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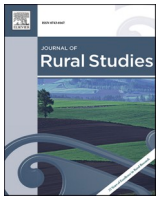

Local food and the nomadic ethical placemaking of the rural idyll: Towards a non-anthropocentric 'rural of the future'

Alessandro Graciotti

Department of Marketing & Analytics, School of Management, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bay Campus, Swansea University, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

The rural idyll is a geographical imagination envisioning a utopian escape from urban modernity and industrial values. However, this imaginary typically serves anthropocentric, neoliberal market logics, which landscape the rural as other. Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) may navigate this tension when committing to the ethico-political relocalisation of food systems. Drawing on Braidotti's nomadic ethics, this study develops a non-anthropocentric (new materialist and posthuman) understanding of the rural idyll, grounded in the narratives of local food consumers participating in AFNs in the Italian region of Marche. Based on 20 in-depth interviews, this research explores how participants' narratives can express a life-affirming desire that (re)configures the rural idyll as a not-yet-sustained condition of more-than-human rural spatial assemblages, providing a counter-point to the negative realities presently landscaping non-human nature as other. Findings show that these narratives contribute to the nomadic ethical placemaking of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll – a virtuality foregrounding a 'rural of the future' committed to fostering human and non-human intra-actions based on the ontological dissolution of the human subject in rural space. This process repositions non-human life discourse as ethico-politically central in agri-food practices and fosters a non-linear, inclusive reinterpretation of local food autochthony. Thus, this study contributes to food geographies and rural studies by showing how AFN-driven local food consumption can help overturn anthropocentric rural landscaping by positioning a non-anthropocentric idyllic image of non-human nature as a harbinger of alternative patterns of becoming, thereby opening up a novel, nomadic ethical understanding of placemaking possible rural futures.

1. Introduction

The rural idyll is a geographical imagination that envisions a future state of perfection in radical alterity to the values of modern advanced capitalist markets – a presently not-yet-sustained, utopian 'elsewhere', which is often co-opted by commercial interests transforming it into an ideological construct shaped by neoliberalist logics (Horáková et al., 2018). While rural idyllic imaginaries can emerge in contrast with contemporary industrial farming paradigms (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020), they typically foster a nostalgic, classist, and static commodification of rural space, framed as a consumable natural and experiential resource (Halfacree and Williams, 2021; Shucksmith, 2018). Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) may emerge within this context as ethico-political forms of organising that seek to reimagine socioecological relationships within agri-food systems (Beacham, 2018; Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2021; Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024). However, they often need to hybridise their operations with neoliberal development strategies to sustain operations in a contested rural space (Le Velley and Dufeu, 2016; Winter 2003). Hence, the 'local food' concept – central to AFNs (Feagan, 2007; Harris, 2010) – does not always guarantee a more socioecologically just alternative, opening itself to critique (Stein and Santini, 2022; Young, 2021).

Engaging with AFNs embedded in a countryside manifesting "both the rural idyll, and the anti-idyll, simultaneously and contiguously" (O'Neill, 2024, p. 9), local food consumers often romanticise rural nature as an 'idyllic' repository of symbols and values of past pre-industrial societies (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020), while also committing to support socioenvironmentally conscious forms of farming, expressing a desire to change today's hegemonic, 'unidyllic' forms of productivist agriculture exploiting both humans and non-human nature alike (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024; Beacham, 2018; Pigott, 2020). Indeed, local food consumers often act with a 'moral reason' to challenge present negative realities, which continuously (re)produce neoliberal industrial and policymaking discourse landscaping rural, non-human nature as 'other' (Feagan, 2007; Horáková et al., 2018). This fosters future-thinking practices (Beacham, 2018), which are capable of

E-mail address: alessandro.graciotti@swansea.ac.uk.

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instantiating ethical food consumption behaviours (Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2021; McEachern et al., 2010; Skallerud and Wien, 2019).

By focusing on local food consumers as *landscapers* (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024), I argue that their more 'ordinary' lived experiences can offer critical insights into how humans engage with rural space in ways that are *non-anthropocentric* (Fan, 2024; Willett, 2021). This can contribute to an ethical form of placemaking in which the rural idyll concept is liberated from advanced capitalist control (Holland, 2011), foregrounding a 'rural of the future' that sustains the collective existence of human *and* non-human nature (Beacham, 2018). As placemaking unfolds through narratives shaped by geographical imaginations, which materially landscape space (Edensor, 2024; Lucarelli et al., 2023; Trudeau, 2006), local food consumers' discourses and practices – driven by a rural idyllic imaginary reflecting a desire to materialise a more-than-human rural space weaving humans and non-human nature in a "vital flow of becoming together" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 7) – can provide a critical counter-point to the current condition of the rural landscape – an 'object' or 'scenery' in which humans and non-human nature stand apart (e.g., Edensor, 2024; Kallio and LaFleur, 2023).

Drawing from Braidotti's (2006, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2016, 2022) nomadic ethics – a new materialist *and* posthuman metaethical worldview for navigating "the schizoid and intrinsically non-linear structure of advanced capitalism" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 40) – this paper aims to advance our understanding of how local food consumption can contribute to the placemaking of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll as a new materialist *virtuality*. This is defined as a potential, yet real, spatial condition that can be actualised by committing in the present to a geographical imagination or concept – such as the rural idyll – which not only confronts but also materially exceeds dominant anthropocentric landscapings of the rural (e.g., Braidotti, 2022; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 1994). Going beyond the rural idyll as a 'purely human' construct (Halfacree and Williams, 2021), and beyond a dialectical understanding of change (Deleuze, 1994), nomadic ethics propose that the process of overturning negative realities cannot emerge from the present as *the actual* – where the rural idyll is a dominant anthropocentric imaginary that landscapes a marginalised rural other – but from the present as *the virtual*, where the rural idyll is a minoritarian imaginary fostering non-anthropocentric ethical encounters, pointing to what rural space is capable of becoming.

Through 20 in-depth interviews with local food consumers participating in AFNs in the Italian region of Marche, this paper addresses the following research questions: *(i)* 'How do local food consumers' discourses and practices construct the rural idyll?'; and *(ii)* 'To what extent do these reflect or contribute to forms of nomadic ethical placemaking?'. This research offers a novel contribution by applying nomadic ethics to the study of the rural idyll and AFNs. It responds to Wadham et al.'s (2024) call for the food geographies and rural studies literatures to add critical texture to how local food consumers and AFNs can resist the 'othering' of non-human nature as a neoliberal form of commodifying rural space under advanced capitalist market logics (see also Horáková et al., 2018). Moreover, it expands on O'Neill's (2024) work by focusing specifically on consumer-led placemaking of rural space as assemblage – that is, a relational ontological configuration of space (Anderson et al., 2012; Halfacree and Williams, 2021; Willett, 2021).

