

Taste, Quality or Price? Investigating Consumer Patriotism in the Food Market

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Abstract

Consumer patriotism is an important trend, alongside consumer trends such as prioritising health, caring for the environment and animal welfare. For many consumers, it is important to feel a direct linkage to the producer and to support the local economy through their purchase decisions concerning food. The purpose of this article was to deepen the understanding of consumer preferences on the local food market. The article fills a research gap in a thorough understanding of consumers' local food purchasing decisions which are based on economic considerations. Empirical research was conducted in March and April 2022 using the CAWI method. 1,009 questionnaires were analysed, with respondents from Poland stating that supporting the local economy is the main reason for purchasing local products. Descriptive statistics and the post hoc Dunn test with Kruskal–Wallis variance were used for the analyses. The results show that women are more likely to purchase local products. The purchase of these products is determined by "organoleptic qualities," the "opportunity to contact the producer directly," and "nutritional values." Dairy, bread, eggs, and groats are the most frequently chosen local foods. The vast majority of the surveyed sample is willing to accept a 10–15% premium on local products. Consumers of local products are often very loyal. This creates opportunities for the development of Internet sales. As ethnocentric consumers are more likely to buy regional food directly from the producer, facilitating the development of short supply chains and direct distribution by creating legislation that protects the consumer and the local producer/supplier is recommended.

Key words

consumer decisions, food market, willingness to purchase, consumer ethnocentrism, purchasing channels.

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Introduction

Customers wishing to purchase goods or services nowadays face a huge dilemma. The multitude of products offered through different distribution channels, no longer on shop shelves alone but also via websites or television, often only adds difficulty to buyers struggling with the question of “what to buy?” With increasing globalisation, consumers can choose products from all over the world, browsing through various offers to buy goods without leaving their homes; thus, the increasingly common dilemma is no longer “what to buy?” but “where to buy from?” Nowadays, consumers tend to show signs of two polarised identities simultaneously: local and global (Bryła & Domański, 2023), although the availability of foreign goods and services raises doubts in some individuals as to whether purchasing goods produced outside of their country of residence is not in conflict with patriotic motives. The increasing length and complexity of food supply chains due to globalisation has caused

a reduction in links between producers and consumers, and reduced consumer confidence in purchased food. The development of local food markets provides an opportunity to create connections between consumers and producers and foster sustainable consumption behaviour on the food market (Weber et al., 2021). Local food systems, which emphasise sourcing food within a specific geographical area, have gained popularity together with the spread of ethnocentric attitudes, which have been related to the recent crises (the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the climate crisis).

Consumer ethnocentrism originally manifested itself in agri-food products and has become more pronounced over time, especially in countries with high food self-sufficiency, including Poland (Kowalska et al., 2023). The attitudes and behaviours among Polish consumers in the food market are characterised by wide diversity (Nestorowicz et al., 2020). In recent years, consumers have paid growing attention to indigenous domestic food products, putting more trust in local producers. So far, no generally and globally accepted definition of local food has been developed. It is assumed that this term refers to food produced close to where it is consumed. What matters is the geographical distance or number of kilometres a product has to travel from the producer to the consumer (Wojcieszak-Zbierska, 2021). Lowering food miles generally means a smaller overall environmental footprint and more support for local economies and farmers. Despite their different meanings, the terms 'local' and 'regional' are widely overused and used interchangeably (Muça et al., 2021; Roy & Ballantine, 2020; Wojciechowska-Solis, 2022). Given the recognised lack of precision within norms, Roy (2022) customarily assumes that local foods are articles "produced in a non-industrial, non-mass manner, using local raw materials or local production methods, and targeting the local market" (including traditional, regional, and ecological products). Therefore, semantically, local products constitute a broader term than, for example, regional products.

Despite several studies investigating consumer ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour in the food market (Yonfá-Medranda et al., 2024), there is a gap in a thorough understanding of consumers' local food purchasing decisions which are based on economic considerations. Past studies have indicated that a consumer's sense of community, i.e. the emotional state of being part of a community, influences intention to buy local food (Russomanno & Tree, 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2024a; Zhao & Wise, 2019), whereas our study investigates consumer purchasing of local food motivated by a desire to support local businesses. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first such study conducted in Central and Eastern Europe. The results of the research might be useful for public authorities and food business operators from other countries of Central and Eastern Europe to develop adequate policies and strategies regarding local food products, and also for other researchers from this macroregion.

This study aims to diagnose the purchasing decisions of Polish consumers of local/domestic/regional food products, which are based on economic considerations. The study is exploratory in nature.

