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The role of the individual in the socio-ecological transformation

CHANGING HARMFUL SOCIAL NORMS: RED MEAT CONSUMPTION

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BACKGROUND MEAT CONSUMPTION

25-30 % of global greenhouse gas emissions comes from the food system (IPCC 2019).

Red meat globally about 6% (FAO (2020)

Food consumption strongly influenced by social processes

SOCIAL NORMS AND MEAT CONSUMPTION

Red meat has achieved a high social status and symbolic value, making it a desirable food that people want more of, if they can afford it (Lokuruka, 2006; Ruby & Heine, 2011).

Climate change has led to an increasing moralization of the consumption of (especially red) meat in some countries, entailing a social pressure to refrain from or at least reduce the consumption of red meat (Cheah et al., 2020).

Such a counter-pressure against dominant social norms could potentially lead to a dramatic change towards a more climate-friendly diet (Nyborg et al., 2016).

Focus is on the social processes behind red meat consumption and how red meat consumption is being contested by social processes set in motion by the increasing worry on climate change.

THEORIES ON SOCIAL INFLUENCE

The importance of imitation or modelling for (social) learning is well documented (Bandura, 1977).

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and the focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al., 1990), suggest that people use other people's behavior as social validation or proof.

Social cognitive theories, such as Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, include social pressure as one of the key determinants of behavioral intentions and behavior.

Schwartz's (1977) norm activation theory proposes that perceived social norms affect helping behavior especially when they become internalized and transformed into a personal or moral norm.

People hold multiple social norms that differ in abstraction and scope, from general cross-situational principles to norms for appropriate behavior in a specific situation or context (Hechter & Opp, 2001; Lindenberg, 2008).

Norms for specific behaviors or situations may be derived from broader, more abstract or general norms.

QUESTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

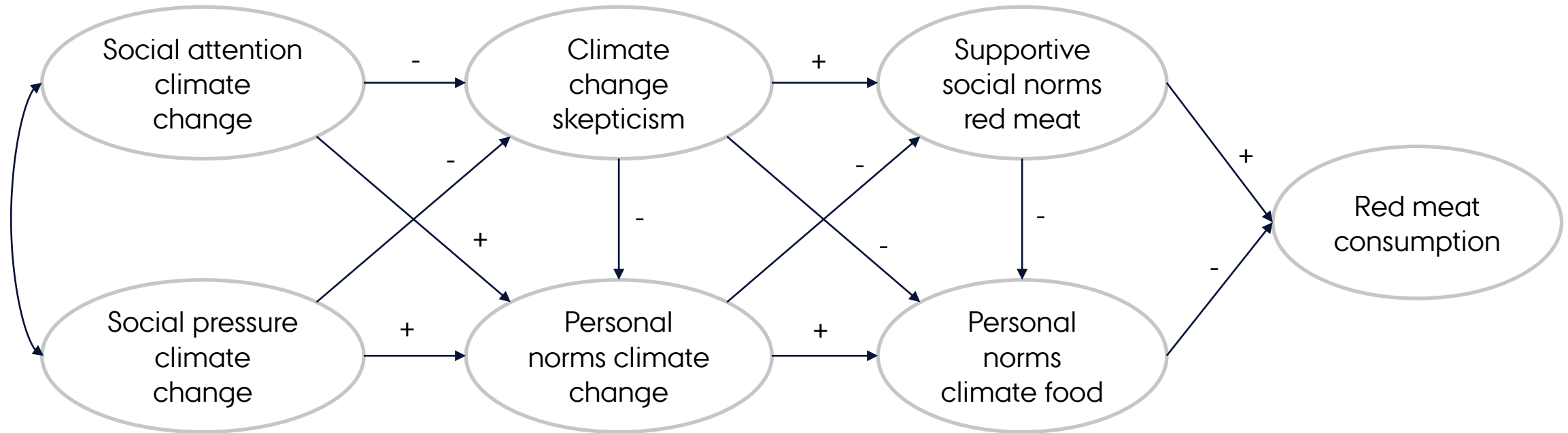
How strong are internalized social pressure and emerging moral norms for adopting a more climate-friendly diet? How did it influence red meat consumption in Norway in the 2019-2021 period? How did it measure up against the dominating social norms supporting red meat consumption?

