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Sociodemographic determinants of local food consumption: A case study of Serbia

Sociodemografske determinante konzumacije lokalne hrane: istraživanje na primeru Srbije

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Abstract

Local food occupies an important place in the framework of sustainable development and preservation of the cultural identity of communities. It includes food products that originate from the immediate environment and reflect the special agroecological, social, and cultural characteristics of the region. Encouraging the consumption of local food contributes to reducing the ecological footprint through shorter supply chains and reduced emissions of harmful gases. At the same time, local food production and consumption strengthen the local economy, encourage social cohesion, and improve the quality of life among the population. In this way, local food becomes a key element in the development of sustainable food systems and the creation of modern public nutrition policies. The primary objective of the research presented in this paper is to explore the extent to which sociodemographic characteristics of respondents influence their preferences for purchasing local food, as well as their general eco-behaviors and attitudes. The study was conducted on a sample of 128 respondents, with data collected through an online survey administered between June and August 2025. The results showed differences in green attitudes among different age groups as well as differences in the level of environmental concern among respondents of different education levels. Significant effects of gender, place of residence, and income were not confirmed. The research provides a more profound understanding of the factors that shape environmentally responsible consumption when it comes to sociodemographic factors.
Keywords: *local food, purchase, eco behavior, sociodemographic characteristics*

Sažetak

Lokalna hrana zauzima važno mesto u okviru održivog razvoja i očuvanja kulturnog identiteta zajednica. Ona obuhvata prehrambene proizvode koji potiču iz neposrednog okruženja i odražavaju posebne agroekološke, društvene i kulturne karakteristike regiona. Podsticanje konzumacije lokalne hrane doprinosi smanjenju ekološkog otiska kroz kraće lance snabdevanja i smanjenu emisiju štetnih gasova. Istovremeno, lokalna proizvodnja i potrošnja hrane jačaju lokalnu ekonomiju, podstiču socijalnu povezanost i unapređuju kvalitet života stanovništva. Na taj način, lokalna hrana postaje ključni element u razvoju održivih prehrambenih sistema i kreiranju savremenih javnih politika ishrane. Glavni cilj istraživanja predstavljenog u ovom radu jeste da se ispita u kojoj meri sociodemografske karakteristike ispitanika utiču na njihove preferencije pri kupovini lokalne hrane, kao i na njihovo opšte ekološko ponašanje i stavove. Istraživanje je sprovedeno na uzorku od 128 ispitanika, pri čemu su podaci prikupljeni putem onlajn ankete sprovedene u periodu od juna do avgusta 2025. godine. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su razlike u ekološkim stavovima među različitim starosnim grupama, kao i razlike u nivou zabrinutosti za životnu sredinu među ispitanicima različitih nivoa obrazovanja. Značajni efekti pola, mesta stanovanja i prihoda nisu potvrđeni. Istraživanje pruža dublje razumevanje faktora koji oblikuju ekološki odgovorno ponašanje potrošača u pogledu sociodemografskih karakteristika.
Ključne reči: *lokalna hrana, kupovina, ekološko ponašanje, sociodemografske karakteristike*

1. Introduction

Health is increasingly recognized as a significant personal and societal benefit. Given the costs related to curative medicine, health problem prevention is of enormous importance. Diseases associated with civilization constitute a significant portion of health problems, which a healthier lifestyle could potentially prevent. Apart from

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physical activity, an individual's health status greatly depends on adequate nutrition (Altgeld et al., 2006). Consumers are more aware that their dietary selections impact their health and are focusing more on the health advantages of food to sustain a healthy lifestyle (Chrysochou, 2010; Pech-Lopatta, 2007). Recently, local food systems have attracted greater attention as a potential alternative to the production patterns employed in the industrialized global food system (Schneider & Francis, 2005). In many respects, the industrial food system has shifted from cultivating crops and keeping animals on farms to "producing" food through highly specialized processes in operations that resemble open-air factories. These processes escalate energy consumption (particularly hydrocarbons), transform soils into net emitters of carbon, substantially contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, diminish soil fertility, decrease biodiversity, introduce chemical toxins into ecosystems, and use or pollute large amounts of water. Although this type of agriculture has purportedly enhanced productivity during a period of significant human population growth, it is not sustainable over the long term. Support for regional agricultural companies or environmental concerns may have a stronger influence on preferences for local food consumption. People who buy locally frequently appreciate connections with farmers and food producers founded on mutual respect, trust, and shared ideals (Hinrichs, 2000).

