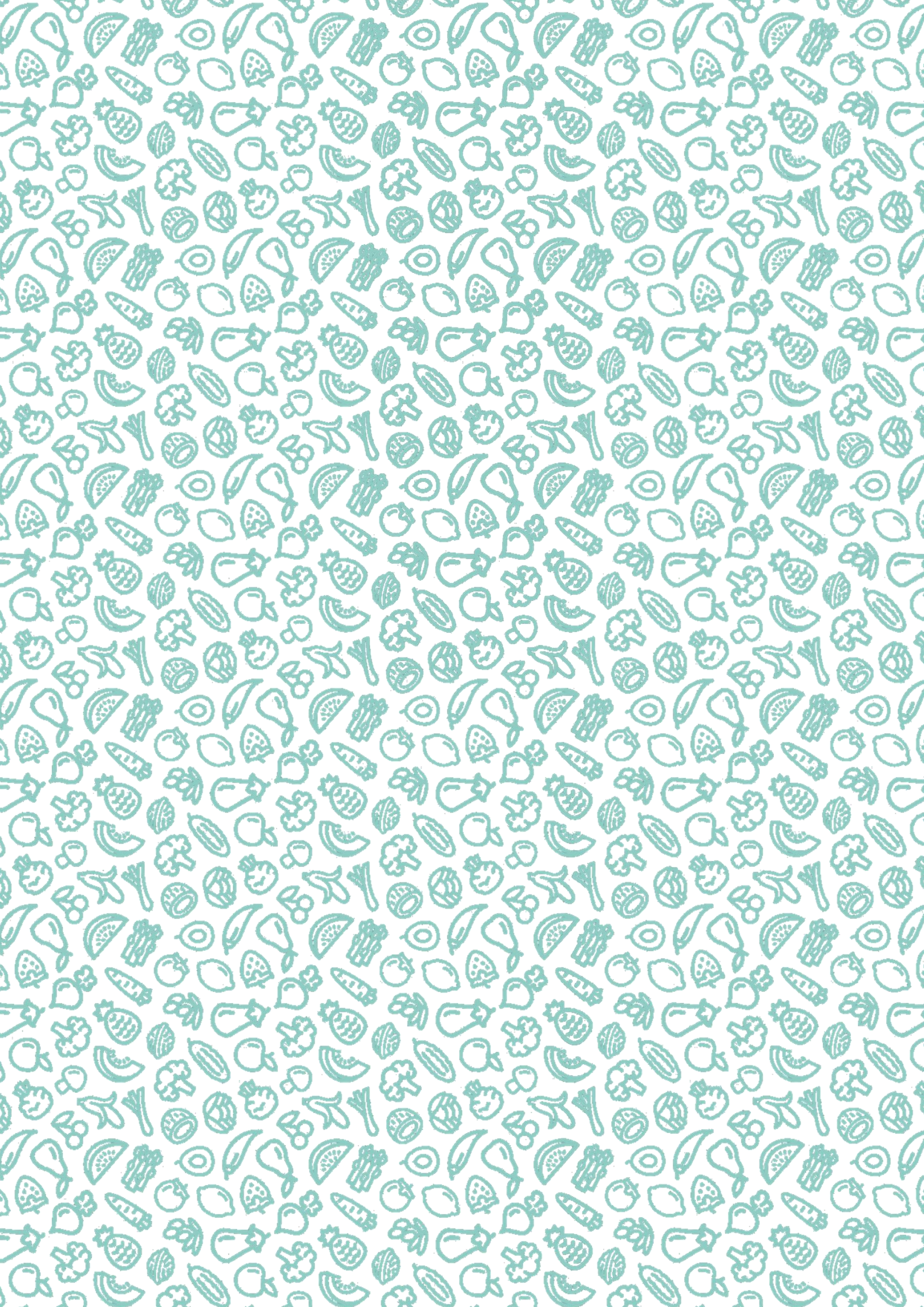# TOWARDS A GENERATION OF VEGANS:
THE MAKING OF A SUSTAINABLE DIETARY PRACTICE

Exploring the lived experiences of everyday food-related social practices of vegans in Slovenia

MSc Thesis by

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Study Programme:

MSc Development and Rural Innovation
Wageningen University

MSc Thesis code:

CPT-80836

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Submitted:

April 2019

"We are not trying to achieve the impossible. We're trying to accelerate the inevitable."

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1 INTRODUCTION

Food impacts both our personal and population health, as well as environmental sustainability and issues of social justice (Donohoe, 2012; van Dooren, Marinussen, Blonk, Aiking, & Vellinga, 2014). Issues pertaining to unsustainable exploitation of environmental resources need to be urgently addressed, as do issues regarding environmental degradation and preventable, manageable and/or treatable non-communicable diseases (Donohoe, 2012; Lang, Barling, & Caraher, 2009). These areas pose an threat to our current sustenance and our quality of life, which will be exacerbated by increase in population that is expected to amount to 9 billion people by 2050 - especially with the consumption trends still growing towards a resource-intensive and all-around unsustainable western lifestyle. Slovenia is an example of a country with such a western consumption pattern, and as such, lends itself well to a case study on populations' dietary practices and its potential for sustainable transition.

There are several sectors that heavily contribute towards human-induced cause of climate change, but the food sector and food-related activities are unique in that they are literally indispensable from our everyday lives (IPCC, 2007). What is more, not only does food impact on the environment, the food production is also itself increasingly vulnerable to changing environmental conditions, leading to questions of equity and food security (Smil, 2002; Westhoek et al., 2011). In this, meat and dairy in particular seem to be disproportionally impactful due to inefficiency of feed-to-food transformation and the burdens their production places on the environment - not just regarding pollution and degradation but also increasing resource scarcity (Smil, 2002; Tilman, Cassman, Matson, Naylor, & Polasky, 2002). Throughout this paper, I aim to address this issue by focusing on one possible solution by studying how transition towards a plant-based dietary regime is shaped and sustained, and how various elements are either inhibiting or conducive to it.

In this chapter, I first outline the wide-reaching impact of our ever-changing food practices and national food policies and programs in terms of population health; then, I focus on the link between the human and environmental health and how they both can - and should - be addressed at the same time, and make a case for why plant-based diets, such as a vegan diet, may be particularly well-equipped for this task. Lastly, I show how a group of 'early adopters' is demonstrating the suitability of this practice - at this time and in this particular setting - despite the current lack of enabling policies as well as widespread social support.

Following the so-called 'nutrition transition' coupled with heavy consumption of animal products and accompanying western lifestyles of the 'global North', we are presented with a major problem not only for the environment, but population health as well. Occurrences of over-, under- and mal-nutrition remain prevalent - often occurring simultaneously in the same populations - and are associated with a variety of health conditions (Caballero & Popkin, 2002; Craig, Mangels, & American Dietetic Association, 2009; Dietitians of Canada, 2010; The British Dietetic Association, 2011). Slovenia is not an exception in this: diet plays a large role in contributing to the instances of death, with stroke, coronary heart disease, cancers, circulatory diseases (such as kidney disease) being the leading causes of death, and a significant number of instances of diet-implicated premature deaths as well (Statistični urad RS, 2014).

The current recommendations by the Slovenian National Institute of Public Health are covered in the Food Pyramid - a triangular diagram representing the optimal number of servings from each of the basic food groups to be eaten each day. These are based on the recommendations of the advice of WHO and were most recently updated in 2014 to include exercise and to exchange relative importance of categories of carbohydrates (starchy foods) with that of fruits and vegetables, as the later are found to be consumed in sub-optimal amounts (Ministrstvo za zdravje RS, 2016). Based on statistical information, experts in the field concur that Slovenian dietary habits are not optimal and could use an improvement. On average, Slovenians consume too much salt and fats, and while the consumption of fruits is rather low, consumption of vegetables is faring even worse (Gale, 2014). Similar findings hold true for children as well, and authorities added an additional warning against the current levels of consumption of energy dense foods, snacks and sugary beverages.

Given that a main purpose of this national program of food politics is to protect the health of the people and decrease the scope and scale of food-related diseases in sustainable ways, it might prove relevant to compare various dietary practices or regimes - both as in how they might best be planned, and how they commonly are put into practice, as in the recent Dutch study (van Dooren et al., 2014). In comparing six dietary patterns, pescovegetarian, mediterranean and vegan diets fared significantly better, both in terms of health and sustainability score. Beyond the untapped potential in decreasing the noteworthy existing gap between the average Dutch diet and the diet according to Dutch dietary guidelines - also based on WHO guidelines -, additional benefits may well be gained by going beyond the guidelines in terms of plant-based food consumption (Berners-Lee, Hoolohan, Cammack, & Hewitt, 2012; de Vries & de Boer, 2010; Gezondheidsraad, 2011; Harvard School of Public Health, 2014; Nationaal Kompas Volksgezondheid, 2014; NHS, 2012; Oyebode, Gordon-Dseagu, Walker, & Mindell, 2014; RIVM, 2011; van Dooren et al., 2014; van Lee et al., 2012; Westhoek et al., 2011).

Making a case for 'ecological public health', according to which nutritionists ought to consider nutrient origin in the context as broad as planetary health before issuing dietary recommendations, Lang urges responsible bodies and authorities to search and advocate for viable alternatives that would have comparable health effects without compromising already vulnerable ecosystems any further (Dye Gussow, 1999; Lang et al., 2009). In his substantial work to date (e.g. Lang, Barling, & Caraher, 2009; Lang, Caraher, & Wu, 2010; Lang, 2006, 2007, 2009; Sustainable Development Commission, 2009), he argues there are few areas of public policy where the positive benefits to lives, health and well-being are potentially as dramatic as they could be in diet and nutrition and advocates for radical - in the sense of structural - change rather than creeping incrementalism with regards to material, biological, social and cultural issues, stressing that "[s]taying on familiar territory is not an option" (Lang, 2007, p. 15). Plant-based diets are increasingly recognised as an appropriate, readily available, widely accesible and economical solution for achieving both health benefits and environmental goals (Craig et al., 2009; Springmann, Godfray, Rayner, & Scarborough, 2016; The Strategy Unit, 2008; Willett et al., 2006).

As our health system is also under increasing strain due to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardio-vascular disease and cancer that can be in part attributed to people's diets, food is a domain that has the potential to not only be a significant part of the problem, but to play an vital role in mitigating their adverse effect while also contributing towards greater sustainability in all prominent areas. While changes and progress in technological developments and medical advances will be important in shaping of sustainable futures, considerable change in our consumption patterns may be more effective as well as more economically efficient (Springmann et al., 2016).

Finding their way into the scientific domain, the health benefits of vegetarian diets (be it lacto-ovo-vegetarian or vegan) first came into the spotlight in the 19th century (Whorton, 1994). Since then, a number of studies testify to not only nutritional sufficiency and adequacy of whole-food plant-based diets (that are rich in fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and mushrooms) for individuals during all stages of the life cycle - including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, seniors and athletes; they have been shown to contribute to overall health improvement (Craig et al., 2009; Dietitians of Canada, 2010; National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013; The British Dietetic Association, 2011). While plant-centered diets are not entirely without concerns of their own, these can be easily resolved by (food) supplementation (e.g. with addition of vitamin B12) and remain cost-effective, whereas the same could not be said for mitigating the negative effects of animal-rich diets (Craig, 2009; FAO, 2013, p. 45; Millward & Garnett, 2010; Springmann et al., 2016).

Plant-based (including vegan) nutrition programs also seem to rank high in effectiveness as well as acceptability to the users, resulting in numerous benefits such as decreased food insecurity scores, better nutrient intake outcomes, weight loss, increased energy levels, etc. for their (short- and mid-term) users (Flynn, Reinert, & Schiff, 2013; Katcher, Ferdowsian, Hoover, Cohen, & Barnard, 2010; Levin, Ferdowsian, Hoover, Green, & Barnard, 2010; Moore, McGrievy, & Turner-McGrievy, 2015; Turner-McGrievy, Davidson, & Wilcox, 2014). This is also apparent in the increase of interest in plant-based diets in Slovenia, with groups such as 'Veganska Iniciativa' (Vegan Initiative) and 'Slovensko vegansko društvo' (Slovenian Vegan Society) leading the way since 2011 and 2012, respectively, providing educational resources and organizing workshops, as well as doing outreach and offering support via increasingly popular projects such as '30 Day Vegan Challenge' that seem to result in high retention rates. However, there still appear to be reservations

regarding plant-based diets being culturally acceptable to the general public, particularly when coming from policy makers, presenting a barrier to its recommendation, implementation and reaping of the disproportional benefits such diets may bring *vis-a-vis* other dietary regimes in terms of health- and environmental impacts, as well to advancement of social justice issues (Fiddes, 2004; Katcher et al., 2010; Nordgren, 2012; van Dooren et al., 2014).

With recognition that diets ought to change if we are to feed growing world population appropriately and healthfully within the means of the global ecosystem, certain societal groups are bound to comply and try to lead by example. In Slovenia, that group appears to account for about 0,5-2,1% of the population, majority of which is relatively young and female with above-average level of education (Crnic, 2013; IVZ, 2009). In an article on social aspects of vegetarianism in Slovenia, Crnic (2013) discusses vegetarianism as a heterogeneous and controversial practice, as food carries with it a range of meanings and is embedded in social relations of power and hierarchy, as well as the processes of inclusion and exclusion. As a marginal practice, vegetarianism presents a challenge to the dominant dietary paradigm, as well as the wider social system in which it is embedded. This is rather salient in everyday discourses surrounding vegetarianism that is often stigmatised, and there seems to be quite some resistance, ridicule, and even active persecution of it - especially when plant-based diets are presented as a choice for adults as well as children - perhaps for the fear or transmission of deviating practices to the next generation(s), which may "represent a serious threat to the established social order" (Crnic, 2013, p.1117). With the practice boasting a quite high retention rate of practitioners despite such resistance, we may be able to shed light on how they are making it work in the long term. I do this by exploring people's everyday experiences as vegan pioneers during their dietary transition and beyond it, focusing on changing of their daily practices, as well as how these practices may be resonating (or not) with their social circles. In line with that, it is equally important to investigate how changing of dietary practices may be resisted, negotiated, and/or constrained within the bounds of lifeworlds we inhabit, and what individual and systemic changes could perhaps tip the scale of choice architecture towards sustainable options.

To do this, I next provide an overview of literature review and operational concepts to help navigate research on this particular topic. In Chapter 3, I couple these with the theoretical framework that is suitable to capture the essence of this research and provide useful tools for its detailed exploration and analysis. In Chapter 4, I proceed with description of choice of participants, study design and detail the procedure of data collection. The gathered data is then ordered and presented in Chapter 5, and is then followed by discussion that includes summary of findings, as well as reflection on the research process and some suggestions for future research.

2 CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

As human beings, there is hardly anything we do that is completely autonomous and devoid of social context. As much as one may contribute towards shaping their environment - including the social one -, the environment is not something that merely passively responds, but rather actively shapes our experiences in return. This is perhaps especially obvious when we are talking about food, as eating is a highly social activity, with our environment influencing our relationship with the people around us as well as shaping our habits by encouraging (or even prescribing) some actions while deterring us from (or even sanctioning) others.

In this chapter, I therefore explore meaningful concepts that relate to food preparation and consumption in order to outline its role and importance in people's daily lives, particularly as it pertains to the social domain. I do that by (1) looking at functions of food and meanings we ascribe to it and derive from it as social beings, and (2) exploring commensality and its effects on people's dietary habits. Finally, I address the (3) information and gaps in existing research as it relates to plant-based diets as a readily available sustainable dietary option.

2.1 Food: Functions, symbolic meaning and society

Food represents a site where nature and culture converge, and has, as such, a whole range of connotations: from eating being a biological process providing nourishment, to a source of enjoyment, indulgence in familiarity, expression of societal norms, to expression of one's status or deeply held values - becoming an object of strong emotional investments and extending the domain of eating from being an end in itself to also being a means to an end (Arppe, Makela, & Vaananen, 2011; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Fischler, 1988). Dietary patterns and food selection are a function of psychosocial, behavioral and environmental elements, and the process embedded in social relationships is highly complex and multifaceted (Bove, Sobal, & Rauschenbach, 2003; Nestle et al., 2009).

Food choice - though often conceptualized by scientists and policy-maker alike as highly individual (with behavioural models providing a template for change of one's knowledge, attitudes and actions) - , is not something that is in its very nature decidedly individual and/or set in stone, even though a significant body of social science research insists on viewing individuals as highly autonomous and rational agents, whose actions may be influenced through exposure to certain missing and/or obscured information, or by appealing to a certain quality and/or value they hold dear. Rather, food choice can be better understood as a inherently dynamic and social phenomenon, even though socio-cultural meanings associated with consumption of certain food items or food groups are all too often downplayed or mentioned as an afterthought (Beverland, 2014; Murcott, 1995).