We assume the first step is acceptance of co-responsibility for climate change mitigation, which is then, in a second step, further specified into norms for specific behaviors that are socially agreed to be particularly climate-relevant.

The process is likely contested at each step along the way, including counterarguments and scepticism regarding climate change.

The acceptance and implementation of new norms for specific behaviors are impeded by the experienced pleasure and other perceived benefits of the challenged behavior and by the social norms supporting existing behavior.

MODEL OF THE NORM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



METHOD

A repeated web-based survey, managed by Kantar in March-April 2019, 2020 and 2021, sampling 4057, 4031 and 4897 participants, respectively, from their ISO certified standing panel in Norway.

Kantar used an interactive procedure, stratifying participant invitations over time to ensure a representative sample of the Norwegian population, 18 years and older, in terms of age, gender, education level and geographical distribution.

For this study we only use data provided by the random half of the participants who answered questions about behavior-specific norms regarding meat consumption.

Of these, 1014 participated in all three interviews and 3590 participated in at least one.

CONSTRUCTS

Consumption of red meat: ‘How often do you have dinner with beef or sheep/lamb?’ (never = 0; less than 1 time per week = 0.5; 1 time per week = 1 to 4 times per week = 4, and 5 or more times per week = 6).

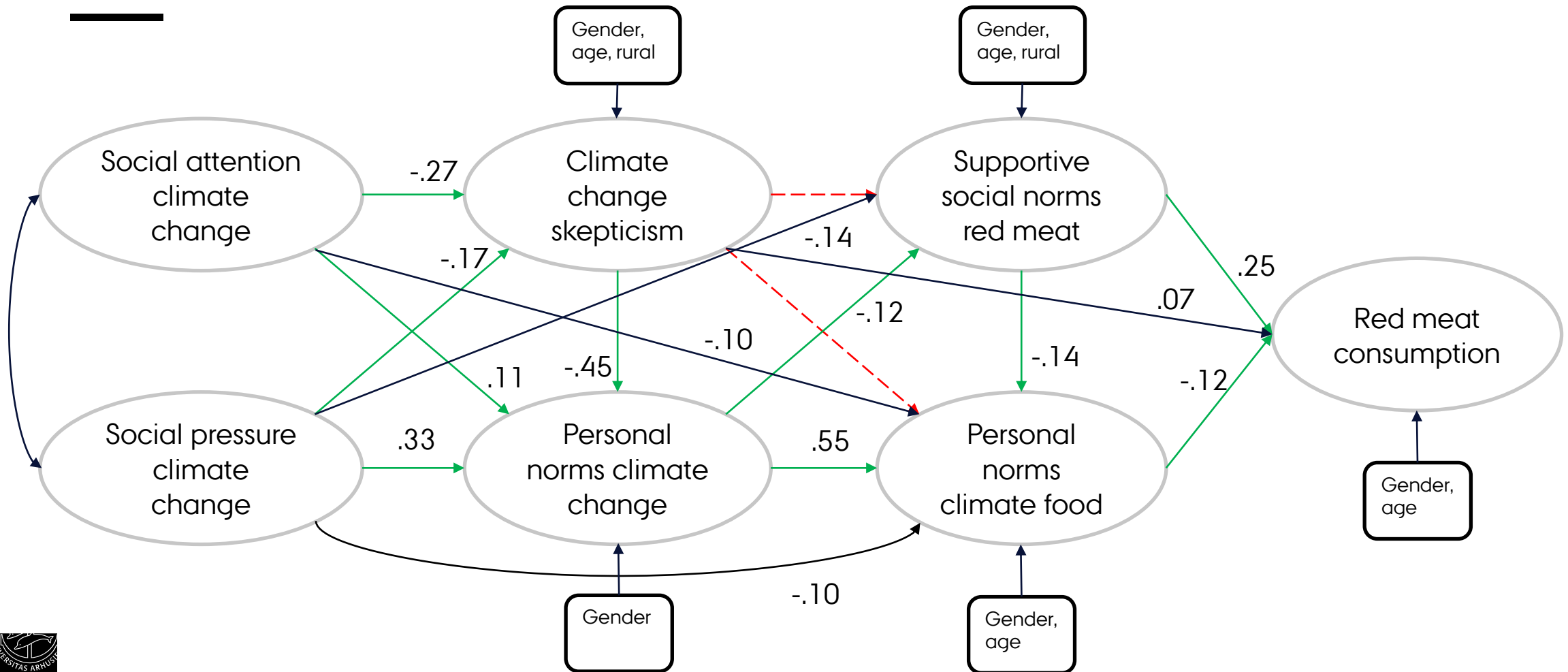
Measures for the **antecedent constructs** in the model were responses to a set of propositions like ‘I have a responsibility to reduce my emissions of greenhouse gases’ (climate change personal norm). (‘Does not match at all’ = 1 to ‘Matches very well’ = 5).

