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“I’m Vegan but I Eat Oreos Like Crazy”

Factors Contributing to Icelandic Young-Adults’
Decision to Follow a Green Diet

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Master of Science in Global Development Studies

“I’m Vegan but I Eat Oreos Like Crazy”

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Decision to Follow a Green Diet**

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Declaration

I, Heba Líf Jónsdóttir, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature *Heba Líf Jónsdóttir*.....

Date13/05/2022.....

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Abstract

The heightened demand for animal-products has increased livestock production which is not free from consequences. It has social, health, and environmental externalities, which has caused a number of people to reconsider their food choices. The Icelandic population consumes more than double the global average consumption of meat, but there are indications that meat consumption in Iceland may slowly be decreasing.

This qualitative study will look into the main factors contributing to young-adult's decision to choose a green diet. In addition, this study will assess what are Icelandic young-adults' main source of information on green foods and the benefits from choosing a green diet.

The reasons for choosing a green diet have in the past mostly been related to health reasons. However, the findings of this study indicate that health is not the main reason for why young-adults in Iceland choose to follow a green diet. Rather, it is for environmental and animal welfare reasons. Health benefits are generally only seen as a possible plus from following a green diet. These decisions are based on information received from media, such as Netflix documentaries and social media. Although different externalities follow the production of green foods as well as animal-based foods, this study indicates that those concerns are not highly valued amongst young-adults in Iceland who follow a green diet.

This study employs the concepts of globalization through media, consumer behaviour, veganism and vegetarianism, as well as new social movement theory. This theoretical framework provides the tools needed to understand how and why the participants of this study, as consumers, make the decision to exclude or limit animal products from their diet, and to explore if a new social movement is on the rise.

List of Abbreviations

AICR American Institute for Cancer Research

FBDG Food-Based Dietary Guidelines

IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

NCD Non-communicable disease

NSD Norwegian Centre for Research Data

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

WCRF World Cancer Research Fund

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1. Introduction

The increase in demand for animal products has impacted the climate, animal welfare, and our health (Mbow et.al., 2019; Hendriks et.al., 2021). It augments the release of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, raises ethical questions in terms of our relationship with animals, and it has led us into taking unhealthy dietary decisions (Mbow et.al., 2019; Singer & Mason, 2006; Moubarac, 2017; Monteiro et.al., 2013). The average global meat consumption per capita per year, had increased from 38 kilograms in 2003 to 43 kilograms in 2014. In comparison, Iceland consumed roughly double the average global consumption of meat, or 91 kilograms in 2014 (Speedy, 2003; Ritchie & Roser, 2017). The production and consumption of animals is not free from externalities (Mbow et.al., 2019; FAO, 2018; Davis et.al., 2015). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines externalities as “*situations when the effect of production or consumption of goods and services imposes costs or benefits on others which are not reflected in the prices charged for the goods and services being provided*” (OECD, 2003).

A dietary transition towards a reduced animal consumption and increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, can reduce the externalities, especially in terms of climate change (Hendriks et.al., 2021; Willett et.al., 2019). A nudge or a visual presentation can be strategies used to affect consumers’ behaviour in terms of food choices (Thaler & Sunstein, 2019; Pabian et.al., 2020), but also information and discussion circulating through different types of media (Laakso et.al., 2021).

The purpose of this study is to look into the factors contributing to Icelandic young-adults’ decision to follow a green diet. The study will then look into where young-adults in Iceland seek information on a green diet and green food choices. This study topic is of special interest to me as Iceland has a long history with agriculture and fishery, resulting in their diet mainly consisting of animal products. However, as an Icelandic citizen with a social network in Iceland, I have come to notice how a green diet, as I call a vegetarian and a vegan diet in this study, has increased significantly. It has also come to my attention how green food products in local supermarkets in Iceland have increased impressively in a short time, which raises questions on how and why the traditional Icelandic animal-based diet may be changing.

1.1. Problem Statement

The Icelandic nation has been dependant on its agricultural and fishing industry for decades, as it plays an important role in the country's economy and food security (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2021; Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2022^a.; Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2022^b). As a result, the diet of the Icelandic population has mostly consisted of meat, fish, and milk (Jónsson, 2011; Jónsson, 1998). Today, Iceland is nearly self-sufficient in terms of meat, egg, and milk production, as well as providing the nation with 43% of its vegetables (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021). However, at the same time, Iceland is highly dependent on imported foods (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021). A dietary change amongst the Icelandic population, towards a diet similar to the planetary health diet recommended by EAT-Lancet, where animal consumption is very limited (Willet et.al., 2019), is likely to leave Iceland even more dependent on imported foods, as well as resulting in economic consequences. National surveys then indicate that the meat consumption amongst the Icelandic population may be decreasing (Gallup, 2021; Gallup, 2019; Gunnardóttir et.al., 2022).

1.2. Research Questions and Aims

This research aims at answering the following research question:

What are the factors contributing to Icelandic young-adult's decision to follow a green diet?

In addition, a sub-question is:

Where do young-adults in Iceland seek information on a green diet?

Through this research, I explore the reasons for why the young-adults in Iceland decide to move away from their traditional diet and what role globalization through media plays in that decision.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter will review literature related to the research questions. This chapter will explain theories and concepts that were used as a framework to organize the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The concepts used are globalization through media, consumer behaviour, vegetarianism and veganism under the term green diet, as well as new social movement theory. The chapter will then explore literature on the different externalities and impacts of the production and consumption of animal products. By looking at the externalities we can get a sense of why young-adults in Iceland may choose a green diet. Lastly, the chapter will look into the planetary health diet recommended by the EAT-Lancet report and its limitations.

2.1. Globalization Through Media

The year of 2020, showed us how globalized the world is. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic spread around the entire globe within months, and a video of a black man, George Floyd, being killed by a white policeman in Minnesota, had been viewed by millions of people all around the world within a few days. The video caused a Black Lives Matter movement, not only within the US, but worldwide (Lule, 2021), showing how globalization through media, the fast spread of information, can push forward different movements. Here it is apt to explain the concept of globalization. A term, like so many others, that scholars do not seem to be able to find a common definition on. Lule (2021) explains how the simplest definition on globalization is “*anytime anyone does anything anywhere across borders*” (p.12). A more concrete definition presented by Haslam et.al. (2017) and the one that will be used for this thesis, is that globalization is:

“a transplanetary process or set of processes involving ... growing multi-directional flows of people, objects, places and information, as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows” (Haslam et.al., 2017, p.105).

Information spreads easily around the world today, mainly through media, and the influence of media is said to be of great importance to social changes (Lule, 2021; Kaul, 2011). Although the term globalization was not first used until around 50 years ago, it is only in recent years that the term has become a part of many peoples’ everyday lives (Lule, 2021). Advances in technology have been a major driver for globalization and

according to Lule (2021) media is the “significant other” of globalization. In other words, media have made globalization possible. According to Appadurai (1996), technical advances in media, with television, cell phones and more, as well as changes and increase in migration, has changed human life and gave a way for globalization to rise.

McLuhan (1962) indicates that electronic communication gives people a chance to communicate as one. Millions of people see the same news, films, advertising images and more (Lule, 2021). Netflix for example has in recent years given out documentaries such as *What the Health* and *Cowspiracy*, where they look into the externalities of modern diets including animal products (Pabian et.al., 2020). These documentaries have reached the eyes of millions of people around the world who have access to Netflix, for example in Iceland, spreading information on different externalities of animal consumption and production (Pabian et.al., 2020). An investigation of the effect of watching the *Cowspiracy* documentary on Netflix on intention to reduce meat consumption, indicates that visual presentation through documentaries has a greater effect on peoples’ perception of meat consumption than text-based environmental, animal, or health awareness campaigns (Pabian et.al., 2020).

Netflix is only one of the many different media platforms where globalization thrives in. Social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., are places where people can discuss and share knowledge on sustainability aspects, production, distribution and more in relation to different food practices (Laakso, et.al, 2021). These places can be an avenue of education and anyone with access to social media can post information on those avenues as well as seek information from them (Laakso, et.al, 2021). Laakso et.al. (2021) explain how social media is “anything but closed” and can be used to convey social action. The easy access to information on negative impacts of animal consumption and different reasons for limiting animal products in one’s diet, may already have had an effect on the consumer’s behaviour.

2.2. Consumer Behaviour

Affecting consumers’ behaviour is not limited to visual presentation through documentaries on Netflix. In their book *Nudge*, Thaler and Sunstein (2019) explain how peoples’ choices and behaviour can be influenced with minor changes or adjustments, a nudge if you will, in the presentation of the choices available. The behaviour can change in both positive and negative ways. Thaler and Sunstein (2019) refer to this as a choice

architecture which organizes the frame that decisions are taken within. Their book begins with a simple example of this. The example is a school canteen and how the choice architecture is the one who decides how the food is presented and where different types of foods are placed. As a result, the position of different foods can affect peoples' behaviour in a direction to choose a healthier option (Thaler & Sunstein, 2019). According to Ranganathan et.al. (2016) and Wansink (2015), package labelling and education shows limited success in the attempts to push for a dietary change. As a result, the development of strategies that better coincide with how people make decisions in terms of food choices is necessary, as purchase is considered to be based on habits and individuals' subconsciousness rather than informed decisions (Ranganathan et.al., 2016). Ranganathan et.al. (2016) explain how in order to promote a change in dietary decisions, it "[...] requires strategies that work in step with how consumers make decisions and influence the factors that drive their food purchases" (Ranganathan et.al., 2016, p.75).

