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## Diversity in food systems and food consumption practices

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# Diversity in food systems & food consumption practices

18/02/2019

Marie Plessz



EUROPEAN UNION

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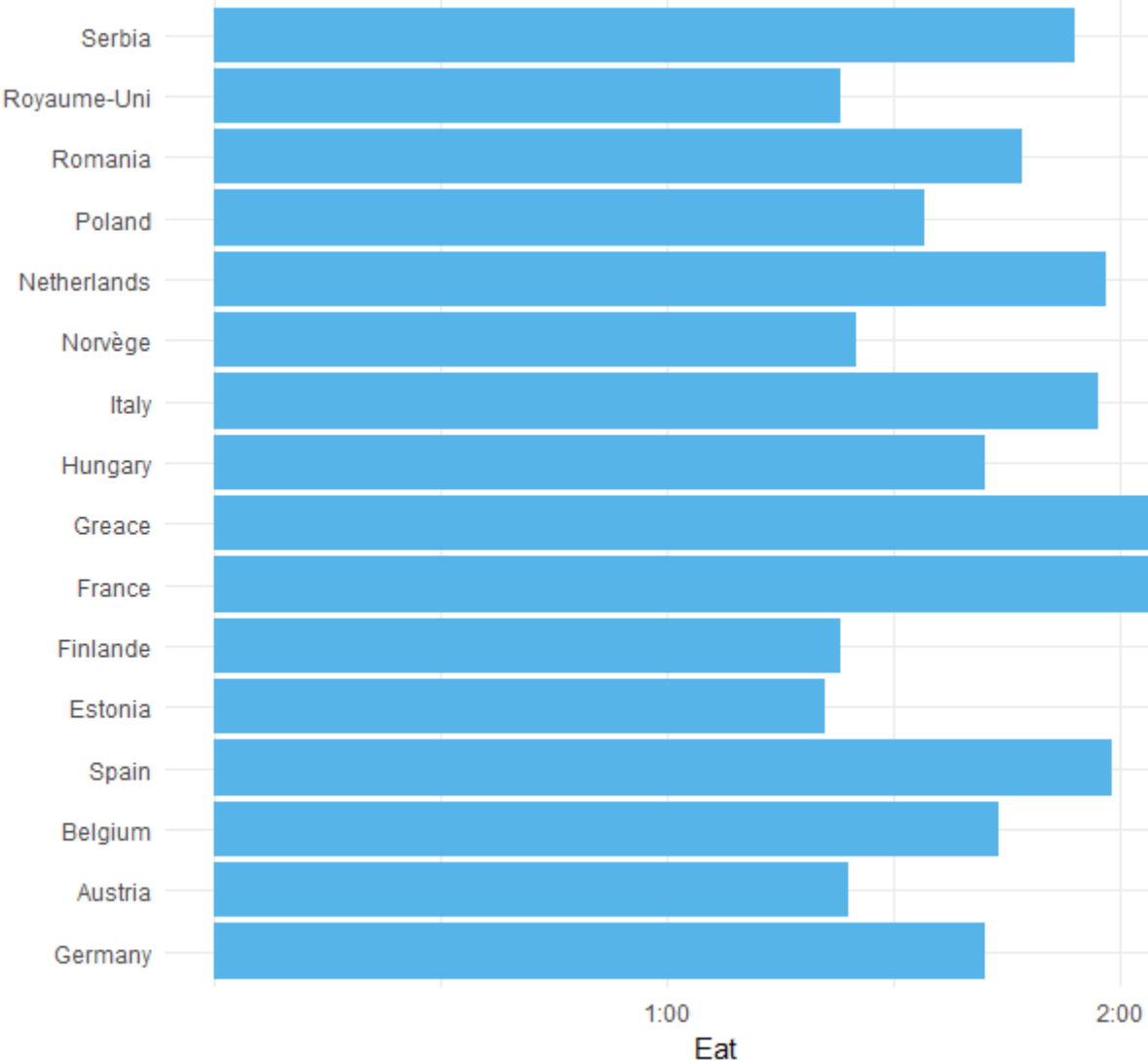


