcoming). Raab, Baloglu and Chen (2018) find that especially serving sustainable food as a core product attracts niche customers, whereas other, more ancillary, green practices have no influence on customer segmentation. Social media (such as The Balanced Small Business, 2019; Bender, 2015; and Food Revolution Network, 2017) appeal to customers to eat local. A local diet is claimed to be more sustainable (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012). This trend might be taken up in the hospitality sector. However, food sustainability is a complex concept that goes beyond serving local food. Therefore, this concept is difficult to implement for chefs and is often understood and executed in varying ways (Sauer & Wood, 2018). Furthermore, many studies assess whether restaurants have adopted green practices and what kind of green practices they implement

(DiPietro et al., 2013; Raab et al., 2018). Previous studies have not been able to capture exactly which practices these restaurants adopt and cannot assess how these green practices relate to green practices in other restaurants. Restaurateurs might adopt some green practices and overlook others (DiPietro, Cao & Partlow, 2013). Therefore, we focus on one type of practice: serving sustainable food. We look at different interpretations of sustainable food (local, seasonal, organic, vegetarian and vegan) and how these compare to the restaurateur's own interpretation of sustainable food.

Entrepreneurs start a business for many reasons. Passion for the sector or the product can be one of those and a passion for sustainability can be another (Cardon et al., 2017). Sustainable entrepreneurs can experience tensions between their economic, social and environmental goals (Blundel & Lyon, 2015). They often have to make trade-offs between these goals, for instance choosing between scaling up economically and not compromising sustainability goals. Possibly, entrepreneurs also experience tensions between a passion for their business and a passion for sustainability. Restaurateurs specifically may experience a tension between serving sustainable food and serving whichever food they want, whether local or not, in season or not, and vegetarian or not. The question that emerges

is: do restaurant owners that serve sustainable cuisine differ from more conventional restaurant owners in their motivation to start their restaurant? Does a choice for a sustainable cuisine come from a passion for restaurants or from a passion for sustainability?

This article is composed as follows: In the literature review, we firstly discuss two types of passion: entrepreneurial passion and passion for sustainability. Then, we discuss sustainable entrepreneurship and the link to sustainable cuisine (local, seasonal, organic, vegetarian and vegan). Each section in the review is closed with the formulation of hypotheses. After the review, the research method and the results of the research are presented. Lastly, we will discuss the outcomes, draw conclusions and give recommendations for future research.

## Literature review

The highly risky, competitive and commercial nature of business ownership makes being an entrepreneur an emotional endeavour; entrepreneurship is a passionate process (Cardon et al., 2012). As such, emotions affect all stages of the entrepreneurial process (Baron, 2008). "Emotions are the general phenomenon of subjective feelings" (Cardon et al., 2012, p. 2) and entrepreneurs have these emotions in response to decisions they have to make in uncertain environments. Emotions are an antecedent and a consequence of entrepreneurial actions (Cardon et al., 2012; Thorgren & Wincent, 2015). For example, entrepreneurs can speak about their business as their "baby", that they have started, cared for, helped mature and identified with at a personal level. These feelings or emotions for a business can have an effect on activities and decisions about the venture (Cardon et al., 2012). Passion is described as an intense positive emotion (Cardon et al., 2009) and an intense motivational and positive force for entrepreneurship (Thorgren & Wincent, 2015). Passion can be the main driver behind entrepreneurship. Passion is related to creative problem-solving, the time spent on entrepreneurial activities and entrepreneurial persistence (Breugst et al., 2012).

The question of what entrepreneurs are passionate about is an important one because the object of one's passion can have important implications for the types of behaviours entrepreneurs engage in, such as persistence of creativity, and the outcomes of such behaviours, such as firm performance. Therefore, understanding a broader set of potential targets of passion might help inform our understanding of entrepreneurs' behaviour and performance outcomes for themselves, their firms and their stakeholders (Cardon et al., 2017, p. 25).