Aside of being subject to the wider societal context, the urging for recognition of the role of wider cultural environment and family members as enablers of dietary change is dating back for over 70 years (Mead, 1943). Various cognitive dimensions of food (e.g. symbolism and meanings) are neatly related to social interactions and interpersonal relationships. As food traditions connect members of families (as well as various other societal groups), they are part of culture as much as language (Spock & Needlman, 2012). Although they are often taken for granted and rendered invisible at a first sight, they still play a significant role in the construction of personal and social identities - be it related to gender, family or other group membership (Paisley, Beanlands, Goldman, Evers, & Chappell, 2008). This has also been well covered in research on transitioning towards vegetarian and vegan (commonly referred to as veg*n) diets and lifestyles (Brady & Ventresca, 2014; Calvert, 2014; Haverstock & Forgays, 2012; Rodan & Mummery, 2016; Rothgerber, 2014; Thomas, 2016; Yeh, 2015).

Norms and traditions may well play a part in everyday eating habits as they get tied with identities, dictating rules of what is eaten and how to behave at meal-times (Fieldhouse, 1998). As a social phenomenon that denotes norms and values, eating behaviour has even been characterized as "ontological security", serving as a sign of normalcy and order (Giddens 1991 in Paisley et al. 2008). But symbolic meaning of food is perhaps especially visible when a change occurs that disrupts established dietary patterns, either following a disease diagnosis (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer,

hypoglycemia) or personal reasons (e.g. attempting to lose weight, practicing religion or complying with other belief systems). Such dietary changes can entail reduced intake of dietary fat, restriction of total caloric intake, elimination or reduction of specific food items, and introduction of novel foods (Paisley et al., 2008). Since food falls under a rather personal domain which is interwoven with a myriad of meanings beyond mere satisfaction of our physical caloric and nutrient needs, the responses to dietary changes may well result in a ripple effect and extend beyond the 'patient zero' to their partner and nuclear family.

As our food choices are tightly aligned with our personal tastes and preferences on the one hand and symbolic meaning ranging from identity display to emotional comfort on the other, our dietary habits are relatively stable and serve as an anchor that resists attempts of dietary change. This may well be why most people find it so difficult to accept, achieve and maintain, regardless of reasons for change (Paisley et al., 2008; Rydén & Sydner, 2011). It is then not surprising that the changer's significant others may display a range of emotional responses to their new dietary practices, including (but not limited to) skepticism, sadness, frustration, anger, excitement, cooperation and encouragement. The latter mainly occur if one is willing to redefine the norms and mental patterns through which they make the sense of the world. Otherwise, they will likely cling to the traditionally normative practices, with their reactions subsequently presenting as more negative in general and defensive in particular. Significant others and society at large may thus play an enabling, neutral or inhibiting role (while they themselves may also be affected in return) when it comes to social support of changer's dietary change by providing or denying comfort, assistance or information to the changer.

2.2 Food: From commensality to dietary concordance

It has been suggested that people never eat alone or uninfluenced by others, because we always eat in the context of 'internal society' which is made up of the relationships we have experienced when young but remains influential beyond that period alone as we remain subject to external judgment and expectations about (un)acceptable feeding experiences (Menzies, 1970, p. 223). Albeit relatively stable over time, eating patterns are still subject to influence from various kinds of personal relationships, and can thus be seen as socially transmissible as we sit down together to enjoy the same food, activity, and to talk (de Castro, 1994; Kemmer, Anderson, & Marshall, 1998). Despite the fact that dietary individualization is common in contemporary food culture, people tend to maintain commensal relationships primarily with their families, and particularly so with their nuclear family, which is the most fundamental commensal unit (Sobal & Nelson, 2003).

Commensality as a term that denotes phenomena of eating with other people has been under increasing scientific scrutiny (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). It remains common to eat about two daily meals together as partners or as a family, especially the more substantial ones (Feunekes, de Graaf, Meyboom, & van Staveren, 1998). Shared eating fulfills more than just fueling and nurturing of our bodies in the biological sense or dietary efficiency; it also has a symbolic importance as it satisfies a need for interaction with particular others through the facilitation of communication, and acts as a medium for expressing love and care (Brown & Miller, 2002; Kemmer et al., 1998). Conviviality in turn establishes and reinforces social ties, regularizes personal relationships, and establishes and maintains certain forms of social integration and common identities (Sobal & Nelson, 2003; Symons, 1994). The preparation of separate meals is hence not preferable from the stance of a shared experience as well as from the practical one (Kemmer et al., 1998).

Be it within or outside of the household context, food is often a central focus of the gathering, with meals depending heavily on customs and culture (Rydén & Sydner, 2011). Commensal eating patterns have been known to reflect and affect the social relationships of individuals, contributing both towards in-group bonding and conflict. Hence, much is at stake when people negotiate food choices: individuals adhering to diets that vary from the norm can be at risk of being (or feeling) isolated and alienated (Bove et al., 2003; Kemmer et al., 1998; Rydén & Sydner, 2011; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). As a result, if an individual changes their diet - for whatever reason - , the transition will affect their social relationships with others, although not always in the same way or potency. Similarly, the efforts to change someone's diet as an extension of nurturing and care through food choices, may either be appreciated by the receiving party, or it may rock the boat significantly.

When it comes to food and dietary behavior, family members and friends are generally associated with greater social facilitation and social support relative to other relationships (de Castro, 1994; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). Sharing of homes, kitchens and social networks often coincides with eating together, and as people often share at least some of their meals with others, it is likely that the social relationships will influence their own dietary change process (Rydén & Sydner, 2011). This may in turn reflect in various stages of dietary concordance, and even dietary convergence: when a person in a regular commensal unit changes their diet, others might follow, resulting in a move towards eating (more) similarly or even eating identical diets (Cohen et al., 1991; Savoca and Miller, 2001; Sexton et al., 1987; Shattuch et al., 1992; White et al., 1991 - in Sobal and Nelson, 2003; Bove et al., 2003). Sometimes, one's food choices can even be fairly accurately predicted on the basis of what the other subject had eaten at a previous occasion, which resonates heavily with the processes of social influence (de Castro, 1994; Sobal & Nelson, 2003).

People's social worlds seem to be focused on the nuclear family, partners and friends, with which they often maintain commensal relationships, perhaps especially due to the meanings related to the sharing of a 'proper meal' which appears to extend to a demonstration of family solidarity and family values (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). The family meal as an event is valued for the time and effort invested in it, as well as for its acceptance and appreciation by its eaters. Such family meals also tend to reflect balance with its content and structure - both symbolically and nutritionally (Marshall, 1995 in Kemmer et al., 1998).

Social networks appear to be critical in adopting and maintaining of one's diet, and veg*n diets are no exception; however, social stigma as well as the pressure of others to conform are commonly quoted as barriers to continuation of dietary adherence. For example, general findings in New York and British studies point to respondents' nuclear families not being supportive of their vegetarian diets, and individuals were hence oftentimes suppressing vegetarian tendencies until they reached a certain degree of independence from parental control (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Jabs, Devine, & Sobal, 1998a; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998). On the other hand, sometimes veg*n practitioners would stand by their decision regardless and withstand the authority pressure; they may quote their 'no other choice' outlook or their newly acquired practices, as well as the newly acquired social circle of supportive like-minded peers as helpful, and oftentimes they would also go on the record saying their parents and other close social contacts have come a long way within years into their veg*n 'project', partially or fully restoring conviviality they had previously experienced (Hirschler, 2011; Twine, 2014).

When it comes to communal meals, then, it is important to find the compromise between food norms, nutritionally adequacy and culturally appropriate food on one side, and individual's needs and preferences on the other in order to feed the entire family without jeopardizing the social context of a meal as a pleasant event on every occasion (Thorsted & Anving, 2010). This may prove to be particularly difficult in light of not only past habits and tradition, but also due to the increasing popularity of various axiomatically distinct food plans, gurus and popular diets, which promise they are the solution to all individual problems and more, implicating the lack of scientific consensus on what the healthiest and most environmentally friendly diet might be. Moreover, they may even be insinuating that science is completely in the dark on these issues - causing much confusion and setting all arguments and 'opinions' on the same foot with grave disregard for scientific process. On the other hand, certain societal groups that are committed to plant-based diets for variety of reasons (e.g. veg*ns) may be striving for the recognition of their diets as nutritionally adequate and appropriate as per wide scientific consensus, which seems to be contested by other prominent figures in the local medical community, particularly so in going against established traditions of Slovenian national nutritional guidelines and school meal provision framework, although some work has been published that attempts to at least partially close the gap (Orel, Sedmak, & Mis, 2014).

Of course, as the number and variety of participants and their requirements grows, it may be increasingly difficult to cater to everyone's needs and wishes within the confines of making a single communal meal as to save time and other resources, and to reflect and preserve the group identity. Day care centers and schools, to draw on an example, are often in charge of feeding and, through it, educating large groups, and preparing a number of different dishes at every meal may become increasingly troublesome and inefficient. Still, the organisation of kitchens is changing, so that -

much like in a hospital - all pupils and students may enjoy appropriate food should they display sensitivities to certain foods. While this is by large a case, similar pleas for adjusted meals on religious or personal belief grounds might well be contested, and possibilities to bring your own food with to be served at a mealtime limited. In the light of catering to various health and/or religion-related needs, some researchers also question what kind of school meal provision system - and its implementation - may be most conducive to obtaining nutritional, social and educational goals (Andersen, Holm, & Baarts, 2015). Even though the inquiries for meatless meals in kindergartens and schools have been rising due to the raise in awareness regarding environmental sustainability, population health, and social justice - and the subsequent lifestyle change -, there has been surprisingly little progress made in, first, giving a seal of approval to veg*n diets, and second, accommodating them in public education institutions that are by law obliged to feed the pupils and students who go there.

2.3 Gaps in (social) research on plant-based diets and implications for future research

Although veganism has been around for a long time, with the word to describe the lifestyle coined by Donald Watson in 1944, it has only gained momentum of its own within the scientific literature in the past decade. Before it was much more often grouped with or nested under or the vegetarian label in social sciences, and with other plant-based (sometimes including pescetarian, vegetarian or Mediterranean) diets in the domain of natural sciences. As the movement has been growing and the numbers of its participants increased to millions worldwide, and with distinguishable characteristics of their own, veganism currently remains and under-researched area that deserves further inquiry, especially in the light of challenges we are facing from the most local to the global scale.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, veg*n related research has come a long way from making a philosophical case for veganism and looking into initial 'reasons for change' and how attitudes may relate to certain behaviours. Entries in medical and environmental journals on the topic have risen dramatically, and veganism has been introduced as a normatively deviant minority practice in the domain of social sciences as well, exploring personal accounts of transitioning and cultural movement characteristics alike, lending itself as a place for looking into subcultures of punk and straight edge (Cherry, 2006; Haenfler, 2006; Larsson, Rönnlund, Johansson, & Dahlgren, 2003). A number of authors invested their time in exploring various group-identities such as gender, race, class and sexuality (Adams, 2011; Brady & Ventresca, 2014; Potts & Parry, 2010); adding titles in the field of discourse analysis (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Cook, 2015; Rodan & Mummery, 2016; Sneijder & te Molder, 2009); and illuminating the human/animal relationships within the field of critical animal studies (Taylor & Twine, 2014); the case was also made for extending personhood to non-human animals (Holdron, 2013; Taylor & Twine, 2014).

Still, vegan eating as a potential sustainable transition opportunity is under-researched in the domain of sociology, with the research mainly covering just the subject of past family and peer reaction to one's adoption of a veg*n diet, with scarce coverage of overall enabling and disabling factors that might be at play. There are a couple of notable exceptions, such as the works of Twine (2014) in exploring vegan transition and Bove et al. (2003) in the field of commensality, in which veg*nism is featured as but one of the various individual dietary regimes that may come face to face in when a couple marries, and it explores dietary convergence processes and patterns that are inherent to it. This gap is troubling since veganism as a movement is fastly growing and still being seen more as a fad than as a serious alternative dietary contender (hindered by hegemonic normative practices of the dominant 'meat culture'), especially as plant-based diets may be adequate and already readily available to significant populations as a means of addressing personal and population health, issues of animal welfare and animal rights, as well as those of environmental sustainability.

As eating less animal products entails not only changing certain activities regarding eating behaviour, but also conscious decision making and habitual, automatic and subconscious actions, thus social sciences have an important piece of the puzzle to contribute in this regard - be it in analyzing current practices and trends, easing the transition of interested or otherwise involved parties, as well as maintaining a more sustainable diet that will benefit humans, animals and the environment alike (Sobal et al., 2012). As veganism is on the rise, research of vegan food practices in its social domain is

increasingly relevant for understanding how individuals manage to negotiate and maintain their chosen diet *within* a family setting and broader social milieu that is implicated in one's everyday life, particularly when raising a family. Equally, it can aid in exploring the potential of a plant-based diet to become reflected in practices of nuclear family members (partners, parents, and children), and as such contributing to erosion of meat culture.

Grieshaber (1997) makes a case for sociological analysis of routine food practices, suggesting it has a potential to illuminate changing patterns and to investigate ways in which household are organised and managed. In other words, food practices as a window into everyday life would offer researchers to shed light onto food-related issues within various social contexts (Punch, McIntosh, & Emond, 2010; Twine, 2014). Twine's work (2014) seems to provide an excellent starting point in expanding the field of commensality and environmental studies by utilizing social practice theory to address the stump in sociological literature on sustainable food practices by exploring social relationships and vegan transition. Twine includes responses of friends and family to one's (announcement of) veganism, social negotiation between vegans and their immediate social circle, as well as the role of negotiation in normalisation of vegan eating practice, and argues transgressing deeply embedded social eating norms and habitual practices often entails a significant social response, ranging from one's immediate social circle to mainstream media. Through the collection of these accounts it became obvious that the main difficulty of vegan practitioners laid with the social responses and/or existing social infrastructure rather than with motivation or access to plant-based foods. Veganism faces unique challenges in recruiting and maintaining practitioners, and the challenges play out in everyday struggles and negotiations between novel or experienced vegan practitioners on the one hand, and those reproducing the work of the animal-industrial complex on the other (Twine, forthcoming). The family and friends of vegan individuals, however, can also be conceptualized as 'non-practicing practitioners', who through occasional reproduction of vegan food practices inadvertently become 'non-vegan advocates', playing an important role in normalizing responses to vegan ways (and vegan eating in particular).

Since commensal eating practices are central to 'doing family', caring and affection (or, in the case of schools, bonding between peers and nutrition education, especially as it pertains to cultural food norms), places of disruption and contestation are an important site for future research. This is especially a pressing domain since various ways of accommodation of vegan eaters in a normative omnivorous milieu is already taking place in everyday settings around the world, and the vegan trend seems to be on the rise everywhere - including in Slovenia.

As practice theory appears to provide a useful lens to particularities of food practices, especially when changes and transitions are concerned, my aim is to expand the coverage of lived experiences of individuals as they make a change towards following a vegan diet, and how they manage to maintain it while having to navigate the reality of living in a non-vegan world where competitive traditional practice is thriving and where validity of a vegan diet is still very much contested. The focus will be especially on a variety of socially-contingent settings and contexts which are rich in value and meaning - all of which is reflected in robustness of tradition.

In the following chapter, I thus explore the theory of social practice as a theoretical framework and its usability in exploring the subject of this paper.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I provide an explanation of my choice of a theory that is well equipped to guide research on sustainable consumption and transitions in the context of situated everyday practices by providing opportunities to explore the makeup and making of a practice. Furthermore, I was interested in a theory that would provide tools for exploration (and later analysis) of opportunities and challenges actors may be facing in terms of changing their habitual practices and hence for rearranging connections between social and technical elements of practices. Similarly, it was important to be able to arrive at an explanation of how routines (or their adaptations) may help towards stabilization of practices and hence enabling subjects to perform activities efficiently (or creatively), enabling long-term commitment.

In this chapter, I first (3.1) set out to describe the Social Practice Theory in its most general terms and outline its basic premises, components and processes that bring practices to life, as well as why and how these may change or disintegrate over time. In the next section (3.2), I elaborate on the application of the theory in the domain of food and dietary consumption, particularly in terms of identifying potential for changing these towards more sustainable practice. Here, I also summarise the work that was published on this subject so far, as well as identify a few new concepts that emerged from food-related research and can further supplement the theory. Finally, in the last section (3.3), I identify gaps in existing research as it relates to sustainable food transitions and present the case for addressing that stump with this research project, and arriving at the research question that will be addressed, explored and answered throughout the remainder of this report.

3.1 Social Practice Theory

When we are interested in establishments of (new) equilibriums and their maintenance in the domain of everyday life, a number of sociologists suggest the lens of social practice theory (SPT) might offer a useful range of concepts to combine to demonstrate the evolution of changes within systems and their corresponding practices - including its emergence and diffusion - by studying everyday life, domestic practices and consumption (Røpke, 2009). It differs from linear individual-focused behavioural models in that it takes into account that preferences, habits and behaviours develop in a *social context,* offering particular attention to routine, collective and conventional consumption (Halkier & Jensen, 2011b; Holtz, 2014; Røpke, 2009; E. Shove, 2005; Warde, 2005). As a middle-range theory originating from the works of scholars such as Bourdieu (1972a, 1980, 1994 in Bartiaux, 2014), Giddens (1984 in Bartiaux 2014), Butler (1990 in Halkier and Jensen 2011), and Foucault (1978 in Halkier and Jensen 2011), it provides a middle ground for interplay between agency and structure, allowing for a more integrated approach to understanding consumer behaviour by putting practices centre-stage (Holtz, 2014). This is particularly important in the context of western societies, where less and different consumption is required for achieving sustainable levels of resource use, but also to manage environmental and public health.