Globally, there is raising consumer interest in local food, which is recognized as a product with a wide range of benefits (Darby et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2009; Tregear & Ness, 2005). This growing interest in local food is due to its potential to improve the sustainability of the food system by making the environment less polluted and giving local farms new business opportunities (Conner et al., 2010). People have long believed that organic farming and the organic movement could help with (imminent) food crises by using less energy, keeping soil fertility for a long time, and giving small farmers more money (Duram, 2005; Pimentel, 2013). Considering the conventionalization of organic farming (Bartel-Kratochvil et al., 2009), it is becoming apparent that organic or other "environmentally friendly" production methods are not sufficient to ensure a sustainable food system (Erb et al., 2009). Instead, it is stated that food should be produced, sourced, delivered, and consumed locally and fairly in addition to being environmentally sustainable (La Trobe & Acott, 2011). In this context, the Slow Food movement represents an important approach to promoting sustainable and local food systems. The shift from individual choices to social practices and the basic value placed on improving the local area are two of the most significant characteristics of the Slow Food movement. It acknowledges not only the role that farmers and producers play as "keepers of Earth" (Petrini et al., 2009), but also the crucial role that consumers play in influencing the market and driving it toward more sustainable products (Carolan, 2016; Guptill et al., 2016). The goals supported by the Slow Food movement go beyond environmentally sustainable agriculture to cover broader themes of food sovereignty, cultural heritage, and the development of local food systems. In this regard, traditional and local-rooted food products play an important role in the preservation of regional identities and in the promotion of sustainable economic and social development (Demirović Bajrami et al., 2025; Ignjatović et al., 2025).

Food products rooted in tradition play a significant role in reflecting national cultural values. It is emphasized that food should be made available for people rather than for transnational businesses that dominate international markets. Food sovereignty prioritizes the people who manufacture, sell, and consume food. This requires greater promotion of smallholder farmers and farmers using organic or agroecological farming methods, such as small-scale food distribution systems. The objective is to create and enhance local, regional, and national food networks that offer wholesome, reasonably priced, ecologically friendly, and culturally varied food. As stated by Seyfang (2006), local food systems can diminish the environmental impact of food transportation by minimizing the distance between producers and consumers. Ultimately, local food production may necessitate a short supply chain, which facilitates a deeper connection between consumers and producers (Nedeljković et al., 2024; Hinrichs, 2000; Morgan et al., 2006). From a European perspective, a local food is characterized by the value attributed to specific production methods associated with a particular geographical region, thereby providing the product with a distinct identity (Muchnik et al., 2005; Fonte, 2008). Natural factors, including the biophysical conditions and microclimate of a specific region, constitute the primary connection to the local reference (Muchnik et al., 2005), as they give distinctive qualities to food products (Barham, 2003; Feagan, 2007). Cultural factors associated with traditional production techniques play a crucial role in establishing the connection between a local product and its specific territory (Muchnik et al., 2005). Consumers often perceive local food products as more desirable compared to global food options; however, research indicates that these perceptions are frequently based on perceived benefits rather than actual demonstrated advantages (Polleau & Biermann, 2021; Schmitt et al., 2017). Additionally, studies show that consumers who express greater environmental and health concerns are more inclined to purchase local food items and engage in other forms of sustainable consumption behavior. These findings imply that preferences for local food may reflect broader pro-environmental attitudes and lifestyles. (Tran & Su, 2025).