Indeed, a vary of different approaches to influence consumer behaviour when it comes to food choices can be found, such as a nudge in the form of a visual presentation of food choices, or with the making of documentaries on the externalities of our diets (Sunstein, 2019; Pabian et.al., 2020; Laakso et.al., 2021). Goncalves et.al. (2021) show how a message promoting purchases of fruits and vegetables with the positioning of those products in strategic places, similar to what Thaler and Sunstein (2019) describe, can promote change in food choices. Goncalves et.al. (2021) state that people consume a large amount of foods high in energy fats, sugar, and salt, and not enough "green" foods, as they call it, such as fruits and vegetables. Goncalves et.al. (2021) use data from Portugal in their research, where statistics show that the local population consumes much less of green foods than recommended, but way more meat, fish, and eggs than recommended. Similar to Ranganathan et.al. (2016), Gonvalces et.al. (2021) show that initiatives to promote healthier food choices through for example education or public health organizations show limited results in changing consumers' behaviour towards healthier lifestyle. The reason for that seems to be due to the amount of information provided which can be overwhelming for people (Goncalves et.al., 2021). The before mentioned nudge however shows to be more affective in changing people's behaviour, as it doesn't constrain the consumers' options (Goncalves et.al., 2021; Thaler & Sunstein, 2019). Rather than informing consumers about what they should not buy or limit intake of, nudging the better and healthier option towards them seems to be more effective way

to change their behaviour and improve public health (Goncalves et.al., 2021; Thaler & Sunstein, 2019).

To describe the concept of a nudge further, it is defined as any aspect of the decision environment “[...] that alters people’s behaviour in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, p.6). Many nudge interventions which aim to increase consumption of healthier foods, for example in school cafeterias or supermarkets, have shown positive results in recent years (Goncalves et.al., 2021; Thaler & Sunstein, 2019). One such intervention is the placement of fruits and vegetables at the front entrance, where every customer has to walk past, which increased the sale of those products by 8% compared to the stores that did not have such a placement strategy (Goncalves et.al., 2021). Another example is using signs which Wansink (2015) claims to increase the sale and choice of products people think are normal or popular to purchase. However, although nudging can push towards a positive change in terms of greener food choices, its long-term effectiveness has not been evaluated, which is one of the biggest limitations of nudging strategies (Goncalves et.al., 2021).

2.3. New Social Movement Theory

Gundelach (1988) explains social movements to be a product of societal changes. He continues to further expand on how social movements work as organizations creating a network of groups which have a common ground in achieving societal change (Gundelach, 1988). Gundelach (1988) puts social movement theory in two stages. In the first stage, which lasted from the 1940s until the 1960s, movements were class-based. The second stage however, which lasted from the late 1960s, is when the movements changed their focus towards social equality and environmental protection (Gundelach, 1988).

Gundelach (1988) elaborates on six characteristics of what he likes to call “new” social movements. One of these characteristics is how the movements’ work is in relation to a set of new and “green” values, working towards an alternative vision of the future based on self-determination, harmony with nature, decentralization, etc. The movements influence their supporters’ lifestyle and values. Another characteristic is that the movements goal is to transform populations’ norms and values (Gundelach, 1988).

Köhler et.al. (2019) state that social movements can influence the politics of transition by advocating and supporting the decline or uptake of technologies or activities. An increase in the popularity of vegetarian and vegan diets can be seen as, and have been looked at as a form of new social movement (Cherry, 2006). According to Cherry (2006) the new social movement of veganism measures its success in cultural changes and changes in everyday lifestyle practices, such as the reduction or exclusion of animal consumption.

2.4. Animal Consumption

Numbers from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) show that the production of livestock is rapidly increasing due to an increase in demand for animal products (FAO, 2018; Speedy, 2003; Cai et.al., 2021). In 2003, the global average meat consumption per capita per year was 38 kilograms. In comparison, Iceland's meat consumption per capita per year was 79.3 kilograms, and 124 kilograms in the United States (Speedy, 2003), showing that Iceland, amongst other countries, consumed above average amount of meat per capita. In 2014, the global average meat consumption had increased to 43 kilograms per year. Iceland's average meat consumption had then also increased to 91 kilograms per year (Ritchie & Roser, 2017). Hendriks et.al. (2021) claim the key externalities in food systems, ranging the whole process from the production to the disposal of food products, to be environmental, such as greenhouse gas emissions, social, such as animal welfare considerations, health related, such as unhealthy diets, and economical (Hendriks et.al., 2021; FAO et.al., 2021). A further example of externalities, defined in the introduction, is how greenhouse gas emissions from the decisions and actions of one person, affects other people, now and in the future, who have nothing to say about these decisions and actions (Hendriks et.al., 2021). Here, I will look into the first three mentioned externalities, environmental, social, and health related.

2.4.1. Environmental Impacts of Animal Consumption

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges humankind is facing today (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2019). The release of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere causes higher temperatures and threatens human and animal welfare (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2019; Mbow et.al., 2019). Extreme weather conditions, floods, and droughts are one of the many problems of increased temperatures due to climate change (Leichenko &

O'Brien, 2019; Mbow et.al., 2019). Up to 37% of greenhouse gas emissions released is considered to be caused by crop and livestock activities, land-use associated with agriculture, processing and consumption of animal products, indicating that the demand for animal products and increase in livestock production is one major driver of climate change (Mbow et.al., 2019; FAO, 2018; Davis et.al., 2015). The emission was calculated from agriculture, land use, and beyond farm gate which includes manufacture of chemical fertilisers and fuel for example. Agriculture ranked the highest (Mbow et.al., 2019).

The emissions released due to agriculture, where the main source of global livestock emissions are cattle, has decreased significantly since the 1960s due to improved meat and milk productivity of cattle breeds (David et.al., 2015). However, the agriculture industry continues to stand at the top in terms of emissions per kilo of protein produced, especially red meat compared to other animal products (Mbow et.al., 2019). The “rebound effect” is called when the production can be performed using fewer and cheaper resources, increasing the efficiencies and the prices of products. This effects consumer behaviour and the use of these products, again increasing the demand for them and eventually leads to increase in production (Mbow et.al., 2019). With that being said, in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions due to agriculture, appropriate governance needs to take place and limits needs to be put on total production according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from 2019 (Mbow et.al., 2019).

When talking about the carbon footprint of certain food products, the sum of greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production, processing, transporting, and retailing is what is being referred to (Drewnowski et.al., 2015). Drewnowski et.al. (2015) explore the carbon footprint of foods in relation to their energy and nutrient density. Drewnowski et.al. (2015) have five food categories: processed fruits and vegetables, meat and meat production, milk and dairy products, grains and other foods, and sweets. Drewnowski et.al. (2015) then introduce five categories in terms of carbon footprint; agriculture, processing, transportation, packaging and storage. Their study does indeed show that meat and meat production, and milk and dairy products, have the highest carbon footprint per 100g produced (Drewnowski et.al., 2015). However, the greenhouse gas emission value per 100kcal show that processed fruits and vegetables have the highest carbon footprint (Drewnowski et.al., 2015). This indicates the complexity of the environmental impacts of food systems as well as the complexity of implementing structured and effective strategies to tackle the problem.

According to numbers from the Environment Agency of Iceland, emissions from agriculture in Iceland has neither increased nor decreased in the past decade (Environmental Agency of Iceland, 2019). However, new data from Eurostat (2022) shows that Iceland releases the most greenhouse gas emissions per capita in Europe. The European Union releases on average 7,8 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, and Sweden, ranking lowest, releases on average 1,8 tonnes (Eurostat, 2022). In comparison, Iceland releases on average 40,9 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions (Eurostat, 2022). This shows that the highest carbon footprint in Europe is amongst the Icelandic population and the country's production, and numbers do not indicate a decrease (Environmental Agency of Iceland, 2019).

2.4.2. Social Impacts of Animal Consumption

Livestock production and consumption of animals does not only have ecological or environmental consequences, but social impacts as well (Clapp, 2020; Singer & Mason, 2006). Clapp (2020) points out how people have in general not thought all that much about how their food get on their plate, how it was produced, packed, or shipped. Singer and Mason (2006) then claim that consumers normally don't think about their food as a matter of ethics. However, as more people decide to boycott meat products in their diets, or any kinds of animal products, more people have started to ask ethical questions in terms of food production, such as questions about the usage of pesticides, the living wage, or animal welfare (Singer & Mason, 2006). According to Singer and Mason (2006), ignoring animals' interests on the grounds that they are not a part of the human species, is like ignoring the interests of other humans based on their skin colour or sex. Saying that humans are superior to other animals, is like saying that white males are superior to black females (Singer & Mason, 2006). Singer, in his book *Animal Liberation* (1975), demands a change in the human's attitude towards animals, or as he calls them "nonhumans", and says it is to be a part of previous liberation movements such as Black Liberation, Gay Liberation and Women's Liberation. Critics on this animal liberation movement, according to Villanueva (2018), argue that animals don't have the same intelligence, abilities nor rationality as humans and therefore humans and animals are not equal in the same way that same sex couples and heterosexuals are or women and men (Singer, 1975; Singer & Mason, 2006; Villanueva, 2017). However, that is not the point Singer is trying to make. The point is that animals should be given equal consideration of comparable

interest – that the pain of an animal should matter as much as the pain of a human (Singer, 1975). In addition, Singer and Mason (2006) state that the farming industry is not necessary to feed the growing population. On the contrary, we use foods that could be consumed by humans to feed animal, which instead of increasing food availability for humans, reduces it. Singer and Mason (2006) explain this as an inefficient way of feeding humans.

2.4.3. Health Impacts of Animal Consumption

The consumption of high processed foods typically high in sugar, salt, fats, and preservatives is increasing with easier access to different foods around the world due to globalization (Moubarac, 2017; Monteiro et.al., 2013). Many of the historical epidemics and pandemics have originated through animal consumption, such as brucellosis, animal tuberculosis, and avian influenza to name a few (Kimman et.al., 2013). A correlation can also be seen between animal consumption, especially processed meat, and non-communicable diseases (NCD) such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and more (Sinha et.al., 2009, Pan et.al., 2012; Micha et.al., 2010; Zheng & Lee, 2009). A study by Sinha et.al. (2009) which includes a half a million participants aged 50-71 years, shows a linear increase in the hazard ratio of mortality along an increased consumption of red meat, and an even higher hazard ratio with the increased consumption of processed meat (Sinha et.al., 2009).

