

Emerging Nordic food approaches

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Introduction

This special issue consists of six articles discussing the ongoing changes of food production and consumption in the Nordic countries and in particular the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The transformation of food production and consumption systems and the social and corporate responses to the observed negative environmental, health and other side-effects of the mainstream, industrialized food production-consumption model have been studied extensively. Research debates have centred around whether and in which ways the emerging new food economy entails a genuine paradigmatic change towards 'post-productivism' (Goodman, 2003; Marsden, 2013; Roche & Argent, 2015) and a 're-territorialisation' of the food economy with new opportunities for endogenous sustainable rural development (Watts et al., 2005; Ploeg & Renting, 2004; Winter, 2003). Such concerns have been summarized in the notion 'the new rural development paradigm' (Murdoch, 2000). Core conceptualizations of transformations of food systems have been and still are, as documented in the papers included in this special issue; 'conventions of quality' (Storper & Salais, 1997; Murdoch et al., 2000), 'alternative food networks' (Renting et al., 2003; Watts et al., 2005), 'short food supply chains' (Marsden et al., 2000), and territorially embedded marketing and certification schemes (Ilbery et al., 2005; Parrott et al., 2002).

Literatures on the emerging new food economy have been dominated by reports from a limited number of countries, in particular the UK, Holland, Italy and the US, while the ongoing changes in the Nordic countries are less comprehensively studied, although they are by no means un-explored (Byrkjeflot et al., 2013; Amilien et al., 2007). As reported in this special issue, Scandinavian producers, consumers and policy makers have come quite some way in transforming the approaches to the production and marketing of food. Main parts of this transformation parallels with the rest of Europe, however other aspects are uniquely Nordic. From a position with no distinct gastronomic profile, a new internationally trendsetting gourmet restaurant sector has sprung up in since the early 2000s, attracting the attention of global medias, gastronomic chefs and 'foodies'. Commentators credit the key initiating and inspirational role for this development to a group of charismatic chefs and gastronomic entrepreneurs, who in 2004 formulated and launched the 'New Nordic Cuisine' (NNC) manifesto. The manifesto aimed for a new way of cooking based on "ingredients and produce whose characteristics are particularly excellent in our climates, landscapes and waters"¹. Purity, freshness and seasonality were other salute words in the manifesto. At present, the NNC is one of the most prestigious and internationally successful cooking trends, represented at Bocuse d'Or, the unofficial world championship in cooking, winning in 2009 (Geir Skeie, Norway), 2011 (Rasmus Kofoed, Denmark), and 2015 (Ørjan Johannessen, Norway). Moreover, 11 of the latest 15 winners of gold, silver and bronze medals at the five

¹ See http://www.clausmeyer.dk/en/the_new_nordic_cuisine_.html.

competitions since 2009 are from Scandinavia². The Copenhagen Restaurant, NoMa, the winner of the British Restaurant Magazine's prize as the world's best restaurant 2010-12 and again 2014, has been one of the lighthouses of NNC in the shaping of a new Nordic, Scandinavian and Danish food identity and profile.

Notwithstanding the inspirational top-down effects of the NNC manifest and its founding protagonists, the changes of Nordic food markets started decades earlier in the form of pioneering and persistent bottom-up activities of business entrepreneurs and local communities throughout the Nordic countries. From a starting point in the 1980's when markets were utterly dominated by standardized, industrial food, a varied supply of specialized local culinary products have been developed and marketed. Local producer and distributor networks have been established, often as part of territorialized rural development strategies for economic diversification. The new culinary offerings and producer networks have become identity markers and components in place-branding activities of rural and urban tourism destinations and an inspirational basis for attempts of re-inventing regional 'terroir' qualities of food in Scandinavia.

Food transition

Authors in this special issue have been invited due to their differing thematic, theoretical and methodological backgrounds in order to reflect the variety of research communities interested in the topic of food. Thus, the papers apply a range of theoretical and conceptual perspectives such as 'convention theory', 'industrial marketing and purchasing network theory' and 'storytelling in provision of meal experiences'. However, despite the varying thematic and theoretical frameworks, all papers somehow directly or indirectly relate to and add to our knowledge of an ongoing, but far from completed *transition* of food systems in Scandinavia. Throughout the processes of editing and reviewing the papers, authors have been urged to discuss theoretical and empirical findings in terms of implications for a system-level transition.

During the last 15 years, transition studies have grown considerable in importance, based on early works by Dutch historians and social scientists (e.g. Geels & Schot, 2007; Geels, 2002). Originally, combining insights from economic history, organizational sciences, and sociology of technology studies, transition studies have evolved into a framework for analysis of possible sustainable transitions in particular sectors such as energy or transportation. More recently, food has emerged as a sector of interest to transition research (Marsden, 2013; Spaargaren et al., 2012).