It is still uncertain what the main factors influence consumers' preferences for local food compared to products from other regions or international sources. Additionally, it is unclear whether these factors differ across countries with diverse cultural attributes. Reasons for purchasing can be internal, related to personal determination, or external, related to the environment in which each person carries out their daily activities. Life demands and changes throughout life change the buyer's perception. The complexity of purchasing a product also affects the consumer. Making correct and effective purchasing decisions is closely associated with the specific characteristics of the product and the level of

education and awareness of the consumer (Cristina Burghelea, 2014).

The aim of this research is to investigate how sociodemographic characteristics of respondents affect their preferences for purchasing local food, along with their overall eco-behaviors and attitudes. By examining these relationships, the study intends to provide a more thorough understanding of the factors that drive environmentally responsible consumption.

2. Literature review

In general, there appears to be a consensus regarding the local food definition, which refers to the geographical region of production close to the consumer (Hand & Martinez, 2010). However, consumers appear to have diverse interpretations of geographical limitations, which can be classified into two distinct groups: geographical distance and political boundaries. Some consumers consider local food to be food that comes from specific political boundaries, such as their municipality or even their region (Onozaka et al., 2010). Mediterraneans tend to link the concept of local with regional meaning (Scarpa et al., 2005), while consumers in southeastern Missouri (USA) use regional definitions of local food products that come from a smaller area inside the borders of a federal state (Brown, 2003). According to other sources, consumers see "country of origin" as a natural way to describe local products (Darby et al. 2008).

Earlier studies identified that most consumers perceive local foods as superior to other foods in many characteristics related to quality (Schneider & Francis, 2005; Onozaka et al., 2010; Giovannucci et al., 2010). Quality characteristics typically connected with local products include taste, freshness, nutritional value, healthiness, and safety. The perception of local food quality is an appropriate factor that can influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, there is increasing evidence that certain customers place significant value on specific social attributes linked to local products. Examples include the desire to help and build personal relationships with food producers (Zepeda & Leviten-Reid, 2004), as well as worries about fair incomes for farmers (Onozaka et al., 2010), motivating more and more consumers to buy local food. In addition, it has also been found that issues in the food logistic network, such as environmental impacts due to the transport and processing of products, can direct consumers towards local food (Giovannucci et al., 2010; Tregear & Ness, 2005). Not every consumer chooses food that is produced locally

(Bingen et al., 2011; Klein et al., 2006). The increasing availability of non-local foods in supermarkets and other retail food establishments is an indication of this dilemma. Accessibility, affordability, and higher costs are frequently seen as major barriers to local food consumption (Khan & Prior, 2010). Moreover, visiting several retail establishments to procure local food might be time-intensive, hence hindering its purchase, as supermarkets offer greater accessibility than markets (Tippins et al., 2002). Comprehending the variances in the behavior of local food consumers enables retailers and manufacturers to customize their product offerings to more effectively cater to food customers from diverse global regions or multicultural nations (Campbell, 2013).

The higher the positive attitudes of the people towards the consumption of local food, the higher the likelihood of buying it (Çabuk et al., 2014; Campbell, 2013). In terms of food consumption, positive attitudes towards local foods (often driven by perceived health benefits related to safe and sustainable production methods) are generally associated with positive behavioural intentions (e.g., Çabuk et al., 2014; Cranfield et al., 2012). In addition, demographic factors are less predictive of local food purchase patterns than attitudes and behaviours (Zepeda & Li, 2006). Positive perceptions of local foods appear therefore to be a key driver of purchasing behaviour, regardless of cultural differences or a nation's level of economic development.

Earlier studies have explored the influence of sociodemographic factors on the consumption of local or organic food; however, findings regarding the determinants of consumer preferences have been inconsistent (Tepavčević et al., 2025; Nie & Zepeda, 2011; Bravo et al., 2013; Lea & Worsley, 2005). While some earlier research suggests that women generally express more positive attitudes towards local food than men (e.g., Kezis et al., 1998; Weatherell et al., 2003), other research has not identified any significant impact of gender on consumer preferences (Patterson et al., 1999; Tregear & Ness, 2005). Many studies indicate that middle-aged and older people prefer local foods more than younger people do (Szmigin, Maddock, & Carrigan, 2003; Kezis et al., 1998; Tregear & Ness, 2005). However, the effect of age on local food preferences is still not clear (Patterson et al., 1999). Education emerged as the predominant demographic factor associated with organic food consumption, with numerous studies indicating that individuals possessing higher educational attainment are more inclined to buy local or organic products (Dimitri & Dettmann, 2012; Zepeda & Li, 2007). The influence of additional variables, including wealth, the presence of children, and ethnicity, produced inconclusive or conflicting results (Dimitri & Dettmann, 2012; Durham, 2007; Loureiro et al., 2001). In addition to that, Li et al. (2018) identified that accessibility to organic and local food is under the influence of household income, job position, and ethnicity/race.