Compared to individuals who eat meat, vegetarians have a significantly lower risk of dying from cardiovascular diseases or cancer (Huang et.al., 2012; Bedford & Barr, 2005). Whether the diet alone contributes to these results is not certain as individuals who choose a vegetarian diet are generally considered to be more aware of health-beneficial activities, such as exercise and limited alcohol consumption (Richi et.al., 2015; Huang et.al., 2012; Bedford & Barr, 2005).

Recommendation on what foods to eat that are beneficial for our health have changed over the decades in addition to not all giving out the same recommendations (Norden, 2012). The Nordic Nutrition Recommendations however are considered to be well-researched within the field of nutritional science, achieved through years of co-operation between the Nordic countries (Norden, 2012). “The Nordic Diet” is a term combining Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) with local Nordic foods (Meltzer et.al., 2019). These guidelines have been revised five times over the last forty years, the latest one from

2012 and an updated one expected in 2022 (Meltzer et.al., 2019; Norden, 2012). Today, the guidelines recommend a more plant-based, or a greener diet, with increased intake of vegetables, fruits, and nuts, but also fish and seafood, and moderate consumption of red and/or processed meat (Meltzer et.al., 2019; Norden, 2012). In the case of Iceland, Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022) show that the Icelandic population generally does not follow the recommendations, eating less fruits, vegetables, and fish than recommended, and more red meat than recommended.

2.5. A Green Diet

A variety of different names for different types of diets can be found (Panoff, 2020). For this research, a focus was put on individuals who identify their diet as a vegetarian or a vegan one, but as we will come to see the division between the concepts of vegetarianism and veganism can be unclear (Panoff, 2020; Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). These concepts are not set in stone and individuals can identify their diets differently within these concepts. Here I will explain the floating concepts within a green diet that is vegetarianism and veganism.

2.5.1. Vegetarianism

According to the Vegetarian Society (n.d.) vegetarianism or a vegetarian diet excludes fish, meat, and chicken. However, the term is difficult for scholars to study, as some who identify as being “vegetarian” occasionally eat meat or fish. Despite being a complicated term, or maybe due to its complexity, the study of vegetarianism has increased in the past years (Ruby, 2015). It is suggested that vegetarianism is “[...] *better measured as a continuum of categories, measuring the progressive degree to which animal foods are avoided*” (Ruby, 2015, p.142). Beardsworth and Keil (1992) divide vegetarianism into 6 different types. Type I covers the ones who consider themselves as vegetarians with some exceptions, for example when vegetarian options are not available. Type II fits the ones who avoid eating meat and poultry. Type III fits the ones who in addition also avoid eating fish, and Type IV the ones who then also avoid eggs. Type V then fits those who avoid eating dairy products including rennet, which are enzymes from young calves, and then the last type, Type VI, fits the ones who identify as vegans, avoiding all animal products (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). This categorization sees vegetarianism as a linear spectrum, where a vegan diet is at one end of the spectrum and considered to be a part of

a vegetarian diet (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992). For example, Cherry (2006) addresses vegans as “strict vegetarians”.

Vegetarianism is not only an individual choice. India has a high portion of its inhabitants, roughly 40%, identifying their diets as a vegetarian one (Ruby, 2015). However, unlike in the Western countries, where most people decide later in their life to live a vegetarian lifestyle, the inhabitants of India are many born into the culture of vegetarianism as it is a practice related to tradition and status (Ruby, 2015; Caplan, 2008). Ruby (2015) explains how a study amongst vegetarians in the UK shows that 74% of the participants had changed their motives for choosing a vegetarian diet (Ruby, 2015). Not only do people have different motives for following a vegetarian diet, but overall, people see different benefits from it. Lea and Worsley (2003) show how non-vegetarians in Southern Australia see vegetarianism as beneficial for one’s health by consuming more fruits and vegetables, but also it being beneficial for the environment and animal welfare (Lea & Worsley, 2003).

Jabs et.al. (1998) claim that the adoption of a vegetarian diet happens gradually rather than abruptly and in a consistent way based on information people collect. Motives for choosing a vegetarian diet can also evolve and tends to change as people collect information on it (Jabs et.al., 1998). A sudden change in diet is considered hard to maintain as the decisions we make in terms of food choices are based on mental and emotional dimensions that can be difficult to change overnight (Jabs et.al., 1998). This is similar to what Ranganathan et.al. (2016) address on how we make purchasing decisions. Jabs et.al. (1998) then present two ways that people use to adapt to a vegetarian diet, that is health and ethical. According to the participants in their research who claim that health is the main motive for why they adapt to a vegetarian diet, say it is on the basis of a perceived threat of disease such as heart disease and high cholesterol (Jabs et.al., 1998). Other studies show similar results, for example Beardsworth and Keil (1991). The participants who adapt to a vegetarian diet based on ethics, do it after making a connection between their food and its origin and animal welfare (Jabs et.al., 1998). De Backer and Hudders (2014) however claim that the four main reasons why people choose a vegetarian diet are health motives, taste preferences, animal welfare, and environmental reasons. Unlike the results from Jabs et.al. (1998) and Beardsworth and Keil (1991), the results from De Backer and Hudders (2014) indicate that health motives are less important than moral motives in relation to animal-welfare and the environment. Health related motives therefor seem to be decreasing in importance while animal and

environmental motives are increasing (De Backer & Hudders, 2014). Today, health, the environment, and animal rights are considered to be the three main reasons why people decide to take up both a vegetarian and a vegan diet in Western societies (Hopwood et.al., 2020).

2.5.2. Veganism

According to The Vegan Society (n.d.^a) people identifying as vegans do not consume any animal products, nor use products made of or produced with animals. Similar to vegetarianism, the reasons for why people choose to live a vegan lifestyle do vary (The Vegan Society, n.d.^b; Hopwood et.al., 2020). Elizabeth Cherry (2006) divides vegans into two groups, called “punk” vegans and “non-punk” vegans. The two groups practice veganism in different ways (Cherry, 2006). The “punks” are the very strict vegans, while the “non-punks” are a little more lenient on the definition (Cherry, 2006). Amongst the “punks”, animal products are never acceptable, while amongst the “non-punks”, eating certain animal products is based on individual definition of veganism (Cherry, 2006).

The term veganism is not set in stone with Cherry’s explanation, but a division exists between people who live a vegan lifestyle, and people who identify their diet alone as vegan (Panoff, 2020; The Vegan Society, n.d.^c). According to Panoff (2020) individuals who do not consume any animal products in their diet, similar to ones who live a vegan lifestyle, strictly follow a so-called “plant-based” diet. However, the term “plant-based” is also used in studies on vegetarian diets (Ghaffari et.al., 2021) which is why the umbrella term “a green diet” for both a vegetarian diet, explained by the Vegetarian Society (n.d.), and a vegan diet, explained by Panoff (2020) and The Vegan Society (n.d.^c), was chosen for this thesis.

More studies on the motives of choosing a green diet are focused on vegetarianism rather than veganism (Ghaffari et.al., 2021). A possible explanation could be if a vegan diet is considered to be a part of a vegetarian diet. However, Ghaffari et.al. (2021), who specifically focus on individuals who choose a vegan diet, indicate that they are more motivated by animal rights, welfare, and empathy than health or environmental motives. It appears that the motives for choosing a green diet, a vegetarian one or a vegan one, were related to health reasons in the past, but are moving towards a more animal- and environmental rights-based reasons (Ghaffari et.al., 2021; De Backer & Hudders, 2014).

2.6. Dietary Transition

The EAT-Lancet report from 2019, explains how various diets have environmental impacts, but ones that are higher in plant-based and greener foods and limited in animal products can improve the health of individuals and has environmental benefits (Willet et.al., 2019). According to Willet et.al. (2019), a transformation in eating habits, improvement in food production, and reduction in food waste are key factors in doing so.

“Transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts. Including a greater than 50% reduction in global consumption of unhealthy foods, such as red meat and sugar, and a greater than 100% increase in consumption of healthy foods, such as nuts, fruits, vegetables, and legumes” (Willett et.al., 2019, p.448).

The EAT-Lancet report presents and recommends a “planetary health diet”, which is largely plant-based (Willett et.al., 2019). The diet should consist of approximately 50% vegetables and fruits, and the other 50% should consist of whole grains, plant protein sources, unsaturated plant oils, and very limited amount of animal sourced protein, if one wishes (Willett et.al., 2019). This planetary health diet is explained to be a “win-win”, and according to the report it is estimated to contribute to reaching the goal of the Paris Agreement from 2015 (Willet et.al., 2019).

The emphasis the EAT-Lancet report places on the importance of the planetary health diet has been widely criticised (Kaiser, 2021; Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020). Kaiser (2021) criticises how the report is explicitly focused on two points only, that is the production and the consumption of foods and does not take into consideration food availability and access in different parts of the world. Thorkildsen and Reksnes (2020) then claim that the EAT-Lancet report fails to take into consideration national differences in natural opportunities for food production and that the planetary health diet EAT-Lancet recommends for the world’s population is not as easily obtained by everyone. The reduction of meat consumption and an increase in green foods can make some countries more reliant on imports than others (Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020; Sturludóttir et.al., 2021). Smith et.al. (2014) then stress the importance that each country evaluates how to best use its natural resources for food production in order to contribute to the reduction of environmental and social effect of agriculture and to contribute to their food security at the same time. For example, land-based food production in Norway, which is nearly self-sufficient in meat, poultry, milk and egg production, is important for their national food

security (Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020). However, Norway has limited potential to produce plant-based products in terms of land and weather conditions and imports a large number of their vegetables, fruits, berries and food grains (Aas, 2019). A dietary transition towards the planetary health diet would make Norway less self-sufficient in their food production, reduce food security in the country, and make the country even more dependent on imported foods (Aas, 2019). Similar can be said about Iceland. The Icelandic food production in terms of meat, eggs, and milk, is an important factor contributing to food security in the country (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021). Although Iceland is highly dependent on imported foods, for example fruits and corn (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021) a dietary transition would make Iceland, like Norway, even more dependent on imported foods and less self-sufficient.