An individual holds a variety of passions. Similarly, when it comes to entrepreneurial passion, there are different types of passion (Cardon et al., 2009; 2012). According to Cardon et al. (2009), entrepreneurial passion can be divided into three categories: first, the individual passion for generating new ideas or inventions; second, the individual passion for creating a new firm and gathering the resources to do that; and third, the individual passion related to market development and growth. This division into three is, however, solely based on entrepreneurial action, while entrepreneurial passion can also extend to products and markets. Therefore, Cardon et al. (2017) divide entrepreneurial passion into six types: passion for growth; passion for people; passion for the product or service; passion for inventing; passion for competition; and passion for a social

cause. The passion that managers in restaurants experience is often a passion for their business and sector (Mooney et al., 2016). However, this passion is not in line with any of the three types discussed above, but does fit better with the six-fold topology given by Cardon et al. (2017). The restaurant business is not a highly innovative business, nor does it have many serial entrepreneurs who start new businesses. Therefore, we do not consider the passion for generating new ideas and inventions and the passion for creating a new firm and gathering the resources to do that as relevant to our research. We focus on the passion for managing a business and watching the restaurant. We assume this is the case for both sustainable and conventional entrepreneurs, since in both cases the sector at large is the hospitality industry.

- Hypothesis 1: Both sustainable and conventional restaurant owners express a clear passion for managing "growth".

## Sustainability passion

One type of passion described by Cardon et al. (2017) is the passion for a good cause. This arguably means that some entrepreneurs start their business because they care for others or because they care for the environment. The passion to care for others and for the environment could influence the choice of a sustainable cuisine for entrepreneurs in the hospitality business. We address the care of others and the environment by including self-transcendence values in this research. Values reflect guiding principles in an individual's life. In particular, values are concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states, such as an ideal society, and to the question of ideal behaviour. They transcend specific situations and guide the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Personal values are relatively stable over time and are significant determinants of an individual's awareness of the consequences of his/her behaviour. Values of self-transcendence reflect a concern for the welfare of others and for nature. Self-transcendence reflects understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of the welfare of all people and nature (Schwartz, 1992). Values of self-transcendence have been found to positively influence multiple kinds of sustainable behaviour, including willingness to pay for the preservation of wildlife (Ojea & Loureiro, 2007), sustainable consumerism (Nguyen et al., 2016), environmental policy support (Hiratsuka et al., 2018), and environmental activism (Stern et al., 1999). Values such as achievement, hedonism and power have an opposite effect on behaviour to values of self-transcendence. We focus on the self-transcendence values in this research, because, as stated above, self-transcendence has a positive influence on many types of sustainable behaviour (De Groot & Steg, 2008; Hiratsuka et al., 2018; Zasuwa, 2016).

Concerning sustainable entrepreneurship, research finds mixed results for self-transcendence values. Conceptual studies link self-transcendence and sustainable entrepreneurship (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011; Schaefer et al., 2015), but the evidence is minimal. A positive link has been found between pro-environmental behaviour values and the recognition of new business opportunities (Ploum et al., 2018). Another study, however, finds a negative link between pro-social values and environmental innovation (Bendell, 2017), while yet another study finds a positive link between self-transcendence values and corporate social responsibility practices (González-Rodríguez et al., 2015). Furthermore, entrepreneurs may have values of

self-transcendence, but use disengagement strategies to exploit an unsustainable business (Shepherd et al., 2013). Also, previous research found that chefs were mostly consumer-driven when it comes to sustainable food and that their perceptions differ on what sustainability in restaurants means (Sauer & Wood, 2018). Since environmental psychology research suggests a positive relation between self-transcendence values and sustainable behaviour, whereas sustainable entrepreneurship research reports mixed results, we hypothesise:

- Hypothesis 2: Self-transcendence values of the entrepreneur positively influence the choice for sustainable cuisine.

### **Food sustainability**

Sustainable entrepreneurs experience tensions between the different aspects of sustainability (Doherty et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015). Not only do they often experience tensions between economic and sustainability goals, they also experience tensions between social and environmental goals and between long- and short-term goals (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). Furthermore, sustainable entrepreneurs often get grounded in one discourse. This makes them less likely to explore other discourses. Because there are multiple interpretations of sustainable food, there is a danger of entrepreneurs only using one of these interpretations as their sustainability discourse (Poldner et al., 2015). The sustainable food concepts that we use in this research will be discussed in more detail in the method section. Here, we wish only to state that they have both social and environmental benefits. Local food, for instance, reduces food miles and is therefore an environmental concept. On the other hand, it also promotes food security and enhances communities (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012). Therefore, there are not just tensions between the social and environmental elements of sustainability at play in this study, but also tensions between the different interpretations of social and environmental sustainability.

- Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of food sustainability differ among restaurateurs serving sustainable food.

### **Research method**

In this section, we first discuss the various discourses of food sustainability, followed by the description of the data collection and the method applied in obtaining the data. Finally, we discuss the choice of analyses.