# Food Choice / Behaviour / Practices

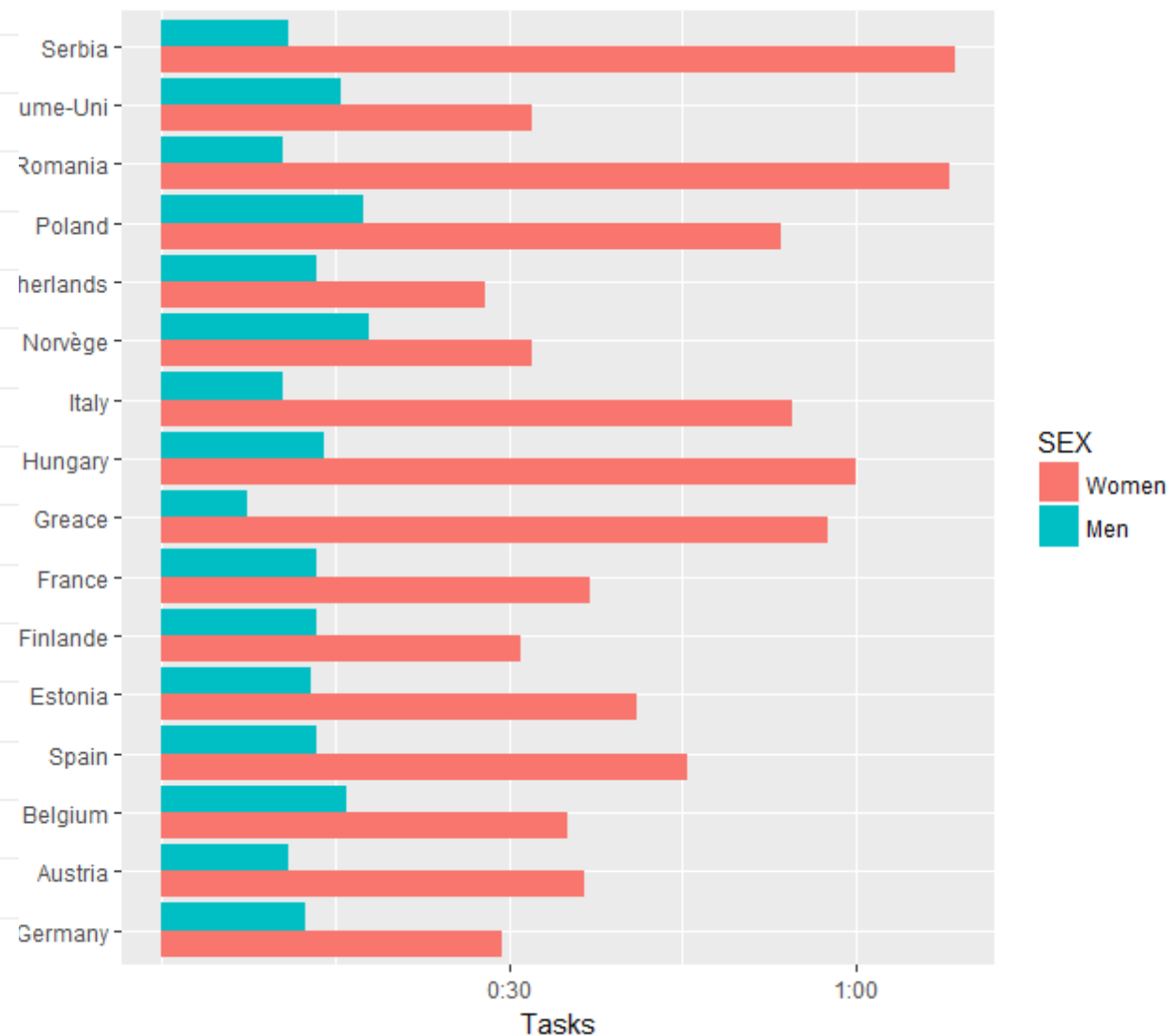
- Take a lot of time
  - bring together many different activities and things
  - Connect with how we view and enact family ties, wellbeing, care, housekeeping, career, identity...
  - Have mostly unintended/ ignored health & environmental consequences
  - Seldom look like choosing between a predefined, limited set of options
  - Are very context-dependent
- ➔ Sociologists increasingly speak about **practices**  
(Warde 2016, Shove et al 2012)

# Time spent in food consumption in Europe

## Eating



## Shopping, cooking, doing the dishes



Source: European Harmonised Time-use surveys provided by Eurostat, elaborated by M Plessz

# Diversity and consumption practices

## 1. Diversity as generated 'upstream' in the food system

How do consumers deal with diversity in the food system?

## Diversity in food consumption practices

## 2. Diversity as variety

“The absence of uniformity or monotony”

In a household/person/group's food practices

## 3. Diversity as difference

“Something that makes one thing or person not the same as another thing or person”