The paper is organised as follows: the Introduction conceptualises the term "local food" and presents the rationale for the study; Section 1 provides a literature review and builds upon the current knowledge to guide the research design and analysis; Section 2 outlines the methodological approach; Section 3 presents the research findings; Section 4 discusses the results; and the final section, the Conclusions, offers the authors' final remarks and summarises the theoretical contributions, practical and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

1. Literature review

Consumer ethnocentrism is classically associated with shopping patriotism on a national scale; however, this phenomenon is often used on a regional scale by companies offering products locally to gain competitive advantage. Ethnocentrism means preferring products of indigenous origin and emphasising their positive features over imported products, as well as rejecting foreign products (Witek-Hajduk & Grudecka, 2022). Consumer ethnocentrism can be defined as a sense of

responsibility, loyalty, and morality of buyers of domestically produced products. Ethnocentric consumers tend to believe that buying local products is appropriate for economic (supporting local economic development, reducing unemployment rate), emotional (pride in one's products, national pride, affirmation of one's culture and its products, and depreciation of other cultures) and moral reasons (Skallerud & Wien, 2019). Our study is focusing on consumer purchasing behavior motivated by economic factors in relation to local food.

The role of ethnocentrism and the country-of-origin effect has been increasing over recent decades. The research shows that the level of consumer ethnocentrism in the food market in Poland is quite high compared to other European countries and the patriotic aspect leads them to prefer Polish products (Bryła & Diomański, 2023). The strength of consumer ethnocentrism depends, among others, on the country of residence/origin of the respondents. In developing countries, such as Turkey, it has been shown that consumers do not want to buy foreign products because it harms domestic economy and causes unemployment. Given a choice, the ethnocentric consumer always prefers domestic products over foreign products and is guided not only by rational (economic) considerations, but also emotional and moral ones (Balabanis & Siamagka, 2022; Migliore et al., 2021; Trivedi et al., 2024; Karoui & Khemakhem 2019; Čvirik & Dotong, 2024; Khavari et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023; Smoluk-Sikorska et al., 2024). If a buyer pays attention to the place of production, the image of the region of production, as well as the customer's attitude towards that region, are of major importance when it comes to deciding whether to purchase the product. This is confirmed by the research among German consumers (sympathy to a given land was clearly reflected in the evaluation of foods originating from the region) (Gebhardt et al., 2020). It is still an open question whether it is not the case that the image of regional food products shapes the image of the region.

Many circumstances influence the formation of ethnocentric attitudes in society; however, progressing globalisation and increasing the role of the Internet and social media in communicating with the public and assisting consumers in making food choices are of particular importance. Moreover, buyers, tired of the monotony of the same global goods offered to them, are looking for niche products that stand out for their individuality, having distinguishing features that cannot be found anywhere else. The consumer, as an active actor on the market, is searching for identity, desiring to once again find the right place in his/her little homeland, especially feeling anonymous in a culture of globalisation, where hypermarkets, as the main seller, are offering the same food all over the world (Bodescu & Moraru, 2022) and the global fast-food market is growing steadily (Mukucha & Jaravaza, 2021). The consumer is looking for an alternative that would allow him/her to discover their individuality. Moreover, feeling unity with the local community allows the consumer to become a citizen of his/her 'little homeland' again and reinforces a sense of security. Purchasing regional products becomes, to some extent, a reflection of the individual's longing for tradition (Kamińska & Krakowiak-Drzewiecka, 2023).

When making local food purchasing decisions, consumers pay attention to nutritional value and healthiness, freshness, high quality, safety, animal welfare, environmental impact, support of the local economy, taste, price, availability, traceability, place of origin, convenience, reliability etc. (da Costa Marques et al. 2022; Kovács et al., 2022). Brozzi et al. (2016) has also shown that consumers' cultural background and spatial typology (urban, predominantly urban and rural place of residence) have a significant influence on their preferences for local food purchase. Given that local food category embrace traditional, regional, and environmentally friendly products (Roy, 2022), it is worth to have a closer look at factors motivating the purchase of organic food. Massey et al. (2018) classified the determinants driving organic food purchases by mapping them onto (1) credence attributes – comprising intrinsic factors such as health benefits, quality, safety, and nutritional content, and extrinsic factors including environmental impact, animal welfare, and production standards – alongside (2) search attributes, which involve price, availability, and appearance, and (3) experience attributes, defined by organoleptic properties. Organic foods are credence goods, as consumers cannot directly verify attributes such as livestock grazing access or stocking density and must

therefore rely on trust (Manning and Kowalska, 2021). Hence, we propose the following research question:

Q1. What factors determine the purchase of local/domestic/regional food by consumers living in cities, towns and villages?