The planetary health diet that the EAT-Lancet report suggests is very restrictive on animal-based foods (Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020), but according to the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research (WCRF/AICR), a moderate consumption of animal sourced foods can be a part of a healthy diet (WCRF/AICR, 2018). Taking the Nordic Nutrition Recommendations as an example, the recommendations do put an emphasis on an increased consumption of green foods, but also a moderate consumption of fish and meat as a part of a healthy diet (Norden 2012). The WCRF/AICR (2018) show for example how a moderate consumption of red meat, or 350 to 500 grams per week, can be a part of a healthy diet, reducing the risk of cancer and other NCDs. It is explained how the correlation between meat consumption and NCDs, is not necessarily due to meat consumption in general, but the problem of too high meat consumption and if the meat is processed or not (WCRF/AICR, 2018). Therefore, the suggested planetary health diet in the EAT-Lancet report, fails to acknowledge other research that suggest that a total avoidance of animal consumption in the world is not necessarily the only way to ensure the health of the environment and individuals, but rather a different pattern of consumption.

Giménez and Shattuck (2011) present different views on how to tackle the problems within the food systems. One of the critics the EAT-Lancet report has gotten, is that the transformation suggestion towards the planetary health diet is put in the hands of the individuals (Kaiser, 2021) which can be categorized under the reformist trend, explained by Giménez and Shattuck (2011). They say the reformist trend entails a change to the food regime through individuals' and consumers' choices. They believe in "voting with your fork". That by choosing and increasing the demand for products that are less

damaging in production will set new industrial standards (Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). The radical trend however, is explained to seek “*deep, structural changes to food and agriculture*” (Giménez & Shattuck, 2011, p.128). Rather than looking at the solution amongst the individuals or the consumers, as reformist do, the radical discourse lays the power of change within the system itself. The production, reproduction, and distribution (Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Clapp (2020) claims that both views, the feeders and the eaters, are important for change to take place. That a systematic revision is needed, but that the actions and choices of the individuals also matter (Clapp, 2020).

3. Methods

In order to address the research question “*What are the factors contributing to Icelandic young-adults’ decision to follow a green diet?*”, and the sub-question “*Where do young-adults in Iceland seek information on a green diet?*”, a qualitative research method was used in the form of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The reason for the method chosen was due to the form of the research questions. The reasons for why people may choose a green diet can vary and be a mixture of many different reasons and/or perspectives.

3.1. Study area

The reason for why Iceland was chosen for this study is not only due to my ties to the country, being an Icelandic citizen, but due to Iceland’s long tradition with animal production and consumption, as will be elaborated on later. Before I started the study, I became aware of an increase in a green diet amongst individuals within my social network in Iceland as well as a significant increase in green products available in the local stores and restaurants. In addition, due to the size of the population and perhaps it’s remote location, it is my sense that the country is often excluded from academic and scientific research. In particular due to the nation’s small size, the country is a specifically interesting research area to me. For this research, I travelled to Iceland and did field work for 5 weeks.

3.2. Sampling

A total of 44 interviews were conducted with Icelandic young-adults. Eligible participants had to be Icelandic and identify their diet as a vegetarian or a vegan one, as the aim was to interview individuals who do not eat meat nor fish. As the research questions specifically address young-adults, the participants had to be within the age range of 25-35 years, that is born between the years 1997 and 1987. The original plan was to conduct 32 interviews, but due to good participation I extended the capacity to 44 participants. A specific selection-criteria was made where half the participants had to identify as female and the other half as male. In addition, half the females and half the males had to have obtained a university degree, and the other half did not. Such division was important to get an insight on the potential affect education can have on peoples’ choice to follow a green diet.

The sampling method chosen for this research was the so-called snowball method. This method is “[...] a sampling technique in which the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research” (Bryman, 2012, p.424). Due to my connection to Iceland the sampling of participants began within my social network in Iceland. I contacted individuals who I knew identified their diet as a vegetarian or a vegan one and asked them if they were interested in participating. Furthermore, I asked them if they knew of other potential candidates who fit the criteria. In addition, I posted an announcement on the Facebook group Vegan Ísland (e. vegan Iceland) in the hope of getting more participants. Table 3.1. shows the division of the participants in this study.

The participants in this research, which identify their diet as vegetarian or vegan, typically fall under the before discussed Types III and Type VI of vegetarians explained by Beardsworth and Keil (1992). That is, individuals who avoid meat products, including poultry and fish, in addition to those who decide to avoid any types of animal products.

Table 3.1.

The participants – Vegetarians or vegans			
44 Participants			
22 Women		22 Men	
11 with university degree	11 without university degree	11 with university degree	11 without university degree

Table 3.1. shows how the 44 participants were divided into two groups based on gender. These two groups were then divided again based on the educational level of the participants.

3.3. Data Collection

When conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a list of questions which touch on the topic to be covered, called an interview guide, but the interviewees have a big range on how to answer the questions (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide (Appendix 1) made prior to the interviews, has a total of nine questions. The first three questions are background questions, and the following six I call key questions. The questions are open-ended and simple, giving the interviewees a way to express themselves freely. Based on the answers from the participants, I asked additional questions to get more insight in their views and answers.

To get the most out of each interview, I travelled from Norway to Iceland in January of 2022 to take the interviews in person. It was important to me to be able to take the interviews in person as interviews through a computer screen could have created a certain barrier. Being able to meet the participants in person and have a cup of coffee with them created a more relaxed environment for the interviews to take place. The majority of the interviews took place at one of the buildings of the University of Iceland. However, I did not notice a difference between the interviews conducted in person and the few interviews that had to be conducted via Zoom.

Bryman (2012) stressed the importance of coding as soon as possible after data collection. All interviews were voice recorded, with the approval of the participants, and transcribed within the next 48 hours of them being recorded. After the transcription, the voice recordings were immediately deleted, leaving the interviews only available for analysis on paper. Interviews in person were recorded on a specific voice recording device. The interviews conducted through Zoom were recorded using the Zoom application. On average the interviews lasted around 30 minutes, some exceeding an hour, others only being 15 minutes, all dependant on how the participants responded and what they had to say.

3.4. Data Analysis

According to Bryman (2012), coding is a key process in approaches to qualitative data analysis. Charmaz (1983) explained codes in this way: “*Codes [...] serve as shorthand devices to label, separate, compile, and organize data*” (p.186). All transcribed interviews were printed out and read over thoroughly multiple times. The reason for why they were printed out was for me to have a better clearance and an overview of the data. After reading the interviews, certain words, phrases or common answers were categorised together under a code with a specific colour. Out of the three types of coding practices presented by Strauss and Corbin, an open coding process was used, which is “*the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data*” (Bryman, 2012, p.569).

While working on the analysis, the concepts and theories within the theoretical framework used, were kept closely in mind. Although the interviews were semi-structured and more of a conversation rather than interviews, they generally did not go off topic.

3.5. Ethics

Students at NMBU must apply for approval of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) before beginning a research and collecting data. This application concerns the protection, privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Once approved, the researcher, in this case I, must inform all participants of my research, the process, their rights and what their participation entails, through a consent form which each participant must sign. The principle of the consent form is that participants should be given all the information needed for them to make an informed decision on if they would like to participate or not. It is important that the participants give their consent as it is a way for them to take full responsibility for the information they provide during the interviews (Bryman, 2021). To ensure that the anonymity of the participants is protected, no names will be used when quoting the participant in the findings.

3.6. Limitations

Conducting social research during a global pandemic inevitably brings about challenges impacting the research. In January 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic was reaching new heights in Europe, Iceland included. The number of people being diagnosed with COVID-19 per day, were well over 1.000 during the 5 weeks field work I did in Iceland (Covid.is, 2022). Due to the rules which applied at the time in terms of isolation, some of the interviews had to be taken over Zoom. However, in some cases we managed to postpone the interviews until the end of isolation. Some of the interviews then had to be conducted through Zoom for other reasons than COVID-19, for example due to the participants being abroad at the time of the field work. Despite the high infection rates in Iceland at the time, most of the participants were willing to meet me face-to-face. It is my belief that being able to do the majority of the interviews face-to-face made the collection of data overall more relaxed and more conversation-like, bringing about the possibility to maximize the quality of the data collected in addition to getting more detailed answers.

Half of the participants for this research had obtained a university degree, and the other half did not. However, some of the participants who were put in the category without a university degree, were attending university at the time of the interviews. This could give flawed analyses on the difference between the answers from the ones who had a university degree and the ones who did not, as it is hard to say if their studies so far have had an effect on their view on the topic. This research can then not generalize the

findings to the overall Icelandic population, as the sampling was a snowball sampling including only a specific age group.

I would like to underline that I myself do not follow a green diet. Hence, there should not be bias regarding the perks or reasons for choosing a green diet affecting the findings in this research.

4. Contextualization

In this chapter I will present the context of Iceland. The country is located in the North Atlantic Ocean and has little over 370.000 inhabitants (Statistics Iceland, n.d.^b). Iceland, as a part of the global north, is considered to be more resilient and less vulnerable to climate change than the global south, meaning that climate change consequences are not as apparent in Iceland as in other parts of the world (Leichenko & O'Brien, 2019). In addition, Iceland has strict rules in relation to the welfare of animals within agriculture and farming (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2022^c). Therefore, the externalities from animal production and consumption, may not be as apparent for the Icelandic population as it may be to other nations.