Social practices refer to everyday practices and the way these are typically and habitually carried out in a society, including but not limited to the areas of eating, transport, and personal hygiene that all present a meaningful part of people's everyday activities (Holtz, 2014; E Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Although practices may start out as activities that are carried out by an individual, they are also social as they are similar for various individuals over space and time, include utilization of skills (and its building up), generation and changing of meaning, as well as inclusion (and consumption) of material artifacts, all closely tied to a larger aggregation of individuals - a collective accomplishment that is society (Andreas Reckwitz, 2002; E Shove et al., 2012).

Any practice at any given time is presumed to consist of three broad categories of elements: (1) materials (physical aspects of a practice - artifacts, technologies, human body), (2) ideas or images (all issues relevant to meaning, understanding of the material, including symbols, understandings, beliefs and emotions), and (3) skills (knowledge, competences, know-how required to perform the practice) (Andreas Reckwitz, 2002; Røpke, 2009; E Shove et al., 2012). These non-clear-cut categories are actively and recursively integrated through everyday performance of a certain practice by its carriers, and practices are stabilized through repetition of performances (or the absence of it) by

practitioners that carry them out as they enact them, affecting both *practices-as-performances* and *practices-as-entities* (E Shove et al., 2012). In other words, practices are formed, maintained, changed and eradicated as a consequence of dynamics of linking between the elements of which a particular practice consists (see Figure 1 below). The difference in dynamics will effectively account for a difference between reproduction for stability of a practice, or re-organization of its elements for innovation (Hargreaves, Haxeltine, Longhurst, & Seyfang, 2011).
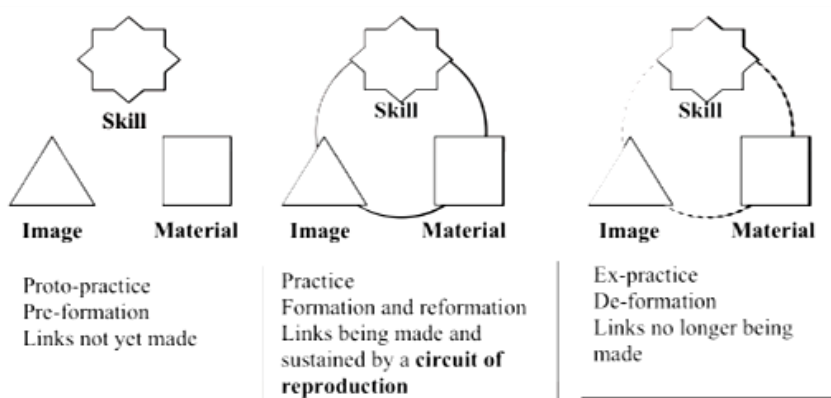
Figure 1: Proto-practices, practices and ex-practices (Shove et al., 2012, p. 25)

Practices are hence perhaps best defined as a routinized behaviour that consists of an interconnected 'block' of elements that cannot be further reduced to single consisting elements (Reckwitz, 2002). Such a block represents a relatively enduring pattern while a practice is reproduced by its carriers and new individuals are recruited to the practice according to their background and history, adding to the reproduction of a practice across space and time (Holtz, 2014; A. Reckwitz, 2002; Røpke, 2009).

Actions and activities attempting to challenge status quo of current systems of practice can thus focus on changing the elements of which they consist or the connections between them; through circulation, employment and development of elements can we thus track their evolution, along with the changing of their carriers (Holtz, 2014; Andreas Reckwitz, 2002; E Shove et al., 2012).

So far, most of the work on SPT has focused on so-called 'circuits of reproduction' - on normality rather than innovation, exploring how (1) elements of a single practice cohere and hold each other in tact and increase their stability; looking into how (2) practices become interconnected and form complexes or systems; and how (3) temporal dynamics offer insight into path-dependence, shedding the light on the past and potential future evolution of practices as well (Hargreaves et al., 2011). Circuits of reproduction entail that practices one currently carries will further shape what the carrier will encounter in his or her daily life, and how they will respond to them (mainly depending on how easily they would fit into one's existing complexes and systems of practice). By referencing practices from everyday-life, SPT maintains that boundaries between distinct systems are rather artificial, since practices (and complexes of practices) feed on and off each other, effectively reinforcing (or potentially challenging) all these different regimes as they cut-cross them in a horizontal manner.

Holtz (2014) proposes an additional component to better understanding of what it is that glues each habitual and socially shared practice together. He suggest that social practice theories be extended to include a set of *processes* operating on elements which result in forming a 'block' of elements that adhere to one another. A starting point is an assumption that for a practice to be successful (i.e. to persist and spread through its reproduction), a certain *coherence* of the elements involved is required, as not to cause inconvenience when an individual engages in a routine performing of an activity. Two base conditions are theorised to be indispensable if such a coherence is to be achieved: (1) material and image must fit, meaning the individual should not experience strong cognitive dissonance, since that would provoke a change in either of those elements to accommodate a better fit; (2) material and skills must fit, meaning the individual has to acquire appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out habitual behaviour efficiently and effortlessly, without having to rely on well-deliberated conscious decisions that invoke significant cognitive effort (Holtz, 2014).

The proposed processes that link components of practices within and between individuals are derived from the routine character of practices (most people act habitually most of the time) as well as from them being in a social domain, hence often shared (allowing for clustering through peer influence). The processes include (1) adapting meaning to material (or vice versa) to enhance cognitive consistency; (2) adapting competence to (newly utilized) materials through learning; (3) habituation through repetition and acting without deliberation on this vs alternative practices. The higher the level of habituation, the lower the change that the individual will reflect on alternative possibilities and potentially change their behaviour and the other way around - the more ingrained the habit is, the higher the mismatch between components (low coherence) must be to break the habit. Additionally, the processes include (4) adapting materials according to its coherence with meaning and competences they hold, or based on observations of activities and materials used by others; (5) exchanging meaning with other individuals (particularly with ones most similar to them) that may lead to an alignment of the meaning of different individuals.

3.2 Diet and sustainability through the lens of Practice Theory

Although social practice theories have in recent years received increasing attention - particularly as means of addressing the shortcomings of still commonly used linear models of behavioural change that are implicated in various policies addressing issues of sustainability - , they have so far been mostly descriptive, leaving the mechanisms behind their evolution (including emergence, diffusion, change and decay) of practices poorly explored (Holtz, 2014). Of the body of literature dealing with issues of sustainability, most is dedicated to topics of energy and transport, with only a few studies addressing food in some way or another. Growing interest in applying practice theory to the domain of consumption resulted in addressing questions such as 'how do changes in practices occur?', and 'what are the levers for influencing practices and nudging them into a sustainable direction?'.

Food-related research so far has been scarce but diverse, indicative of a wide scope of applicability and growing popularity of the practice theory approach. In the following paragraphs, I present a quick overview of a few subjects and lessons that I may be able to draw on in carrying out my own food practice research.

Bartiaux and Reátegui Salmón (2014), for example, include food in their investigation of green consumption in daily practices related to tourism, energy consumption and mobility, questioning the role of close personal relationships in sustaining (or not) of daily life practices. The authors found social interactions very meaningful for the framework of theories of practice (even though these theories do not provide an explicit place for them), as they serve as "impeding structures that narrow down our alternatives for actions" (Ilmonen, 2001, p. 14). They stress the importance of reference persons, cultural intermediaries, friends and acquaintances for changing practices *beyond* their role of mere linking of components, since the influence of other household members as partners in domestic tasks provide points where "my normal routines are confronted with your strange habits" (Ehn & Löfgren, 2009, p. 15).

Their perception of practice thus aligns with the one of Schatzki (1996), where practice is deemed both a performance and a coordinated entity, with Shove (2003) stressing the importance of spatiotemporal coordination between multiple practitioners, and Hargreaves (2011) introducing the concept of "communities of practice" in which members collaborate to perform a practice - underlining negotiations and conflicts when a change in practices occurs. Practice change is thus argued to be an outcome of continued commitment in practices of closely-related persons, and seems to be achieved easier in smaller households than in larger ones. Greater success in greening household practices might also arise if mothers/wives can control either direct or indirect control over them (bringing up the concept of gender and domestic power), particularly in cases where close personal relationships do not necessarily share similar knowledge and a coherent teleoaffective structure - a linking of ends, means and moods - to perform a particular practice (Bartiaux & Salmón, 2014). Concepts of gender, power and age were similarly also explored in the work of Halkier & Jensen (2011a), but they also shed light onto how food and non-food-related practices, such as job practices, mothering practices and socialising practices may interact and influence nutritional outcomes.

Drawing on learning through membership in "communities of practice" as well, Sahakian and Wilhite (2013) explore a move towards more sustainable forms of consumption through people being exposed to new practices and involved in experimenting with them. By building the case on consumption areas with the highest negative impact in relation to a range of environmental indicators, namely food, transport and heating of homes (Huppes et al., 2006; Tukker et al., 2006), they turn attention to designing more efficient solutions by shifting focus from technological silver bullet solutions to the understanding and changing of everyday practices. Though such practices include routinized activities, they are far from static, and the authors explore how practices change - and can be made to change - on examples of consumption of bottled and tap water; putting a city on a diet along with adjustments in city infrastructure to allow for safe and convenient biking and walking as alternatives to car travel; and addressing food miles by putting local foods first. In the latter example in particular, knowledge transfer through demonstrations of new practices proved to be a powerful way of stimulating change, especially in providing multiple learning opportunities across various elements of practice - from providing heirloom vegetables, sharing recipes and menus, and meal demonstration. In such a participatory, social context, gaining new skills and knowledge through engagement in and with new practices, social learning is proposed as a form of initiation into new communities of practice.

A similar learning experience regarding sustainable food was provided in a study by Warner, Callaghan and de Vreede (2014), where hosts invited friends who they thought would be interested to join them for a sustainable meal in their homes - an experience centered around an adult education approach to project-based leisure. The authors recognize that certain characteristics in meaningful, interactive experiences can facilitate food citizenship through enabling critical reflection and role modeling, including engaged experiences, structured activities, and sustainable food norms. Authors deem personal social context, engaging experience, social norms and social networks are concepts essential for explaining such reported changes.

Securing of "supportive environments" for health in the face of ecosystem collapse was also explored by Poland, Dooris and Haluza-Delay (2011). By drawing on practice theory, they advocate rethinking education for social change and put forward concepts of transformative learning and cultural change, juxtaposing it with reliance on technological advance and incremental change that presumably serve powerful vested interests. They argue that social context is crucial in adult learning, again lending on the concept of "communities of practice" in building resilient supportive environments. Association with such a reflexive community of practice is of vital importance, as well as locally specific information on ecologically sound practices, critique of existing social structures and a sense of the possible (Haluza-DeLay, 2008).

Food-related research has also covered specific topics such as promotion of organic food consumption following the turnaround of agricultural policies (Brand,2010). Here, the analysis of media discourses and trust, as well as disruption of consumption habits, pressure on policies, existence of alternative (niche) practices, formation of new discourses, as well as political, economic and social alliances that consumers engage in, are deemed as preconditions for successful process of sustainability transition. Furthermore, Brand highlights that social and cultural embeddedness of practices need to be taken into account, as experiences do not easily translate from one setting to another.

Supporting the hypothesis of comprehensive alignment of various factors was also supported in a carbon labeling experiment on university canteen food, as it brought along a temporary de-routinisation of the practice rather than superficial noticing or annoyance, resulting in increased levels of reflexity, discussions and learning processes on the part of canteen visitors (Spaargaren, van Koppen, Janssen, Hendriksen, & Kolfschoten, 2013). Related to Twine's concept of 'non-practicing practitioners', they also make a note of indirect behavioural impacts through increased dialogue and learning in social settings.

3.3 Exploration of vegan food practices

Even though we may well be facing an uncertain future as a result of our past and current *modus operandi*, the society we live does not seem to be very conducive to changing its long-established ways, despite widespread agreement in scientific community regarding changes that need to take place if we are to avoid more trouble down the line.

However, there is always a certain amount of discrepancy between individual and societal pace of change, the former lending itself better to more abrupt and the latter to more gradual change. There is rich coverage of individual's motivations for taking the leap and changing their food/lifestyle practices in respect to vegetarianism/veganism, but the research is scarce on taking consideration of everyday (social) implications linked to the rich social milieu we live in, looking at a myriad of factors that influence one's dietary change and maintenance.

This particular research project builds on findings on well-researched sustainable and feasible changes regarding our diets, and fills multiple gaps in literature as it goes beyond individual motivations, values, and attitudes in characterizing behavioural change by (1) adding to the field social sciences of sociology of eating through exploring domain of veganism as a minority practice that presents a challenge to traditional, long-established eating practices, and (2) complementing practice theory research on sustainable transitions, particularly as they pertain to food consumption.

My aim is to shed light on the lived everyday experiences of vegans in Slovenia as early adopters of a sustainable dietary practice in a variety of everyday settings, such as their social circles, and in a variety of circumstances (e.g. life stages). Researching through membership in communities of practice where people are exposed to new practices and/or experimenting with them in everyday settings offers a more grounded approach to understanding transitioning practices rather than conducting social experiments, particularly as educators are increasingly recognizing the importance of informal learning in social and leisure contexts where habitual patterns can be "unfreezed" and dismantled by bringing practices into discursive consciousness (Warner et al., 2014). Different food practices may be carried out by individuals, but not in isolation from other participants, physical objects and information flows which constitute the practice, which necessarily entails collision of practices and the elements they consist on.

In the course of this research, I pay close attention to experiences of individual practitioners (prior, during and after one's transition to veganism), allowing me to expand on the existing knowledge on sustainable dietary practices as encapsulated in the everyday lived reality of a Slovenian vegan. Here, the focus is on the elements of both traditionally normative *and* innovative vegan practices that were either limiting or conducive in one's adopting and maintaining of a vegan diet.

The Research Question leading the exploration of this project is thus as follows:

How do social practices shape and sustain the transition to a vegan diet?

I will attempt to answer it by exploring the questions (1) *'What helps people become and stay vegan?'* and (2) *'What are the obstacles to people becoming and staying vegan?'* through analysis of the individual elements of Social Practice Theory.

4 METHODOLOGY

Now that I have zoomed in onto the research topic - sustainable food transition - and identified the area of interest that would benefit from further inquiry - exploration of lived experiences of everyday food-related practices -, as well as proposed the way of addressing it - via Theory of Social Practice - , I next expand on the rationale for application of specific techniques used to identify, select, and process the information.

In 4.1, I explain the process of procuring a suitable sample of participants. In 4.2, I show how I went about choosing a suitable data collection method and outlining the research procedure which my data generation and analysis would later benefit from. Lastly, in 4.3 I explain what measures I relied on throughout the data collection process, as well as how I generated and processed the data in order to effectively answer the research question.

4.1 Participants

To investigate the phenomena and answer the research question, I utilized multiple case study research design in order to get a fuller insight of the researched phenomena by studying multiple accounts of people's experience with adopting and maintaining a vegan diet.

The sample consisted of 17 participants (which represented the point of data saturation), all residing in Slovenia, who a) identified as vegans, and b) were parents - as to cover the widest array of personal circumstances. The second criteria allowed for a wide scope of data gathering, as it enabled me to cover a number of different situations participants would have encountered up to the present time (transitioning and/or maintaining their diet while cohabiting with primary family members where they might not have been primarily responsible for their own meals; living in one's own own household alone and or/ with a partner; raising of children alone, with a like-minded or a non-veg*n partner, or with assistance of a third person/institution). This participant pool lend itself well to in-depth information collection of unmediated and first-hand accounts of vegans' own everyday food practice experiences and social relationships that are closely tied to them, and helped with investigation of various kinds of struggles and successes, learning to demand and negotiate, to compromise and by-pass, to fold and to insist, as needed. Through this, I was able to collect accounts that pertain to the use of elements that constitute a normative dietary practice, as well as those that relate to re-inventing of daily food practices - culminating in vegan innovation -, though the creative use of existing elements and the integration of new elements into the circuit of reproduction.

In an open call for research participation on a given topic, respondents were recruited through a number of online platforms (websites and pages of Slovenian veg*n-friendly groups, such as 'Slovensko vegansko društvo' (SVD) and 'Veganska iniciativa' (VI), as well as related forums and groups, such as 'Sovica' - a group for veg*n parents whose objective is to share experiences and advice on healthy eating and development of children. Given available statistical information on vegans obtained from SVD and VI, majority of participants were expected to be women of childbearing age - in this regard, my sample conforms to the expectation (please refer to Table 1; names have been changed to secure anonymity).