The paper begins by reviewing placemaking literature through the lens of local food consumption, followed by a critique of the anthropocentric foundations of the rural idyll – particularly the othering of non-human nature in rural landscaping. To address this, it introduces nomadic ethics as a framework for theorising an ethical form of placemaking grounded in non-anthropocentric rural idyllic encounters. After outlining the research design, the findings show how the rural idyll emerges as a virtuality shaped by participants' placemaking narratives, aimed at (re)configuring the Marche countryside as a more-than-human rural spatial assemblage. The paper concludes by discussing its limitations and calling for further research on nomadic ethics and local food consumption.

2. Literature review

2.1. Placemaking the rural idyll: A local food consumption perspective

Human geography has extensively studied the concept of *landscape* as a symbolic layer of meaning that cultures impose on the built and natural environment (Edensor, 2024; Trudeau, 2006). Placemaking is a process of landscaping that unfolds through place users' discourses and practices, typically conveyed by narratives constructing a system of signs and images – such as geographical imaginations (e.g., the rural idyll), which exert a performative effect on space production (Lucarelli et al., 2023). Indeed, rural landscapes are shaped by placemaking narratives that *differentiate* observable features of urban (vs. rural) environments (de Olde and Oosterlynck, 2022; Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020), associating the countryside to an idyllic "idea that structures a perspective about social relationships and how land should be used in a particular place" (Trudeau, 2006, p. 422).

In the local food consumption context, research shows that consumers construct ideal – typically bucolic – representations of the countryside (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020), placemaking a 'local food landscape' in rural space (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024), through a process that mostly follows a visual narrative constituting an image of place (Trudeau, 2006), behind which "lies a system of beliefs and representations" telling "something not only about the culture being portrayed but also about the values that underlie" it (Campelo et al., 2011, p. 4). For instance, Rodriguez (2020) shows that the image of non-human nature in rural landscapes can be leveraged by producers to exclude visually detectable values and lifestyles associated with globalised, industrialised 'urban' food system paradigms, thereby encouraging more conscious consumers to purchase local food (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024; McEachern et al., 2010; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Tellström et al., 2006).

Local food consumers' rural idyllic imaginaries can foster ethical food consumption behaviours by nurturing a sense of social welfare and active environmental protection, particularly through avoiding large-scale marketing channels, such as supermarkets, and resisting productivist approaches to farming (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024; McEachern et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2017; Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024). However, these narratives often fall short of driving transformative change and may (more or less) inadvertently contribute to the othering of rural space – reproducing elitist 'urban–rural divide' stereotypes (Carolan, 2022), and constructing a human-centred representation of 'nature' rooted in nostalgia for pre-industrial agrarian societies. While symbolically opposed to industrial approaches, such imaginaries remain typically anthropocentric (Halfacree and Williams, 2021). *Rural otherness*, constructed in this way, negatively affects both human and non-human inhabitants of rural space (e.g., Carolan, 2022; Halfacree and Williams, 2021; Shucksmith, 2018; Wadham et al., 2024), as they become part of an idyllic scenery that landscapes the countryside as a branded experience for local food consumers (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Rodriguez, 2020; Tellström et al., 2006).

2.2. Rural otherness: an anthropocentric placemaking narrative of the rural idyll

Responding to Philo's (1992) call to examine processes of 'othering' in the socio-geographical differentiation of rural space, rural sociology and geography continue to explore how otherness remains central to the cultural and spatial imaginaries of the countryside (Carolan, 2022; Hjort, 2023; O'Neill, 2024). Scholars have examined the othering of rural space through the lens of subaltern power relations, exploring how stereotypes and value-laden urban sociocultural hegemony negatively affect rural residents' identities, socio-economic vulnerability, and neglect (Agyeman and Neal, 2009). In fact, urban–rural power asymmetries reinforce rural dependency on urban-led sociocultural structures, planning, and neoliberalist land use policies either exploiting or

neglecting rural minorities (Hjort, 2023; Moris, 2021; Stenbacka, 2011; Ther-Ríos, 2020; Trudeau, 2006).

While scholars have primarily focused on how rural human populations are othered, shifting attention to non-human rural inhabitants reveals how "spatialised understandings of difference" (Holloway, 2004, p. 143) intersect with idyllic conceptions of nature and rural otherness (Cloke and Jones, 2003; Little, 1999). However, this literature has often overlooked how non-human natural entities can be positioned as integral to "rural life worlds" (Wadham et al., 2024, p. 172 – see also Arceño, 2021; Goodman, 2015; Halfacree and Williams, 2021; Holloway et al., 2006; Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024). Attending to more-than-human relations is vital to counter anthropocentric moral frameworks that historically cast rural idyllic non-human entities as "background extras in an otherwise human story, often subsumed under broad labels (e.g., farm animals) or reduced to their value to humans (e.g., meat)" (Wadham et al., 2024, p. 172). It is therefore crucial to explore how the rural idyll concept, liberated from anthropocentric and advanced capitalist logics excluding "naturalised and nonanthropomorphic others" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 2 – see also Holland, 2011; Horáková et al., 2018), could landscape non-human nature *differently*, advancing a new imaginary envisioning alternative, possible rural futures (Braidotti, 2022).

By critically engaging with the ethics of landscaping non-human nature, philosophers in the field of environmental ethics have proposed a conceptualisation of nature as "valued precisely for its otherness" (Hailwood, 2000, p. 353), endowing idyllic, non-human nature with a non-instrumental ethical value influencing what the ethical placemaking of the rural idyll might mean, particularly in agri-food system development contexts (Wienhues and Deplazes-Zemp, 2022). This metaethical worldview is based on the combination of two individual liberalist key ideas: *(i)* "a strong sense of nature's distinctness and independence (its otherness) is required for a sense of *its* value as opposed to mine or ours" (Hailwood, 2000, p. 360, emphasis in the original); and *(ii)* humans cannot help but consume nature in terms of 'landscaping', which outlines a process of placemaking (Edensor, 2024; Hailwood, 2000, 2006; Trudeau, 2006). According to Hailwood (2000, 2006), an ethical placemaking of nature must refrain from making 'nature' object of human desire, and should instead ground itself in 'co-independent' self-preservation (Hailwood, 2006). This means that organising geographical imaginations – such as the rural idyll – should unfold 'in harmony' with nature, i.e., by refraining human desire to be "*that* much part of the scenery" (Hailwood, 2000, p. 370, emphasis in the original), just like "the English countryside is more 'in harmony with nature' than is the landscape of the Los Angeles megalopolis" (Hailwood, 2006, p. 177).