4.1. The Traditional Icelandic Diet

For this research, it is important to look into the history and the present of Icelandic agriculture and fishery, to stress just how important the animal-based industry and diet has been for the population. Iceland has over the centuries been dependent on its agriculture and fishing industry, as it has been the foundation for Iceland's food security and working industry (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2022^a; Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2022^b; Jónsson, 2011). Until the mid-nineteenth century, the livelihood of the Icelandic population was farming and fishing (Jónsson, 1998). As a result, the populations' diet mainly consisted of animal products such as fish and meat, and most importantly, milk (Jónsson, 1998). In that sense, the daily calorie intake came from fat and protein from meat and fish, but carbohydrates in the form of for example bread, was considered a luxury food (Jónsson, 1998). Therefore, the consumption of milk was very high amongst the Icelandic population, as an important provider of carbohydrates (Jónsson, 1998). In that sense, the production and consumption of animal products through agriculture and fishery, has followed the Icelandic population for decades and to this day the industry plays an important role in the Icelandic economy (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2021). Policies restricting the production of meat or limits on the fishing industry would create problems for farmers and fishermen, as well as the nation's food security, but so would the continuance of it without any changes. In the formulation of a new agricultural policy in Iceland, three key factors are addressed which will have a great effect on the development of agriculture in Iceland in the nearest future (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2021). Those key factors are sustainable

land activity, climate issues, and technology. The new policy aims at reducing Iceland's carbon emission by 29% or more by the year 2030 (Stjórnarráð Íslands, 2021).

4.2. The Perspective of the Icelandic Population

The Environment Agency of Iceland has an ongoing project called “Together against waste” where the aim is to reduce the creation of waste and the demand for natural resources (Saman Gegn Sóun, n.d.). The project focuses on self-sufficiency and frugality, better use of resources as well as spreading awareness to help limit the creation of waste (Saman Gegn Sóun, n.d.). The project is split up into nine categories, one being specifically on waste (Saman Gegn Sóun, n.d.). According to a newly released Gallup survey on environmental and climate related issues (2021), seven out of ten individuals in Iceland wanted to change their behaviour in the hope of doing good for the environment. Then, the ratio of people in Iceland who are considered “low consumers”, eating meat ones a year or never, has increased significantly (Gallup, 2019). For example, the ratio of people who never eat pork raised from 3,8% on average in the years 2007-2009, to 6,3% in the years 2016-2018 (Gallup, 2019). In spite of these results, the production of animal products in Iceland has not decreased and is that related to an increase in a keto-diet or a low carb diet amongst Icelanders which are diets focused on high consumption of animal products (Gallup, 2019; Statistics Iceland, n.d.^a).

The newly released Gallup survey from 2021 indicated that roughly 66% of Icelanders have changed their behaviour in some way over the previous 12 months to limit their negative effect on the environment (Gallup, 2021). The most common thing people did was recycle, or 88,4%, but 18% said they had reduced or stopped consuming animal products (Gallup, 2021). The most common answer to what it was that led people into changing their purchases for the home to limit their impact on the environment, was increased awareness through education and general discussion, as well as changes within the Icelandic society (Gallup, 2021). This could indicate that information on environmental externalities from different types of consumption, for example food consumption, is reaching the Icelandic population and perhaps pushing forward a societal change. However, out of three options, the authorities, big companies, and the individuals, Icelanders believed that the individuals have the least responsibility when it comes to making actions against climate change out of the three (Gallup, 2021). Furthermore, the recent Gallup survey (2021) included a question on whether people

think that news about the seriousness of climate change are exaggerated, generally correct, or generally underrated. 18,4% thought they were exaggerated, 51,6% said they thought they were generally correct, and 30% thought that they were generally underrated (Gallup, 2021). This indicates that the population in Iceland generally listens to and believes in information about climate change. However, a great difference could be seen between men and women, but 16% more men than women thought that news on climate change were exaggerated (Gallup, 2021).

4.3. What do Icelanders Eat Today?

Results from a national survey on the eating habits of the Icelandic population from 2019-2021 was recently published (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). The survey was performed by The Directorate of Health and the Laboratory of Nutrition at the University of Iceland (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). The results showed that the diet of the Icelandic population has changed from the last time a similar survey was made in 2010-2011 (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). The results were then compared to the national guidelines and recommendations on nutrition, which are based on the prior discussed Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022).

The change in meat consumption amongst Icelanders seems to vary between groups within Iceland. Consumption amongst young women changed the most, with the biggest change happening in the most recent years (Gallup, 2019, Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). However, only about 1% of the Icelandic nation identified their diet as a vegan one and almost 3% identified their diet as a vegetarian one (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). In addition, only 2% said they never consume meat products (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). These numbers may seem rather low. However, these numbers were only based on answers from 822 participants in total, with fewest participants between 18-39 years of age, or only 240 (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). The report addressed this issue and explained how the youngest age group was the one most difficult to reach (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). Therefore, the ratio of people in Iceland who follow a vegetarian or a vegan diet, may be higher.

Meat consumption amongst the Icelandic population has decreased by 10% between surveys, indicating that overall meat consumption in Iceland is decreasing (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). A great difference could be seen between age groups and gender, but males aged 18-39 eat most meat of all groups, exceeding the 500g a week recommendation,

while females in the same age group eat the least meat (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). Milk and dairy consumption decreased between surveys, and again males consume more of these products than females. Older generation of males then consumes more milk and dairy products than the younger generation (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). The survey indicated that a possible dietary change is more apparent within the younger generation, especially amongst women (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). In conclusion, both Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022) and the previous Gallup surveys (2021; 2019) indicated that meat consumption amongst the Icelandic population, especially the younger generation, is decreasing, but slowly.

5. Findings and Discussion

This chapter will introduce the findings from the data collected in relation to the research- and sub-research question. The analysis presents several themes in relation to the objective of the research questions. The themes are; Not an overnight decision; Different reasons for choosing a green diet; Information on green food choices; Positive societal changes; and Advocating for a green diet and green food choices. The theoretical framework and the contextualization will then be used to support and discuss the findings presented.

5.1. Not an Overnight Decision

The process of adapting to a new diet is not linear (Jabs et.al., 1998). Although some of the participants in this study started their green diet after seeing one Netflix documentary, or made a new year resolution, the most common road towards a green diet was one of slow transition. 28 out of 44 participants in this study identify their diet as vegan, and 14 of them identified their diet as vegetarian before they slowly took out other animal products leading to a vegan diet. The participants who identify their diet as vegetarian had a similar slow transition with limiting any sort of meat or fish products in their diet gradually. In addition, some of the vegetarian participants said that they were on a slow transitional process to exclude any animal products from their diet with the aim of following a vegan diet.

It appears that the decision to choose a green diet can be made overnight, although the majority of the participants recommended slowly taking meat, fish and/or other animal products out of their diet. One participant thought that if people would become vegetarian or vegan overnight and ironically, quit “cold turkey”, it could lead to people giving up if they are not familiar with the variety of vegetarian and/or vegan options beforehand, or doing it with the wrong intentions. *“I was a vegetarian at first for 6 months, but then I eased into it [a vegan diet]. I think that a lot of people give up because they dive into this too fast. Cut everything out [from their diet] and get annoyed and frustrated. Rather do it step by step”*. These findings indicate that the way towards a green diet, seems to be most commonly a slow transition rather than a decision people take overnight, which aligns with Jabs et.al. (1998) findings on how a vegetarian diet appeared to most often occur gradually rather than abruptly. The participants in their study described it as “an evolutionary process” or “a journey” (Jabs et.al., 1998). Here it is also worth to reflect

back on Ruby (2015), and how he explained how vegetarianism measures the process of the degree to which animal products are avoided. Some of the participants expressed how they had gone back and forth within their green diet. One of the participants who chooses a green diet due to health-related reasons explained *“I’ve been eating vegan on and off for 10 years. I’ve had times where I follow a vegetarian diet, but most of the time my diet has been vegan”*. When asked why she has her vegetarian times she answered *“I was just curious to see how my body would react”*. These findings show how individuals can bounce back and forth within the 6 types of vegetarianism presented by Beardsworth and Keil (1992).

5.2. Different Reasons for Choosing a Green Diet

The interviewees revealed that the reasons for why young-adults in Iceland choose a green diet are not set in stone. A variety stated that their motives to choose a green diet has shifted from their initial ones. Some said that they began due to climate related reasons, but the reason for why they continue the diet was due to animal welfare, while others said the opposite. *“I started this due to environmental reasons at the time. The animals didn’t matter to me when I began, but today I do it because of the animals”*. It was very common amongst the participants that they thought that the longer you pursue a green diet, the more you tend to educate yourself on it, resulting in a change of motives to continue. Similar to what Jabs et.al. (1998) argued, the motives for choosing a vegetarian diet tend to evolve as one gets educated on it.

One participant mentioned that it was important to have a strong enough motive or reason to choose a green diet for one to continue the diet. The same participant had participated in Veganuary, which is when people from all around the world in January try a vegan diet for the whole month (Veganúar, n.d.), but after Veganuary he felt that he didn’t learn enough about the diet to justify continuing. *“I participated in Veganuary in 2018, but then I didn’t have any reason to continue. [...] It wasn’t until in 2019 that I was like “ok, this is something that I want to do”, but I was missing a reason to go through with it, because this sympathy for animals just wasn’t there for me”*. When the participant began writing his Bachelor thesis on animal ethics, his motives to choose a green diet started to develop. *“[...] I wanted to dive into this to keep on being vegan, educate myself more on this”*. This can be related again to Jabs et.al. (1998) and how information and education on why to choose a certain diet can influence how you adapt to the diet. This

participant then specifically mentioned how he looked at the work of Peter Singer while seeking information and motivation to choose a green diet, but Singer, through his work, called for a change in humans' perspectives towards animals (Singer, 1975).

No noticeable difference could be seen between female and male participants when it came to the main drivers for choosing a green diet, nor in other aspects of this research. Tables 5.1. and 5.2. further illustrate the statistics between female and male participants. However, reaching male participants was more difficult than female. More females reached out wanting to participate than males, and when participants pointed out other potential candidates who fitted the criteria, they were more often females. This could indicate that there are overall more females in Iceland who choose a green diet, or that females are more open about their dietary choices. In addition, according to Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022), women in Iceland aged 18-39 years eat the least meat, and young men in the same age group eat the most meat. This could be a potential explanation for why it was more difficult to find male participants.

Table 5.1.

	Female	Male
Vegetarian	7	9
Vegan	15	13

Table 5.1. shows the division between vegetarian and vegan participants based on gender.

Table 5.2.