Starting from the second half of the 1990s, the issue of ethnocentric attitudes has been the subject of research in Poland and other central European countries (Jadach, 2021; Řezanková et al., 2023; Szwed, 2018). Such consumer studies have been often related to the food market (Nolan & Hobbs, 2023; Szabuniewicz & Majkut, 2021; Kaczmarek & Wieja, 2021; Suhartanto et al., 2024b). It is a fact that consumer patriotism in Poland has been changing dynamically in the context of globalisation. In the 1990s, there was an “infatuation” with foreign products following Poland’s political and economic transformation. This resulted in the buyers being characterised more by consumer internationalism – a phenomenon opposite to consumer ethnocentrism – Poles slowly turned towards indigenous products (Drabik, 2022). Such a trend is also related to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening economic crisis (E.I.T. Food, 2020; Yu et al., 2022). Purchasing domestic goods is beginning to be perceived as an investment in the national economy, support for domestic production, prevention of local unemployment and a contribution to availability and stability of food supply which is crucial for ensuring food and nutrition security. In Poland, consumer ethnocentrism is usually associated with buying goods with the inscription made in Poland, although this phenomenon can also be observed locally or regionally (Angowski & Jarosz-Angowska, 2020). It can also include actions undertaken not only by consumers but also by other business operators who promote the development of domestic companies. In the case of consumers, it means that in all their market behaviours, especially when making choices and purchases of goods and services, they are guided mainly by the benefits for their country (Hanus, 2020).

Consumer’s orientation towards domestic products is reinforced by external factors such as campaigns and social pressure, the strength of consumption traditions, often brought from home, as well as food nostalgia (Han, 2023; Rytönen et al., 2024). This develops a certain level of economic awareness in the buyer, which affects all his/her consumer decisions in the future; it is a kind of responsibility, morality, and loyalty that induces the customer to purchase national goods out of concern for local prosperity. A characteristic feature of the Polish food market is the use of names of locations in the names of products so that consumers get a direct message about the place of production of a given item. Examples include Żywiec Zdrój water, Nałęczowianka water, Tymbark juices, Pudliszki, Łowicz or Piątek articles. A further part of the name provides information about the qualities of the region, placed on packaging and labels, e.g. “From the Green Lungs of Poland”. The message the buyers receive evokes positive associations and prompts them to purchase the goods. It should be noted that the level of ethnocentrism is influenced by market signals. The state cultivates ethnocentric attitudes through the implementation of campaigns designed to enhance consumers’ socio-economic awareness and encourage the support of local businesses by choosing their products (Miftari et al., 2021), such as: ‘Teraz Polska’ [Poland Now], ‘Agro Polska’ [Agro Poland], ‘Produkt Polski’ [Polish Product] and ‘Dobre, bo polskie’ [It’s good because it’s Polish]. Furthermore, the EU quality schemes for traditional specialties guaranteed have been developed in order to facilitate the producers of traditional agricultural products, including foodstuffs, to communicate the value-adding attributes of their products to consumers. The quality schemes include: (i) protected designations of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indications (PGI) for agricultural products, including foodstuffs; (ii) traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG) and optional quality terms (Regulation (EU) 2024/1143).

In political discourse, the advancement of local food systems is frequently characterized as a strategy to enhance the resilience of the overall food system, mitigate its environmental impact, and support rural development as well as social cohesion within communities (a sense of community). Exploring consumers’ dietary choices and food purchasing decisions are key for both public and private decision-makers to develop and implement effective policy measures and

strategies aimed at promoting local food systems (Stein & Santini, 2022). These measures include, inter alia, educational campaigns and information messages (e.g. information provided on food labels). Therefore, the following research questions were posed:

Q2. Which local/domestic/regional products are most often chosen by Polish consumers?

Q3. How does the ethnocentric consumer react to price changes?

Q4. Where do consumers of local products mostly shop?

2. Methodology

The research was conducted in March/April 2022. The sample was selected based on respondents' availability and voluntary willingness to participate in the survey ($n=1,237$). With some caution, it can be said that this large-scale survey was conducted on a representative nationwide sample of Polish consumers. The eligibility criterion for further analysis, including statistical calculations, was the consumer's declaration that the guiding motive for purchasing local products was the intention to support local businesses, i.e. indicating a reason for economic consumer ethnocentrism. The questionnaires of 228 respondents who indicated that their decisions to buy local products were not related to the economic motive of purchase ethnocentrism were eliminated from further analysis. Ultimately, 1,009 (81.57%) correctly completed survey questionnaires were qualified for analysis. Women made up 68.29% of the sample and men 31.71% of the number of respondents (Table 1). Participation in the survey was voluntary and fully anonymous. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to identify the values important to the Polish consumer of local products. The second part was developed to identify preferences, motives, barriers, and channels for purchasing local products. The third part included metric questions. In the prepared questionnaire, mainly nominal and ordinal, five- and seven-point rating scales were used. It was decided to opt for a Likert scale because it enables to perform mathematical calculations with the use of variables measured on an interval scale. The measuring scales were validated in accordance with applicable regulations. The vast majority of scales were of our authorship and the scale items were verified on a 5-point Likert scale. The computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) method was used to collect the material. In the study, the value of the Cronbach α -test was within the range 0.70–0.90, which showed that the scales had internal consistency and reliability. Statistical analysis was assisted by Statistica 13.3 PL software.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the consumer of local products supporting the economic development of the local environment by gender.