However, despite its non-anthropocentric aspirations (i.e., Wienhues and Deplazes-Zemp, 2022), this argument reinstates non-human natural entities as "background extras" (Wadham et al., 2024, p. 172) in an 'all-too-human' – i.e., fundamentally anthropocentric – rural idyllic story (Braidotti, 2006; Deleuze, 1986). Indeed, it ultimately upholds a universalist moral stance (i.e., to refrain from landscaping) that stifles humans' desire capability of co-developing, together with non-human natural entities, "new modes of ethical behavior" (Braidotti, 2012, p. 173) – modes which community-based, more socioecologically just forms of placemaking could foster through urban/rural AFN development strategies (e.g., Beacham, 2018; Farrier et al., 2019; Marsden, 2013; Robertson, 2020; Tan and Tan, 2023). This complexity calls for a more 'radical' form of non-anthropocentrism from an ontological perspective – one that rethinks placemaking as a process of landscaping which displaces the centrality of human discourse and repositions non-human life acknowledgment as ethico-politically central in rural and agri-food system development, which nomadic ethics can help conceptualise.

2.3. Nomadic ethics: towards a non-anthropocentric placemaking of the rural idyll

Nomadic ethics builds upon a new materialist ontological framework that challenges anthropocentric philosophical traditions (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 2020), and develops a metaethical worldview grounded in the affirmation of posthuman desire – one that aims to affirm human and non-human life in a self-disinterested and nonprofit-minded way (Braidotti, 2006, 2012). Drawing primarily on Deleuze's (1986, 1988) interpretation of Nietzsche and Spinoza, this desire is 'life-affirming' – that is, it aims to affirm the "innermost freedom" of human and non-human life (Braidotti, 2022, p. 8), advancing a posthuman understanding of ethics grounded in the new materialist relational ontological conception of monism and radical immanence (Braidotti, 2016).

New materialist monism sees all 'matter' (e.g., meanings, imaginaries, objects, human and non-human entities, etc. – Deleuze, 1994; Thrift, 2008) as emerging from encounters within a web of relations in a continuous process of 'becoming' (Barad, 2003; Braidotti, 2016). Becoming refers to the constant flux of change in which the world is entangled (Anderson et al., 2012; Deleuze, 1986). This process unfolds through desire, and does not transcend the world (i.e., it is not above or beyond it), but is immanent to it (i.e., within it) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Through encounters, matter emerges as *assemblage* (DeLanda, 2016; Guattari, 1995) – i.e., a heterogeneous, ephemeral web of relations that assumes a semiotically subjectifying configuration in a rhizomatic way; that is, non-linearly, unpredictably, and creatively (Braidotti, 2022; DeLanda, 2016; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). All matter is assemblage – a multiplicity *intra-acting* with other multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari, 2020). Here, 'intra-action' (as opposed to 'interaction') underscores new materialism's anti-essentialist relational ontology, in which matter does not pre-exist its relations but rather emerge through them (Barad, 2003). From a nomadic ethical perspective, matter encounters – i.e., *affects* (Deleuze, 1988; Thrift, 2008) – can increase or diminish the power of life-affirming desire to produce change by overturning negative realities through imaginaries of alternative, possible futures, i.e., virtualities advancing counter-points to the present as the actual (Braidotti, 2022; Doel, 2010).

From a spatial perspective (Anderson et al., 2012), this is how rural space can be 'idyllic' and 'unidyllic' – i.e., semiotically subjectifying qualifications (Guattari, 1995) – in contiguous, blurred, and ephemeral, ever-evolving assemblage configurations in the lived experience of different place users (e.g., Murdoch et al., 2003; O'Neill, 2024). Indeed, different place users can (re)configure rural spatial assemblages in different ways due to changes in matter encounters having different rural idyllic intensities (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; Guattari, 1995) – namely, through representations, infrastructures, and practices that can be perceived as more anti-productivist and less urban than those experienced in other rural areas, depending on specific historical, cultural-geographical, and market contexts (e.g., Edensor, 2024; O'Neill, 2024). Crucially, assemblages are not static. They can dissolve and reconfigure through new representational, socio-institutional, or experiential encounters – *becoming-other* (Braidotti, 2006). As assemblage becomes 'other' than itself, it prefigures a virtuality as a "future anterior" in the present as the actual (Gerhardt, 2020, p. 683).

'Becoming-other' does not imply othering in terms of exclusion or marginalisation (e.g., Agyeman and Neal, 2009), but instead represents a process through which an assemblage *differentiates itself from 'itself'* (Deleuze, 1994). Within nomadic ethics, it concerns a process of becoming through which assemblage (re)configurations unfold through humans' life-affirming desire bringing about a posthuman, ontological dissolution of the individual human subject, allowing the emergence of non-anthropocentric assemblages where *bios* – i.e., dominant 'human' discourse – ceases to occupy a central position (Braidotti, 2006, 2022; Deleuze and Guattari, 1977). Hence, if non-anthropocentric rural idyllic imaginaries emerge from local food consumers' discourses and practices expressing a life-affirming desire to become-other, they foreshadow the

potential reconfiguration of current rural landscapes in a non-anthropocentric, more-than-human way.

In other words, this can lead to a form of landscaping the countryside which foregrounds a deeper sense of human and non-human 'togetherness' (Braidotti, 2006), namely an ethico-political discourse centred on the virtual, yet-to-be-actualised primacy of non-human life (i.e., *zoe*) in relation to *bios* in rural spatial contexts. Its potential actualisation *can create* new rural spatial assemblage configurations as possible futures lurking within the present rural condition (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 2020) – a nomadic ethical form of placemaking in which human landscaping combines with the wellbeing of a more-than-human sense of community (Braidotti, 2006). By advocating an emphasis on *zoe* (as opposed to *bios*), nomadic ethics provides a conceptual framework through which to create new modes of ethical behaviour where *zoe* takes centre stage in (humans') rural idyllic imaginaries and placemaking narratives. As nomadic ethics encourages empirical inquiry into how life-affirming desire fosters respect for non-human nature – not by stopping at critique but by moving towards "the creative actualisation of the virtual" in terms of what rural space is capable of becoming (Braidotti, 2022, p. 7) – the remainder of this paper examines how local food consumers construct a non-anthropocentric rural idyll as virtuality, and how this contributes to nomadic ethical placemaking.

3. Research design

Consumer resistance to non-local (globalised), productivist agri-food systems has spurred the rise of localisms – ethico-political producer-consumer networks (such as AFNs) promoting local food as an alternative to industrial, globally displaced supply chains (Beacham, 2018; Kneafsey et al., 2021; Oñederra-Aramendi et al., 2018). While critics note that localisms can foster defensive worldviews (Feagan, 2007; Harris, 2010; Winter, 2003) and yield limited carbon savings (Stein and Santini, 2022; Young, 2021), such critiques often overlook broader socioenvironmental concerns – such as place-belongingness, animal welfare, and soil health – that increasingly drive local food consumption in the Global North (Pigott, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Schmitt et al., 2017; Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024).