Based on these findings, several hypotheses were set:
H1: Attitudes towards locally grown food and the environment vary significantly depending on gender.
H2: Attitudes towards locally grown food and the environment vary significantly depending on the place of residence.
H3: Attitudes towards locally grown food and the environment vary significantly depending on age.
H4: Attitudes towards locally grown food and the environment vary significantly depending on education level.

H5: Attitudes towards locally grown food and the environment vary significantly depending on income.

3. Research methodology

The primary objective of the research is to determine to what extent the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents define their preferences for purchasing local food and, generally, their ecological behavior and attitudes. For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was created to investigate attitudes towards the consumption of locally grown food. The questionnaire is a modified version of the original instrument used in research conducted by Rusyani et al. (2021). The first section collected data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, place of residence, education level, and income. The second section measured the respondents' attitudes and habits related to the consumption of locally grown food. Respondents expressed their degree of agreement with the statements within the factors using a five-point Likert scale (from 1—"I entirely disagree" to 5—"I entirely agree"). The first factor, Environmental Knowledge, contains 4 items that relate to some general knowledge concerning the impact of locally grown food on the environment (e.g., "Consuming locally grown food is environmentally friendly"). The second factor, Environmental Concern, measures the level of environmental concern through 4 items (e.g., "Locally grown food helps to build a sustainable environment"). The third factor, Green Attitudes, measures through four items the degree of agreement of the respondents with some environmental claims regarding eco-branding, eco-packaging, or eco-labels (e.g., "Locally grown food always comes in eco-friendly packaging"). The fourth factor, Perceived Behavior, measures through 3 items the perceived behavior related to locally grown food (e.g., "I have the time, resources, and will to buy locally grown food"). The last, fifth factor, eco purchase, consists of 4 items related to ecological purchasing, i.e., the purchase of locally grown food (e.g., "Despite the sometimes-higher price, I am happy to buy locally grown food"). All items from the factors were originally translated from English to Serbian, with careful respect for the meaning and context of each wording. Thereafter, a back-translation was performed from Serbian to English to verify the accuracy and consistency of the translation in relation to the original text. This ensures the linguistic and conceptual equivalence of the items, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the instrument.

Sample description

The study utilised a cross-sectional design, with data collected from June to August 2025 via an online questionnaire shared on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were made aware of the research's purpose prior to giving their consent. The inclusion criteria stipulated those participants be at least 18 years old and citizens of the Republic of Serbia. A total of 128 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis. The sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Among the entire sample, 57.8% of respondents were female, while the share of male respondents was smaller, and they participated with 42.2%. The greatest proportion of respondents was under 25 years of age (60.2%), while the smallest number of respondents was older than 55 years (4.7%). Among the respondents, 44.5% have completed secondary school, 41.4% have a university degree, 10.9% have a master's degree, and the smallest number of respondents have a college degree (3.1%). The survey shows that 40.6% of respondents earn up to 50,000 RSD. These results are unsurprising since over half of the respondents are under 25, suggesting that many are students. Therefore, it is assumed that they are not permanently employed but rather work on occasional temporary jobs (seasonal, i.e., they perform work through a cooperative). Respondents with monthly incomes exceeding 90,000 RSD accounted for 21.1% of the total. The results of the research indicate that there are far more respondents who live in the city (85.9%) compared to those who live in the village (14.1%).