Variable name		Gender			
		Female		Male	
		N = 689	[%]	N = 320	[%]
Age	18-24 years old	300	43.54	120	37.50
	25-40 years old	210	30.48	116	36.25
	41-55 years old	153	22.21	76	23.75
	56 years old and more	26	3.77	8	2.50
Place of residence	Large city	249	36.14	96	30.00
	Small town	108	15.67	48	15.00
	Village	332	48.19	176	55.00
Household size	1-person household (I live alone)	52	7.55	32	10.00
	2-person household	88	12.77	76	23.75
	3-person household	168	24.38	76	23.75
	4-person (and more) household	381	55.30	136	42.50
Perception of one's financial situation	Good (I can afford to buy what I want)	301	43.69	132	41.25
	Average (I am able to buy most of the things I would like to have)	364	52.83	184	57.50
	Bad (I have just enough money to satisfy my basic needs)	24	3.48	4	1.25

Source: Own elaboration.

Those for whom supporting the local economy is an important aspect when making purchasing decisions described their financial situation positively. More than 50% of respondents estimate their financial situation as average and more than 40% of respondents believe their financial position is

good. Consumers of local products are mostly people living in three or four-person households (Table 1).

Firstly, descriptive statistics were used to analyse and interpret the results of the surveys. Secondly, the Kruskal-Wallis significance test (with Dunn test) for more than 2 surveyed groups was used to check the significance of differences between the groups of respondents. The test is non-parametric and its use becomes necessary in settings where the dependent variable is ordinal, where the assumption of normality cannot hold. Calculations were performed using STATISTICA 13.3 PL.

The influence of demographic and social variables on consumers' ethnocentric behaviour has already been extensively studied when researchers focused on the importance of these variables when making purchasing decisions (Department of Statistics, Ramadania et al., 2023; Czine et al., 2024; Helly et al., 2022; Gupta, 2024; Miguel et al., 2023; Vuong & Khanh Giao, 2020), although many authors (Thomas et al., 2020; Capelli et al., 2017; Bhattacharya et al., 2023; Yonfá-Medranda et al., 2024; Karoui & Khemakhem 2019) have indicated that the effect of age, gender, and/or educational level on ethnocentric purchasing behaviour is insignificant. However, Akbarov (2022) showed the significant moderating effect of gender, marital status, and personal income on the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchasing behaviour in Azerbaijan.

Based on the work of the aforementioned researchers, the authors of this study chose the place of residence of the respondents as a differentiating variable for ethnocentric behaviour.

To identify alternate channels used to purchase local products, a purchase duplication analysis was applied. The purchase duplication analysis was originally developed by Ehrenberg (1988). It was initially used to analyse the patterns of consumption of various brands. Later, this method was also applied to the analysis of shopping channels used interchangeably by consumers. Drawing upon the research literature on the methodology of purchase duplication analysis, the authors of this study employed this method to investigate the channels used to purchase local products for all consumers in general, without dividing customers into groups, as the methodology suggests.

3. Research results

Respondents were asked to rate selected associations that were most frequent in the pilot study that the authors conducted in the year preceding this study. They considered the importance of six selected factors that affect their purchasing decisions concerning local food. In this case, a 5-point Likert scale was used (1 – I absolutely disagree; 5 – I absolutely agree). Polish consumers placed the highest value on organoleptic characteristics of local food (Table 2) (Q1).

Table 2. Selected factors determining the purchase of local food products.

Factor	Mean	Rural area	Small town	Large city	p-value
Organoleptic qualities	3.83	2.00a	4.06b	2.91c	0.000*
Nutritional values	2.43	2.33a	3.20b	2.90c	0.194
Product quality	1.96	1.62a	3.63b	2.23c	0.000*
Origin	2.25	2.63a	1.67b	2.91c	0.056
Short shelf life	2.30	2.68a	2.20b	2.86a	0.219
Opportunity to contact the producer directly	2.54	3.49a	1.33b	3.19a	0.000*

Note: * level of significant difference at $p < 0.050$. Different superscripts indicate significantly different means following the Kruskal-Wallis post hoc Dunn test.

Source: Own elaboration.