Framing local food consumption as a locally situated, place-based practice (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020), this research focuses on the Italian region of Marche – a hybrid space characterised by an urban–rural mosaic of "medieval perched hill towns" (O'Neill, 2024, p. 8), AFNs, and "'i prodotti tipici'" (O'Neill, 2024, p. 3) – where late but rapid modernisation transformed a peasant society (*mezzadria* – Graciotti and McEachern, 2024) into a post-peasant one in a single generation (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024), shaping idyllic imaginaries of the countryside as a 'natural' escape from urban life (Kallio and LaFleur, 2023). Following a qualitative research design, I conducted in-depth interviews lasting 30–80 min online, around mealtimes, across a 10-month period in 2021, with local consumers who purchase food from local AFNs at least once a week. Saturation was reached after 20 interviews by exhausting the potential for theoretical contribution through an empirically rich range of examples and lived experiences (Nelson, 2016). Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, utilising patrons of different local AFNs as gatekeepers (McCracken, 1988; Nelson, 2016). Pseudonyms were used to anonymise participants (see Table 1).

All interviews were transcribed and analysed using an abductive approach, which involves iteratively coding interview transcripts by focusing on unexpected encounters with participants' rural idyllic imaginary and instances of nomadic ethical placemaking (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012), producing the two main themes (i.e., "*1. "A Natural 'Contamination'": Local Food as Intra-active Rural Idyllic Matter*; and "*2. "This Way I Help Nature": A Nomadic Ethical Placemaking of the Rural Idyll*) for this 'story of consumers' stories' to unfold (e.g., Thompson, 1997). Recognising the influential role of storytelling in fostering sustainable placemaking (Tan and Tan, 2023); the prevalence of meaning-making narratives in local food consumers' rural idyllic imaginaries (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Rodriguez, 2020; Tellström et al., 2006); and the performative, placemaking element of place users' geographical imaginations (Edensor, 2024; Lucarelli et al., 2023; Trudeau, 2006), this research adopts a narrative approach to tell a theoretically informed story of participants' everyday experience of local food consumption (Thompson, 1997). Guided by the paper's research questions, this narrative approach enabled participants to identify with local food, emotionally invest in rural idyllic imaginaries, and reflect on their consumption as an ethical practice (Júnior et al., 2022).

Table 1
Participants.

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Job	Residency
Umberto	M	25	High School Diploma	Employee	Rural
Arianna	F	26	Master's Degree	School Teacher	Rural
Lucio	M	29	High School Diploma	Manager	Urban
Ubaldo	M	30	Master's Degree	School Teacher	Rural
Erica	F	31	Master's Degree	Freelancer	Urban
Silvia	F	34	Master's Degree	Unemployed	Rural
Nicola	M	37	Bachelor's Degree	Freelancer	Urban
Ilaria	F	40	Master's Degree	Employee	Rural
Ester	F	40	Bachelor's Degree	Freelancer	Urban
Melissa	F	41	Bachelor's Degree	Unemployed	Urban
Benedetta	F	42	Bachelor's Degree	Employee	Rural
Martina	F	42	Master's Degree	Journalist	Urban
Samuele	M	50	Master's Degree	Entrepreneur	Urban
Franco	M	50	High School Diploma	Employee	Urban
Agnese	F	54	High School Diploma	Unemployed	Rural
Alessandra	F	54	High School Diploma	Employee	Rural
Stella	F	55	Master's Degree	Freelancer	Urban
Loretta	F	60	Master's Degree	Retired	Urban
Cesare	M	63	High School Diploma	Retired	Rural
Aurelio	M	77	Master's Degree	Retired	Rural

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. *"A natural 'contamination'": local food as intra-active rural idyllic matter*

The understanding of local food as a product "*not so much related to large cities, but rather to a rural context*" (Arianna, F, 26) is shared among all participants. This finding aligns with previous research on local food consumers' understandings the rural idyll, perpetuating a rural-urban dichotomy fuelled by value-laden conceptualisations of rural (vs. urban) spatial experiences, regardless of locals' urban/rural residency (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024; Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020). Supporting evidence that the placemaking of the rural idyll primarily relies on visual narratives expressing ideological stances that often perpetuate urban-rural binaries (de Olde and Oosterlynck, 2022; O'Neill, 2024; Trudeau, 2006), participants perceive local food as inextricably linked to a 'nature' that is visually othered from urban, industrial, productivist values (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020). Encapsulating the vision of other participants recounting their newly discovered or longstanding interest in having frequent, proximate, idyllic experiences with the countryside, "*it's a visual matter*", as Ubaldo (M, 30) states.

I associate local food with the soil and the countryside because I don't really know much of the other [i.e., the urban]. *I've been to the city very little. Being in the countryside, you see food a bit more. I mean, you see it, whereas in the city, you don't see the product being grown. You see it when it arrives at the supermarket as the fields are far away. So, it's a visual matter, in a sense. In the city, you don't see it, whereas in the countryside, you see the field or farm* (Ubaldo, M, 30).

However, what unexpectedly emerges from participants' stories about their relationship between local food and a 'natural' idyllic countryside is their reference to the 'soil' of nature as a key player in the emergence of food localness. Given the time to delve deeper into their stories of local food consumption, a more-than-'ocularcentric' experience (Braidotti, 2006) extends participants' visual narrative of the relationship between food localness and the countryside, thus providing a new conceptualisation of local food as a more-than-human assemblage, constituted by a web of rural idyllic relations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). This web of relations encompasses matter such as local farms/production sites, animals, crops, and – of course – the soil, thus reflecting Robertson's (2020) notion of soil-'planty' mattering, which refers to "the active role of soils and their intra-actions with other urban [in this case, 'rural'] matter in shaping place" (Robertson, 2020, p. 311). In this context, as Umberto (M, 25) shows, the final 'local' food product configures food localness as an expression of a life-affirming desire for rural idyllic intra-actions in shaping agri-food systems.

Take cattle farming for example. You have to consider that the Marche cattle breed eats 'things' from the local area, and so it is characterised by the type of food it eats, which is always from the area. Breeders take the animal to that type of terrain because they know that there is that type of grass, which is more suitable and appropriate. This affects the final product, clearly, something that large-scale production can only dream of. So, local food is really about valuing the territory and the product of a person, a small producer with a few employees (Umberto, M, 25).

It is evident from Umberto's (M, 25) story that local food consumers' narratives regarding human and non-human relations shape food 'localness' as a value-added property produced by a human *and* non-human rural idyllic community, in contrast to the current productivist, anthropocentric condition tyrannising over the 'nature' of rural space for purely human-centred, commercial purposes. Expanding on this view, Cesare (M, 63) sees productivist interactions with the soil as highly disrespectful to nature, and embodied by 'conventional', large-scale industrial approaches to agriculture (e.g., McEachern et al., 2010; Pigott, 2020; Schmitt et al., 2017).