After potential participants have been acquainted with the specific objectives and procedures, interviews were scheduled at a time and place of their convenience where the interview was conducted and recorded for the purposes of this research.

Janja (32), vegan since 2011, mother of 4 (aged 5, 5, 3, 0.5), married
Marko (32), vegan since 2015, father of 2 (aged 3 and 0.5), married
Sara (34), vegetarian since 2000 and vegan since 2014, mother of 3 (aged 5, 3 and a newborn), partnered
Barbara (39), vegan since 2012, mother of 2 (aged 3 and 1.5), partnered
Nina (34), vegetarian since 1991 and vegan since 2012, mother of twins (aged 1.5), partnered
Tamara (42), vegetarian since 1999 and vegan since 2006, mother of 1 (aged 4), separated
Maja (21), vegan since 2015, mother of 1 (aged 4), single and single parent
Peter (48), vegetarian since 1991 and vegan since 2013, father of 1 (aged 12), separated
Polona (34), vegetarian since 2014 and vegan since 2016, mother of 3 (aged 5, 4 and 0.5), married
Larisa (30), vegetarian since childhood and vegan since 2013, mother of 1 (aged 3), partnered
Erik (35), vegan since 2011, father of 2 (aged 12 and 6), married
Eva (35), vegan since 2014, mother of 1 (aged 4), married
Manca (31), vegan since 2015, mother of 2 (aged 3 and 1), partnered
Mateja (33), vegan since 2009, mother of 1 (aged 2), partnered
Katja (26), vegan since 2011, mother of 2 (aged 2 and 1), partnered
Lea (31), vegan since 2012, mother of 1 (aged 2), single and single parent
Urban (29), vegan since 2010, father of twins (aged 2), married

Table 1: Participant profiles

4.2 Study design and procedure

As can be seen in the existing body of literature that makes use of (or the case for) Practice Theory framework, researchers have made use of numerous data collection methods (some have even analysed their previously gathered data and gave it a new spin through the application of practice theory). Still, some approaches seem to spring more naturally, particularly ethnographically inspired observational approach to conducting studies, allowing for real-time direct and un-negotiated access to social practice performances (Halkier & Jensen, 2011b; Hargreaves, 2008, 2011). As ethnography sheds light onto tacit, embedded knowledge that is implicit in certain activities while preserving the authenticity of the observed practice as much as possible through minimizing of the interference, it provides a clear starting point for acquiring a broad and deep perspective of phenomenon of interest.

However, ethnography-inspired observation comes with its own set of limitations, especially if employed as the only method of practice research. Meaningful social circles such as family settings and practices that are bound to it are difficult to explore and observe in-situ at any given point since the presence of an outsider-observer may easily cause disturbance in their usual dynamics. In my particular research, *in-situ* observations would not only be overly intrusive and in effect, skewing results towards unrepresentative of participants' reality, but also impractical or straight out impossible to a great extent as a lot of the information I set out to collect could only be accessed through recollection of- and reporting on past events and lived experiences. All this rendered observation unpractical and unfeasible and lead me to exploration of other methods that might produce quality data for analysis that would lend themselves well to SPT.

A collection of retrospective accounts obtained via in-depth interviewing, turned out to be the most promising way of gaining insight into development and change that shapes practices in a variety of settings and circumstances (Twine, 2014). This method of data collection could be (and has been) used on its own or coupled with observation, especially so as Social Practice Theory is by and large concerned with outlining practices by considering the 'doings' as well as 'sayings' of its carriers (Warde, 2005, p. 134). To ensure rich and robust data, I made use of life-course interviews in order to establish a timeline of key events and changes that followed subjects' life stories (particularly pertaining to

their adoption and practicing of veganism in the context of various family, housing, and educational settings). For an overview of topics that were covered during the course of an interview and example questions, please refer to Table 2.

	RESPONDENT	RESPONDENT'S PARTNER	RESPONDENT'S FAMILY	RESPONDENT'S CHILDREN	INSTITUTIONS
PRACTICE TRAJECTORIES - before transition - during transition - post transition (established practices) **PRACTICE ELEMENTS** - materials - skills - ideas **CARRIERS OF PRACTICES** - communities of practice - non-practicing practitioners	How did you come to consider changing your diet? Did you have any hesitations? What were they about? How did you get started? Who did you rely on for support? What resources did you rely on for information? What new things did you try and learn about? In what ways did veganism present challenges that you weren't facing before? How does your veganism fit into your everyday practices now? /.../	What were your partner's dietary habits and preferences like when you first met and how did they develop throughout the course of your relationship? What areas did you experience difficulties in (in relation to practicing veganism)? Why do you reckon what is? Has that chanced since, and if so, how? Is the diet of your partner influenced by yours? If so, how did that come about? If not, how do you make it work with shopping, cooking, upbringing of children etc.? /.../	Growing up, what were your family's dietary habits? Can you describe your everyday meal-time routines? How about holiday ones? What was your family's opinion regarding your own veganism? How did they communicate it? How did your interactions surrounding food change with your transition? Did that change over time, and if so, in what ways? How did factoring children into the picture influence their position on vegan diets? /.../	What diet do your children follow? Are there exceptions to the rule? How did the children react to the change of diet (if applicable)? How is their plant-based diet different from a standard Slovenian diet? How do you make sure they get all the nutrients they need? Does your child understand how and why they eat differently from most other people? What are responses of their peers and other people they encounter? /.../	What institutional arrangements lend themselves well to a vegan practitioner? Which ones proved more difficult to navigate? How did you go about it? What remains an area of struggle? Has it changed over time and if so, how? How do you think that could or should be further improved? /.../

Table 2: Getting insights through interviewing

These and similar questions set stage for a narrative-like approach to interviewing, which aimed to capture and represent personal dimensions of experience of respondents over time through gathering and analyzing information pertaining to the individual life world and cultural context (Clandinin and Connely 2000). The two are understood to be interdependent, and narrative inquiry moves between the internal and external world of the storyteller as embedded within their environments and across time.

As participants are encouraged to share information, they provide accounts and anecdotes that they themselves deem an important part of their journey, as they take part in a steered-but-only-semi-structured interview setting. Narrative provides for a very powerful tool in creating a sense of power and autonomy, particularly for minority and marginalized groups. Providing these individuals with a forum where a diversity of unheard voices and nuanced discussions is welcomed makes narrative inquiry a popular choice within emancipatory fields and empowering movements such as feminism. Narrative inquiry comes with its own set of recommendations as how to conduct and interview to best serve the respondents and data aggregation alike (see Table 3 for some examples on ways of soliciting answers).

WAYS OF HELPING PEOPLE TELL STORIES	
- begin from the "not knowing" position rather than an expert position	- Tell me about a time when ...
- invite characters into story	- Who were you with?
- invite temporal nature	- How long did that go on? what happened next?
- identify turning points	- When did you realise that it couldn't go on? - What were the biggest status passages in your life? - What difference has x made in your everyday life?
- explore moments of tectonic shifts	- When did you realize ...? - How did you come to ...? - What do you think about that now?
- meaning making	- What was hard about making a change? - What was x like for you? What did it mean to you that they responded in this way? Are there other stories like that that come to mind?

	- What kind of sense did you make of all that?
- cultural context (giving details of values, beliefs, habits etc.)	- How did you know that ....? - Why do you think that happened? - What did you think about that? Was that okay with you? - Was that something you usually did?
- embodied nature of narrator	- What was your sense of what was going on? what could you see/hear? - How did you cope with that? - How did that affect you / make you feel/think?
- significance of other people (how does teller's network of relationships impact on events?)	- Was anyone aware of what was happening? - What did your family think of that? - Who told you? - Did you ask anyone for help?
- choices and actions of the teller	- What made you decide to ...? - Why did you want to do that? - What were you intending? - When did you decide to ...?
- historical continuity (contextual information)	- What was happening in your life then/before?
- beginning, middle, end	- Where does your story begin? - How did you get into that situation? What happened after that?
- check for coverage of their experience	- Has there been anything you were hoping or thinking I might ask that I haven't touched upon?

Table 3: Using narrative approach in interviewing

Narrative inquiry is also known for putting knowledge - including its emotive component ,- centre-stage, be it bound to cognitive memory, constructed memory or perceived memory (Bruner, 1987). Personal knowledge that an individual possesses (such as (un)expected struggles and successes, misunderstandings and negotiating as related to vegan food practices in general and transitions in particular), is then further contextualized. Making sense of "why" of human action is tightly linked to understanding both formal and lived contexts, as institutional(ised) discourses and everyday practices intertwine, which allows for furthering understanding of the researched topic.

It takes an additional step from having personal experiences to translating them into accounts, so it is important to keep in mind that stories as told by narrators themselves are not merely reflecting the ''reality as lived'' but rather reconstructions of person's experiences. To say that these are performative themselves (perhaps particularly so in doing identity) takes nothing from their "realness", but has a bearing on which stories are told and how.

Knowledge created and constructed through gathering of stories based in lived experiences helps make sense of complexity of human lives with regards to the past and creating of meaning, carrying information about events, including interpretations based on experiences, values, beliefs, hopes, intentions and plans for the future (Bruner 1986). In this way, both content and meaning of stories are taken into account and both are subject to analysis, offering insights into a) material content that offers itself to thematical analysis, say with the help of grounded or social practice theory, as well as b) individual's textured experiences of their social reality allowing for pluralist positioning.

4.3 Measures

The semi-structured interviews started with an invitation to fill in dates of some life events that would have impacted participants' practices (as well as clarification and/or relevancy of some further interview questions). These were followed by a loose, topic-centered interview guide featuring topics that commonly arose in online communities among participants themselves as well as some probing questions about everyday activities and materials featured in them. After establishing rapport and gaining some insight into their everyday practices as they relate to food in their household and beyond, I continued with curated questions to gain further insight into their experiences to get a fuller account and understanding of various elements and processes that play(ed) a central role in their journeys.

Participants were invited to provide accounts of their everyday food-related encounters before and after their dietary transition to capture the elements of specific habitual and routinesed food-related practices, their eventual disruption, and the subsequent making of space for new practices and elements brought into it - making it maintainable in the long term. Here, the contrast between the narrative of a traditional omni-normative communal meals with communal meals

following someone's transition to veganism was expected to provide especially salient presentation of elements and dynamics by allowing investigation of past and/or current conflicts, as well as mapping negotiations and adjustments leading towards new configurations of communal meals. The area of coverage - within the institution of home or education - included specific foods that were on or off the menu and the welcoming or resistance towards novelty food items, traditional/central items or dishes that hold a particular meaning for the participants and their social circle (from nutritional, emotional, religious, etc.), the meaning and process of commensal eating for the participants, the distribution of roles and responsibilities of people involved, the general atmosphere and dialogue (or lack of it) during the meal, as well as how are new ideas, knowledge and skills emerge, are shared, and who takes part in this exchange.

For the purposes of analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim in Slovene language. Content analysis was then performed with the assistance of coding by drawing on meaningful categories arising from theory (e.g. materials, images, skills, transition, practice disintegration, practice formation, re-alignment of practices, (re-)skilling, community of practice etc.). Additionally, various settings (home or public) and any other inherently-arising recurring themes that have surfaced during the interviews were also included as categories. Information was then organized to follow a SPT elements structure and divided in two parts to shed light on how veganism as a dietary practice comes to be and stay, as well as what struggles and adjustments await their practitioners (and by extension, their circles and institutions they take part in).

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

With food practices informed strongly by our socio-cultural context, resulting in a somewhat rigid and commonly firmly established bundle of practices throughout our growing-up, changing trajectories and deeply ingrained habits such as food practices is not an easy feat.

Practice Theory offers a lens through which we can inspect these particular elements of a practice via answering questions regarding what one might eat for their next meal, with whom, when, why and how, along with what a 'proper meal' might look and taste like, and what other social functions it may be facilitating or fulfilling. Coupled with a suitably applied data collection method for the subject under investigation, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews and a relevant subject sample to draw on, practice theory turns into a practical tool for analysis. It mainly does that through shedding light onto disruption (and re-appropriation of elements) of other previously established practices, and explaining how carriers sustain the newly formed practices. In this, it relies on looking at practices from various points of views, namely the elements that form any one practice: (1) meaning or ideas (that include cultural conversations, expectations and commonly shared norms), (2) materials (including objects, tools and infrastructure), (3) competence (knowledge and embodied skills), and (4) communities of practice (people connecting to form interest groups in which they exchange information relevant to their new practice).

In this chapter, I try draw on this framework to organise and analyse the gathered data in order to answer the research question I set out to explore, addressing how various elements of social practices shape and sustain the transition to a vegan diet. I do this in two parts: first, I shall illustrate how a vegan dietary practice emerged (5.1.1) and how respondents sustained it (5.1.2.-5.1.4); second, I illustrate the most significant obstacles respondents faced and how they went about it (5.2.1-5.2.4). Together, these parts showcase how a new practice comes to be, how it competes for elements and carriers with an established practice, and how it perseveres and grows by acquiring new carriers - be it through outreach or birthing of new practitioners - despite numerous obstacles these may be facing.

5.1 What helps people become and stay vegan?

In this first part of the chapter, I focus on subjects that appeared most strongly related to people making a switch from one (old and normative) practice to the next (that of veganism, and vegan diet in particular) and kept with it to date. I explore (1) what ideas prompted respondents to go against the grain, (2) what materials they relied heavily on in the process, (3) what skills they acquired to put the former to use, and (4) how forming a community helped connect these individuals and make them a part of broader societal movement.

5.1.1 Ideas: Change of hearts and minds

The spotlight of this section will be on looking at the 'why' part of a vegan dietary practice - the ideas and motivations behind peoples' passage to veganism. Two primary ideas were (1) animal rights and (2) individual health.

The first idea - animals having intrinsic value and rights, regardless of how utilitarian society deems them to be - appeared as the main one for interviewees as well as for practitioners of veganism at large. In this section, we shall focus on how that presented a pathway to veganism through expanding on previously established notions of feeling empathy and affection towards (certain) animals. More specifically, by not waving off the idea of animal rights, respondents came to see veganism as a way of closing the discord in between their thinking and feeling processes on the one hand and their actions on the other. This potential for change was especially striking in the context of a widely-held belief that people need to rely on animal products in order to achieve and maintain physical health, which renders the question of animal consumption as one of necessity for survival and thus renders the case for ethics obsolete.

The second idea - that of individual health - appealed to a smaller subgroup of respondents who were seeking a way towards better health through changing their diet. This was usually done by focusing on eliminating animal-derived and heavily processed foods while relying on one's own body as a measuring tool of its state of wellbeing (more on that under the heading 5.1.3.). In most cases, this idea provided a subsidiary pathway that was not standalone, but more frequently complementary to the first. Still, by way of learning about the adequacy of well-planned plant-based diets, respondents were often reassured in their exploration of the ethical case for veganism.

In taking a step back and attempting to re-evaluate their beliefs, participants closely examined the idea of animal welfare and societal categorisation as well as subjective valuation of non-human animals. How come society awards *humans* bodily autonomy but denies it to other animals? How did participants consider themselves 'animal lovers' but continued to eat meat? Why does society treat certain species of animals different than others, and what kind of logic and moral standards are used to evaluate it, given that the conclusions (and subsequent norms and practices) can vary widely from culture to culture?

Participants attempted to make sense of their greater (existing) empathy for (some categories) of animals, such as between categories of 'companion animals', 'wild animals' and 'farm animals' by examining their past and current relationships with the former, as well as learning more about the latter (including the practices they were subjected to). Seeing to what lengths they have gone to help an animal in need - be it a syringe-feeding a bird that fell out of a nest to maturity, or taking care of a famished and diseased stray dog, made them think about how instinctual that was for them, and how good they felt about it. So why did they not see the need to protect other animals that were equally able to feel pain and enjoy life? As they were already familiar with the concept of animal welfare that provides non-human animals certain rights and humans with certain obligations towards them - even if under the premise of animals being expendable in serving human ends - they put the logic of its societal application under the microscope:

> "I came across this campaign about the Yulin festival - you know, to raise awareness about - and obviously to stop it from going on in the future, and I thought to myself - okay, clearly, killing and eating dogs is wrong in my mind, but who's to say lambs or pigs or bunnies or cows are fair game? Their cuteness should not be playing that much of a role. I may not have first-hand experience, a bond, with a sheep, but I'm sure someone somewhere would swear they make the best companion animals. Or at least better than some dogs would. And their experience of pain and fear and freedom is probably just the same ... so why should you only care about one? How can the very same species be considered man's best friend in some places, a plague on the streets in another, and a food delicacy in yet another? That, to me, made absolutely no sense." - Sara (34)

Additionally, budding vegans were concerned not just with the logic of physiologically non-significant and culturally relative differences between various species and/or groups of animals, but also about their categorisation as potential resources to be drawn on and optimised for maximum profit which rendered them particularly vulnerable to harm. Respondents were deeply moved by learning about various violent practices that appeared to be industry standard - from keeping animals in small cages to debeaking of chickens and castration of pigs without the use of anaesthetics. They were further distressed by hearing about additional on-farm cruelty or slaughterhouse procedure violations that media reported on with increasing frequency. Many have pointed out their disgust at the societal inability to, - in their view -, sufficiently protect animals from avoidable harm that was inflicted on them, even under the animal welfare acts, often for the sake of cost optimisation of business operations, but felt powerless in addressing it from *within* the system.