#### **Choice for food sustainability interpretations**

We recognise that there are a multitude of perceptions on sustainable food. Therefore, we assess different approaches to sustainable food in a comparative manner. Following societal trends in sustainability, we have identified five discourses on food sustainability: local; organic; seasonal; vegetarian; and vegan. We rely on scientific studies to validate that seasonal, local, organic, vegetarian and vegan food are more sustainable than food that does not fit these characteristics (Garnett, 2011; 2013; 2014). Moreover, our choice of these five discourses on sustainable food is supported by their popularity in the Netherlands and by the Dutch Centre for Nutrition (Voedingscentrum, 2019). The next paragraph discusses scientific evidence for food sustainability.

Local food is considered sustainable because local food supposedly uses less food miles, less water and less energy for growing in arid countries or greenhouses. It also promotes food

security and supports the local community (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012; Feagan, 2007). Growing local food is best done conjointly with seasonal food, because local food can otherwise come from heated and lighted greenhouses (Stănescu, 2010). Organic food promotes food security by promoting seed and breed diversity. It is also better for people, because some pesticides, herbicides and fungicides can potentially have a negative impact on human health, as had been illustrated by the number of cases against Monsanto, the producer of a pesticide that allegedly causes cancer (McCausland, 2019). Organic food also has advantages for biodiversity by going against monoculture and allowing for insects or animals to exterminate pests as opposed to pesticides (Hole et al., 2005). Finally, vegan and vegetarian are more sustainable due to a higher efficiency of water, resources and land for plant-based food (Garnett, 2014; Morawicki, 2012). By removing a link from the chain by removing animals, the food system does not lose any calories in animal feed or water to the animal's inefficient digestive system. Furthermore, animal welfare considerations are important to take into account. In this research, we asked respondents to indicate which kind of sustainability fits their cuisine best.

#### **Data collection**

We collected data in 2016 via an online survey. We sent emails to restaurants that had their email addresses listed on the website lens.nl. In total, we sent 3 036 surveys. We received 295 partial responses, which is an acceptable response rate for an email survey (Chidlow et al., 2015). After removing erroneous and missing variables, we were left with 169 responses. We developed our questionnaire following the recommendations on survey design, including the use of simple syntax, relevant and clear scales, and a suitable layout (Krosnick & Presser, 2010). We asked the participants about their passion for the hospitality sector, passion for the restaurant business, what types of food they serve, and why and how they view sustainability.

We are familiar with the entrepreneurial passion scale developed by Cardon et al. (2012), but decided not to use this scale. We felt that it does not reflect the passion that many entrepreneurs in the restaurant business have for managing their business, and thus we decided to develop our own measures. Furthermore, Cardon et al. (2017) later came up with more types of passion that do not fit this scale. The same goes for the value scale (Steg et al., 2014). We adapted the concepts in this scale to fit to the restaurant business. We used Likert scale questions, with five answer options.

#### **Data analysis**

This paper presents data-driven research that looks for correlations, not causalities. New issues can emerge from the data rather than being in the data intentionally in order to test a hypothesis (Miller & Goodchild, 2015). For the passion and self-transcendence variables, we did an exploratory factor analysis. We used the derived factors as input for our next analyses. We did a number of regressions, which were either logistic or linear, depending on the distribution of the data. We did a linear regression for those variables with a normal distribution of the regression residuals and for those variables with a normal distribution after log-transformation. Some of our variables were so polarised that the distribution was the opposite of normal, with high quantities of cases near the highest and lowest values. Those variables we recoded into

binary variables. We performed logistic regression for these variables and also for our self-reported sustainability measure, which was already binary. For the sustainable food categories, we selected those responses that had indicated that sustainable food is served in the first place and only used these in our analysis. We created a composite sustainability index, for which we calculated the average of the percentages of local, organic, seasonal, vegetarian and vegan food served. See Table 1 for all variable specifications.

## Findings

In our sample, 64% of the respondents were male and the average age was 43. All respondents were between 21 and 70 years of age at the time of the survey. 59% of the restaurateurs had one or more children. 131 out of the 169 respondents indicated that they serve sustainable food, which is 78% of our sample. Out of the restaurateurs who indicated that they serve sustainable food, on average 46% served organic, 43% local, 65% seasonal, 36% vegetarian, and 19% vegan food.