Those who practice conventional farming see the soil as flat, half-a-meter deep and you can do whatever you want with it. The conventional way just throws in all the chemicals they want, and something must come out of it. If it doesn't, they force it. Then maybe in ten years, if that soil is arid and lifeless, they couldn't care less and move somewhere else or just keep on forcing it. Those who practice alternative types of agriculture have great respect for nature and that's enough for me (Cesare, M, 63).

Further stressing the importance of the intra-actions between rural idyllic matter in the production of local food, Cesare (M, 63) claims that he does not need food from anywhere else but the site of 'contamination'[1] between idyllic rural traditions and the natural, "*geophysical*" (Cesare, M, 63) features of the soil of the Marche countryside, where he lives. This relationship unfolds over time through non-anthropocentric, rural idyllic nature/culture assemblages (Braidotti, 2008; Goodman, 2015), ranging from the 'atavistic', traditional practices of shepherds to the fisher culture of coastal towns (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024). This area, with its picturesque hills and proximity to the sea, conveys a more-than-human, 'contaminated' rural idyll construct as "*the image of something representative, geographical, of our territory*" (Nicola, M, 37).

The raw material itself isn't as important as the 'contamination' with the territory that allows for its localness. First and foremost, it's a natural, geophysical 'contamination'. It's the soil that gives territorial characteristics to local food (Cesare, M, 63).

Here, the word 'contamination' is used by Cesare to emphasise the 'visceral', relational ontological intra-action between rural idyllic matter producing food localness within a *zoe*ful posthuman *terroir* (e.g., Kallio and LaFleur, 2023; Arceño, 2021). Indeed, Cesare (M, 63) is "*happy with this opportunity that nature has given* [him], *to be born and live here*", a territory where rural idyllic 'contamination' characterises local food as an assemblage 'becoming' local when human *and* non-human rural idyllic matter conjure to *beget* it. This rural idyllic web of relations produces local food not only as a more-than-human assemblage, but also as a product whose uniqueness becomes tangible from a holistic, sensual, urban/rural consumer perspective. Indeed, participants' stories show how they become *drawn into* this intra-active web of relations and – in a sense – become 'contaminated' by it, even if they are not directly involved in production, do not reside in rural areas, and are confined to the end of the supply chain. For instance, Loretta (F, 60), an urban resident, states that it is important to support farmers and producers' 'contamination' through consumption, because we, as the eaters of local food – the final consumers – will end up contaminating "*our bodies*" (Loretta, F, 60) with their products (e.g., Goodman, 2015). Moreover, while recounting how his purchase strategies reflect the search for the local, traditional food of inland Marche, Umberto (M, 25) retrieves a memory – which is not just olfactory but also 'atmospheric' (e.g., Steadman and Coffin, 2023) – that he identifies as his 'gateway' conversion to local food consumption.

Well, the true value of food is, certainly, respect for nature. We can see, after all, what's happening to the whole Earth, and it is also important for what we put into our bodies. So, I always try as much as possible to find a product that has respected all of this, so that no pesticides or various synthetic products are used. Respecting nature also for these poor bees, poor things, that are suffering. We consume honey, my husband and I, which we buy from a friend of ours who is one of a few truly conscious producers. Those who produce should really respect these things with awareness and not just for commercial purposes (Loretta, F, 60).

There's a fact that brought me so close to local food. When I was a child, the baker who lived near where I live now [a transitional rural space situated between coastal and inland small towns] *would always pass by. Every time the baker arrived and we opened the door, there was always this smell of bread that enveloped you, it would enter your nose, and maybe you had just woken up and you would smell the bread surrounding you. You would stand there and go, 'Ah, that's beautiful'. Then you add the fact that my grandfather was a farmer, and we always ate at home in a certain way. You put two and two together, and here I am* (Umberto, M, 25).

Therefore, the non-anthropocentric rural idyllic intra-actions that produce local food rely on a more-than-human assemblage configuration process that not only affects how participants imagine the countryside, but also *migrates from* rural space to affect consumers' lives through the local food of AFNs – and *vice versa*. Indeed, further expressing a nomadic ethical understanding of local food consumption and the 'nature' of the rural idyll, participants are also open to historically non-local food products 'contaminating' rural Marche. For instance, Aurelio (M, 77) shares his first-hand experience of immigrating and sustainably integrating the seeds of traditional foods from his rural Southern Italian upbringing into his orchard in the Marche countryside.

[1] Throughout the text, I will use 'contamination' (in quotation marks) to refer to Cesare's (M, 63) connotation of the term – a new materialist, posthuman, transformative connotation. I will use contamination without quotation marks to refer to the commonly understood 'negative' connotation of the term.

I grew up in this region in the South of Italy as a child. I had a vegetable garden there, and I wanted to bring some products that I know from my childhood here, like the long zucchini, the prickly zucchini, certain types of beans. So, I brought these seeds here, and I'm glad I shared them among friends where I live now. This local food is not precisely historically autochthonous, but that's not the point. The greater the variety of products, the greater the sustainability for the environment. The fewer products we cultivate and the more we impoverish the soil richness, which is what mass production does (Aurelio, M, 77).

In this case, Aurelio does not refer to 'autochthony' in terms of 'historical lineage' (e.g., Deleuze and Parnet, 1987), but rather expresses the idea that new 'local' food assemblages – constituted through the intra-action between human and non-human rural idyllic matter – should and can be produced by non-productivist agri-food innovations that respect nature, and therefore emerge in affirmation of *zoe* (Braidotti, 2006, 2008, 2012). Just like Aurelio (M, 77), other local food consumers from Marche also consider as 'local' food that which is not autochthonous in terms of historical lineage to the region's *terroir* – such as the production of Manitoba flour in Pesaro or the hypothetical cultivation of pineapple in the Monte Conero area (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024). This reflects participants' openness to non-linear and inclusive local food system development, which integrates *zoe*ful, anti-productivist farming practices that introduce 'non-indigenous' non-human natural entities into the local countryside. These findings echo previous research from nearby Abruzzo, where many key actors in local food production are 'not of the area' yet remain integral to the local rural landscape (Holloway et al., 2006).

In this sense, participants do not tie food localness necessarily to a territory in terms of a linear, static, "*immutable tradition*" (Melissa, F, 41), which typically informs the concepts of an anthropocentric rural idyll (Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020; Halfacree and Williams, 2021) and 'autochthony' (Hilgers, 2011), but in terms of a nomadic ethical re-assembling of a place's identity/tradition with 'new', sustainable human and non-human rural idyllic intra-actions through "alliances, alloys [which] are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions" (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, p. 69). This is further evidenced by Melissa's (F, 41) understanding of local food's autochthony – as what a specific nature/culture environment can sustainably host and beget, regardless of historical agri-food lineages – and Franco's (M, 50) experience with 'neo-indigenous' local food products.