There were significant differences regarding the strength of influence of three factors on food choices made by consumers living in rural areas, towns, and cities, i.e. organoleptic qualities, the quality of production, and the opportunity to contact the producer directly. Analysing the results, a similarity between the group of respondents living in large cities and rural areas can be seen, which may be a result of urbanisation trends in Poland in recent years, where migrations of people of working age from large cities to rural and suburban areas have been noticeable. The “opportunity to contact the producer directly” is more important for these groups of respondents than for

respondents living in small towns. Such attributes of food products as “organoleptic qualities” and the “quality of production” are more important for the consumers from the group of “residents of small towns” than for the other two groups when deciding to purchase local foods (Q1).

Locally sourced products can be distinguished by various certification categories found on the product label. These include European Union certificates confirming the geographical origin of the product (PDO, PGI, GTS), national certificates („Jakość-Tradycja”, Agro Polska, Teraz Polska), certificates promoting local products (“Produkt Polski” Integrated Production, QMP, QAFP, GMO-Free), and certificates confirming that they are produced using environmentally friendly methods (organic food, Rainforest Alliance etc.).

Table 3 presents the preferences of the surveyed consumer groups related to the purchase of local foods from the eleven selected product groups. The preferences of the three consumer groups surveyed were significantly different only in the case of five product categories (dairy, eggs, sweets, meat and meat preparations) (Q2). A similarity can be again observed between respondents living in large cities and rural areas. They gave significantly higher ratings to such products as dairy, eggs, oil, and sweets. Only for the variable “meat and meat preparations”, despite the highest score of 3.84, does the group of respondents from large cities stand out significantly from the other two groups surveyed. This may prove that the consumers in large cities have greater access to a variety of products sold at various points of sale, i.e. large-format stores, speciality shops, island stands in shopping centres, or fairs held during festive periods. Thus, they have the opportunity to conveniently purchase and assess the qualities of local or regional products. Residents of rural areas mostly have direct contacts with the producers “from the neighbourhood”. Finally, Polish consumers in small towns often have limited physical access to local/regional foods due to the small number of points where these products are sold, which may have translated into lower scores in some categories. It's also worth mentioning that some local products are produced organically (such as vegetables and fruit, dairy, meat, and related products). This means they are often sold under the organic category in organic food stores, which are usually located in large cities.

Table 3. Purchasing preferences for selected local/regional/domestic products.

Selected local products	Place of residence			p-value
	Rural area	Small town	Large city	
Dairy	4.05a	4.59b	4.09a	0.016*
Fresh fruit and vegetables	3.43a	3.75b	4.03c	0.427
Bread	3.63a	3.79b	4.04a	0.928
Eggs	4.08a	3.64b	4.01a	0.023*
Groats	4.02a	4.50b	4.08a	0.067
Confectionery and biscuits	3.28a	3.27a	3.29a	0.992
Wine from a local vineyard	3.71a	3.14b	3.12b	0.281
Craft beer	3.47a	3.71b	3.42a	0.919
Oil	3.72a	2.93b	3.74a	0.038*
Sweets	3.68a	2.71b	3.84a	0.021*
Meat and meat preparations	3.45a	3.60a	3.84b	0.012*

Note: * level of significant difference at $p < 0.050$. Different superscripts indicate significantly different means following the Kruskal-Wallis post hoc Dunn test.

Source: Own elaboration.

Consumers of local products are often very loyal to specific producers and have a strong motivation to purchase chosen products, even if their prices increase (Q3). Financial situation, strong motivation, and other considerations allow more than 67% of respondents to maintain the same consumption level with an increase in the price of up to 15% (Table 4). With the price increase up to 25% more than ¼ of respondents (29.9%) are willing to keep their consumption of local products at the same level. A few percent of respondents say they will increase the quantity/frequency of local food purchases in such a situation. Unfortunately, around half of the respondents from each surveyed group declare that the increase in the price of local food by ¼ could result in a decrease in the quantity and/or frequency of purchases of these products. Around 20% of residents of rural areas and large

cities and just under 30% of residents of small towns say they would reduce their purchases of local food or look for cheaper mass-produced substitutes with a 10-15% price change. More than half of all respondents surveyed claimed they would decrease the quantity and frequency of local food purchases if their prices increased by 25% or more (Table 4). Large income disparities in Polish society between residents of large cities and small towns can still be observed. Residents of rural areas are often bi-vocational (they make their living not only by farming but additionally by working full-time) or they live in the countryside but commute to the city for work, and their income is higher than that of the average resident of a small town. Furthermore, the ongoing suburbanization process in Poland has facilitated shopping directly from the farmer for three decades (Kowalska, 2011).

Table 4. Consumer behaviour on the local food market in the event of a price change.