	Female	Male
Environmental reasons	10	7
Animal welfare reasons	9	10
Health reasons	3	5

Table 5.2. shows the division of the main drivers for choosing a green diet based on the gender of the participants.

5.2.1. Strong Opinion on Animal Welfare and the Environment

In the latter half of the interviews, I asked the participants which of the three most common reasons for why people choose a green diet, that is climate change, animal welfare, and health related reasons (Hopwood et.al., 2020), was the most important one for them today to continue practicing a green diet. Only 8 participants claimed that health

was their main motive, while animal welfare was the most common reason. 19 participants said that animal welfare was most important for them, and 17 participants said that the environment was most important. Many felt this question the most difficult. *“I would say that my main reason is animal welfare, but environmental issues are about the welfare of everyone, humans and animals, so it is hard to say”*. Some of the participants explained that today, after having educated themselves on the matter, it was a mix of all the reasons, but if they had to choose, the most common answer was animal welfare.

A common answer amongst those that choose a green diet mainly due to animal welfare, was that if you could have a diet that doesn't cause pain, then why wouldn't you? Many participants said that they couldn't imagine themselves killing an animal, so it seemed at odds to pay someone else to do it for them.

Amongst those that claimed that environmental reasons are their main motives for choosing a green diet, a common explanation was that if they could in some way decrease their effect on the climate, choosing green foods seemed to be the easiest way to do so. Especially since limiting their time traveling and flying to and from an island such as Iceland seemed to be a more difficult way to reduce one's carbon footprint.

Although health was the least common reason for choosing a green diet amongst the participants, being the main driver for only 8 of them, many claimed that they felt better, physically and emotionally, after excluding animal products from their diet. The most common answer was that they felt that their digestion improved and they had less stomach problems after eating a big meal. *“I always eat so much at once, and it's easier when there is no meat. It [meat] can get heavy for my stomach”*. However, others said that they didn't feel any physical difference from shifting to a green diet. Although, many participants said that they felt better emotionally since they knew that their diet not only was better for the environment but it also caused less pain and violence towards animals. *“To think that we are superior to other animals, makes us able to think the same thing towards other humans. It creates such a toxic behavioural pattern and nurtures all sorts of hate and violence [...]”*. Singer and Mason (2006) shared a similar perspective where they compared the discrimination of animals based on their “non-humanity”, to the discrimination of humans based on skin colour or sex.

The strong opinion on animal welfare and the environment amongst the participants, supports what De Backer and Hudders (2014) indicated. That animal welfare and environmental reasons are becoming more important for people to choose a green diet

rather than health related reasons. However, out of the 28 vegan participants, 13 claimed their main reason was animal welfare, which does not align with Ghaffari et.al. (2021) indication that people who follow a vegan diet are more concerned with animal welfare motives rather than health or environmental ones. In fact, overall, no specific difference could be found in the answers between the ones who identified their diet as a vegetarian or a vegan one. This might indicate that young-adults in Iceland who choose a green diet, whether it is a vegetarian one or a vegan one, have a similar mindset. As Ruby (2015) and Beardsworth and Keil (1992) addressed, the terms vegetarianism and veganism are perhaps not two different ones, but rather a linear progressive degree to which animal foods are avoided.

In terms of the environmental concerns of the participants, it did not seem like they had considered the environmental impacts of green foods. Only a few participants acknowledged the disadvantages of the increase in green food products available and the unintentional nudge in the Icelandic supermarkets. Those few said that they would prefer to choose Icelandic vegetables or locally produced products when available rather than imported foods. But unfortunately, most vegetarian or vegan products available in Icelandic supermarkets are not locally produced. “[...] *I don't want to buy a paprika that grew somewhere else if I can buy Icelandic paprika. More Icelandic production. [...] but I appreciate being able to buy a hamburger that is meat but is still not meat*”. The few participants that expressed their opinion on imported foods, preferred locally produced food not only to limit carbon footprint in terms of transportation. They placed more importance on the need to support local production than the environmental issues of imported foods.

Iceland is nearly self-sufficient when it comes to meat, eggs, and milk, but a green diet consists of mainly imported foods such as fruits, vegetables, corn (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021) as well as meat replacements. Similar to the primarily focus of the EAT-Lancet report on food production and consumption, which has been widely criticised (Kaiser, 2021; Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020), the participants generally seemed to put their main focus on these aspects as well. The participants did not seem to take under consideration the availability of green foods in Iceland, nor the potential economic effects of widely reduced meat and fish consumption in the country. The point Smith et.al. (2014) made on how each country should put an emphasis on using its natural resources for food production, whether in terms of meat or other products, for self-sufficiency, food security, and environmental aspects, the participants did not elaborate on. Nor did they seem to

consider the degree of greenhouse gas emissions released in relation to food energy and nutrient density as Drewnowski et.al. (2015) pointed out.

5.2.2. A Radical Trend Amongst the Educated

One participant specifically mentioned her distrust in the ideology around a carbon footprint. She explained how the term “carbon footprint” was invented and made popular by an oil company which made it a way to blame the individuals for climate change rather than big companies, such as the oil company in question. *“Even though I do in a way believe in the idea of a carbon footprint, I find it difficult to believe that the individuals have as much power as the ones behind the campaign of the carbon footprint. There are hundreds of companies that are responsible for most of the greenhouse gas emission released in the world and I think its scapegoating to blame the individuals for something that is the capitalism’s and company’s fault”*. Here, the participant followed the radical trend as explained by Giménez and Shattuck (2011). This participant felt that the responsibility and the power to reduce carbon emissions, lies within the big companies, the system, rather than the individuals. This participant then also addressed what has been stressed by Smith et.al. (2014) on how access to resources needs to be considered in the dietary transition discourse. The participant continued and said *“[...] in addition it is a privilege to be able to change one’s lifestyle so it is within the range that carbon footprint calculators recommend. Not everyone has the resources to change their life in a short time and to shame people for living the kind of life that society has told us to live is a privilege blindness and draws the attention from the bigger problem”*. Here, the participant indirectly criticized the planetary health diet. Similar to other critiques on the planetary health diet, such as Kaiser (2021) and Thorkildsen and Reksnes (2020), the diet is not as accessible to everyone. As the participant mentioned, not everyone has the resources to make such a dietary shift as the planetary health diet requires. In the case of Iceland, the country does not have the resources of their own to support the nation with the ingredients for a planetary health diet without being dependent on the importation of green foods (Sturludóttir et.al., 2021).

Some difference could be seen between the answers from participants with a higher formal educational background. Overall, the ones who had a university degree, had less belief in the act of the individual when it comes to better the environment. *“I don’t think it will matter if some 100.000 Icelanders stop eating meat in the big context, but I guess it*

has to begin somewhere. It kind of doesn't matter what we do here in Iceland, but it may bring peace for someone's conscience". The majority of the participants who had a university degree felt that a real change for the better would be in the hands of big companies and authorities. *"I realized after I started to learn more about politics and such, how it is such a neoliberalism to believe that the individual can change everything. We are told that if we want to see a change, be the change, and I mean yes yes, it can have an effect but not that much".* Although the participants with a university degree had less belief in the act of the individual, they still felt that individuals could make a difference but not to the level needed to see a positive effect in terms of the environment or animal welfare.

A few participants that had not obtained a university degree but did attend university at the time of the interviews, had also limited belief in the act of the individual. This could indicate that even though the participants had not officially graduated with their university degree, their studies so far may have had an effect on their view on the topic. What strengthens that hypothesis is the fact that only one participant who did not have a university degree nor did attend university at the time of the interviews claimed to have limited belief in the act of the individual based on information he had gathered himself.

In general, the participants who did not have a university degree and did not attend university, fitted into the reformist trend as Giménez and Shattuck (2011) described it, since they had more belief in the act of the individual to better the environment and animal welfare, as well as overall health of the society. The participants who had a university degree or were attending university, seemed to be on the radical trend, as they felt that in order for real change to occur, a systematic change would need to take place (Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). *"The system and the big companies are the ones who need to change, but I mean I believe that the act of the individual does something, like recycling and such, the more people that do it the better, right? It must be. But it is more difficult to see any big change from that".* According to a Gallup survey from 2021, the Icelandic population believed that the individual holds the least responsibility when it comes to actions against climate change (Gallup, 2021). Although individual actions have increased the demand for green food products, resulting in an increased variety of products available, it does not seem to be having an effect on the environmental externalities from animal production in Iceland. As numbers from the Environmental Agency of Iceland show, emissions from agriculture in the country does not seem to be decreasing (Environmental Agency of Iceland, 2019). Therefore, the 10% decrease in

meat consumption amongst the Icelandic population (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022) does not seem to be having an effect on the overall meat production in the country so far.

5.3. Information on Green Food Choices

According to Lule (2021), media has allowed globalization to occur. Furthermore, Laakso et.al. (2021) explained how in particular social media has been a great avenue for globalization and education. Social media has made the flow of information and knowledge easy and open (Laakso et.al., 2021). The Icelandic Facebook group Vegan Ísland (e.Vegan Iceland) is an example of such an avenue. The group has over 24.000 members and counting, where people can share and seek information on the vegan diet or general veganism. In addition, while doing the research in Iceland, I noticed how the selection of vegetarian and vegan products as well as meat replacement products in the local supermarkets had increased. Before, vegan products were mainly available in one specific store in Reykjavík called Veganbúðin (e.the vegan store). The store began with an online sale of vegan products in 2018 with only about 30 products for sale. The demand for the products sold at Veganbúðin has increased to the point where the store now holds the title as the world's largest vegan store (Veganbúðin, n.d.). With the increase in sale of vegan and vegetarian products, other supermarkets have begun selling similar products, for example Krónan, which aims at offering the widest range of products for consumers to be able to buy everything they need at one place (Krónan, n.d.). This inevitably has increased the visibility of vegetarian and vegan products, which the participants believed to be a way of spreading information on the variety of different green food choices available and that a green diet is not only about eating vegetables. This increase in green foods visibility may be seen as a type of an unintentional nudge. I use the word "unintentional", as the point of increasing green foods availability is likely not to change the consumers' behaviour in terms of diet, as explained by Thaler and Sunstein (2019), but to increase sales. The increased visual presentation of green food products in local supermarkets has according to the majority of the participants not only made it easier to follow a green diet, but it has also created an awareness of green food choices and diets within the society. It is however worth mentioning the possibility that the demand from tourists in Iceland may have contributed to increased offer of green foods, but that possibility was not further explored for this research.