Local food has to be autochthonous, like paccasassi [wild sea fennel]*, that is something typical of this area, which tries to preserve or share the traditions of the past. However, tradition isn't something immutable. You have to be open to new products – absolutely. But you also need to know where you come from. For example, unless you know the soil of* Monte Conero *was actually well-suited for growing pineapples – then sure, go ahead with something like that. But if you're just planting pineapples on* Monte Conero *because it's trendy to eat locally grown pineapple – then no, that doesn't make sense. Look at* paccasassi*, for example. I didn't even know what that was until a few years ago. I didn't know it was a local plant. I had never heard of it. So, it was a new product for me. But I believe what matters most is the desire to start from your own territory – or from any specific territory – to understand it and to have the technical knowledge and the passion. From there, you can do anything. But it has to be done with purpose, and above all, with the utmost respect for the environment where you're introducing this new product* (Melissa, F, 41).

A local food product doesn't necessarily have to come from 'tradition'; it can also come from experimentation, which can certainly be a good thing. Let's say, for example, the 'Conero gin', right? It's a spirit created by some locals who took aromatic herbs from our territory, from Monte Conero*, and created a product that didn't exist before! They took things they had in the area, adapted them, and created something interesting and new that had never been here before, right? I see this in a positive way. You can continue to drink* vì de visciola [a traditional Marche spirit made from wine and sour cherries] *and other historical products, but you can also discover new things. It's important to have something different and innovative as well* (Franco, M, 50).

Therefore, for participants, local food is the result of a 'contamination' unfolding through intra-active ethical encounters with rural idyllic matter in a more-than-human spatial assemblage deprived of any anthropocentric, 'othering' dynamics. This allows for experimenting innovative human and non-human intra-actions, as in the case of participants' openness to the introduction of non-indigenous non-human natural entities in their local food system, in an assemblage-like (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012; O'Neill, 2024), posthuman way (Braidotti, 2006, 2008, 2022). On the one hand, participants express their life-affirming desire to disentangle human and non-human relations from anthropocentric moral and spatial assemblage configurations of the rural idyll as a neoliberal capitalist market resource to exploit brought about by *bios*. On the other, they affirm their desire to entangle human and non-human relations in a *zoe*ful, non-anthropocentric, rural idyllic 'togetherness' (Braidotti, 2006). The following section expands on how participants express their desire to position non-human life discourse as ethico-politically central to the landscaping of rural space, thereby offering more nuanced insights into the rural idyllic virtuality that their life-affirming desire, as local food consumers, seeks to bring into being through a nomadic ethical form of placemaking.

4.2. *"This way I help nature": A nomadic ethical placemaking of the rural idyll*

By consuming the local food of the 'good farmer' (Carolan, 2022; Shucksmith, 2018), Alessandra (F, 54) claims she 'helps' nature, underscoring participants' life-affirming desire to respect rural space by seeking more socioecologically just local food products through AFNs. Indeed, participants are aware they are "'naturally landscaping' creatures" (Hailwood, 2000, p. 369). However, their respect for nature does not preclude – and thus does not stifle – the potential creation of new modes of landscaping. Rather, it gives rise to a *different*, non-anthropocentric rural idyllic imaginary disentangled from neoliberal market logics and resistant to the 'tyranny' of human-oriented ends, fuelled by a life-affirming desire to make rural space become something other than an anthropocentric, productivist, 'unidyllic' assemblage (Braidotti, 2006, 2022).

The producer must be honest and good, you know, one who cultivates well or raises their livestock well with good fodder, instead of poorly made feed. This way I help nature. We have to eat, there's nothing we can do about it, we consume. But we should try to avoid the worst (Alessandra, F, 54).

Participants' understanding of local food as intra-active rural idyllic matter helps them desire a not-yet-sustained relationship with nature, which they can achieve with like-minded AFN stakeholders. For instance, Lucio (M, 29) states that he understands local food production akin to an esoteric practice, which only rural producers operating in rural idyllic environments – having a "*rural mentality*" (Alessandra, F, 54) – know how to interact with because "*it's clear that nature's not easy to manage and predict*" (Lucio, M, 29). Therefore, to become as ontologically imperceptible as possible as 'consumers', participants enact various strategies aligning with this rationale. In particular, as illustrated by Aurelio's (M, 77) quote below, nearly all participants deliberately avoid supermarket chains to ensure they do not consume food perceived as tainted by productivist contamination. Ester (F, 40), however, is more critical. She understands that food from AFNs does not always equate to a sustainable relationship with nature (e.g., Murdoch et al., 2003; Winter, 2003). She purchases 'local' food only from farmers' market stands with limited quantities of produce. To her, this signals both the farmers' respect for natural resources and the use of truly non-anthropocentric, rural idyllic, anti-productivist methods of

production, which she associates with 'natural' food's atypical aesthetics (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024).

> *Normally, producers with limited production – either because they sell at home or have a small market stall – don't abuse chemicals. Often, they have animals, so they use their own fertilisers and avoid abuse. It's one thing for someone who has a field of many hectares and needs to produce a thousand lettuce plants that they then sell to large-scale supermarket chains; and another for the farmer who grows twenty lettuce plants and brings them to the morning market or the weekly farmers' market. It's the product itself that doesn't imply abuse* (Aurelio, M, 77).

> *You have to be very careful at farmers' markets. If products come from small, local farmers, you can recognise them if you pay attention, even in terms of quality. They are a bit deformed, a bit damaged. Objectively, you can see that other stalls have quantities and quality that are just not possible for local productions* (Ester, F, 40).

Considering Aurelio's (M, 77) reference to small local farmers' sustainable practice of using animal resources as fertiliser, and the idea that a nomadic ethical respect for nature should always involve acknowledging non-human life (Braidotti, 2006), it becomes interesting to understand participants' stories of their relationship with non-human animals. Loretta (F, 60), recalling her care for producers who respect the welfare of bees, now refers to a local food producer from the Fermo and Ascoli area. This offers another example of how, even though consumption – including meat, from Loretta's (F, 60) omnivore perspective – cannot be entirely avoided, there remains an imperative to challenge the negative realities of animal life within a rural space shaped by human-centred productivist demands (e.g., Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024; Wadham et al., 2024).