In three cases: climate change personal norms, climate change denial or skepticism, and perceived social norms about meat eating, we had more than one item to measure a theoretical construct. In these cases, the measures were treated as reflective indicators of a latent construct in the statistical analyses.

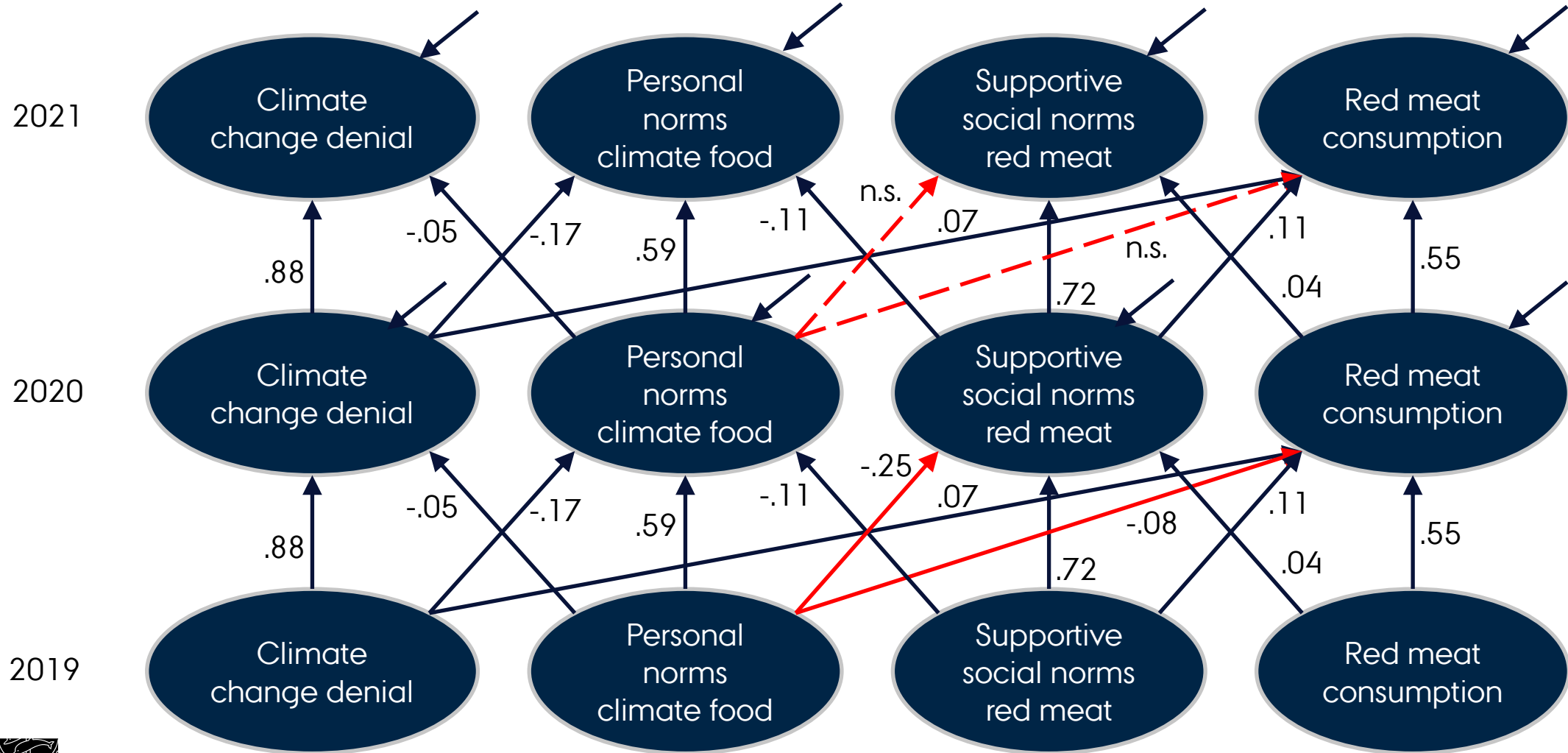
For scales, see:

Vatn, A., Aasen, M., Thøgersen, J., Dunlap, R. E., Fisher, D. R., Hellevik, O., & Stern, P. (2022). What role do climate considerations play in consumption of red meat in Norway? *Global Environmental Change*, 73, 102490.

SEM SOCIAL AND NORMATIVE ANTECEDENTS OF RED MEAT CONSUMPTION IN NORWAY 2019. *N* = 1980



CROSS-LAGGED PANEL ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RED MEAT CONSUMPTION AND ITS IMMEDIATE ANTECEDENTS IN 2019, 2020 AND 2021. $N = 1869$



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As expected, red meat consumption is strongly supported by social norms in Norway

But it is challenged by the societal discourse about negative climate impacts of red meat consumption and the resulting negative moralizing of the diet.

As consumers internalize personal norms about a climate-friendly diet, they reduce their red-meat consumption.

- It appears that this social pressure was neutralized during the Corona pandemic – perhaps due to the heavy moralization of other everyday behaviors?

Until now that process has been (too) slow.

- In 2021, 3.8% said they don't eat red meat – 39.4% that they were willing to reduce the number of meals with red meat

Since most dinners are eaten in private, reaching a “social tipping point” (Nyborg et al., 2016) is difficult

- Public events and canteens may be the best setting!



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Thank you for your attention 😊

Any questions?

THE ACT PROJECT: FROM TARGETS TO ACTION: PUBLIC RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

Aim: To provide society with recommendations for policy instruments that enable transition to a low-emission society.

Responses: behavioral, attitudinal, normative

We focus on what people think about the climate, about their own responsibility to act, what kinds of policies they support, and what explains their choices in case of acts that have large carbon footprints

We base the analyses on institutional theory and social psychology – strong emphasis on action as a social phenomenon

Development over time, changes in behavior, norms and attitudes: establish time series of data

4000(+) respondents (18 years or older), plus panel over years

Data collected 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Vatn, A., Aasen, M., Thøgersen, J., Dunlap, R. E., Fisher, D. R., Hellevik, O., & Stern, P. (2022). What Role do Climate Considerations Play in Consumption of Red Meat in Norway? *Global Environmental Change*, 73, 102490.

1. What are the main factors explaining the variation in individuals' red meat consumption in Norway?
2. What role does climate considerations play?

In this study there has been specific emphasis on the role of

- Habits
- Social norms
- Personal norms reflecting social processes

Is red meat becoming 'moralized' – social processes that make red meat less acceptable?

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Strong effect of **habits**. It is moreover strongly supported by **social norms** (pro red meat), and also to some extent wholesomeness. The habit seems to be an important social dynamic involved here.

Climate concern manifested in a **personal norm** has a negative effect on meat consumption. Not strong, though

This norm is influenced by **social pressure**. We may speculate if we see the start of a social process 'moralizing' red meat consumption