Doing the right thing - and something that made sense and felt good - became increasingly pressing for the participants, especially if they were to protect their self-image of an 'upstanding citizen' and an 'animal lover' - both of which were self-imposed and central to them - in the society where moral schizophrenia was rampant. Aside of newfound personal agency in doing your part to help alleviate the problem, participants also staunchly refused to be associated with the group that they had become to see as complicit with the atrocities they had learned about.

However cathartic this break from the norm felt to participants, finding their way to opt out of needlessly abusive and inherently unfair system came with the burden of having to reconcile with their own past actions as an animal product consumer themselves. Now that a viable alternative - veganism - was on their map as a sensible and feasible option and

they felt compelled to take part in it (especially as the established alternative appeared less and less attractive), they would come to reflect on how their past *modus operandi* was protecting their sense of identity before such a change was conscionable. Furthermore, that would help them understand the widespread mechanisms that concealed the need for - and the existence of - alternatives for most of their lives.

While all interviewees had already been aware of the existence of practice of vegetarianism - if not veganism - as a potential alternative to the standard Slovenian diet at least since they were in their teens, most have not thought it a viable option for themselves then. They'd either been pleased with their established food practices and/or haven't given food much thought altogether beyond it being a source of fuel and the core of various social events, or simply because that was what was presented to them at mealtime (and the events preceding the meal were not sufficiently salient at mealtime).

While most respondents spoke of some kind of childhood memories that centered around enjoying the company of so-called pets and/or farm animals, conflating the categories to an extent, only a few started making the connection between the living animals and what was on their plates. About half of respondents recalled memories connected to bearing witness to the ritual home slaughter of farm animals at their - of their grandparents'- homes in the countryside, and noted how unpleasant that felt and how they tried to avoid being around. They also reported on how such rituals were normalised by cracking jokes about it and turning it into a festive occasion through a re-writing and re-framing of events: the ritual of the killing of animals was often rendered as a celebration, accompanied with a plethora of food, drinks and music:

> *"The slaughter time was always a festive time for my family, I remember people really looking forward to it, it was a big ordeal, lots of food, drinks, singing along harmonica ... We weren't really sheltered from it, and my uncle - a farmer - he'd encourage his young son to participate, to hold the animal, and I thought that was so ... I wouldn't say wicked, but definitely not something I'd volunteer to do. So I've tried to keep my distance, but it's hard to ignore a headless chicken running around and people cheering and laughing." - Mateja (33)*

The positive framing of the home slaughter ritual appeared to be reasonably efficient in eliminating the unease most participants might have felt as children and have them participate in the practice well into their adult years, making their path to veganism more of a long-term process. For others, the dread and feeling of something being wrong, resulting in a 'point of no return' in leaving meat off their plates, was described as more of an instantaneous revelation that reportedly did not allow for postponing of action on their part.

To summarise, such a profound change of their daily eating patterns often did not happen on its own, but instead followed them facing (either repeatedly or as a one-off) a persuasive reason that made them question their ethical and moral stance. Additionally, if they would continue with practice as usual, their positive self-image would now be at stake, as they have since learned about alternative courses of action and felt compelled to take part in it despite having to go against the societal norms. Aside for ethics making it to the very top of participants' list of motivations, and being sensitised to viewing the animals from a less of an instrumental point of view, health-oriented problems and insights have provided an alternative (but complimentary) pathway to a vegan practice. This, when coupled with respondents addressing the flaws they discovered in their own reasoning, strengthened their commitment to the practice of veganism and interest in its ideological underpinnings, as well as the trying out new elements it brought their way, making for a resilient idea that could (and in the case of respondents, did) persist.

5.1.2 Materials: Changes in the pantry and on the dining table

Regardless of how they decided of giving veganism a try, disrupting habitualized food patterns and interactions that come along with them was not always smooth sailing, and interviewees did not shy away from discussing that. Many respondents light-heartedly described how they had found themselves inconvenienced or lost at their first vegan grocery shopping trip and meal planning session. They would need to figure out which of their staples were now 'off

limits' (e.g. basil pesto with cheese), not knowing what comparable or new products to replace them with (e.g. basil pesto with pine nuts), where to look for them (health food sections or stores), how to prepare it (e.g. tofu, textured vegetable protein (TVP) chunks, quinoa), and what unsuspecting animal ingredients derivatives they could expect in specific products (e.g. carmine in candy, milk derivates in pre-packaged olives, gelatine in some margarine spreads).

As this eliminated several of options they had been familiar with and used to cooking with, they were then facing the intimidating questions of what to fill their grocery shopping basket with, and subsequently, put in their pots and pans. Still, as vital as this question was for everyone to answer for themselves so they could go about this new practice, it appeared that this was one of the easiest ones to figure out as it was relatively straight-forward and required little-to-none additional information after the initial few weeks of orientation:

"I felt confused and overwhelmed at first, so I called a vegan friend of mine, and she took me shopping for food one day, and she was there to answer all my questions, and it was nice to have that kind of support, she even helped me put a weekly menu together. I came home that day with a whole heap of items and a much lighter wallet, but it was then that I actually realised I was going to be okay, I wasn't going to be missing out on things." - Nina (34)

"I think you mostly need recipe ideas at the beginning, to get you started on thinking outside the box. Moreover, then there are things you've always been making but never considered it being vegan, so all of a sudden, there's this relief, something familiar that you can start yourself on while you figure out the rest, so you don't need to experiment with some new and exotic ingredients every day, not knowing what to expect or how it'll turn out." Barbara (39)

"Someone in a Facebook group shared this list of 'accidentally vegan' products that did not have a vegan logo on them but just so happened to be made without any animal products and available in shops practically everywhere - and they added photos next to them! Now that is a brilliant idea. I recognised many of the items from the shelves of my regular supermarket, and a few were already in my pantry. Good old 'Bajadera' [nougat and chocolate praline] was here to stay, and so were my favourite 'napolitanke' [wafer cookies]." - Lea (31)

After the initial realization regarding the availability of both overt and 'stealth' vegan foods, new vegans found reassurance in abundance of familiar staples to rely on (e.g. items from categories of fruits, vegetables, pulses, grains, mushrooms, nuts, and seeds), as well as certain processed products that were already 'accidentally vegan'. Furthermore, there have been easily identifiable alternatives to many other, typically non-vegan products (e.g. coffee creamer, yogurt, seitan mince) which they could swap out one-to-one. This helped ease the stress of figuring out what to put on a table for the family to enjoy as the next meal and assured participants that being vegan was, indeed, a valid possibility for them long term - even if it may require some adjustment or an investment of time to either source it or make it from scratch.

Participants explained how they relied on their old favourites by utilizing already familiar foods in familiar ways - from cooking a simple vegetable stew with whatever they could pluck from their garden in the summer, making a hearty 'matevž' - mashed potatoes with brown beans and fried garlic with soured cabbage on the side, to recreating a festive-occasion worthy 'tatarski biftek' made of lentils, sundried tomatoes, capers, garlic, onion and various herbs and spices they already had in stock. Sometimes, they would be able to make the recipe as is, other times they would make certain substitutions. As the new practitioners felt more comfortable (and re-acquainted) with the wide selection of foods readily available year round - be it fresh or not, 'accidentally vegan' or obviously and purposefully made vegan -, they commonly came to experiment with them in novel ways as well. This expanded their repertoire of go-to recipes with e.g. a barley salad (instead of a barley stew), cauliflower mashed potatoes (instead of just mashed potatoes), and various kinds of hummus (instead of serving a tin of chickpeas over a green salad). Participants sometimes chose for less familiar and less traditional options when it came to processed foods as well, opting for e.g. sweetened nut butter with carob (instead of for a 'stealth' chocolate paste that would cater to more traditional tastes).

All respondents mentioned some degree of experimentation with foods, and most noted that their learning about new techniques and products soon changed from a chore to an exciting treasure hunt. They would spot new vegan items in supermarket's inventory, and start to shop for novel items such as coconut milk, curry spices, tofu, tempeh and seitan at specialty foreign (especially Asian) markets. This enabled them to create a vegan fusion kitchen in their very homes, and to push the edges of culinary possibilities by trying out and relying on unconventional ingredient choices in arriving at familiar flavours and textures. An example is using tofu as a base for a quiche filling, or aquafaba - 'chickpea brine' - as a substitute for whipped egg whites in making chocolate mousse, fast replacing more traditional vegan chocolate mousse recipes that relied on ripe avocados or silken tofu as a base.

Such experimentation and flexibility allowed for expanding one's set of culinary and food innovation skills, and upholding of one's responsibilities as the chief household cook as well as a host(ess), providing vegan and non-vegan family members and guests with a variety of already familiar sights, flavours and textures. Additionally, this demonstration of a vegan dietary practice served as a tool to gradually do away with stereotypes about 'plain and boring rabbit food' and to (re-)establish themselves as 'normal' rather than deviant in that domain, as well as to show that there are dishes within the vegan foods category that everyone could not just have but also genuinely enjoy:

> "I think the biggest challenge - a fun challenge, even though it was quite frustrating at first - was to cook and bake in a way that would suit non-vegans, like my omni partner, so they wouldn't be able to discern - and dismiss! - it at first sight. And it's really rewarding, too, when people will come to you and compliment you, saying they never imagined that a vegan cake could taste this good, and they keep coming back for more." - Mateja (33)

Overall, baking appeared as a category that required the biggest adjustment in terms of using novel ingredients (e.g. aquafaba, maple syrup, silken tofu) or familiar ingredients but in novel combinations (e.g. vinegar and baking soda for leavening) because many could not be used to replace the original ingredients one-to-one in all different recipes serving vastly different functions. At the same time, baking also provided a unique opportunity because it, - by its very nature -, readily conceals the unappetizing stand-alone raw materials going into it by transforming them through the mixing and baking process. This resulted in participants presenting their family and friends with 'unsuspicious' vegan treats (rather than the main dish) which people were more likely to approach with an open mind.

Vegan recipes, especially ones including sweets, have notably become increasingly easy to come by online, and have been translated to (and/or issued in) Slovene language as well, increasing their availability online as well as in various bookstores and supermarkets. However, most participants still reported relying heavily on their online- and offline-interest groups for recipe exchange, as personal preferences and ideas about e.g. sweetness of a cake and cookie textures were observed to vary widely from one cuisine to the next, and they preferred using more 'local' recipes to cater to their established sweet tooth tastes and preferences. This mainly occurred after the initial testing, once participants were already familiar with the new set of ingredients and comfortable with their newly acquired veganising skills that allowed them to make the recipes work for them rather than the other way around - be it in their efforts to reproduce old favourites or to further expand their palate.

5.1.3 Skills: The process of (re-)learning for a new lifestyle

In this section, I will highlight some of the skill sets that greatly contributed towards people being able to sustain the vegan diet beyond the initial experimental stage. These could be summarised in: (1) familiarizing oneself with the field of nutrition and health, (2) food sourcing and preparation (addressed in 5.1.2), and (3) communication skills (further explored in 5.2.3).

When discussing vegan diets, one of the common presumptions was for the food to be rudimental and, to an extent, ascetic, as well as lacking in sufficient nutrition to fuel human bodies for our everyday basic needs and thus incompatible with optimum health and wellbeing we might be striving for. These culinary and nutrition skills are something that people would acquire between their family and wider cultural circle, and were thus part of a structured

effort to steer the individual and population towards certain food habits. Transitioning to a plant-based diet thus required re-skilling in both domains as to satisfy people's expectations surrounding food they were consuming.

Exploration of one's journey to health was centre-stage in interviews, consistent with participants wanting to keep themselves (and their growing families) well for the long term. As we zoom in on developing skills regarding nutrition and health, we shall focus on two aspects of it: (a) people using their bodies as an indicating instrument, and (b) epistemic skills that include learning to browse for information in the field of nutrition, reading through it and filtering out information that is not relevant, reliable, or up to date.

In using their bodies as an indicator of what feels good, health incentives steered some respondents who were dealing with food allergies and sensitivities, food poisonings, and other medical conditions, towards plant-based diets, as outlined in testimonies below:

"We started cutting down on meat because of the allergies of our kids, because we saw it did us harm, that it didn't work for us, and then later we quit it completely and became vegetarian ... and after the dairy allergies we pretty much became plant-based for health reasons /.../. After the last pregnancy, I would go out for coffee sometime and they wouldn't have, say, rice milk, so I'd drink it with the [cow's] and then the little one would be cramping up for two days as a result ... so then you say, okay, that's it, no more, it's not worth it." - Polona (34)

"Actually, I started thinking about food not too long before I decided to change my diet, for very selfish reasons - I used to have problems with my stomach, I was bloated, I had gastritis - I just didn't feel well. So then I started to think - it could also have been stress-related in part, but yeah, I started to think about food, which I hadn't done before. So I first left out sweets and I still felt rubbish, then I really started to think, okay, what else could I try ? And somehow I came across that video by Gary Yourofsky and a few others, and I started to contemplate going for it ... so veganism just happened to fall into my lap while I was ready to make any kind of change, and I said I'd try it for a month to see if there was any difference in how I felt, could I still be actively pursuing sports, will I feel weak ... Soon after I made the switch, I started to investigate the ethical side of it, and nowadays, that would be enough to keep me going." - Erik (35)

People thus took notes on how they felt - especially when they did not feel well - and would employ their bodies serving as health-indicating device by paying attention to signs such as energy levels, one's weight, digestion, state of their nails/hair/skin, and improvement of symptoms of conditions like asthma. This way, people would be able to estimate which way their health was going, and could track changes to later re-evaluate and adjust their diets - be it in terms of energy input, or macro- or micronutrient intake, making it a feedback-driven learning experience.

Additionally, respondents resorted to looking for answers to common questions about vegan diets that everyone was quick to ask about - such as where one would get sufficient protein, iron, calcium, etc. This process of re-skilling in the epistemic domain of nutrition relied heavily on drawing on existing databases of information, and learning to retrieve and sort through information available to them (often times available only - or mostly - in a foreign language). While for the early adopters of vegan diets, the scarce amount (and foreign language) of information might have been more of an issue, for later adopters, the challenge leaned more heavily towards being able to make sense of the large amount of information at their fingertips, looking for the well-researched and well-referenced works that could support the health of their families and stand in the 'court of public opinion'. Facing such abundance of information, participants often resorted to falling back on the work of the world leading groups and organizations in nutrition and dietetics (such as AND - formerly known as ADA -, DC, NHMRC, DGE, BDA and BNF[1]) which is continuously expanded and updated, as well as translated into a number of languages, and freely offered to the public.

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[1] American Dietetic Association (ADA), now known as Academy of Nutrition and Dietetic (AND) , Dietitians of Canada (DC), Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ernährung (DGE), British Dietetic Association (BDA), British Nutrition Foundation (BNF)

Similarly to taking interest in experimenting with novel foods, lots of respondents also reported growing interest in nutrition education and have actively worked on improving their scientific literacy skills which came handy in a variety of settings. On the most personal level, this knowledge would make sure they are getting everything they need to arrive at (and/or maintain) good health, including supplementation with B12, as well as learning about sourcing various nutrients from food. Becoming skilled in this domain resulted in developing one's confidence in their daily dealings with other people when discussing the newest news article claiming 'butter is back', or in situations where they would otherwise feel especially vulnerable, such as at the doctor's office. In effect, participants testified being able to stand up to their medical professional when the doctor would use the 'abstaining from meat and other animal products' as an excuse or a default, catch-all reason for their health ailments, or when they were labeled irresponsible for maintaining a plant-based diet.

This was especially the case during the period of pregnancy - a time when many check in with their medical professional and adjust their dietary and supplementation regimes in wanting to secure the best possible outcome for themselves and their offspring. Few Slovenian doctors were reportedly accepting of their patient's vegetarian and vegan diets, especially during this stage of life; most were still very troubled by it. Respondents explained this with ascribing doctors cautiousness - it was suggested that they were perhaps erring on the side of caution in the light of having insufficient and/or outdated information about plant-based diets and the tests they might need to carry out to make sure they had all their bases covered. Other times, doctors' behavior was seen as straight up defensive and unprofessional (more on this strained relationship between the two communities to follow in 5.2.4). Having the resources that allowed respondents to stand up to such misconceptions and treatment proved to be key in helping vegans safely continue with their chosen diet, as well as in breaking fresh ground that would help the next vegan patient in that doctor's care:

> "I told my MD who happens to be a peds doctor about me being vegan a number of years back, and about my children as well. I felt I needed to be transparent about it, but I came prepared - my previous doctor was very unprofessional and he was outright douchy when, at a regular check-up, I asked about the possibility of getting my B12 tested. I remember being really taken aback by his reaction, and he was bullying me for some 20 minutes, too, with 'but cows will take over the Earth' kind of things, he never even touched the topic of the vitamin test or nutrition. So now, I have this folder of scientific articles on my computer, and some food pyramids and the like, and I'll print them out and bring them to appointments - I figured, should there be an issue I can always leave the material with them in hopes that maybe they'll read it and the next patient will be better off for it." - Katja (26)

5.1.4 Community of practice: Finding like-minded people and developing a support system

This sections covers issues surrounding one's social circle. First, it illuminates struggles of early adopters and their solutions, and then it moves on to covering the formation of broad interest groups - the interest being veganism -, both online or offline. Additionally, I will highlight specialisation of such broader groups into particular spin-offs that were better able to accommodate a growing number and diversity of vegans themselves depending on their needs, hobbies and preferences. This growth culminated in formation of tight groups of 'chosen families' and several centralized hubs operating with trusted and up-to-date information on various domains that were both well structured and easily accessible to seasoned and new practitioners alike (as to ease their transition and secure their long-term membership).