5.3.1. Media the Main Source of Information

The interviews gave clear results that different kinds of media are the main source of information for young-adults in Iceland on a green diet and green food choices. Out of 44 participants, 42 mentioned specifically that media was their main source of information, directly or indirectly, meaning that they either looked for information themselves online, or got it indirectly through television or content on Facebook or Instagram. Perhaps the most common answer was documentaries on Netflix, such as *The Game Changers*, *Cowspiracy*, *Seaspiracy*, and *What the Health*, to name a few. As Pabian et.al. (2020) mentioned, a visual presentation has more effect on people's perception on food externalities than text-based campaigns. Although these movies have been a general source of information for the participants, some of them mentioned that they watched these movies while being aware of potential propaganda strategies and not taking all the information presented as the holy truth.

Social media was also a popular source of information, for example Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The Facebook group Vegan Ísland is a popular place where participants have sought information on green food choices, both on purpose but also indirectly through their general use of Facebook. *"People are constantly posting all kinds of educational material, not necessarily scientific material, but for my part I've learned a lot by being a part of the group and this is a growing group so it's in a way the best place to seek all the information you might need. It's constant material, you don't have to look for it, you just go on Facebook and it's there. You don't need to Google. This community here in Iceland is so accessible"*. This participant emphasized a similar conclusion presented by Laakso et.al. (2021) on how the social media avenue is "anything but closed".

The participants displayed an awareness of how media has made the flow of information easier and faster. *"The communication length is much shorter now than it was 20 years ago. It is so easy today to follow someone [on social media] who is a vegetarian and lives in Australia and get information and inspiration. My mom could not have done that when she was 35, you know? It would have been much harder for her. Same with access to products. She could have only eaten products that were vegetarian or vegan naturally and not buy the products that are available today"*. Here, the participant gave an example of how humans live a different life now than they did only a few decades ago. As Appadurai (1996) stated, technological advances which have been the main driver of globalization, have changed human life (Appadurai, 1996; Lule, 2021).

In addition to social media and documentaries, many cited the increase in Icelandic news coverage on environmental problems and health related issues from abroad, caused by animal production and consumption as a source. It seems that the discussion is becoming more “mainstream” as one participant stated and not only happening between individuals through social media. *“People are more amenable to this and have a more open mind and more people are open to trying out something that is vegan or vegetarian without them self being vegan or vegetarian. [...] this is more in the mainstream now for sure”*. With an increased involvement of the press, the conversation is brought to peoples’ homes, causing an even bigger and more open discussion on the topic in the Icelandic society. When the participants were asked where they thought the Icelandic population in general got their information on the externalities of animal production and consumption and the perks of choosing a green diet, the local press as well as social media was a common answer.

These findings indicate that different media plays a key role in spreading information to young-adults in Iceland. This supports the findings of Lule (2021) and Kaul (2011) on how easily information spreads through media and the importance of media when it comes to societal changes. The fact that Netflix documentaries was also a common source of information amongst the participants, supports the findings from Pabian et.al. (2020) on how effective a visual presentation can be on peoples’ perception of meat consumption.

5.3.2. General Discussion Within the Society

The general conversation about green food choices in Iceland seems to be increasing fast. Participants who had been following a green diet for some time mentioned how it has become easier over the years, in addition to it no longer being frowned upon to exclude and/or reduce animal products from one’s diet. Some participants felt that in the past, there was a wider expression of annoyance when they informed someone that they didn’t eat meat before a dinner party for example. This frustration has decreased and making a vegetarian or a vegan dinner party is not seen as such a big problem as some felt it was only a few years ago. *“Everyone knows climate change is real and everyone wants to do their best, and choosing green food choices is a part of that. So now when I say I’m vegan, I don’t get as many comments on it as I did a few years ago. It is almost as the tables have turned and it is now more frowned upon to not choose green food choices*

than it is to do so". The participants felt that the discussion within the Icelandic society had changed over the years for the good and it has become more normal to choose green food choices. The reason for this change, the participants felt to be due to increased discussion within the local media and social media, particularly in terms of the threat of climate change.

These findings can be seen as a result from globalization as described by Haslam et.al. (2017). How in this case, the flow of information and products, has not only affected the behaviour and food choices of the participants, but also the general discussion and wider acceptance within the Icelandic society on green foods as described by the participants. Although Ranganathan et.al. (2016) meant that education shows limited results in changing peoples' diets, the answers from the participants indicate perhaps otherwise. That the discussion in the society about a green diet, where people educate each other, appears to be showing results in the form of a reduced meat consumption, as has been shown by Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022). Furthermore, Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022) showed that young women in Iceland are the group that has had most changes in diet, indicating that perhaps the discussion is most blooming amongst young Icelandic women. However, the participants in this research did not imply that that was the case, but nor that it wasn't. Then, the increased visibility of green foods is perhaps a form of a nudge that not only increases the sales of these products, but it could also be a factor contributing to further conversation within the Icelandic society.

5.4. Positive Societal Changes

As Gundelach (1988) explained, new lifestyles and values causing societal changes, are what push forward new social movements. People choosing to follow a green diet is an example of a new lifestyle which has been looked at as a form of a new social movement (Cherry, 2006). Nearly all participants thought that the increase in green food choices and diets have had and will continue to lead to positive societal changes. The most common response was that perhaps a paradigm shift has happened over the past few years. One participant said that the increased visibility and variety of green food choices made him feel like his decision to choose a green diet actually made a beneficial difference for society. Only a few years ago Veganbúðin, located in Reykjavík, the capital, was predominantly the only store that sold vegan products in Iceland. Veganbúðin attracted one participant from another part of the country in order to be able to buy vegan products.

Green food options were very limited across the country, but with the increase in demand for such products, not only have supermarkets in Reykjavík increased their product variety, but other supermarkets across the country as well. This has made green food choices easier, more accessible and more visible to everyone.

One participant said that she would have taken the step to choose a green diet sooner if more green food options had been available within the university she attended. *“I lived at the university at the time and I couldn’t always bring lunch or dinner with me from home. As soon as the university came with more green food options at the canteen, I though “this is the perfect opportunity” [to start following a green diet]”*. Most participants then mentioned how the increase in visibility of green food choices may result in a general decrease in meat consumption amongst those who do not specifically identify their diet as a green one, and that by itself would be a big positive change within the Icelandic society. Many of the participants then also mentioned the increase in green food options at restaurants and how restaurants in Iceland have over the past year or two significantly increased their green food options. *“This wasn’t like this only 5 years ago, so there is clearly something going on”*. Some admitted that before, it was difficult to have a green diet when going out to dinner due to the limited green food options restaurants offered.

5.4.1. Positive Health Outcomes

Almost all participants said that by choosing a green diet they started eating more diverse foods. One participant specifically mentioned how by getting to know and looking up different recipes online, through social media or Google for example, one expands his knowledge on different food cultures and sees that the animal diet is not as popular elsewhere as in Iceland.

Even though health reasons do not seem to weigh heavy in Icelandic young-adults’ decision to choose a green diet, many participants said that choosing a green diet is likely to have great benefits for the health system. However, some participants did address the fact that people who choose a green diet, still can have a very unhealthy diet and overall lifestyle. In spite of that, many participants believed that a green diet, including more fruits and vegetables, would in the long run reduce lifestyle diseases that are often connected to peoples’ diets, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, increasing the economic power of the health care system. *“But you can eat very unhealthy by being*

vegetarian or vegan, so you can't say that everybody will be healthier by being vegetarian or vegan and lifestyle diseases will vanish, but it is more likely to have an [good] effect. It is more likely your overall health will improve than not". As Huan et.al. (2012), and Bedford and Barr (2005) claimed, people who follow a vegetarian diet are considered to be better informed on health-related activities. That in itself, the participants thought would be of overall beneficiaries for the society.

One participant specifically addressed his concerns with the variety of vegan products available that are highly processed. *"I started to lose my belief in these products [vegan products] when all this fake meat came in. [...] there are too many products that are not healthy foods and have to many fake ingredients. [...] all these imported products that are just E-chemical soups"*. Another participant said *"I'm vegan but I eat Oreos like crazy"*. Although people cut out processed meat products, which has been related to different health issues (Sinha et.al., 2009, Pan et.al., 2012; Micha et.al., 2010; Zheng & Lee, 2009), it does not mean that people necessarily stop eating processed foods in general by following a green diet. Willet et.al. (2019) explained the planetary health diet to be beneficial to peoples' health, but what Willet et.al. (2019) failed to address in the EAT-Lancet report is that although people would choose the planetary health diet, people could still live an unhealthy lifestyle. The planetary health diet does not guarantee a healthy diet, nor does a vegetarian or a vegan one as some of the participants addressed.

5.4.2. Contagious Social Movement

Many of the participants expressed how amazed they were on how big the green community in Iceland has gotten. *"This is such a special country and we need to import most products at the same time we are highly dependent on our agricultural production, so it's kind of amazing how big this has become here"*. Most participants claimed that everyone knows someone who follows a green diet. Most participants then agreed that it is as if the green diet or green foods are contagious in some ways. One participant mentioned how he joined the Vegan Ísland Facebook group with the only purpose in mind to mock the people that post and comment on posts in the group. *"But then I really started to see what was on this group and started being interested in the things people were saying. As a result, I started to find meat repulsive"*. Many participants also mentioned how the younger generation is not afraid to speak about green food choices to the older generation, for example their parents. *"My parents have reduced their meat*

consumption tremendously, and I don't think they would have done it by themselves, but they do it because they have heard me talk about these things and from others they know". Another participant had a similar story. "This Christmas was the first Christmas dinner my parents had which had no meat. They always invite us all over for Christmas dinner and this Christmas they had a vegan wellington and a bunch of vegetarian courses. And it was so normal. No one said anything about it. And they [the parents] are not even vegan or vegetarian".