Change in product price		Place of residence						In total	
		Village		Small town		Large city			
		N = 508	[%]	N = 156	[%]	N = 345	[%]	1009	100%
Increase in price of local products by 25% or more	The quantity/frequency of purchases will remain the same	181	35.63	48	30.77	73	21.16	302	29.93
	I will increase the quantity/frequency of purchases	20	3.94	0	0.00	20	5.80	40	3.96
	I will decrease the quantity/frequency of purchases	246	48.43	80	51.28	200	57.97	526	52.13
	I will buy cheaper products of other origin if there is a change	61	12.01	28	17.95	52	15.07	141	13.98
Increase in price of local products by 10–15%	The quantity/frequency of purchases will remain the same	354	69.69	108	69.23	217	62.90	679	67.29
	I will increase the quantity/frequency of purchases	41	8.07	0	0.00	36	10.43	77	7.63
	I will decrease the quantity/frequency of purchases	101	19.88	44	28.21	80	23.19	225	22.30
	I will buy cheaper products of other origin if there is a change	12	2.36	4	2.56	12	3.48	28	2.78

Source: Own elaboration.

The research has shown that ethnocentric consumers who want to support the local economy prefer various channels for buying local foods (Table 5). Indeed, residents of large cities and those living in rural areas have a greater preference for discount and hypermarket shopping. Even though the opportunity to contact the producer directly is not a very important factor influencing the decision to buy local foods for the residents of small towns compared to other surveyed groups (Table 2), they prefer to buy local food directly from the farmer or local processor. This may be so because they particularly value the opportunity to obtain detailed information on production conditions or product characteristics by having direct contact with the producer. Shopping in speciality shops also has significantly more supporters among residents of small towns (Table 5) (Q4).

Table 5. Preferred channels for purchasing local food.

Factor	Mean	Rural area	Small town	Large city	p-value
Direct purchase from the producer (farmer/processor)	3.83	2.00a	4.06b	2.91c	0.000*
Purchase by You-Pick system (from the farmer's field/orchard)	2.43	2.33a	3.20b	2.90c	0.194
Purchase from a speciality shop	1.96	1.62a	3.63b	2.23c	0.000*
Purchase at a marketplace	2.25	2.63a	1.67b	2.91a	0.056
Online shopping – manufacturer's website	2.30	2.68a	2.20b	2.86a	0.219
Shopping during events, study tours	2.54	3.49a	1.33b	3.19a	0.000*
Discount shopping	3.27	4.03a	2.13b	3.92a	0.000*
Shopping in a hypermarket	3.00	3.85a	1.13b	3.79a	0.000*

Note: * level of significant difference at $p < 0.050$. Different superscripts indicate significantly different means following the Kruskal-Wallis post hoc Dunn test.

Source: Own elaboration.

The ability to substitute food distribution channels is very important when buying local products for consumers with ethnocentric beliefs. In the event of a product shortage, rather than look for a substitute, they search for alternate distribution channels. Table 6 shows consumer decisions concerning the substitutability of distribution channels for local food products (Q4).

Table 6. Selected duplication channels to already existing distribution channels for local food products.

Purchase Channel	Total	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
Directly from the producer (A)	54.5%	-	20.5%	5.5%	1.4%	9.6%	19.2%	20.5%
From a local wholesaler (B)	19.4%	57.7%	-	11.5%	7.7%	11.5%	19.2%	7.7%
General grocery stores (C)	3.7%	80.0%	60.0%	-	20.0%	40.0%	80.0%	20.0%
Supermarkets (D)	2.2%	33.3%	66.7%	33.3%	-	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%
Online purchasing (E)	6.0%	87.5%	37.5%	25.0%	12.5%	-	62.5%	50.0%
Speciality shops (F)	11.9%	87.5%	31.3%	25.0%	6.3%	31.3%	-	31.3%
Other (G)	21.6%	51.7%	6.9%	3.4%	0.0%	13.8%	17.2%	-
Average Duplication		66.28%	40.48%	19.64%	9.30%	25.98%	42.44%	21.80%

Note: Respondents could identify at least 3 alternate purchasing channels.

Source: Own elaboration.

Buying directly from the producer is the first choice for more than 54% of respondents. Only a few per cent of respondents buy local products from general grocery stores, supermarkets, or online. The data in the (A)-(G) columns of Table 6 show the percentage of consumers choosing one shopping channel, who use other channels at the same time. For example, almost 58% of consumers using channel B (buying from a local wholesaler) buy local food through channel A (directly from the producer). Furthermore, 80% of consumers who declare a preference for buying in general grocery stores (C) also buy products directly from producers (A) and the same percentage of consumers also buy local food in speciality shops (F). Despite the increasing popularity of the online purchasing channel, this channel was pointed out by only 6% of respondents as the main channel for purchasing local foods. Online shoppers (E) also choose either channel A (87.5%) or channel F (50%) as a substitute for their preferred place of purchase. Other purchasing channels not included in the table, e.g. roadside trade, sales at marketplaces and bazaars, sales at local events, and others, have been grouped under the term “other” (G). The survey has shown that channel G plays a relatively important role in the market. Customers predominantly using channel G usually choose channel A (direct purchase from the producer) as an alternative. The willingness to purchase local products during dedicated events (e.g. raspberry, buckwheat, or harvest festivals) and study tours (organised thematic trips) was declared by a large majority of the respondents (ca. 70%). It seems that consumers of local products are well-informed, know the offer, and use all possible purchasing channels.