While most respondents embarked on their journey to veganism by themselves, they quickly discovered longing for a group of like-minded people - a safe space fulfilling a number of needs. These varied from exchange of knowledge and skills, and sharing of food, to making new connections (in the form of friendly acquaintances or chosen family). Other times, community would simply offer a listening ear to venting about things, as well as a shelter from bullying and a place to recharge their batteries before heading back to carnistic society.

This support system, be it an online group (such as a forum, Facebook group, or through Vegan Easy Challenge website) or a 'real life' group of 'buddies' (friends or acquaintances they would meet for coffee or at potlucks, workshops,

lectures) helped them better navigate this new dietary practice as it was readily available if and when they might be going through a rough patch. This was especially the case when they were left to their own devices in the face of repeatedly being challenged, undermined and being made fun of by their peers (or groups of them).

The 'early adopters' especially had their work cut out for them, as they had little-to-none such support (aside from an odd blog or a foreign forum) to fall back on. Facing the lack of access to knowledge and skill exchange that a wider support system could provide, several respondents expressed that it was their strong motivation and commitment to the new lifestyle that helped them persist, with personal growth quoted as a fortunate side effect:

"No one really helped me when it came to purchasing vegan food, I just started reading the labels - it's much faster now that dairy and eggs need to be in bold - and explore it all myself. I'd find recipes online, on some Slovenian website that is long gone now, but that was really helpful then. For the rest, I just had to figure things out on my own. You jump in and you struggle for a while, and then you swim. But I rather enjoyed getting proactive in the field of food, nutrition, planning, writing of articles, essays, working on self-development ... there's so much potential to grow as a person and as a professional." - Tamara (42)

"When I moved away from home and started living on my own, that was a big step for me. To be vegetarian in those days, that was really unheard of, probably more radical than being vegan is nowadays even. We were immigrants, my family, and when Slovenia gained independence, I felt really out of place. I think being vegetarian really helped me back then. It may sound off but it really did. And I'll always tell people - having a PhD in maths isn't my greatest achievement, even though I'm very proud of it. But to have become vegan in a society that is so different ... that takes courage, and commitment, and it builds you." - Peter (48)

But as the number of vegan practitioners grew, so did the movement - and the support networks started popping up, providing a safe space where people from all over the country could associate and discuss various animal rights theories, ask about veganising a recipe for a specific occasion, discuss articles or documentaries they had come across, share petitions, and inquire about various ailments.

The few central groups started seeing spin-offs that were more narrowly defined and particular in serving interests of the group members, and hence better at tending to their needs. This diversification resulted in groups concerned with specific set of specialized interests, including those of culinary skills, sporting activities, child rearing, animal rights activism, environmentalism, zero waste living, and budgeting, amongst others. Regional groups also grew more common and popular, especially amongst people who were struggling with bullying due to their new dietary practice, leading them to making new interest-related connections. Expanding one's social circle with friendly acquaintances hence became easier, especially amongst those who wanted to combine their existing passions and hobbies with like-minded people. Bigger cities became hubs for youth to come together and form their own pocket interest groups (or just to realise they were not alone on their journey):

"I get together with a bunch of lovely vegan parents these days, the vegan scene around here is really thriving. And even at Uni, you run into vegans, and at the student house. And occasionally when you're doing grocery shopping even, or when I take our dog to the vet, heh. They're not always super intense, close friendships, we're not necessarily besties, but we can rely on each other for advice and we share our common woes. It's an instant connection, really open and friendly, and that's a nice change of pace." - Maja (21)

"I've met new people on account of being vegan, many of which I otherwise wouldn't have crossed paths with. We used to go to a nearby city to attend vegan potlucks and lectures ... we went quite a few times, met a bunch of people, had some nice food and exchanged some recipes - this was especially nice at the beginning, when we were still new at it. Later on, I actually also have a talk on sports and vegan nutrition, but it's really a nice hub for hanging out with easy-going people who get what you're all about. So the network definitely branches out quite easily." - Erik (35)

Others still felt lonely and misunderstood and craved for a deeper connection - a community they would come to view as their chosen family, representing a trusted and valued subset of their social circles. These new vegans seeked solace,

understanding, and answers to their dilemmas, and while they may come to rely on their earlier established friendships, new connections would come in handy in times of peril where no one else could understand or advise. Such impromptu families provided a safe space for self-expression and learning as you go, as well as for one's sense of acceptance and belonging when one may be struggling with finding balance. They proved very valuable time and again, particularly in the context of an ever-shifting landscape consisting of a dynamic set of competing frames, norms and habits, as well as in the context of complexity of human connections and interactions:

> "I got support of my partner, but not of other people. Actually, everyone else that I can think of was against it. My father said that we were going to get cancer, that was his response. And my mother said that this isn't right, that we need to eat "everything in moderation", and where we'd get our protein, this kind of things, you know how smart people get when this topic is brought up. And about the kids, that they won't be developing properly and they'll be sick, even though our experience was completely different, with the occasional cold, they never needed antibiotics to this point which is rare for their age, if you ask around day care a bit. But yeah, fellow vegan moms have proved to be indispensable on this journey many times over." - Barbara (39)

> "My wife was really supportive of my decision to change my diet, we would just talk about everything very openly, and she's actually joined me since, so she could experience the benefits and the struggles first hand. My mom, however, she just doesn't get it, won't accept what happens to animals, how [animal products] impact health. Everyone seems to be overweight and having trouble with high cholesterol and such, but they won't do anything to change it, they won't even try. So they kind of hide behind their bad habits and excuse and defend it, instead of admitting, okay, there may be something off there, why don't we try that instead. This kind of stuff just wears you out, especially in the beginning where it's just you against the world." - Marko (32)

Additionally, the importance of chosen families lied in that they could always be relied on to provide temporary relief through people venting about events that might be weighing them down (and allowing for people in need to cleverly 'venue shop' and spare their significant others their raw frustrations and grievances by first working through it themselves).

Various platforms were thus serving a number of different functions by sharing resources (by providing recipes, scientific articles, shopping tips, nutritional plans etc.) and experiences (the insider tips and tricks), as well as providing an online meet-up point where you might discover some local company. As the vegan population grew, - and with it the array of information -, the need for information to be available in a more streamlined and organized fashion culminated in creation of a few central websites that would group the essential information and make it easily accessible to an onlooker: from how a vegan food pyramid looks like and how to stock your pantry, to featuring summaries of animal rights theories, environmental issues and medical standpoints, as well as providing information on where the next fairs, potlucks and workshops will take place, etc.

From this point onwards, managing locality became especially easy and inviting for the newcomers as they could simply look up the events taking place in their proximity and join in for an event. From there on, they would either stay within the bigger local group or organically spin off into a smaller, unofficial one - depending on the connection they felt to other members. Various informal vegan parenting groups have kept the momentum going by meeting up at their convenience to chat and compare notes while the kids were playing.

A community of practice such as a network of fellow vegans (and vegan parents in particular) with a vast range of experiences has been thoroughly appreciated as it provided participants with a temporary immersive vegan bubble - a chosen family - in which they would feel nothing but welcome and normal, where sharing food and ensuring safety of their children was effortless, and in which they could get prepared for any specific future challenges as the children would be growing up. Meeting new people and adjusting one's social circle was thus seen as invaluable:

> "It is really important that you get yourself some like-minded company. I was rather lonely for a year, it was a bit sad, and then I posted an ad in a online vegan group, saying I'd appreciate to hear from other vegan parents, and that I'd be happy if we could meet up sometime, share our experiences ... and then one of them came to me once, and we organized a big meeting, and it turned into a monthly gathering at various towns in Slovenia with different

people organizing it. And now, there's four of us here in town, and we hang out a lot and love it. My eldest also had a sleepover at their place recently when we were at the seaside and it was great, they're all vegan too, so I can easily go out then. And they'd bring me food when I was breastfeeding ... it's good to have a network at all times, but especially when there's a crisis. Like if you are in a hospital, I know I could count on them to make me vegan meals and bring them to me ... and I'd still have three kids at home to take care of, and my husband has to work, so one of these friends, who's a stay-at-home mom for the time being, said we could easily bring them over to her place for a bit. To have one or more of such trustworthy, reliable people who you know will have your back, that's just priceless." - Larisa (30)

5.1.5 Summary

To summarise, what I have shown in this part is what the initial process of becoming vegan entailed and how old and new elements of practices were drawn on to support the process. Accessing knowledge of the ideas regarding animal welfare and animal rights provided participants with motivation to embark on this new journey; being able to draw on variety of familiar (and newly discovered) materials provided a sense of relief and control in adopting new dietary habits; acquiring new skills in the domain of nutrition and health provided participants with confidence in their ability to maintain long-term health and advocate for themselves when in vulnerable situations; and community of practice provided much sought after feeling of being understood and accepted, a sense of belonging, and the comfort of having supportive friends when it all gets a bit much.

5.2 What are the obstacles to people going and/or staying vegan?

In this second part of the chapter, the focus is on the elements of practice that are strongly related to the current normative food practices and that, - since they still are rather abundant in circulation -, result in significant obstacles that are beyond just any one person to overcome. This pertains in particular to (1) traditional normative beliefs about food, (2) how sediments of past cultures are engrained in institutional networks, (3) how new - vegan - ideas need to be carefully communicated as to be effective in speaking one's truth *and* protective of individual's existing interpersonal connections at the same time, and (4) how the struggle for power between various societal groups manifests through claims to knowledge.

5.2.1 Ideas: Challenging tradition and the normative food practices in Slovenia

This section will explore (1) the ideology behind the normative food practices of Slovenia, what it means and how it came to be - shining light onto why and how it became so engrained and what it came to signify. Additionally, I show (2) how this ideology was challenged by the idea of veganism and how the transgressions presented itself. (We will further expand on how this barrier presented itself and how it was navigated - in order for a new practice to co-exist alongside the currently normative one - in section 5.2.3.)

The fact that none of the participants was raised as a vegan (and only a couple of them mentioned some kind of childhood experience with vegetarianism) allowed for thorough exploration of traditional food practices which their families were aligned with: from what they consisted of and how they came to be.

The 'old-fashioned', traditional Slovenian meals were reported to be relatively simple and usually centred around bread with butter and jam or honey, cheese, cold cuts or an egg for breakfast, while the remaining two main meals - lunch and dinner - revolved around strong, hearty, flavour-packed warm meals. Roasted meat and potatoes (commonly baked with roasted onions in leftover grease from the roast or with lard and cracklings) were often quoted as the gold standard, especially for a Sunday lunch. Additionally, various kinds of dumplings (made with wheat, buckwheat or corn flour), soups (clear with animal stock and noodles), polenta with goulash (cooked corn meal with beef stew), pasta and rice dishes (such as minced meat bolognese and mince meat and rice stuffed bell peppers in tomato sauce) also topped the list.

The workdays generally allowed the whole family to gather and lunch together between 3 and 4 p.m., and the weekends usually allowed for a more elaborated three course meals traditionally shared with extended family rather than just the primary family unit. These warm meals were hence a highly social event, usually scheduled between noon and 1 p.m. upon their return from Sunday mass, and/or on special occasions such as holidays and other celebrations. Here, the food would serve central role as a medium in strengthening the sense of unity and belonging to the gathered group. The extra effort put into preparing a more elaborate, even excessive presentation, signified the importance of the event (and the person(s) related to it). Regardless whether it was a religious holiday or someone's personal milestone, the whole family would enjoy a festive meal that took hours to cook from scratch in the honour of the event:

> *"I remember the big birthday celebrations, when someone would turn 40 or 50, and the tables would always be chock-full, and sometimes the whole bird or a suckling pig would be roasted at home and put in the centre of it for everyone to admire. It would take half a day to prepare it, so there would be a lot of labour invested in it, and people knew to appreciate that. They might even get some to take home afterwards, as a party favour of sorts. And there would be a lot of laughter surrounding who would get what 'exclusive' part, or adults challenging kids - or kids challenging each other, too - to dare to eat the tail or the ears or the nose. And the whole things would be a joyous event, the brave ones would lead and there was enough liquid encouragement for the shy adults." - Katja (26)*

> *"In our family, the goal at meals was to stuff ourselves full, I'd say. On Sundays, we'd always have bone broth soup and baked potatoes with lard and cracklings, and rice, and two kinds of meat, and salad, it was really a feast. And some extended family members joined in as well, my aunt, grandparents etc." - Maja (21)*

Meals were made to be filling and abundant - so much so that after lunch naps were not a rarity amongst elder family members, and leaving food on your plate was seen disrespectful both in terms letting good food go to waste as well as an insult to the host who took time to prepare the meal with great care.

From various responses it was obvious that meat especially was still more than not synonymous with 'proper nutrition', and hence presented as a highly desirable, even luxury food. Meat itself was sometimes a reason enough for, and often the centre point of, a celebration - especially after the historical periods of scarcity. These were not uncommon due to uncertain political climate, migration and poverty that affected our grandparents' and great-grandparents' generations the most, but became deeply engrained into mentality of generations that followed.

Religion played an important role in Slovenia as well, serving as a constant and a prominent refuge that both the rich and the poor had access to when in need of solace or guidance. As such, church reinforced some of the traditions through association with religious imagery: on Easter, people would fill woven baskets with premium foods that aligned with church teachings imagery (smoked ham for Christ's flesh, horseradish for nails on the cross, red dyed hard boiled eggs as Christ's blood, and 'potica' for Christs' thorny crown). These would be brought to an early mass to be blessed before eating them for a festive breakfast in honour of Christ's resurrection, underlining the stark contrast between the human- and non-human animals - the latter seen as expendable, soul-less resources given to humans to serve us and cater to our needs, rather than sentient individuals.

Everyday 'poor man's foods' were not coloured with such strong symbolism and remained at the brinks of - or even off - the plates during the holidays. Pulses, such as brown beans, along with certain vegetables, such as sour cabbage (and to a lesser extent fish, which was consumed on 'fasting Fridays') were considered less desirable relative to the 'strong

foods'. The latter were construed as an exclusive festive splurge, seeing as they used to maybe make it into the cooking pot for 'the big holidays' such as Easter and Christmas, and - if they were lucky enough to afford it - Sundays. Animal products were thus seen as highly desirable and nutritious in times of poverty and food scarcity, and what's more, they have by-and-large kept such status to the present day whereas legumes mostly make an appearance in a stew or on a salad rather than making their way into the 'main event'.

As allergies and food intolerances were uncommon (or went unrecognised), food averse 'picky eaters' would not be specifically catered to - sometimes told they should 'go and tie a napkin over their eyes' so they wouldn't be able to distinguish the bits they did not like from the bits that they did, or to eat around things if they had to. Some adjustments might hence be tolerated to ensure children did not go hungry while not straying far from the food that was shared by the family, as not to disrupt the pleasant event by inconveniencing the adults too much:

> *"Growing up, we were fed a standard diet, and there were traditional Sunday lunches with the soup, the potatoes, the meat and the salad, but I never was the one for meat - I might eat it if it was minced in a pasta sauce or something, but if there were bigger chunks, I'd pick them out and leave them on the plate, practically my whole life. I didn't care for texture, the mouth feel. But I used to drink a lot of milk, lots of dairy, cheese and such instead."*
> *- Marko (32)*

Voluntarily forgoing animal products made little sense in this context, especially after factoring in historical origins and cultural norms. Seeing meat (along with other animal products) as desirable, festive, tasty and overall indispensable from personal and social lives of people remained deeply engrained, and it explains why parents would often try to make certain adjustments to ensure their kids would, indeed, at least eat of what was offered.