Across social/ethnic/cultural groups

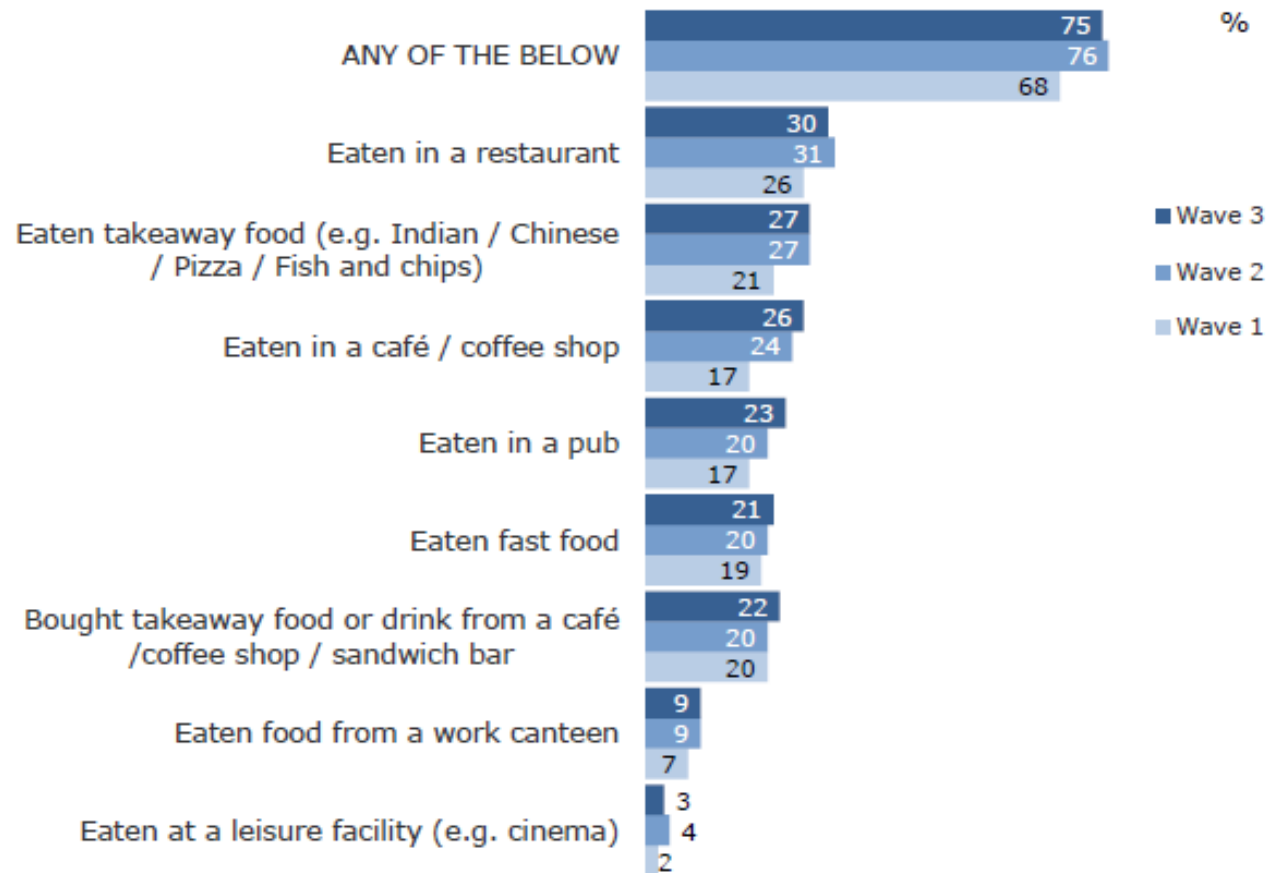
# Consumers and diversity in food systems

- Diversity in products and provisioning channels
- Diversity in definitions of appropriate ways of eating
  - Prescriptors: public policies, NGOs, marketing, friends, family
  - Prescriptions: objective and content
  - Prescriptions ‘in silos’, often competing, sometimes conflicting
- Consumers **work** at reducing diversity and its negative effects
  - Try not to purchase some products,
  - Routines, Tastes
  - Work requires time, energy, skills. May fail.
- Mostly **women** do it

# Variety

- Variety in **meal content**: a social norm
  - It is considered appropriate: good housekeeping avoids monotonous meals
  - Generates more **food waste** (Evans 2014)
  - Sometimes ready-prepared, pre-packaged products sold (and viewed) as ways to ensure variety.
- Inside a food repertoire (tastes)
  - A different soup everyday, is it variety?
  - Wider repertoires in higher socioeconomic groups?
- Variety in **eating contexts**
  - Most meals taken at home (80% of dinners in France)
  - Commercial venues, work, school, hospital, retirement home, prison, holiday, on travel...
- Both a social norm and an answer to daily-life organisation
- Generates economic activity but resource-intensive