Also noteworthy is that the Internet as a popular shopping channel in many markets does not work well among consumers of local products. The specificity of local products may also be related to the fact that consumers prefer direct contact with the producer (Table 6). Our respondents indicated the economic motive of ethnocentrism as the primary reason for local purchases. This may be the reason why it is more popular to buy directly from the producer, either from local company stores, trading next to a production plant, or selling points next to farm processing plants. What the consumer of local food probably appreciates about the supply chain is that it is short – the produce is fresh and the consumer is able to trace at least part of the journey from “farm to fork”. Furthermore, he/she might be aware of the impact of food choices on reducing food miles and carbon footprint.

4. Discussion

The study was to deepen the current understanding of the preferences of people who consider themselves patriots of domestic production, indicating that the basis of their decision is a conscious objective to support the local economy and improve the domestic labour market. The age of the average Polish consumer who cares about protecting the local market and appreciates the qualities of

local products has been decreased over the past few years. Earlier, Awdziej et al. (2016) in their study showed that it is the elderly who appreciate local products more, which may be linked to their income level and the level of knowledge about these products, but now Śliwa (2022) has shown that young people and women show greater consumer ethnocentrism and the least attention to the country of origin of the product is paid by people over 60 years of age. Similar findings are presented in our survey (Table 1).

The producer is intrinsically linked to the local product, often cultivating a family or local tradition, pursuing a passion, but mainly gaining a source of additional income. The research by da Costa Marques et al. (2022) and Van Bussel et al. (2022) confirmed the importance of such attributes of local products to the consumer as availability, support for the local economy, taste, place of origin, and producer recognition, and we came to similar results in our study (Table 2).

A systematic literature review conducted by Newman et al. (2014) showed that consumers in developed countries are often willing to pay more for domestic food products than others (convergence with the results of the study presented in Table 4). It is worth adding that according to experts from Polish economic portals, 9 out of 10 Polish consumers declare that the place of origin of food matters to them, while 59% of consumers are more likely to buy domestic products rather than imported ones (Forsal.pl, 2021). This creates opportunities for the growth of local/domestic/regional food markets and the development of less popular sales channels, like Internet sales. Our study shows that Polish consumers utilize a variety of channels to buy local foods, however, online purchasing channel is rarely chosen (Table 5 and 6). Providing wider access to these products should positively affect the development of disadvantaged regions. The development of infrastructure and technological security measures should contribute to the growing importance of online sales in the local food market.

According to Camacho et al. (2021), economic crises result in manifestations of consumer ethnocentrism, where the main reason for this manifestation is an economic motive. Akkaya (2021) drew a similar conclusion when surveying Turkish consumers. His study showed that Turkish consumers did not like to buy foreign products because it was harmful to the economy and caused unemployment, which is in line with the opinion of our respondents. In this regard, our study initially focused exclusively on the responses of consumers whose purchasing decisions in the food market were primarily driven by economic motives. Other motivations for purchasing local food will be examined in future research.

Not only Poles and other Europeans prefer to buy what is local; consumers from various countries located on continents such as Australia, South America (Chile) (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015), North America (e.g. the United States), or Asia (China) (Zhang et al., 2020) are showing an increasing interest in local food, as well. Consumers consciously choose local products, paying attention to their organoleptic qualities and nutritional values, as well as to the opportunity to get to know the producer directly (sometimes even the whole history of the place/family that produces the local product offered). Local brands are becoming synonymous with high quality, freshness, safe ingredients, and simple and traditional recipes (PMR 2019). Such values were also indicated by consumers in the survey presented (Table 2). Similar conclusions were made by Sampalean et al. (2021), who highlighted that Italian consumers are also guided by selfish motives when buying traditional products, paying particular attention to the place of origin. A manifestation of patriotic motives is consumer ethnocentrism, which involves supporting local entrepreneurs, ensuring fair wages, and recognizing producers (Birch et al., 2018).

Consumer patriotism is an important trend, alongside consumer trends such as prioritising health, caring for the environment and animal welfare, or paying particular attention to the symbolism of a product, which is becoming increasingly important compared to classical competitive criteria (price, quality, availability) (Karoui & Khemakhem, 2019). These values are also respected when producing local food in organic production system. According to the study by Thøgersen (2023), consumers generally prefer domestic food products to imported ones and when choosing among domestic

products they mostly prefer local products. In his opinion, information about the locality of a product influences the purchase decision more than information that the product is organic. In recent years, the “You-Pick” system has become increasingly popular in horticultural holdings (Table 5). The willingness to purchase local products during dedicated events and study tours was declared by a majority of the respondents, which is in line with other studies (Dąbrowska, 2018; Maksan et al., 2019; Roy & Ballantine, 2020).