Refusing to eat meat (and other animal products) thus signifies more than just the rejection of the food itself (as opposed to when one would change diet on doctor's orders), but also what it came to stand for. It would inevitably imply denial of conventional wisdom and upbringing, as well as disrespect for the family, and cause disturbance in an otherwise uneventful gathering. Here, the new vegan would often be seen as 'holier than' at a mere mention of their new dietary practice, and promoted to 'preechy', 'unreasonable', 'ridiculous', 'spoiled' and/or 'ungrateful' when responding to prompting questions of 'why?'. As the vegan perspective stands on a very different foundation and is arguably less human-centered by its very nature, the replies to it were usually out of the realm of what others would consider satisfactory. The answers amongst the line of living at a time and in a place of relative abundance of food choices and nutritional information that allow people to make responsible choices that are in sync with the current times with its pressing issues did not readily resonate with the public. As such, listing facts surrounding issues of population growth and health, climate change, and animal ethics did little to resolve the issue. Moreover, oftentimes that lead to a heated debate and the split of the family unit into 'vegan' vs. 'them' that continued into the unspecified future, rarely retiring for longer than a few gatherings at a time.

5.2.2 Materials and infrastructure: Institutional frameworks

In this section, we first focus on a contextual background with a prominent example of sedimented food practices in the form of school meals. After, we explore how respondents navigated this barrier in various ways - from trying to work within the existing system of school meal provision, to venue shopping, and even establishing their own alternative day care and learning institutions.

Ideology of currently normative food practices in Slovenia has informed more than just social norms, and has been equally deeply engrained in the the country's institutional framework of school meal provision and education as an integral part of school curriculum. This robust system of subsidised meals is leaning on official food and nutrition recommendations and it commonly relies on school workers such as teachers themselves to create the weekly menus in-school, and on the kitchen staff to execute it. School meal system is fairly standardised and optimised form of food provision, with the underlying idea of offering all children - including underprivileged ones - a chance of an equally good

start at life. While this system comes with many perks, its rather rigid format proved itself not responsive (enough) to vegan children whose parents wished they would also be able to partake.

Respondents noted that, being used to social milieu not always being most conducive and inviting to vegan practitioners, they had grown used to planning ahead and taking food with when on the go. 'Odd-one-out' situations like being away on a day trip may be inconvenient, but were relatively easily planned for or otherwise accommodated. However, when it came to daily or long-term arrangements such as day care where children might be by design spending significant amount of time including up to four meals, - of which two warm ones -, vegan parents saw it as more troublesome. They expressed that often, they felt not just pressured to comply with the school meal system and dietary guidelines as is, but were dismissed, ridiculed, or even shamed for requesting and inquiring about plant-based options for their school-aged children.

As food is central to the vegan ideology, parents put extra thought into making choices that would fit their life philosophy as well as into their busy everyday lives. In this, they were quite creative, and they relied on information from their vegan networks to further their array of options to choose from. Below, I will illustrate how parents (1) shopped the private day care market, (2) made compromises, (3) made use of loopholes in existing public school meal system legislation, (4) had children take home-prepared plant-based meals with them, or even (5) resorted to home schooling.

Firstly, as respondents discovered that the private market might be more likely to cater to veg*ns and provide plant-based meals for their offspring, they were quick to check their options. While these organizations might fulfill the dietary requirements, they sometimes came with a significant cost in either accumulative monthly fees and/or time investments when dropping off children and picking them up, as they were not always a local option. As a result, many could not afford it, rendering it unfeasible.

Secondly, respondents sometimes opted for a local choice of public day care provider, even though that meant they would need to make some compromises in the dietary department. On occasion, (some of) their requests were accepted without any need for filing paperwork; still other times, they would have to accept the terms that were offered, regardless of their initial wishes:

> *"In kindergartens, sometimes there's wiggle room and they're willing to accommodate you or meet you half-way, but usually not. There was a vegetarian option in a day care close by so we opted for that but we didn't hold her back if she wanted to try other things. We didn't want to make her feel like an outcast, we didn't want her to feel different or limited in that way. Then in the second kindergarten, she had regular meal plans, they wouldn't make any accommodations, and in the one she's going next, it'll be vegetarian again. But at home, she'll eat vegan like the rest of us." - Marko (32)*

Thirdly, the word on existence of loopholes in the school meal system legislation quickly spread in the vegan parenting circles. Intended to protect vulnerable pupils with various array of medical indications, public schools were obliged to provide meals to accommodate such individual diets (e.g. dairy-free, egg-free, pork-free, etc.). While these did not *per se* offer grounds for vegetarian diets (including vegan one), parents would sometimes make use of this pathway to secure a vegan meal for their child as per doctor's referral. As not many doctors were keen on the idea of plant-based diets for children unless medically necessary, and not many parents felt comfortable resorting to this line of action, this option was reserved for those that could find understanding with their pediatrician and were not bothered by their beliefs being rebranded as a medical indication.

Fourthly, if that proved to be a dead-end or if respondents did not feel comfortable resorting to these options, they would next consider home-cooking meals they would then pack up and deliver to the school along with the child. Out of concern for their child fitting in better, a few of the parents also made it their mission to cook according to their educational facility's meal plan. This, however, required extensive planning and resources on the part of the parents:

"Our little one goes to a regular public kindergarten, and I would cook a vegan menu for him - whatever they'd have on a regular menu for the week there but veganised, and I'll drop the food there every day on his way to work, so the kitchen staff can just heat it up and serve it to him. I committed to that, I'd rather have him served whatever his peers would be - my partner probably wouldn't complicate like that with all the imitation meats and things ... some of these things he isn't fond of anyway, so sometimes we'll add some bread rolls for him to have instead." - Urban (29)

Finally, if other options proved unfeasible, vegan parents choose to invest in alternative care-taking and educational system they could craft to their will - both in dietary and educational department - by homeschooling. This was especially the case were respondents felt equipped to offer quality learning and growing up environment at home - either as they were themselves qualified educators, or were able to outsource that task to a trusted and trained individual, therefore circumventing the day care market altogether. Clearly, this option was not for the average parent or vegan practitioner, and as such lent itself to a very narrow pool of participants:

"We actually have it all covered with the two of us at home, we'll just take turns if someone needs time for themselves or to run an errand. Especially since I'm not working at the moment, so there's not much need for other people to take over. But my mom is also vegan so that wouldn't be a problem, and if we agreed on something, that's how it would be, you just make that clear." - Larisa (30)

"We have a friend that comes to babysit them on occasion and I'll cook for them and have things ready, so she can just feed them. Or my sister, who's currently abroad as au pair, she'll babysit them a lot and I trust her completely, and she'll also cook vegan meals. But they'll always all come to our place, where there's no questionable foods around. I also wouldn't put them into a regular daycare, they are not up to my standards. Food in general, I mean I really started valuing healthy food since I've seen what health issues it caused me." - Janja (32)

Even though giving their children the best possible start at life was at the forefront of every single family, different solutions worked for different people based on their resources, beliefs and priorities - even within the vegan community. Regardless of which option they opted for, participants expressed that raising vegan children in a non-vegan society remained challenging for various reasons. Sometimes that was due to exerting greater burden on parents themselves, or due to having doubts about their children growing up in an insulated vegan bubble. More commonly still, parents were concerned their child would be feeling left out or be bullied for eating (or thinking about food and animals) differently than their peers (and sometimes, they would worry about day care workers sneaking or forcing the animal product on the child as well):

"My daughter will now recognize items on the table - like meat - and she won't eat them. In kindergarten I told them we're vegan and they were okay with that, and allowed me to bring some extra's with me when I drop her off, like a meat-replacer or something. But they wouldn't warm it up for her come lunch time, and they'll sometimes still put meat on her plate, and she felt bad about it. I never made her feel bad about her having a bite then, but she kind of developed this conscience, so she'll tell them to hold the meat and to give her pasta and sauce - where the meat was cooked -, and at three years old, that was quite something. Afterwards, it got a bit more tense at that place food-wise, I felt our wishes weren't respected and my daughter was stressed out about it... We even went to obtain a doctor's note saying she should be fed a meatless diet because of possible allergies, but the staff didn't follow through - because they knew I was vegan. She goes to a vegetarian day care now." - Maja (21)

In the light of children getting conflicting messaging from various prominent individuals in their lives, parents would also make concessions as to not burden their children with strict standards to adhere to, and would not let the perfect practicing of veganism be the enemy of the good relations:

"I think my daughter is a little bit puzzled, because she plays sports and they keep on stressing how they need to eat meat to be strong, and to have such a snack when they get home ... you try to present a good example at home and to talk about things openly, but I definitely wouldn't want to pressure kids into playing along, particularly outside the home. I'd rather she does that on her own terms, to show the world the image of herself that she wants to and is comfortable with." - Peter (48)

It remains to be seen whether the issue of school meals will be holistically addressed in the future - perhaps by addition of a provision that would allow for freedom of belief exceptions, which would cover various groups of increasingly multi-cultural population. Schools would also need to secure additional funding for these programs for training and education of menu planners and chefs to be able to cater nutritious and child-appropriate meals to anyone who partakes in public education. Until then, parents are - for the most part - still left to their own devices.

5.2.3 Skills: Communicating for healthy self image and social relationships

In this section, I address the issue of communication between vegans and non-vegans following dietary/lifestyle change, where participants struggled to explain their point of view in a way that safeguarded both parties integrity and maintained the relationship on good terms. Communication issues manifested themselves in many different ways that resulted in irritability, weariness or feeling of being misunderstood and rejected on either (or both) sides. This may have been a particularly sensitive topic to discuss (reasons for that were explored in section 5.2.2), especially as a vegan diet is underlined with a strong ethical component and is perceived as highly political *vis-a-vis* standard Slovenian diet. Salience of this personal vs. political nexis becomes particularly clear when people's reactions to a vegan diet are compared to those of a medically indicated diet.

Countless questions, heated arguments, teasing, bullying, moralizing and avoidance are a few examples of troubled social interactions. In order to get better understanding of the issue, I will (1) describe initial communication surrounding one's coming out as a vegan, (2) show how these reactions were linked to heavy investments of emotional labour and protection of one's identity, and (3) address emotional fatigue following such interactions. Lastly, we will review some of the strategies and skills participants adopted to rise up to these challenges.

In coming out as vegans, respondents were starting from a rather unprivileged, deviant, minority position. Veganism is still a relatively new word and a concept in the eyes of wider Slovenian public, and one often prefaced with a negative stereotypical connotation, accompanied with many unknowns. Respondents have compared going vegan and coming out to one's social circle to a hardball initiation ceremony where you need to withstand all kinds of tests and challenges before you are (re-)accepted to the group. Participants often felt they were themselves still figuring things out on the go, and yet they felt they should be ready to answer any and all questions as a representative of a vegan community. While they may have learned enough about veganism to adopt a plant-based diet and make meals, their knowledge base on a wide variety of topics that were of interest to the public - ranging from highly technical questions to hypothetical scenarios -, was still under construction.

Not everyone was very comfortable in their new role yet, especially when going against the stream while still feeling overwhelmed by the new information they took to heart, and all while they were still very much sensitised to the issues pertaining to animal welfare and animal rights. Participants were often still feeling rather raw and vulnerable, as they felt the choice of going vegan was a reflection of them as 'good person' and hence a deeply personal one. Being heavily emotionally invested in their choice, respondent felt frustrated, misunderstood, and disappointed that others would not embrace the practice in question, or at least acknowledge they were doing the right thing (and that their new lifestyle was not merely a 'trend' or 'a product of cheap propaganda').

Dealing with frequent strenuous interactions often took a toll on vegans' socializing experience due to a feeling they needed to endlessly advocate for themselves in situations ranging from uncomfortable to distressing and to straight out hostile:

> *"We would have fights during lunch, and every so often I'd just get up in the middle and just leave, because they'd gang up on me. I was never the one to start a fight, but also not to take a beating. That never really resolved completely, I just try to strategically avoid certain subjects as much as I can, or I ignore the comments. In the*

beginning, I was actively avoiding eating together with them - I really had no desire to socialize when I knew there
was a large possibility of stepping on a mine again ..." - Tamara (42)

This had some respondents resort to minimizing participation in such outings; instead, they opted to seek solace and support in their vegan circles. In an attempt to be able to better cope with such situations in the future - for the sake of preserving own sanity and existing social relationships -, participants often reflected on their own 'before vegan' times - analysing their past attitudes and possible reactions to veg*nism, as well as possibilities to adjust their communication style accordingly:

"You know, at first when I went vegan, there was this boost of energy, some kind of a high that comes with a relief
of not being part of that ugliness anymore, of knowing you're doing your par, being part of the solution and all
that, and you want to shout about it from the rooftops, you want everyone to know. And you can try - I certainly
have - to 'convert' people, to win arguments, but then during the interaction, you get so outraged and worked up
about people not getting it. And then you're humbled. I mean, that could have been me, on the other side, a little
while back, not having a clue and really not getting it. And so you have to wonder about what might get through
and how to talk about it, especially considering that's probably the first time they are asking these questions, even
though for you, it might be the hundredth." - Katja (26)

While they may not have had the answers to all the burning questions yet, vegans were quick to try and close that gap in their knowledge to satisfy their own and the onlooker's curiosity:

"That's definitely the other side of things, when you're being bombarded with misinformation and judgements ...
and in the spirit of your wanting the others to understand veganism for what it really is, or focusing on aspects
that'd resonate with them, you need to know much more than what's of interest to you personally. And you need
to keep a cool head, impossible as that is sometimes." - Eva (35)

"The first 6 months or so were a little awkward, when people ask and comment and pay close attention to what
you do and eat and say, so you feel like you're under magnifying glass. And it happens over and over again, with
each of your friends and colleagues and family neighbours and neighbours, so that gets tiresome. On the other
hand, you get to clarify your perspective much better, so you seem more "collected", and there's an occasional
conundrum or a question you haven't thought about before, so you get to look it up and learn new things in the
process. But nutrition wise, people seem to think that the 'right amount' of anything is what they themselves are
having, regardless what that might be and what their medical file says. " - Manca (31)

Respondents might have still been struggling with communicating about veganism, but they grew more comfortable in their choice, and they certainly had plenty of opportunities to practice their answers, tone, and the overall approach to the subject - in short, honing their argumentation skills. One helpful tactic, endorsed by all, was judging what the questions were really about - were people's questions coming from a place of concern or genuine curiosity? Or were they an attempt to ridicule, provoke, find a flaw in one's argument and dismiss one's position as hypocritical (or, alternatively, as extremist)? Learning which conversations were constructive enough to continue them - and thus which battles were worth fighting - went hand-in-hand with knowing when it might be best to disengage to save one's energy and avoid frustration or conflict escalation:

"I wish I'd had read much more to be better prepared for outside criticism and scepticism, so that I'd have answers
up my sleeve in a way, because you'll hear every improbable and/or fictional scenario, not to mention discussing
same old things to no end. But also, you kind of have to listen for what they really want from you and why.
Sometimes you can have all the answers and that'll just irritate them and then they'll call you preachy or biased or
extreme and proclaim "victory". But yeah, information is your friend, the more detailed and "sciency", the better.
And other, more established vegan veterans, they're great resources for that." - Marko (32)

"It was really painful to take part in a conversation about veganism sometimes, sometimes I'd just say out right I
don't want to talk about it, because I just couldn't, it was too much - having to bear witness to the things

happening in animal industries, and then having it mocked, you mocked for doing the right thing. There's people who will approach you and will express genuine interest in it, they'll mention they've read or heard or seen something, and want some input, to pick your brain, try to understand ... that's fine, of course I'll do that. But if someone's just looking for a fight, then count me out." - Maja (21)

Sharing your personal story was another productive method that helped keep the conversation civil and on point; however, it proved less effective in group settings were vegans were outnumbered. Additionally, conversations surrounding veganism would commonly arise when people were gathered together around a (non-vegan) meal, which reportedly made interactions particularly awkward and participants more likely to assume a defensive stance.

While with time, frustrating communication exchanges declined in frequency, they rarely completely dissipated within participant's existing circles. The challenges remained, and some interpersonal relationships suffered as a result of it. Equally, new relationships outside of vegan circles continued to start rather awkwardly, as something as simple as ordering a soy latte may come to burden a previously casual conversation with a deeply personal (and political) one. And lastly, while vegans may have felt more equipped with knowledge and skills to argue their position, they still commonly felt uncomfortable pressure of assuming multiple roles within any such conversation - one of being a nice conversation partner while being an effective animal rights advocate and *the* vegan community representative to their communication partners at the same time.

5.2.4 Communities of practice: Struggle for power and claims to knowledge

In this final part, we touch upon the friction between two communities of practice - one of vegans (and vegan parents in particular), the other one of medical professionals. Here, we can observe two epistemic perspectives that deal with information on nutrition and health, each competing for entitlement to power and claims to superior knowledge, as well as in their notions of deference. In this section, I will also show how these communities of practice interact (sometimes with media as mediators) and what consequences that may have for the health of vegans and how the vegan community is perceived by the wider public.