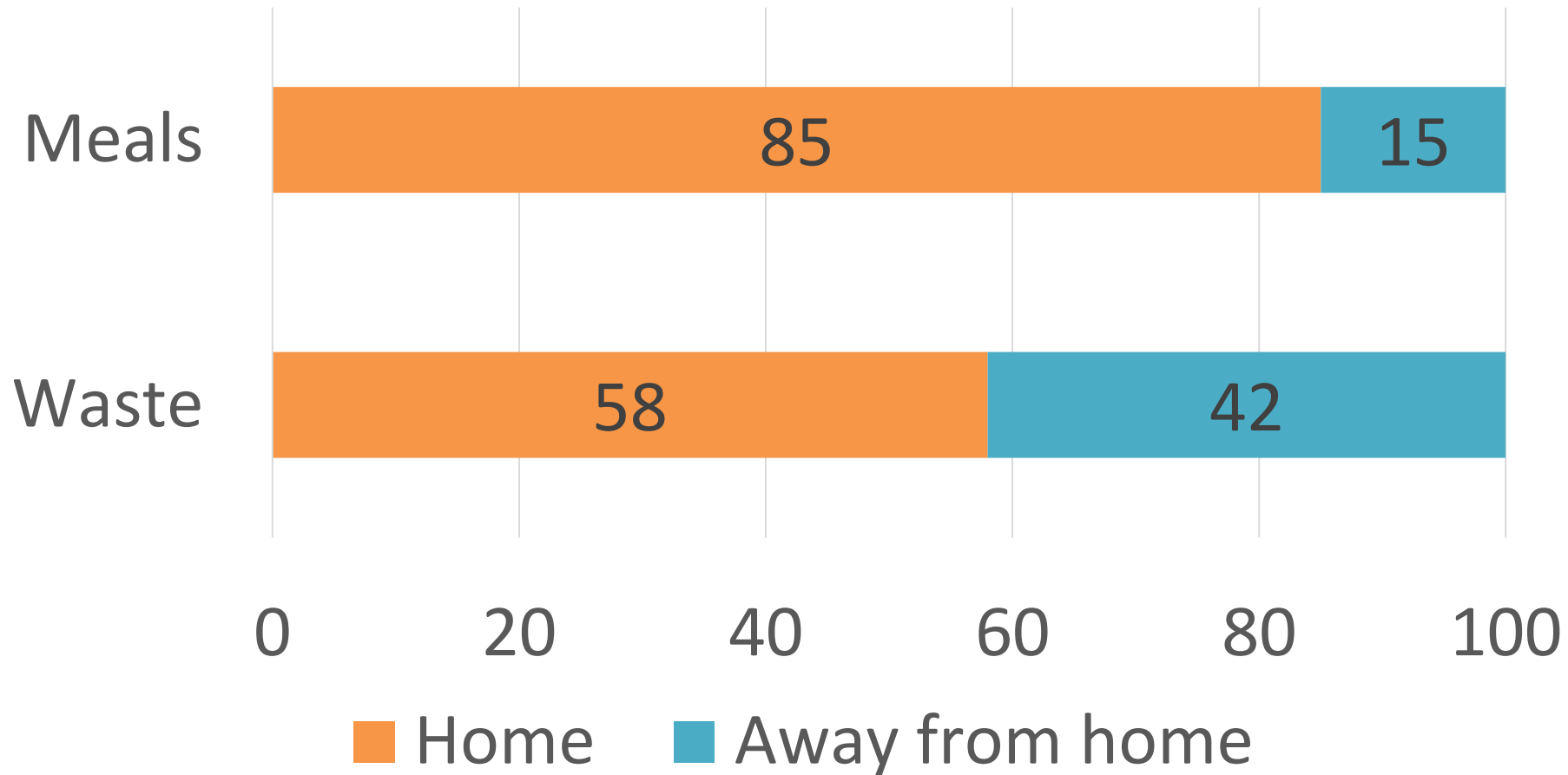
# Diversity of eating out in the UK 2014



Source: Q2\_33 Have you done any of the following things in the last seven days, that is since last ...  
 Note: respondents were able to give multiple responses to this question



# Meal contexts and food waste in France



ADEME, 2016

# Differences

- Differences in tastes express class, ethnic and gender identity
  - Liking/avoiding specific foods (Bourdieu, *Distinction*)
  - Signals who you are to others
  - Makes you feel at home/a stranger
- Differences in living conditions
  - Household composition, equipment, housing (garden? Compost, freezer?)
  - Income, work schedules
  - Food skills and capacities
  - Vary across socioeconomic group
- Diversity helps accommodate citizens' tastes and living conditions  
→ **social cohesion**
- **BUT** policies focusing on helping citizens make the right choices → **stigma** and **blame** on the most **vulnerable** citizens

# 3 challenges

- Resource-efficient diversity?
  - Environmental resources
  - Consumers' time and skills
- Gender equity: can we have diversity without generating even more food work and responsibilities for women?
- Social cohesion: can we reduce the market and social value of 'bad variety' without generating social exclusion and stigma?

## 3 R&I Issues

- Make collective meal arrangements socially inclusive AND healthy AND sustainable
- Share responsibilities and work generated by diversity with upstream actors
- Design policies that focus on the contexts of consumption rather than on consumers



# THANK YOU

For your attention

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