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of respondents

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	54	42.2
Female	74	57.8
Age		
Up to 25 years	77	60.2
26-35 years	16	12.5
36-45 years	17	13.3
46-55 years	12	9.4
Over 55	6	4.7
Education level		
High school	57	44.5
College	4	3.1
Bachelor	53	41.4
Master	14	10.9
Place of residence		
City	110	85.9
Village	18	14.1
Income*		
Up to 50.000 RSD (below 430€)	52	40.6
50.001-70.000 RSD (430-600€)	36	28.1
70.001-90.000 RSD (600-770€)	13	10.2
Over 90.000 RSD (over 770€)	27	21.1

*Euro equivalents are approximate and were calculated using an exchange rate of 1 EUR = 117 RSD

Source: Authors' research

4. Results and analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis

The results of descriptive statistical analysis are shown in Table 2. The highest mean value is found in the factor Environmental Concern, while the lowest is in Ecological Purchasing. The statement "Environmental protection is the responsibility of every individual" received the highest rating, whereas "Locally grown food always comes in eco-friendly packaging" received the lowest rating. The standard deviation is below 1 only for one factor (Environmental Concern), amounting to 0.97. It exceeds 1 for all other factors, with the highest value being 1.27 for ecological purchasing. For the factor Environmental Knowledge, the high mean value of 4.05 indicates that

most participants hold a positive opinion regarding the impact of consuming locally grown food on ecosystem preservation. This result suggests that participants recognize the link between environmental knowledge and the advantages of locally produced food. The relatively high standard deviation (1.02) indicates that the responses were generally inconsistent, meaning that most participants did not share similar views on this topic. Environmental concern has the highest mean value (4.10), indicating that participants hold the responsibility for preserving the environment and recognize the importance of locally grown food in this context. Most respondents believe that their individual efforts matter when it comes to environmental protection. The standard deviation is the lowest (0.97), which means that the answers are consistent. Green attitudes have a somewhat lower mean value (3.35) compared to the previous factors, suggesting that such attitudes are not as strongly expressed. This may indicate that, although participants recognize the benefits of locally grown food, their green attitudes may not be sufficiently strong or consistent. The higher standard deviation (1.03) points to greater variation in responses, meaning that there are notable differences in participants' attitudes. The mean value of 3.79 suggests that participants have a certain tendency to purchase locally grown food. However, this value is not high enough to indicate a strong or consistent intention to buy locally produced food. These results may mean that participants value local food but face barriers to acting on their preferences. The standard deviation (1.11) indicates significant disparities in participants' perceptions of the alignment between their behaviors and intentions. Ecological purchasing has the lowest mean value (3.28), indicating that the actual practice of buying locally grown food is not as common or consistent as reflected in the previous factors. This points to a gap between theoretical attitudes and actual purchasing behavior. The highest standard deviation of this factor (1.27) suggests significant variation in purchasing behavior among respondents. Based on the results of the descriptive analysis, it can be concluded that the respondents have a positive attitude toward environmental preservation through the consumption of locally grown food. Despite a desire to protect the environment, respondents don't take much action. It is necessary to raise public awareness to translate theory into practice through education, the promotion of sustainable practices, and by making locally grown food more accessible, among other measures.

By applying the Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the reliability of this questionnaire was tested. The obtained results indicate that the Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.7 for all factors (the lowest being 0.840), thus falling within the range of high reliability (Kaiser, 1974).