> *He has pigs grazing on some hectares of land, he even calls them by name, and then he produces cold cuts. You can imagine what they're like compared to others, even if they cost a bit more, it's worth it for all it involves. I've seen what he feeds them and everything else. I gave you this example of these animals, these pigs that basically live in the wild, and the same applies to hens, obviously. When you see them so often on TV, right? These poor hens, crammed in like that. Goodness. And I'm not a vegetarian or – even worse – a vegan. I eat everything, because humans are omnivores. I grew up, after all, with my grandfather in the countryside* (Loretta, F, 60).

This omnivore understanding of farm animal wellbeing – shared by other participants – reflects how the consumption of animal products is not rejected outright, but instead approached with moral deliberation and a commitment to making non-human animal life matter in specific cultural-geographical contexts where meat consumption is prevalent (e.g., Halfacree and Williams, 2021; O'Neill, 2024; Rodriguez, 2020). This contributes to a form of 'making meat moral' (Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024), which some scholars consider a legitimate non-anthropocentric ethical stance (Milburn and Bobier, 2022), insofar as consumers actively seek to significantly minimise the harms of animal farming and unsustainable soil treatment by supporting such practices. However, more radical forms of non-anthropocentric food ethics are better equipped to critique the ethical ambiguities concerning the ending of non-human animal life in rural space (e.g., Evans and Miele, 2012; Wadham et al., 2024), as instantiated by arguments developed by advocates of veganism (Waverley, 2023).

Loretta's (F, 60) negative remarks about vegetarians and vegans reflect the perspective of a participant embedded in a cultural-geographical context that has only recently become more aware of the ethical issues surrounding the killing of animals (Evans and Miele, 2012), generating an ongoing scholarly and general public debate in which rethinking our relationship with food can lead to social stigma, judgement, and tensions – especially within predominantly omnivore sociocultural settings (Aboelenien and Arsel, 2025). This situation exemplifies how a nomadic ethical placemaking of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll – particularly in relation to the challenge of de-anthropocentrifying the concept of the 'food chain' (Goodman, 2015) – does not entail a linear or unproblematic process. As life-affirming desire seek the ontological dissolution of the 'human subject' in continuous assemblage reconfigurations, humans remain imperfect and partial, vulnerable to reactionary anthropocentric forces (e.g., Deleuze, 1986). This involves complex ethical negotiations (Braidotti, 2006, 2022), in which the rhizomatic affirmation of life-affirming desire, as a continuous process of becoming-other with *zoe*, can (re)entangle the 'human subject'-assemblage with both old and new anthropocentric forces (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977, 2020).

Going forward with her story, Loretta (F, 60) mentions 'biodynamic farming'[2] to provide examples of local agricultural practices that establish a stronger link between a non-anthropocentric construction of the rural idyll and her anti-productivist stance as a consumer. Her story encapsulates other participants' understanding of nature as a space for "*esoteric*" practices (Cesare, M, 63), providing a nomadic ethical understanding of rural idyllic matter as having a *life of its own* (Braidotti, 2006, 2008). This allows for an understanding of the relationship between local food consumption and the nomadic ethical placemaking of the countryside that not only has "a touch of magic" (Pigott, 2020, p. 1665), but also stems from narratives based on a virtual image of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll – fostering a form of landscaping based on a life-affirming desire that contrasts with a presently dominant anthropocentric, dichotomous understanding of non-human rural idyllic matter as 'other'.

In this regard, participants discuss biodynamic farming as embodying the ideal, *zoe*ful set of values for local food systems to landscape rural space and create alternative, possible rural futures. Loretta (F, 60) and Cesare (M, 63) believe that biodynamic farmers' respect for nature is grounded in a non-anthropocentric, life-affirming dissolution of a producer's self-representation as an individual human subject interacting with animals and working the soil. This translates into their respect for local food systems that relationally bring together human *and* non-human rural idyllic matter as a more-than-human, yet-to-be-sustained, virtual rural spatial assemblage configuration – as we are all part of "*cosmic flows*" (Cesare, M, 63). Cesare (M, 63) specifically suggests that biodynamic farming represents a minoritarian, yet clear instance of nomadic ethical affirmation of *zoe* over *bios* from both consumer and producer perspectives, counteracting the anthropocentric, productivist (mis)conceptualisation of the non-human nature of rural space as a resource to be othered and endlessly exploited for profit, without regard for non-human natural life (e.g., Braidotti, 2006).

In fact, rural idyllic intra-actions flow through a process of becoming 'together' (Braidotti, 2012) were humans are "*part of a planet* [a series of cosmic flows] *that doesn't mind our own business*" (Cesare, M, 63). Thus, Cesare (M, 63) offers an insightfully nomadic ethical observation: that we, as humans, should position ourselves within a metaethical trajectory that actively resists the hegemony of human discourse (*bios*) over non-human rural idyllic matter, and instead commit to actualising a desirable, potential, more-than-human reconfiguration of rural spatial assemblages – one that places *zoe* at the centre of the ethico-political discourse presently shaping local food system development (Braidotti, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2022).

> *Over time, biodynamic farming naturally enriches the soil. The 'green manure', right? For example, growing plants and then cutting and burying*

[2] Biodynamic farming – or 'biodynamics' – is "a form of organic agriculture that was developed by Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th-century" (Pigott, 2020, p. 1666), and its philosophy promotes soil fertility through the application of unique herbal mixtures to fields and compost piles, including the use of cow horns, during particular seasons. These mixtures aim to attract or enhance cosmic, ethereal, and astral energies that influence the growth of plants and the well-being of animals, invigorating the soil and promoting a sustainable use of farming waste (Pigott, 2020).

them to provide potassium and many other substances useful to the soil. Let me give you an example from this biodynamic farmer I know. I was with him, and I saw the earthworms coming out of the soil! You know well that the earthworm was almost disappearing due to the use of glyphosate and various other substances. He's basically not using anything anymore, because his soil has reached equilibrium (Loretta, F, 60).

I have a lot of respect for the producers who practice biodynamic farming because I think they have absolute respect for the soil, its natural cycles, including those of the sun and the moon. What comes out is very good and therefore preferable from my consumer perspective. Those who practice biodynamic farming see the soil as part of a planet that doesn't mind our own business but is undoubtedly part of cosmic flows influencing the moon and tides, the growth of vegetables, or whatever – it's a well-known fact. Some people say, "it's not true, who told you that!". Oh, come on! Lunar phases have always been important to life. Biodynamics refers to a concept of nature within a broader context, right? A cosmos of energies, flows, etc. This is how the soil functions and lives. When you plant something in the soil, the soil reacts in its own way. Biodynamic farmers deserve absolute respect. They can do voodoo rituals or the rain dance [he laughs]. *I don't care as long as they treat the soil with respect* (Cesare, M, 63).

