

# SELECTING, COOKING, SERVING AND EATING FOOD WITH SUFFICIENCY– INTRODUCING RESTOBRIETY AS A NEW PARADIGM

*2025 International Symposium on Climate, Finance, and Sustainability  
19-20 June 2025 at the House of Management Science, Paris Pantheon-Assas University.*

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## **Abstract:**

Restaurants significantly impact the environment, yet their sustainability role is under-researched. This paper introduces *restobriety*, a new paradigm integrating ecological sufficiency into restaurant management, from selecting to eating food. Grounded in environmental ethics and the experience economy, restobriety follows five principles: constraint as creative force, sufficiency as luxury, transparent hedonism, systemic integration, and cultural contextuality. This approach holistically transforms logistics, marketing, finance, and human resources, prioritizing quality and responsible resource management. This study aims to investigate practical conditions for implementing restobriety, examining how stakeholders—including managers, chefs, customers, and suppliers—perceive and enact this approach across diverse cultural and gastronomic contexts.

**Key words:** restobriety, sustainable restaurants, sustainable dining experience, sufficiency, food supply chain, commensality.

## 1. Introduction: repositioning restaurant in the context of ecological urgency

In the Anthropocene epoch, human activities have become the dominant geological force and that pushes alarmingly humanity's ecological footprint beyond planetary boundaries (Rockström *et al.*, 2009), the food system emerges as a key contributor to environmental degradation. With 26% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions today coming from the food supply chain (Poore & Nemecek, 2018), this system presents an urgent environmental challenge (Willett *et al.*, 2019). While researchers tend to focus on the agricultural production system, sustainable farming practices (Balmford *et al.*, 2018; Clark & Tilman, 2017; Pretty, 2008), individual dietary changes (Springmann *et al.*, 2018), or food waste reduction (FAO, 2019), the role of restaurants in environmental sustainability has been relatively neglected in academic literature. Although restaurants are a significant contributor to food waste, plastics pollution and energy consumption (Kasim & Ismail, 2012), only a slight percentage of the green hospitality research focuses on the practices of restaurants (Kim *et al.*, 2017). This absence of research on restaurant practices presents a significant gap, and raises questions regarding how restaurants are supposed to operate in the context of sustainability challenges (Filimonau & De Coteau, 2019). This is so much more significant given the increasing demand by consumers for a green dining experience (Bacig & Young, 2019), and the prospects for restaurants to function as cultural spaces where sustainability is perpetuated.

Restaurants are not simply places of consumption. They are complex intersections of typically opaque and risky global supply chains (Manning & Soon, 2016), artistic culinary experimentation (Ferguson, 2004), profound social interaction and community connection (Sobal & Nelson, 2003), and multi-sensory, memorable consumer experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Spence, 2017). Beyond their economic and experiential functions, restaurants also serve as crucial sites for the enactment of complex social and cultural 'rules' governing food consumption. Indeed, drawing from structuralist perspectives (Douglas, 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1968), foodways are understood to be governed by underlying 'grammars' that shape how meals carry meaning and reinforce social order. Therefore, restaurants have considerable potential leverage points for ecological transition (Abson *et al.*, 2017), including Michelin-starred restaurants and their conscious effort to use local sources to minimize the ecological effects of their consumption. However, to truly realize this potential, we need a profound paradigm shift, moving beyond superficial "green" initiatives.