According to the answers from the participants, it is as they felt like the size of the Icelandic population plays a vital role in how contagious a green diet is. That Icelanders love to follow popular trends. *"We are such herd animals. If someone tries something, then everyone needs to try it as well. That's what happened in 2015 or 2016 when being a vegetarian became so popular amongst teenagers, at the time we were in high school, remember?".* Other participants felt a similar way. *"I think this is still a little fashion-bubble. I think a lot of people are only doing this [choosing a green diet] because it sounds good".* Another participant said *"You have a feeling that the whole world is opening its eyes and Icelanders are so good at following trends and the environment. They just follow what they see online or in the television or something".* Continuing on the contagiousness of a green diet, some of the participants believe that the Icelandic generations to come are likely to eat very limited animal products due to the changes in diet that are happening amongst young Icelanders today. That is, that a slow societal change towards a green diet is likely already happening amongst the Icelandic population and will follow, or "infect" the generations to come. *"Veganism is the future, at some point we will all have to go there I think. The sooner that that will happen, the positive societal changes will happen sooner. Overall, I feel like people who choose a green diet are in general more aware of environmental issues for example and do more about it, like recycle".* Although the answers from the participants indicate that a green diet is contagious, a few of them expressed how they thought it would be unlikely that the Icelandic nation would ever completely stop eating animal products for good.

According to the answers from the participants, more and more people in Iceland are choosing a green diet. However, Icelandic surveys show low numbers of people who follow a green diet, such as Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022). Gunnardóttir et.al. (2022) however do recognize that their numbers are based on a limited sample. In that sense, based on the views from the participants in this research, one might question if the numbers from national surveys hold ground. Numbers do nevertheless show that meat

consumption in Iceland is decreasing (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022), which could align with the participants' description on how people are more open to eating green food products. Even though surveys indicate that the number of people who follow a green diet is increasing at a slow rate (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2020; Gallup, 2019; Gallup 2021), green food choices in general seem to be increasing according to Gunnarsdóttir et.al. (2022), as well as according to the participants of this research. People can reduce their meat consumption without excluding meat and identify their diet as vegetarian or vegan.

Moderate consumption of meat can be a part of a healthy diet (Thorkildsen & Reksnes, 2020; WCRF/AICR, 2018). Although the number of people who follow a green diet in Iceland may not be high, the local population is eating less meat than before and the eating pattern of the population is changing (Gunnarsdóttir et.al., 2022). These results, along with the views and description of the participants, could be an indicator that a new social movement may be on the rise, as described by Gundelach (1988). The people who avoid or limit their meat consumption can be seen as a group with a common ground hoping to have an effect for the better, whether it is in terms of climate change, public health, or animal welfare. The people who follow a green diet have already influenced a change within local supermarkets as more green foods are now available than before. This is one of the things social movements can do according to Köhler et.al. (2019).

5.5. Advocating for a Green Diet and Green Food Choices

Although the results from the interviews indicate that the general discussion on green food choices and diets in Iceland is increasing and people are becoming more open to trying out something different from the traditional Icelandic food culture, it appears that people are still very cautious about how they talk about their green diet. Some participants expressed how they still fear to be judged for their choice of diet. *“I think it’s very sad the common image people have on vegan people that they are angry vegans. I am sometimes afraid to tell people I’m vegan because I don’t want to have that stamp on me. But if I feel that people are being genuinely curious and interested I try to educate and inform the best I can”*. Most participants then admitted that they are not the ones who start a conversation on what they are eating in a social setting, but rather answer honestly when and if people ask them. *“I answer questions when people ask me, but I don’t walk into a conversation, say hi my name is this and I don’t eat meat”*. According to the participants, people are generally curious and are not afraid to ask questions about their

diet, whether it is about what they are eating at the moment, recommendations on green products such as vegetarian burgers or vegan dressings, or delicious green recipes. However, the participants explained how they generally prefer to lead by example and be role models. They didn't think that trying to talk someone into choosing a green diet was very efficient. Instead, they try and cook delicious green recipes and let everyone that wants to have a taste. *"I have a few friends who have made a Mexican chicken soup but replaced the chicken with soy meat without telling anyone. No one mentioned anything. Sometimes the texture is a bit different, but the spices taste the same though"*. Another participant said *"I make a lot of food for people that just happens to be meatless, and people either notice it or not"*. Furthermore, the participants overall agreed that the best way to advocate for a green diet in words, would be to talk about the good things that it entails. *"I rather try to talk about the good things about being vegan, about different delicious foods, rather than sharing a picture of an animal in pain online. It's better to say "hey, join the fun" and talk about it on a fun note"*.

Although the interviews indicate that different media are the main source of information for young-adults in Iceland about green food choices, the young-adults themselves do not seem to be so keen on using their own social media platforms to advocate for a green diet or food choices. A few participants said that they occasionally use their social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, to share information for example animal cruelty, Netflix movies that they recommend or recipes, but they are generally the ones who seek information from these platforms rather than being the ones giving out information. Without generalizing, if the young-adult's in Iceland are not the ones sharing material on social media, the material they see must to a large degree be coming from abroad. Technical advancement has pushed forward globalization (Lule, 2021; Appadurai, 1996) which can be seen with the stream of information across borders on green foods reaching the young Icelandic population.

Similar to what Pabian et.al. (2020) claimed on the effect of visual presentation, the participants of this study seem to choose a visual presentation of green food choices, for example by presenting and offering green meals to other people. However, the participants do discuss with other people about green foods and diet and answer when people ask them about it. And, according to the participants, people do ask questions. This again indicates that people in Iceland are generally intrigued about green food choices and want to learn more about it, which could explain how meat consumption in Iceland has decreased, but why the number of people who follow a green diet may not

appear so high in national surveys (Gunnardóttir et.al., 2022). People can reduce meat consumption and increase green food consumption, without following a green diet.

6. Conclusion

The demand for meat and animal-products for consumption has increased in the last years, further enhancing the widely debated externalities of the food systems. Iceland consumes more than double of the average global meat consumption. However, according to a newly released national survey, meat consumption in Iceland appears to be slowly decreasing. This research has addressed the research question, what are the factors contributing to Icelandic young-adults' decision to follow a vegetarian or a vegan diet, called a green diet in this thesis. In addition, this research has looked into what their main source of information are on these diets. Throughout the thesis, the externalities from animal production and consumption has been evaluated through existing literature. The aim of the study is to give an insight in why young-adults in Iceland choose to go from the traditional animal-based Icelandic diet, towards a green one, and what role media plays in that decision. Through 44 semi-structured interviews with young-adults in Iceland, this study has shed a light on what has influenced the participants' decision to choose a green diet, where that influence has come from, as well as the societal changes that have occurred so far.

The main findings in this research, was that the participants mainly choose a green diet due to environmental and animal welfare reasons. Health related reasons were not common amongst the participants although most expressed their belief in the health-related benefits from choosing a green diet. The participants had educated themselves on the externalities from animal production on the environment, but generally did not express their opinion on the externalities from imported green foods, indicating that they may not be aware of them or that they don't consider them to be as serious as externalities from agriculture and animal consumption.

The main source of information on a vegetarian and a vegan diet, and the exclusion of animal consumption is media. Netflix documentaries and social media are the most common source of information where the participants seek information intentionally, for example recipes, or unintentionally by their general use of for example Facebook and being a part of the Facebook group Vegan Ísland. Although these are the places where the participants seek information from, these do not seem to be the places the participants share information. A preferred way to share information is through action, visualization, and general discussion with other people. For example, cooking green meals and offering

to others, or answering questions about a green diet or foods when and if asked without forcing the information on people.

The findings then indicate that the increase in visibility of green food products in the local supermarkets has been a form of a nudge, pushing for further conversation within the society on a green diet and green foods. More people seem to be open to try out different green foods and meatless meals than before, without necessarily following a green diet. Although national surveys do not indicate that a high number of people in Iceland follow a green diet, numbers do indicate that meat consumption is slowly decreasing. This in addition to the answers from the participants could indicate that green food choices may be contagious in some ways. If that's the case, a space for a new social movement has been created and the reduced meat consumption in Iceland could be the first indicator that a societal change may be on the way.

A division could be seen in the opinion amongst the participants on how necessary changes in the food systems could and should take place. The ones who did not have a higher education had more faith in the act of the individual to push forward positive changes, while the participants who had a higher education or were attending university at the time of the interviews felt that more radical systematic changes were needed.

Globalization through media is reaching the Icelandic young-adults. If information on the negative impacts of animal consumption and green food ideas were note circulating through media, it could be that meat consumption in Iceland would not be decreasing, nor that green foods availability would be increasing. Although this research has shed some light on how media is affecting consumers' behaviour in terms of food choices, further research is needed to get a better understanding of how and if in fact a dietary change is happening amongst the young Icelandic population. One might however wonder if green foods visibility and variety would be increasing, if a dietary change was not happening.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Factors Contributing to Icelandic Young-Adults' Decision to Follow a Green Diet and Where They Seek Information on it.

1. Background questions

1.1. What is your age?

1.2. What is your education level? (Secondary school, BA/BS degree, master's degree, etc.)

1.3. For how long have you identified your diet as vegetarian/vegan?

2. Key questions

2.1. What are your main reasons for choosing a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..

2.2. From where did you get information about vegetarian/vegan lifestyle that made you decide to become a vegetarian/vegan?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..

2.3. To what degree and how do you think being vegetarian/vegan will contribute to change for the better (both for yourself and society at large)?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..

2.4. From where do you believe Icelanders in general get the most information on vegetarian/vegan lifestyle?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..

2.5. In what ways do you advocate vegetarianism/veganism, if any?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..

2.6. Would you like to add more info of relevance for factors influencing Icelandic young-adults to choose a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle?

a. ..

b. ..

c. ..



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