As I have previously touched upon in chapter 5.1.3, new vegans have frequently felt the need to educate themselves on nutrition in general and vegan nutrition in particular to fill their knowledge gaps. This re-skilling allowed them to be informed about the foods and supplements that would allow them to improve or maintain health for the long-term. Similar to various notions of ethics and rights awarded to different animal species cross-culturally, nutrition guidelines can vary quite significantly from country to county. In this, Slovenia departs from leading world-renowed dietetic organisations by adhering to a more cautious approach regarding embracing of veg*n diets - especially where children are concerned. Over time, with increasing vegan population and nutritional studies concerning them, the gap between the knowledge base of vegans and that of medical professionals has been steadily increasing. Seemingly, vegans were - in no small part through their new social networks - one of the first ones in line of relevant new information (and eager to adopt them), while doctors often referred questions on topics of nutrition to their previously established internal community guidelines and school curriculums that were more cautious and less elastic in terms of change and adaptability. This resulted in frustration that numerous respondents were quick to express:

"I feel like everyone is shouting about vegan diets being totally ok from the mountain tops already, as long as you check a few nutrition boxes like B12, it's only [Slovenians] that are still so backwards ... they'll agree to vegetarianism under doctor's supervision, preferably next to having a PhD in food combining up your sleeve ... but that's about it." - Urban (29)

"Slovenian healthcare workers really need proper education on vegetarian and vegan diet - whether they want to admit this or not -, and possibly also other people who work with children like in day cares and schools as well, so that they'll understand that veganism is okay, and we won't turn green or die from it." - Janja (32)

Medical doctors such as general practitioners in Slovenia receive relatively few hours of nutritional training during the course of their professional education, and in the curriculum on healthy diets, the (pesco-)vegetarian diets are still deemed appropriate (but not recommended), while veg*n diets are commonly reduced to a footnote as being *sub-par* as (overly) restrictive and thus advised against. Characterised as 'lacking', the latter were even called 'forbidden' for children by Dr. Orel (head of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Ljubljana UMC), whom the media often consults and quotes on issues pertaining to nutrition and health.

On the other hand, the knowledge set of vegans, though perhaps more easily updated and individually adopted, was for the large part not substantiated with a degree in the relevant field, and the knowledge-thirsty vegans sometimes lacked in ability to interpret the complex and ever more abundant scientific data. By each community resolute in their position on veg*n diets, the perceived discrepancy between the locus of knowledge and power has commonly lead to conflicts regarding the authority in the domain - be it in situations that took place in medical facilities or outside of them. Participants reported being able to avoid such conflicts through either yielding to doctors (even if in appearance only), or through non-disclosure of their dietary patterns, but that was not always desirable or possible (e.g. in the case of hospital stays, where food would be provided internally). Another alternative was to circumvent the western medicine altogether, which sometimes presented with unfortunate and at other times dire and tragic consequences.

One prominent example of such an event happened in 2011 when the national story broke surrounding an infant's death at 8 months of age in the care of her vegan parents who chose to forgo medical care altogether. The child has reportedly only ever been exposed to medical attention days before her death which media reported to be due to malnutrition, linking her death to a 'vegan diet' she was subjected to. While it was later discovered the little girl had been fighting atypically presenting pneumonia, and sepsis - one of the most common causes of death in infants overall - was quoted as an official cause of death, a nation-wide witch-hunt ensued. In this, 'extremist vegans' who prioritised wellbeing of animals over that of their own children. Several more articles and round tables followed, in which Dr Orel was most commonly consulted as a presumed authority on the issue, with the Vegan Initiative representatives joining the discussion per invitation only later on.

In this conflict, the whole nation could be privy the exchange of information and claims to knowledge between the representatives of both groups. While the vegans had the lower hand due to the context of an infant's death (and the lack of any official education in nutrition and medicine), the tragedy was still commonly blamed on the parents choice of diet rather than on the seeking of timely medical attention. Respondents indicated that it quickly started to become clear that the representative of the doctors underestimated the knowledge of nutrition the vegan dialogue partners possessed. This somewhat evened-out representatives' relative positions in engaging a dialogue on the points themselves, rather than resulting in attempts at unilateral transfer of information from the medical doctor to the public.

This dynamic can be corroborated through literature on epistemic and relational conflicts when learning (or problem-solving) is concerned. When a conflict emerges, not all interactions between the involved parties will lead to progress. Generally, a conflict can be solved in an epistemic way (where the focus is on the task and confrontation of divergent points) or in a relational way (where the focus is on social comparison of competences) - where the latter is detrimental to learning. Moreover, if the parties are aware they were operating with complementary rather than identical sets of information, that further encourages cooperation and results in superior learning outcomes (Darnon, Buchs & Butera, 2002). As the communication between the two parties eased up, ending in recognition that the two sides might have more in common than initially thought, each was drawing on their respective sets of scientific information and personal experiences (whether everyday or clinical). This has sown some seeds that could potentially lead to increased cooperation between the communities, if there is interest in furthering the discussion beyond addressing that one acute situation. Darnon, Buchs & Butera (2002) stress how the quality of relationships between concerned parties is very important if progress is to be made in terms of solving the problem at hand, especially when it comes to aptitude tasks where presuming one answer correct renders the other one wrong.

Aptitude tasks, depending on what the motive of the participants is - either understanding the problem in its complexity or showing of their competences -, resolve in two possible ways: epistemic (finding the correct answer) or relational one (demonstrating one's competency). It appears that, in situations where one's competency is threatened, the latter prevails, and the common outcome is that one tries to assert their point of view *while* invalidating the other in a so-called 'conflict of competences' (Darnon, Buchs & Butera, 2002). If, however, the said individuals perceive a degree of complementarity between each other (and believe they can both be right under certain circumstances), the threat is reduced and the conflict may be resolved in a more productive manner. In this, the feel of 'resource interdependence' - meaning the parties can benefit from exchange of their information and experiences - can make the interaction more relevant and thus facilitate sharing and task-orientated problem solving.

Unfortunately, in the years that followed, the discussion saw no epilogue, change in cooperative inclinations of the two communities, or evolvement of nutritional guidelines and thus no change in official position on veg*n diets. This remains problematic for a multiplicity of reasons. First, all respondents mentioned their their family, friends, and even an odd acquaintance quoted the death of that infant as a reason of insufficiency and danger of plant-based diets. Many have also mentioned the disapproving reactions made out of fear for their and their children's health and wellbeing, and receiving comments about being irresponsible parents. Second, if vegan parents opted not to disclose their lifestyle for the fear of being stigmatised and lectured rather than being given helpful advice that would honour their ethics, or if they chose to forgo doctor's supervision altogether, they were left to their own devices. This, in turn, further increases the negative attitudes towards medical community, and adds to the burden of responsibility on vegan parents, leading to a possibility that a medical issue would go unrecognised, undiagnosed and untreated, potentially resulting in undesired outcomes in terms of health of vegan individuals, as well as the reputation of vegan movement at large. Equally, by not being able to follow development of health vegan children, these cases would remain undocumented and stigma surrounding vegan diets salient, while doctors would lack motivation to additionally educate themselves on suitability, planning and troubleshooting of plant-based diets in various stages of one's development. Lastly, by rendering the veg*n diet option unviable, mainstream public might also miss out on hearing information that might help improve their overall health, particularly in the light of widespread chronic diseases in which diets are heavily implicated, and that might at the same time support planetary health.

5.2.5 Summary

To conclude, in this part I have shown how various elements of social and traditional food practices interact are engrained, invoked, and enacted while serving to preserve the traditional practice-as-is against erosion and a competitive new (vegan) practice. Regardless of these challenges and transgressions that transpired, respondents were able to find innovative ways to maintain their diets, to protect their newly acquired identities and their existing social connections, as well as to provide a suitable environment for their children to grow up in - be it through mediation, negotiation, and/or circumvention of impeding elements and structures.

6 DISCUSSION

Throughout this thesis, I aimed to answer and explain how elements of traditionally normative dietary practices interact with those of vegan dietary practice, as well as how they interact and influence each other throughout one's dietary transition and continuous adherence to this relatively novel dietary practice. In trying to pinpoint what might help people become and stay vegan, what obstacles needed to be overcome to do so (and in what ways), I drew on Social Practice Theory. This particular lens allowed me to break the practice under investigation into its consisting elements - ideas, materials, skills and carriers - that helped structure and focus analysis in order to shed light onto these different elements in isolation, as well as in relation to one another - within *and* between the two competing practices. In this chapter, I will further discuss findings in the context of chosen theoretical framework and their implications for veganism as an overall sustainable dietary practice and a promising site for future research and social change. Additionally, I will evaluate the quality of the study through addressing my own positionality as well as limitations of the study, and offer suggestions as to future research.

6.1 Lessons about veganism as a practice

Analysis of collected data through the lens of SPT has offered rich insights into changing trajectories from a traditional Slovenian dietary practice to an all-around more sustainable vegan practice. By means of comparing and contrasting the two practices, I was able to illustrate the most burning points of contention and offer explanations as to why that might be so, as well as ways in which respondents went about addressing them in order to maintain a certain balance between domains of much importance as they pertain to food - be it in the sense of ethics, health, environment, and/or social relationships and functions these may be facilitating or fulfilling.

Change of the very meaning of one of the components was most often quoted as a deciding factor in embracing the vegan diet, and its salience as well as potency served as a strong motivator in going against the stream - even if that meant having to (re-)negotiate one's identity, family relationships and a place in the society at large. From this initial knowledge acquisition and value internalization, it followed that other elements would need to be adjusted or swapped out accordingly, if practitioners were to ground their good intentions in practice rather than just theory. Motivation for change and food as a source of nutrition may be the core domains of any food practice that readily spring to mind (as is obvious from abundance of questions from onlookers and studies by researchers). Still, other - more inter-personal and otherwise social domains proved to be much more of a challenge and a hurdle to one's maintenance of a vegan diet. As many have noted, the time and energy investments into shopping, cooking, re-arranging their pantry and learning about a plant-based food pyramid have been minimal compared to frustrations about interpersonal communication, disputes over the value and appropriateness of veganism and vegan diets in particular. Furthermore, by not looking at the vegan practice and its elements in isolation but rather in relation to another - normative - practice, it became clear that neither was 'neutral' - even though the latter was so pervasive that its content often went unquestioned ('it's tradition' or 'common sense' and therefore inherently positively valued), and even embedded in society's many structures. This is even reflected in the lack of a name of a 'traditionally normative omnivorous practice' that is culturally and not biologically conditioned, and the term 'carnism' to denote this ideology that is juxtaposed with veganism has only been coined in 2001 (and sparsely used ever since outside of the vegan community), pointing the finger of otherness towards the transgressive vegans rather than towards self-reflection.

In order to fulfill their needs and minimize turmoil, vegan practitioners have adopted various strategies that helped them mediate social relationships and structures. They did so by invoking and incorporating alternative elements in their daily practices, or by relying on different individuals and networks for socialization and exchange of information that better fitted their newly adopted worldview, and which were less burdensome at the minimum and fully embracing under the best of circumstances. As such, these offered an alternative social circle that would come to compliment and/or substitute their close social units such as family and friends. And while this seemed to be the way to securing at least some level of concordance and reaping of the benefits stemming from it, many were still looking

inwards to, if at all possible, bridge the existing gap and patch up the close existing relationships - if not for their own benefit, then for the benefit of their children.

6.2 Lessons about Social Practice Theory

Social practice theory helped structuring the research in terms of interview questions and (sub)chapters where I was able to narrow the focus to one particular element at the time - even though in practice, these are much more complex and intertwined. Providing me with a novel way of looking at data and reporting on it, SPT had a central role in filling in some of the identified gaps in existing research on sustainable diets and veganism in particular, especially as people are transitioning from one dietary practice to another, and they do so in a rather social context that pertains to many functions and meanings of food. Here in particular it helped me address the relationship between the practices and their carriers in much greater detail and in a much wider scope that was previously done.

On the other hand, SPT is not always the most elegant or straight-forward way to break data into categories, as it begs the question - where does one element end and the other begin? And how do we best cover the prominent relationships between the elements within and between practices, as well as their carriers, so that there is sufficient background information to understand one, but in a way that information does not end out of place, or appear too repetitive throughout the work (in other words, content, structure and cohesiveness while trying to simplify the complex interactions might be at odds). Still, the theory reflects the messiness of the human interactions and practices (past, current, future; complementary, unrelated and competing ones) rather than relying on a linear and individualistic A-B-C models of behavioural change, instead addressing a wide scope of issues and through this reframing contributing to sociological thinking regarding eating practices and their reproduction, centering an eating practice within the organization of one's everyday life.

With its many perks in terms of description and explanation of situation-as-is, including the areas of smooth and contested transition, on occasion I found SPT lacking in its problem-solving (including to some extent, prescriptive) power in order to overcome the obstacles in terms of maintaining one's loyalty to a practice, as well as to carriers of competing practices that carry competing set of elements - starting with meaning. Introduction of additional concepts that would assist in identifying common ground and possibilities for the two sets of practitioners to better relate to one-another and problem-solve efficiently and effectively.

For this, SPT might benefit from adopting concepts from related fields and areas of research, as well as from relying less heavily (or even exclusively) on methods of observation, but rather complementing them with interviewing, (auto)ethnography, discourse analysis, etc.

6.3 Evaluation of study quality and future research

Reflecting on my own positionality as a researcher honours the significance of its potential effects on the research process - from devleopment of an idea and data collection to findings and implication. This is especially important given the qualitative nature of the research, in which I myself was a data collection instrument. Considering interaction between myself and respondents who volunteered to participate, my own - as well as the participants' - identities would come into play, as well as our perceptions of each other. In recognising my position and my biases, I was be able to gain insights into how to approach the shared space of research and members of the particular group, as well as how to engage with the 'other'.

As a young female student who grew up in a small rural and conservative town in Slovenia, and a vegan of 10+ years myself, I was able to permeate the circle of vegan parents even though I myself was not yet 'one of them'. Establishing my role as a supplicant, trust and rapport with participants thus came easy, given that - as a function of our 'shared

sameness' -, participants would be able to freely share their experience as they would with a friend (or a fellow practitioner and a member of vegan community of practice). Participants were able to relax and speak without the need to censor themselves or to fear judgment, and all while having confidence that they would not be misquoted or their positions misrepresented. Given all that, I was able to tap into a variety of rather personal topics without it being deemed intrusive, as years of having been active in vegan circles and my knowledge of insider topics would warrant for my genuineness and be especially helpful in posing probing questions to cover the wide scope of interest without missing out on any prominent relevant topics.

On the other hand, with the subject being so close to heart, I kept having to check myself and keep on being mindful of my role as a researcher in keeping my questions related to theory and subject of investigation throughout the interviewing process. Similarly, my own subjectivity would prove rather salient throughout the process of analysis via reporting the findings, where I had to take special care not to embrace stories (even thought they might have been relatable) and to control the expression of my voice in order to remain 'an objective researcher' - a somewhat naive and untenable quest for any one party -, all while seeking to represent the voices of participants and provide an understanding through accounts of experiences of these vegan individuals.

Regarding limitations of the study, not being able to combine the approach with observation of practices in question was something that would possibly eliminate a certain amount of bias in participant reporting as interactions could be observed first hand, e.g. without meaning being assigned to it by respondents. The study is also limited to being a snapshot in time at the moment of conducting interviews, and as such could not follow developments in one's life as a vegan practitioner or in societal shifts of meaning and changes to infrastructure in real time. Similarly, the sample was limited to 1st generation Slovenian vegans who by-and-large became vegan as adults and did not grow up with vegan parents or have to deal with non-vegan peers at school. The sample also did not include a multiplicity of voices in terms of non-vegan practitioners and/or non-practicing practitioners (being respondents' spouses, parents, friends; or doctors, nutritionists, teachers, day care staff, policy makers; or former vegan practitioners who have since succumbed to recidivism) whose perspectives would further enrich the dataset.

These limitations have clear implications for future research that might be carried out in order to paint an even fuller picture of vegan dietary practice as one of the readily available sustainable possibilities in addressing a myriad of domains all at once. Further research in the domains of communication, commensality and dietary transgression as well as concordance would also be very welcome - zeroing in on (potential) carriers of practices and relationships between them. Nutritional studies on adequacy and nutrition literacy of vegans (and their offspring) in practice might also provide useful insights and help troubleshoot potential issues before potential negative effects are deemed irreparable, ending in personal or family tragedy and a nation-wide deterrent cautionary tale. Additionally, policy analysis and comparison of existing and new infrastructure would also add to the big picture - especially when done on an international scale, as it could lead to robust data that might encourage and even enable vegan diet as a practice by making it an easier - or even a default - choice.

6.4 Conclusion: Towards the generation of vegans and sustainable future

With the mounting pressure of taking immediate and effective action to secure our future well-being and survival as a society, change on a systemic level addressing these threats is inevitable. And while change might be easier and faster to implement downstream, it would be unfair and misguided to put it on individuals themselves to solve the quandary humanity is facing. However, looking at the practices various groups and individuals are engaging in - despite having to overcome numerous obstacles in doing so - could well serve as a starting point and inspiration that could contribute towards alleviation of the problem, especially if these measures were further explored and incentivised, or perhaps even reframed as default - however utopian that may seem right now. In the meantime, we might as well internalise the words of Colleen Patrick-Goudreau and continue with our efforts to secure a better future for everyone:

> *"Don't do nothing because you can't do everything. Do something. Anything."*

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