This is where the concept of "sobriety" (sufficiency) becomes paramount. Sobriety, rooted in ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions, transcends simple austerity. It embodies both a radical rejection of excess and a modest, pleasure-based simplicity, while also raising tensions about privilege, fairness, and the distribution of environmental responsibility (Welté, 2024b). By minimizing the négatif effects of food on the environment, adopting a sufficiency approach in food systems serves as a key pathway towards achieving this transformation (Hemar-Nicolas & Hedegaard, 2023). It challenges the prevailing system of production, distribution, and marketing designed to produce and consume more (Sirieix and Le Borgne, 2017). Sobriety in consumption implies moderating one's practices, running counter to the uninhibited and valued enjoyment of purchasing desires. This is an inaudible reflection in societies marked by a culture of consumption (Welté, 2024a). Yet, precisely this counter-cultural positioning makes "sobriety" both challenging and transformative when applied to restaurant operations. It integrates ecological responsibility into every aspect of practice, demanding a radical transition to a simpler way of life with sufficient, albeit lower, material living standards. In the restaurant context, "sobriety" demands a comprehensive reimagining: from carefully selecting ingredients with regard to their origin and impact (Beske *et al.*, 2014), to culinary methods that foster deep appreciation for ingredients and their stories (Johnston & Baumann, 2015), organizing service based on the social and emotional aspects of consumer experience creating shared experiential

spaces, and even engaging with customers through profound, multi-sensory culinary experiences (Filser, 1996; Holbrook & Hrischman, 1982). This paradoxical approach—achieving richness through restraint—requires restaurants to redefine abundance not as quantity or excess, but as quality, mindfulness, and meaningful connection to both the natural world and dining community.

## **2. The conflict of sobriety in restaurant management**

Integrating "sobriety" into restaurant operations presents a significant paradox. The concept of sobriety, fundamentally rooted in individual ethics, faces inherent challenges when applied to organizational contexts (Welté, 2024b). This creates a direct tension within restaurants, where commercial objectives and consumer expectations often conflict with the principles of temperance. The restaurant experience, particularly the culture of commensality (Fischler, 2011), is deeply intertwined with notions of joy, generosity, and social cohesion (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). Traditionally, concepts of abundance and variety have been instrumental in driving customer satisfaction where joy is a major factor in choice of food (Hemar-Nicolas & Hedegaard, 2023). Such consumption patterns are often deeply embedded in social structures, as cultural theorists like Bourdieu (1984) illustrate how tastes in food contribute to the signaling of class and status, thereby playing a role in social reproduction.

Moreover, the very essence of public dining involves orchestrated experiences, where ambiance, decor, and service are curated to elicit specific emotional responses (Filser, 2002; Finkelstein, 1989). Finkelstein argues that, in this context, diners effectively purchase not just food, but entertainment and feelings, suggesting a commodification of emotions within the modern restaurant market. This perspective underscores how deeply ingrained consumer expectations link pleasure with extravagance and outward display.

Furthermore, the implementation of sobriety strategies frequently encounters practical limitations. Managers may find themselves navigating a conflict between ecological conscience and the imperative for economic growth, or observe the paradoxical use of natural resources in unsustainable proportions.

These tensions vividly illustrate the systemic challenge restaurants face in reconciling the provision of a rich, shared meal with the urgent demands of ecological sobriety, which necessitates a reduction in energy and resource consumption. This inherent conflict forms the central problem that this research program seeks to address. The global climate crisis, marked by rapid warming and unprecedented changes over millennia (IPCC, 2021), compels an immediate re-evaluation of current values to mitigate industrially induced risks and ensure the long-term sustainability of both ecosystems and culinary culture (Beck, 2010; Beck, 1992).

A critical concern also arises regarding the potential for commercialization of sobriety. There is a risk that it could become a false promise of adaptation, condemned to become in turn a concept exploited for commercial ends (Welté, 2024b). This critique highlights the danger of restaurants adopting *sobriety* merely as a marketing tactic, or greenwashing. Such concerns underscore the importance of developing authentic solutions, that genuinely transcend superficial "green" initiatives.

Restaurants operate within a complex adaptive system that encompasses logistics (Christopher, 2016), intricate supply chains (Beske et al., 2014), pervasive economic pressures, and evolving customer expectations (Kivela et al., 1999). Consequently, achieving sustainable innovation in this sector demands a comprehensive systemic transformation. This transformation entails integrating environmental, social, and economic values (Seuring & Müller, 2008), implementing green supply chain management through strategic collaboration (Gold et al., 2010), employing innovative experiential marketing to craft positive and

memorable dining experiences, fostering groundbreaking culinary artistry (Ferguson, 2004), and cultivating a novel environmental ethic that extends the concept of community to encompass land, water, flora, and fauna (Callicott, 1989).