Thus, a relationship between local food consumption and the placemaking of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll as a virtuality emerges from participants' narratives, expressing a desire to landscape a 'rural of the future', which disentangles the rural idyll concept from its current status as an anthropocentric geographical imagination othering non-human nature. This is a life-affirming desire to create a more-than-human rural spatial assemblage configuration of the Marche countryside – one that, at present, exists only as a virtuality, or "the potential bearer of new constellations of Universes of reference" (Guattari, 1995, p. 18). Thus, in the context of local food consumption, respecting nature means living by a virtual image of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll through nomadic ethical placemaking. This involves forming life-affirming narratives that perform non-anthropocentric alternatives to current anthropocentric otherings of rural space (Lucarelli et al., 2023), actualising the virtual as "a way of giving a measure of the possible" (Braidotti, 2022, p. 12).

5. Conclusion

This paper explored how local food consumers' discourses and practices challenge prevailing anthropocentric conceptualisations of the rural idyll, reframing it as a virtuality – a non-anthropocentric, not-yet-sustained spatial condition capable of contrasting present negative realities that landscape rural non-human nature as other. The findings highlight how local food system development could benefit from a new materialist and posthuman reconfiguration of the rural idyll as a 'rural of the future', grounded in local food consumers' life-affirming desire to landscape rural space as a locally situated, more-than-human assemblage of intra-active rural idyllic matter, including non-autochthonous beings. Drawing on 20 in-depth interviews with AFN participants in the Italian region of Marche and employing a narrative approach, this research offers an innovative application of nomadic ethics to the placemaking of a non-anthropocentric rural idyll through the lens of local food consumption.

By focusing on the placemaking narratives of 'ordinary' local food consumers (e.g., Willett, 2021), this research adds critical nuance to dominant discourses of the rural idyll shaped by policymakers and industry actors (O'Neill, 2024), which often reproduce anthropocentric moral-economic frameworks and practices (Wadham et al., 2024). In particular, it shows how local food consumers' narratives – understood through a nomadic ethical placemaking perspective – express the desire for the affirmation of a countryside that constitutes an assemblage of more-than-human rural idyllic relations, contributing to a potential, future actualisation of a non-anthropocentric, virtual rural idyll. By privileging a community-based rather than enterprise-driven conception of the relationship between human and non-human nature in the context of socioenvironmental sustainability (Fan, 2024), the study contributes to ongoing debates on the othering of rural space and advances a nomadic ethical understanding of socioecological justice in the context of local food consumption and AFNs (e.g., Beacham, 2018; Horáková et al., 2018). In doing so, it responds to calls for closer integration between rural sociology, food geographies, and emerging scholarship on the central role of non-human nature in the production of locally situated rural spaces (e.g., Wadham et al., 2024).

In this regard, this paper has shown how nomadic ethics can serve as a framework to *(i)* deepen our understanding of local food consumption and the ethical placemaking of rural landscapes; *(ii)* reimagine the rural idyll beyond neoliberal market logics, orienting it towards non-anthropocentric and more socioecologically just alternatives; and *(iii)* enable AFNs to foster human and non-human collective existence through the expression of life-affirming desire, by committing to geographical imaginaries – such as the rural idyll – that, in conscious local food consumers' lived experience, both confront and exceed the current anthropocentric condition of rural landscapes.

Thus, this research offers valuable implications for potentially influencing both policy and organisational discourse on sustainable farm-to-fork strategies and agri-food system relocalisation at the city-region level (Graciotti and McEachern, 2024). In fact, local food consumers' narratives possess placemaking potential that policymakers and rural planners should recognise and harness in shaping socio-environmentally sustainable rural landscaping (e.g., Lucarelli et al., 2023; Marsden, 2013), by supporting AFNs not only through funding or infrastructure but also by recognising their role in shaping increasingly more inclusive, posthuman, ethical rural idyllic imaginaries, which helps drive local food consumer demand for developing local food systems in the Global North (e.g., Graciotti and McEachern, 2024; Beacham, 2018; Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020).

It is important to note that the demographic profile of this study's participants may reflect a broader trend of educated elites supporting agroecological movements in the Italian region of Marche, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to similar cultural-geographical contexts (e.g., Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020). Nonetheless, this study offers a nuanced contribution to rural sociological and human geographical critiques of rural otherness (Carolan, 2022; Hjort, 2023; O'Neill, 2024; Philo, 1992; Ther-Ríos, 2020) by foregrounding the performative dimensions of local food consumers' life-affirming desire to landscape the countryside as a more-than-human rural *idyllic* assemblage, thus countering dominant anthropocentric understandings of the rural idyll. Indeed, nomadic ethics challenges the hegemony of human-centred thinking (*bios*) and instead promotes a more inclusive, non-anthropocentric ethical framework in which non-human life (*zoe*) is given central ethico-political importance (Braidotti, 2006, 2008).

Another limitation of this study is that the sample consisted solely of omnivore participants. Future research should build on these insights by critically comparing how different local food consumers – such as vegans and vegetarians – envision more radically non-anthropocentric rural futures. This is particularly relevant given the ethical tensions that emerged in this study (e.g., Evans and Miele, 2012), where participants expressed concern for non-human animal life, conceived as morally significant intra-active rural-idyllic matter, yet limited their reflections to anti-productivist forms of animal farming (e.g., Wernersson and Boonstra, 2024). Nomadic ethics should challenge human relationships with the concept of the 'food chain' (e.g., Goodman, 2015), especially where understandings of animal sentience remain unexamined (Waverley, 2023). Specifically, future research should explore how nomadic ethical placemaking of the rural idyll can challenge omnivores' attempts to defend non-anthropocentric ethical arguments for meat consumption (e.g., Milburn and Bobier, 2022). In this context, the human–animal embodiments emerging from a vegan food ethical worldview (e.g., Waverley, 2023) may offer stronger counter-points –

both theoretically and empirically.

Moreover, future research should explore how nomadic ethics can apply to rural development policy, providing an alternative to the implementation of neoliberal approaches to rural space production (Horáková et al., 2018) – a pressing issue in the Italian region of Marche, where rural development is framed in the anthropocentric terms of strategic entrepreneurship models leveraging the social capital of rural idyllicism as produced by major private industry stakeholders (e.g., Cluster Agrifood Marche, 2025; Regione Marche, 2024). From this perspective, future research should be designed to investigate how policymakers and AFN supply-chain stakeholders can operationally rethink production, management, and communication practices by developing and implementing nomadic ethical strategies actualising non-anthropocentric rural idyllic virtualities.

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Dr Alessandro Graciotti is a Lecturer in Marketing at the School of Management, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Swansea University, UK. His research focuses on new materialist placemaking, the consumption of food and place, and the advancement of poststructuralist non-representational theory in consumer research. He has a particular interest in developing autoethnographic methods from both rhythmanalytic and schizo-analytic perspectives, building on approaches from critical human geography. He has published in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, *European Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Place Management and Development*. He is an Early Career Reviewer Board member of *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*.