Table 2. The descriptive statistical analysis

Factors and Items	AM	SD
Environmental Awareness (α = 0.866)	**4.05**	**1.02**
By consuming locally grown food, the ecosystem is preserved.	4.02	1.16
Locally grown food is biodegradable.	3.93	1.19
Locally grown food can be recycled and it is suitable for composting.	4.08	1.21
Consuming locally grown food is environmentally friendly.	4.16	1,13
Environmental concern (α = 0.855)	**4.10**	**0.97**
Locally grown food helps build a sustainable environment.	4.29	1.07
Environmental protection is the responsibility of every individual.	4.46	1.07
Locally grown food minimizes waste and recycles it.	3.77	1.21
Consuming locally grown food makes me happy.	3.90	1.22
Fewer chemicals are used in the cultivation of local food products.	3.48	1.29
Green Attitudes (α = 0.886)	**3.35**	**1.03**
Locally grown food always comes in eco-friendly packaging.	2.79	1.22
Eco-branding and eco-labels are proof of an environmentally friendly product.	3.32	1.33
Locally grown food is safer and healthier.	3.80	1.18
Perceived Behavior (α = 0.840)	**3.79**	**1.11**
I hope to buy locally grown food.	4.21	1.08
I protect the environment by buying locally grown food.	3.63	1.35
I have the time, resources and will to buy locally grown food.	3.53	1.38
Eco Purchase (α = 0.907)	**3.28**	**1.27**
I often buy locally grown food.	3.44	1.39
Despite the sometimes-higher price, I am happy to buy locally grown food.	3.34	1.38
I have a habit of buying locally grown food for my daily needs.	3.16	1.45
In the last six months, my purchases have been more environmentally friendly.	3.20	1.38

AM – Arithmetic mean, SD – Standard deviation

Source: Authors' research

Results of t-test and ANOVA analysis of variance

In order to test whether sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents (gender of respondents, age, education, level of income, place of residence) influence differences in attitudes related to the environment and consumption of locally grown food, independent samples T-tests and ANOVA analysis of variance were used. Using the t-test, it was found that there were no significant differences in attitudes towards local food based on the gender of the respondents. Specifically, the results were as follows: Environmental Awareness (t=-1.374, p=0.172), Environmental Concern (t=-1.639, p=0.104), Green Attitude (t=-0.047, p=0.962), Perceived Behaviour (t=-

0.360, p=0.719), and Eco Purchasing (t=-0.063, p=1.368). These findings suggest that both men and women demonstrate a similar level of awareness and appreciation for the importance of consuming locally produced food. Such a result may indicate that attitudes towards local food are shaped more by broader social and environmental factors. Therefore, we reject hypothesis H1. The t-test was also applied to determine whether there were differences in attitudes in relation to place of residence and showed that there were no statistically significant differences. Environmental Awareness (t=-0.023, p=0.981), Environmental Concern (t=-0.225, p=0.822), Green Attitude (t=-0.429, p=0.669), Perceived Behaviour (t=-1.008, p=0.316), and Eco Purchasing (t=-1.280, p=0.203). The lack of statistically significant differences in attitudes in relation to place of residence may be a consequence of general trends or public campaigns that affect all respondents. With globalisation and market development, the availability of local food may have become comparable in rural and urban areas, which may affect the similarity in attitudes. Additionally, the results may be influenced by either the relative homogeneity of the sample or its small size. These results did not provide support for H2. By applying the ANOVA analysis of variance in relation to the age of the respondents (Table 3), it was found that notable significant differences exist only within the Green Attitudes factor (F=4.430, $p < 0.002$). To determine which age groups there are differences in, an LSD post-hoc test was applied, which showed that respondents in the age group 36–45 express fewer environmental attitudes compared to those in the age group up to 25 years. In educational systems, more and more attention is paid to ecology, and awareness of environmental problems and sustainability has been raised among respondents up to 25 years of age. This age group may be more exposed to modern environmental trends and information in the media, and the results obtained can be justified by these factors. Respondents aged 36 to 45 often have more responsibilities and different priorities, which may affect the extent to which they confront environmental issues. These results partially confirmed H3.

Table 3. ANOVA according to age

Factors	Up to 25 years	26-35	36-45	46-55	Over 55 years	F value	Sig.	LSD post-hoc test
Environmental Awareness	4.16	4.14	3.66	3.85	3.85	1.015	0.403	-
Environmental Concern	4.15	4.34	3.74	4.04	3.96	0.995	0.435	-
Green Attitude	3.61	3.11	2.62	3.27	2.83	4.430	0.002	1>3
Perceived Behavior	3.83	4.17	3.20	3.78	4.06	1.815	0.130	-
Eco Purchasing	3.30	3.31	2.88	3.35	4.04	0.964	0.430	-