According to the PMR report (2019), for one in three people surveyed in Poland, consumer ethnocentrism is so important that consumers declare buying local products even if their prices increase. In the era of the coronavirus epidemic, economic uncertainty related to changes in global markets, and climate change, ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours are also a form of supporting local entrepreneurs. Consumers seeing the plight of small local entrepreneurs were more likely to opt for their offer, even though it was expensive. More than 60% of respondents to this survey indicated a 10-15% price change boundary, where they remain loyal to local products despite the price increase (Table 4.).

The fact that consumers use local origin as an indication of product quality was confirmed by Merle et al. (2016), who found that French consumers perceive local cheeses and apples to be healthier, tastier, and more environmentally friendly (Table 2 and 3). These consumers regarded their choices as the way to support French farmers. Similarly, the vast majority of participants in a representative survey of Polish consumers conducted by Bryła (2015) believed that local and regional food products were of higher quality than mass-produced food, as well as more trustworthy and authentic. Consumers view information about the origin of food products as an indication of a better taste experience (Maesano et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2014), which makes the decision-making process very complex and difficult to understand. The majority of consumers in Poland, New Zealand, the USA, or Italy, believe that local food products are healthier, fresher, tastier, higher quality, and more environmentally friendly than products from global brands (Bryła, 2019) (Table 2.).

Conclusions

This study, based on panel data from 38 OECD countries over the period 1995–2022, demonstrates that urbanization significantly moderates how economic complexity and capital formation influence environmental outcomes. Rather than serving as a passive backdrop, urban contexts actively condition both the direction and magnitude of these structural impacts on ecosystem vitality.

Three key findings emerge. First, the positive environmental contributions of economic complexity weaken as urban density increases. This attenuation likely reflects challenges such as congestion, resource competition, and diminishing returns to innovation in highly urbanized settings. Second, urbanization appears to mitigate the ecological costs associated with capital accumulation, likely through more efficient infrastructure use, shared systems, and stronger regulatory oversight. Third, the analysis confirms a nonlinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship between urbanization and environmental performance, consistent with the Urban Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis. Environmental degradation initially intensifies during early stages of urban growth but tends to improve once cities reach more advanced levels of development, likely due to enhanced governance capacities and greater diffusion of green technologies. This finding underscores the importance of urban governance capacity and integrated planning in achieving environmental sustainability, as emphasized by global frameworks (UN-Habitat, 2023).

The findings concerning energy dynamics reveal additional nuances. While renewable energy adoption consistently improves environmental quality, persistently high energy intensity continues to pose significant challenges. This suggests that while transitioning to renewable energy is essential, complementary strategies, such as implementing energy efficiency standards and promoting circular economy practices, are also critical for reducing overall energy demand and achieving deeper environmental gains.

From a policy perspective, these insights underscore the importance of spatially differentiated approaches. Efforts to promote economic complexity could be more effective when tailored to peri-urban or moderately dense areas, whereas capital investment strategies may benefit from focusing on compact, resource-efficient urban forms. Rather than viewing urbanization as uniformly beneficial or detrimental, policymakers are encouraged to recognize its contingent effects and design sustainability strategies that are sensitive to local urban contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the ecological modernization literature by reframing urbanization as a moderating mechanism rather than an independent driver of environmental change. It also reinforces the Urban Environmental Kuznets Curve (UEKC) hypothesis by showing that sustainability outcomes hinge not only on affluence, but also on institutional maturity and technological absorption. Practically, the findings highlight the need for differentiated sustainability strategies that align with urban form, economic complexity, and capital dynamics.

Nonetheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study relies on country-level panel data, which may obscure important intra-national differences in urban structure and environmental governance. Second, while the analysis incorporates key structural and energy-related variables, it does not account for potentially influential institutional or cultural factors. Third, the exclusive focus on OECD countries may limit the generalizability of the findings to non-OECD or developing contexts.

Future research could further explore whether these moderating dynamics vary across (1) different regional groupings, (2) stages of economic development, or (3) urban governance models. Additionally, city-level analyses could offer more granular insights into how intra-urban variations shape the links between economic structure, urbanization, and environmental outcomes. City-level evidence further supports the dynamic relationship between urban growth and air quality (Zhu et al., 2025), highlighting the relevance of localized analyses in urban environmental studies. By conceptualizing urbanization as an active moderating force, this study offers a more sophisticated interpretation of how economic and ecological systems interact during sustainability transitions.

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