Before testing our hypotheses, we used an exploratory factor analysis on the entrepreneurial passion and self-transcendence survey questions (Table 2). We found a good fit for both the passion and self-transcendence scales. Our factor analyses yielded Cronbach's alphas of 0.7 and 0.79, which is satisfactory. The KMO reliability test scored 0.62, which is considered acceptable. We proceeded to include the passion and self-transcendence factors in the regression analyses.

We analysed four models for the linear regression (Table 3). Self-transcendence values have a positive effect for vegetarian and organic food and for the composite sustainability index (for an explanation of this index, please consult the data analysis section and Table 1). Passion has a negative effect on both the sustainability index and organic food. Thus, this analysis suggests a negative relationship between passion for the restaurant business and serving sustainable food. Being male is negatively related to serving sustainable food and to serving vegetarian food. We find a positive effect of education level for organic food and the sustainability index, which means that the higher the education level, the more organic and sustainable

TABLE 2: Exploratory factor analysis of the passion and self-transcendence variables ( $N = 169$ )

	Passion	Self-transcendence
Passion		
Passion for working in a restaurant	0.64	
Passion for managing a restaurant	0.64	
Cronbach's alpha = 0.70		
Self-transcendence		
Help others to eat differently		0.66
Do something for the environment		0.79
Do something for society		0.77
Do something for others		0.56
Cronbach's alpha = 0.79		

food restaurateurs serve. Finally, we find that the number of employees of a restaurant (size) has a positive effect on serving seasonal food. It should also be noted that the difference in  $R^2$  for the sustainability index, organic and vegetarian food versus local food is large. Whereas our variables provide a good model for sustainability index, organic and vegetarian food, the model for seasonal food is weak. Therefore, there could be entirely different variables at play for seasonal food that we have not managed to include in our data.

After the linear regression, we perform three additional logistic regression models for those dependent variables that were not suitable for linear regression (Table 4). First of all, we found a non-significant and weak fit for local food. As such we can not make any conclusions about local food, except that its use in restaurants is likely to be influenced by different variables. However, we found a good fit for self-reported sustainability and for vegan food. Furthermore, we found that for vegan and self-reported sustainability, self-transcendence was significant and had a positive effect. For self-reported sustainability, passion was significant with a positive effect, whereas passion had a negative effect for serving vegan food.

Comparing the logistic and linear regressions (Table 5), we found that passion had a positive effect on self-reported sustainability, but was negatively associated with vegan and vegetarian food and the composite sustainability index.

TABLE 1: Description of the variables used in the analyses

Variable name	Variable description	Specifications
Self-reported sustainability	Self-reported sustainability of the restaurant food	1 = Yes
Self-transcendence	Altruistic factor	Wants to help society Wants to help environment Wants to help others Wants people to eat differently
Passion	Passion factor	Passion for restaurant business Passion for managing a restaurant
Gender	Gender, binary variable	1 = Male
Children	Whether the respondent has children, binary variable	1 = Yes
Firm size	Number of employees	
Education level	6 levels of education	Categorical variable, from low (1) to high (6)
Organic	% organic ( <i>biologisch</i> ) food	
Local	% local food	Log-transformation: $\log\_local = \log(local/100 - local)$
Seasonal	% seasonal food	Transformed into binary variable, 1 = over 50% seasonal
Vegetarian	% vegetarian food	
Vegan	% vegan food	Transformed into binary variable, 1 = over 50% vegan
Sustainability Index	Average of the % local, organic, seasonal, vegetarian and vegan	

TABLE 3: Linear regression results

	Sustainability index (β)	Sustainability interpretations (β)		
		Organic	Vegetarian	Seasonal (log)
Self-transcendence	0.36***	0.40***	0.23***	0.15
Passion	-0.21***	-0.08	-0.33***	0.13
Gender	-0.14*	-0.11	-0.21***	-0.03
Children	-0.11	-0.03	-0.11	-0.15
Firm size	-0.03	-0.02	-0.09	0.22**
Education level	0.19**	0.19**	0.12	0.14
N	129	129	129	103
F	9.35	6.77	9.97	2.34
R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.25	0.33	0.13
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.28	0.21	0.30	0.07

\*p < 0.1, \*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01

We favoured the sustainability index over the self-reported sustainability, and rejected Hypothesis 1. We found that self-transcendence was generally positively related to sustainable food. Therefore, we accepted Hypothesis 2. Self-transcendence values of the entrepreneur had an effect on the choice for sustainable cuisine, however, it was not always positive. Interesting side findings were that education level was positively related to sustainable food, while being a man was negatively related to serving sustainable food.