Source: Authors' research

When it comes to education level (Table 4), a statistically significant difference was obtained only for the factor Environmental Concern (F=3.592, $p < 0.016$). Applying the LSD post-hoc test, it was found that respondents with a college/university degree expressed a statistically significantly lower concern for the environment compared to those with a high school, college, and master's degree. People with a college/university degree have an education that is focused on specific fields and practical skills. These programs may devote less time to broader social or environmental issues compared to college and master's degrees. Such an arrangement could result in less concern for topics such as environmental protection. However, guided by this reasoning, these programs should then also apply to those with a high school degree, which indicates a mismatch. Other factors, including the individual's personal characteristics, lifestyle, and social environment (Table 4), could explain this discrepancy. Thus, H4 was partially confirmed.

Table 4. ANOVA according to education level

Factors	High school	College	Bachelor	Master	F value	Sig.	LSD post-hoc test
Environmental Awareness	4.00	2.94	4.11	4.32	2.082	0.106	-
Environmental Concern	4.02	2.81	4.18	4.50	3.592	0.016	2<1,3,4
Green Attitude	3.36	2.13	3.36	3.59	2.207	0.091	-
Perceived Behavior	3.77	2.75	3.81	4.12	1.605	0.192	-
Eco Purchasing	3.22	2.63	3.68	3.41	0.552	0.668	-

Source: Authors' research

6. Discussion and conclusion

Local food plays a vital role in sustainable development, positively impacting health, the economy, and the environment. By purchasing locally grown food, consumers support local producers, which strengthens local economies and communities. This practice also reduces the ecological footprint and typically provides fresher, higher-quality products. To maximize the benefits of local food, the state must invest considerable resources in promoting it—through subsidies, organizing events, and educating consumers. Without consumer awareness of ecological labels, their introduction is ineffective. Locally produced and specialty foods are often perceived as more natural, tastier, fresher, healthier, superior in quality, more environmentally sustainable, and socially equitable than conventional options (Roininen et al., 2006; Vanhonacker et al., 2010). Additionally, some consumers are willing to pay a premium for these specialty or locally produced foods (Giraud et al., 2005; Jekanowski, Williams, & Schiek, 2000). This research aimed to identify the sociodemographic profile of individuals who

buy and consume locally grown food. The results reveal that gender and place of residence do not significantly affect attitudes toward the environment and locally grown food, possibly due to the widespread influence of public campaigns or global trends impacting all respondents. In terms of gender, the findings align with those of Patterson et al. (1999) and Treger & Ness (2005), but do not support hypotheses H1 and H2. Respondents under 25 exhibit greater environmental awareness than older groups, which contradicts earlier studies (e.g., Kezis et al., 1998; Szmigin et al., 2003; Treager & Ness, 2005). The current study partially supports hypothesis H3. Additionally, respondents with higher education (college/university) demonstrate less concern for the environment compared to those with secondary school, undergraduate, or master's degrees, leading to partial confirmation of H4. Following previous research (e.g., Li et al., 2018), it was anticipated that income would influence attitudes toward local food. However, contrary to expectations, income did not significantly affect these attitudes, resulting in the rejection of hypothesis H5.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted on a relatively small sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of the Republic of Serbia. Second, data collection relied on an online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms, which may have resulted in an underrepresentation of individuals with limited internet access or those who do not use social media. Previous research has examined the relationship between sociodemographic variables and the use of local and organic food. However, there is a lack of sufficient research focusing on the connection between sociodemographic variables and access to local and organic food options. Nonetheless, insufficient research has been conducted to study the connection between sociodemographic variables and access to local and organic food. Individuals' access to such food options, and hence their ability to make food choices, remains questionable. Respondents have a positive attitude toward environmental preservation and the consumption of locally grown food; however, theoretical awareness does not always translate into practical behavior. The gap between attitudes and actual purchasing behavior indicates that there is a need for greater education and the promotion of sustainable practices. Although research on motives for purchasing local food in developing countries has recently begun (Arsil et al., 2013; Arsil et al., 2014), to date it has not been studied whether national culture influences such motives, which may be one of the recommendations for future research.

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