### **3. Toward a concept of *restobriety*: a new paradigm for sustainable restaurant**

It is within this context of necessary systemic evolution that we introduce *restobriety*, a new conceptual paradigm specifically designed to reconcile the intricate demands of restaurant operations with a profound commitment to ecological integrity.

#### **3.1. Definition**

*Restobriety* is an approach to restaurant practices, derived from restaurant and sobriety. It's more than just being sustainable, it weaves ecological carefulness directly into how food sourcing and preparing, how people connect, and how they experience. It is defined as a conscious and deliberate sufficiency embedded across all stages of the restaurant's operation – from ingredient selection and sourcing, through cooking and serving, to the act of eating and consumption.

#### **3.2. Core principles of *restobriety***

The conceptual framework of *restobriety* is built upon a multidisciplinary foundation. It draws insights from *environmental ethics* (Callicott, 1989) - recognizing nature's intrinsic value); *culinary anthropology* (Fishler 2011) - understanding food as a potent vehicle for cultural meaning-making and the *experience economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) - focusing on transformative dining experiences rather than mere service provision. This interdisciplinary grounding positions *restobriety* as both a pragmatic approach and a significant theoretical contribution to sustainability discourse.

*Restobriety* is guided by five core principles:

*i) Constraint as creative force:* (Acar *et al.*, 2018): Limitations such as seasonal or local ingredients or resource scarcity serve as drivers of culinary innovation and artistic expression rather than impediments. This principle demonstrates how constraints paradoxically unleash creativity, forcing chefs or manager to discover novel solutions for menu within defined parameters. Examples include crafting distinctive signature dishes from locally available vegetables or developing innovative preservation techniques that enhance flavor profiles.

*ii) Sufficiency as luxury:* Quality intensification through thoughtful reduction, rather than excessive quantity (Bocken & Short, 2016), defines authentic dining and creates deeper, more refined experiences. This principle reframes luxury as adequacy and optimal use, exemplified by concise menus that prioritize flavor intensity and ingredient integrity over overwhelming choice. True value emerges from fewer, more carefully curated experiences that showcase culinary mastery and intention.

*iii) Transparent hedonism:* Pleasure is seamlessly linked with ecological accountability, allowing customers to derive enhanced joy from understanding the positive impact of their dining choices (Kadic-Maglajlic *et al.*, 2019). This creates fulfilling experiences that are simultaneously morally sound, where sensory satisfaction is amplified through ethical alignment. Diners experience deeper pleasure when understanding a dish's ethical origins— from regenerative farming practices to fair-trade sourcing relationships.

*iv) Systemic integration:* Ecological carefulness is woven into every operational facet, eliminating divisions between "green" practices and core business functions to achieve holistic transformation (Beske *et al.*, 2014; Seuring & Müller, 2008). Sustainability becomes inherent to the entire restaurant system, encompassing supply chain management, zero-waste processes, energy-efficient operations, and staff education. This comprehensive approach transforms

kitchen scraps into value-added products while reducing environmental impact and operational costs.

v) *Cultural contextuality*: Expressions of restobriety vary authentically across local food cultures, incorporating indigenous wisdom and adapting approaches rather than imposing universal standards (Sims, 2009). This principle ensures sustainable practices remain rooted in cultural expression through traditional fermentation techniques, time-honored cooking methods, or regional specialties that reflect local ecological systems. Cultural sensitivity prevents homogenized global trends while celebrating authentic gastronomic traditions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This research program sets out to investigate the practical conditions for implementing this restobriety model in the real world. It seeks to understand how it can be successfully integrated into the complex realities of the restaurant industry. The concept of restobriety represents a new research program that can be applied to logistics, finance, marketing, and human resources. For example, a key focus could be on how various stakeholders—such as restaurant managers, chefs, customers, and suppliers—perceive, interpret, and experience restobriety across different cultural and gastronomic contexts.

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