Based on the differences in our findings, we accepted Hypothesis 3; perceptions of sustainability do differ among restaurateurs serving sustainable food. The insignificant model for local food and the weak model for seasonal food show that these types of sustainable food are determined by different motivations that we have not included in this study. However, the clearest indication that sustainability perceptions

differed was the conflicting effect of passion on self-reported sustainability versus the sustainability index, vegetarian and vegan food. We think that those individuals with a passion for food and restaurants might be less willing to adopt plant-based cuisines, even though these are often more sustainable.

### Discussion and conclusion

With this research, we aim to uncover the motivations of restaurateurs in different types of sustainability. We find that when it comes to sustainable food, there are two types of people: those who are passionate for the restaurant business and do not serve sustainable food, and those who are driven by a passion for sustainability and use food and restaurants for their sustainability goals. Neither of them specifically cares for local food.

Our study points out that it is relevant to address what sustainability is. Looking at the different interpretations of sustainability and the different motivations of restaurateurs, we argue that it is beneficial for restaurateurs who are interested in sustainability to look beyond what they are already doing, and towards what else they can do to improve sustainability of the business. Vegetarian and vegan restaurants may want to include local and seasonal foods, while organic restaurants could benefit from including more plant-based food in their cuisine. Furthermore, we find that passion for the restaurant business and passion for sustainability have a conflicting effect. It appears that most entrepreneurs are not passionate about both sustainability and the restaurant business, but only about one of these.

Underlying, we expected local food to have an impact as well, since popular media gives a lot of attention to this, such as The Balanced Small Business (2019), Bender (2015) or Food Revolution Network (2017), and appeals to customers to eat local. Of course, there is debate on how it is a challenge in eating only

TABLE 4: Logistic regression results

	Sustainability (self-reported, β)	Sustainability interpretation (β)	
		Vegan	Local
Self-transcendence	1.46***	1.77***	0.41
Passion	0.59**	-1.07***	0.22
Gender	-0.29	-0.56	0.05
Children	0.16	-0.32	-0.39
Firm size	-0.02	-0.06	0.01
Education	-0.01	0.08	0.20
Log likelihood	-67.91	-32.60	-81.33
LR χ <sup>2</sup> (f)	30.65	35.35	6.56
Prob > χ <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.00	0.36
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.18	0.35	0.04
N	162	129	129

\*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01

TABLE 5: Significant scores across sustainability motivations compared

	Self-reported sustainability	Sustainability index	Local	Seasonal	Organic	Vegetarian	Vegan
Self-transcendence	Positive	Positive			Positive	Positive	Positive
Passion	Positive	Negative				Negative	Negative
Gender		Negative				Negative	
Children							
Firm size				Positive			
Education level		Positive			Positive		

locally and seasonally and at the same time make sure you keep a healthy diet (Clonan & Holdsworth, 2012). If we truly ate only local, currently eating local would come down to — due to up scaling of production and agricultural policies — a one-sided, nutritionally deficient and rather boring menu. For a proper local diet, we would have to turn the clock back to before the Second World War (Stănescu, 2010). Furthermore, if we are able to produce a local food supply that is not one sided, we run into the debate of whether producing a wide variety of food locally is the most efficient and hence most environmentally friendly way to be sustainable (Kaplin, 2012). The debate on what is local and how sustainable it really is did not win over the hearts of the restaurateurs in choosing that option for their sustainable cuisine.

The debate on local food can of course be extended into regional dishes and cultural heritage, combined with seasonal products. Debating local food can be a way to fire up sustainable cuisine in the hospitality sector. Research on how hospitality management defines food sustainability and local food and the (im)possibilities of an all-local menu being appealing enough could give insight into this debate. We also recommend future research to consider the differences between all types of green and social practices that sustainable restaurants can adopt. Practitioners and researchers alike could benefit from viewing sustainability in the restaurant sector in a holistic way, as opposed to sticking to a single and narrow interpretation of sustainability. Furthermore, attention should be given to the demand side. The customer is king, and hence, if customer demand is indeed growing more and more sustainable, the restaurants have no option but to follow. How the customer demand is changed and what the preferences and willingness-to-pay for sustainable cuisine are can help managers to make short-term planning for sustainable futures.

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