According to Terry Marsden; "Transitions may be viewed temporally as periods in which opportunity for change opens up within a system (i.e. a socio-technical regime made up of dominant economic, industrial, political and scientific rules and assumptions) to produce something disconnected to earlier supporting structures, as the dominant system struggles to respond to surrounding (landscape) pressures" (Marsden, 2013, 124). In line with this, transition theories include three interacting societal levels; niches which are the nexus for innovations and new technologies, and the socio-technical regime including the dominating technologies, practices and policies, which determine a certain field of social activity. The third level is the socio-technical landscape which is the exogenous context including cultures changing only slowly.

The temporal dimension is explicit in transition studies, but authors underline the often rather weak spatial perspectives (Coenen et al., 2012). The lack of spatial perspectives is not, however, a general characteristic of research on food transition, which often suffers from a too strong focus on one particular spatial scale, the

² The Bocuse d'Or Winners' Academy, 2016, <http://www.bocusedor-winners.com/uk/chefs/>.

local, and thus is caught in what Born and Purcell (2006) term 'the local trap', i.e. "the tendency of food activists and researchers to assume something inherent about the local scale. The local is assumed to be desirable; it is preferred a priori to larger scales. What is desired varies and can include ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy, better nutrition, and food security, freshness, and quality" (Born & Purcell, 2006, p. 195). To Born and Purcell, and in the relational transition theory approach of Coenen and colleagues, scale is nothing that exists a priori, but is actively constructed by actors pursuing their goals; "Actors construct scales as they seek to look after their own interests within the networks most salient to them" (Coenen et. al., 2012, p. 975). Actors operating across different scales and places actively construct networks in a process of inter-localization.

Although only few of the articles in this issue explicitly apply transition theory perspectives, they commonly illustrate the possibilities of and obstacles for transitions in differing Scandinavian, national, regional and local contexts as well as the close interaction between the spatial and temporal dimensions of food transitions. A re-occurring challenge for niche producers is how to grow without losing the values – or changing the 'conventions of quality' - that are intimately connected to being supplier of 'organic', 'local' or other food qualities and that are sustained by complex network configurations and negotiations involving varying types of stakeholders. To grow often means re-scaling a firm's operation to reach out to a larger market, i.e. from a local to a national market. Papers in this issue investigate the re-scaling of food business activities in varying territorial and industrial settings, including the altering of relations to actors at other scales, or actors belonging to industrial configurations with other - sometimes conflicting - quality conventions.

Overall changes of food markets

The first paper provides an overall picture of the development of markets for specialty food and drinks in Denmark, Norway and Sweden during recent decades. Henrik Halkier, Laura James and Egil Petter Stræte start with presenting a definition of speciality food including two dimensions; localization and specialization. They go on by comparing, mainly in quantitative terms, the ongoing changes in food production and consumption and the related policies and institutional settings in the three Scandinavian countries. Based on their definition and sets of indicators they find that speciality food has increased in all three countries since the 1990s. Speciality food and drink seem to have a strong position in Sweden, particularly in organic food. Organic farmland represents 15% of total farmland according to the statistics. The figures are 6% and 7% in Norway and Denmark respectively. Norway has a relatively high number of products protected under labels based on criteria such as taste and raw materials. Denmark has made most use of the New Nordic concept and has seen a remarkable growth in microbreweries (Halkier et al., this volume).

Halkier and colleagues raises the question to what extent it is possible to outline a "Scandinavian model" of food governance. They argue that commonalities exist, particularly when it comes to a pattern of "...extensive interaction between central government, local government and private firms...." (Halkier et al, this issue, 14). The emergence of this pattern of interaction can be placed within a distinct historical-geographical context. What we today consider a consolidated niche of organic food have been well under way for decades. For instance, as part of the emergence of the alternative movement in Denmark, organic food was set on the agenda in the 1970s. A few farmers, processors and distributors supplied a minority of consumers, but the

policy support and institutional set-up of organic food in Denmark (including a national certification scheme) was starting to emerge already in the 1970s. In the remote valleys of Norway productivist agriculture influenced, but never transformed production or consumption completely. Due to harsh climate and poor soils, large scale industrialized agriculture as in Denmark and southern Sweden was impossible. Combined with a protectionist agricultural policy, which made imported food rather expensive, local food traditions had a better chance to survive. Thus, producers of specialty products such as fermented trout, beer and cheese were well positioned when urban consumers discovered specialty food from the 1990s and onward. Today several of these producers have obtained national PGIs, based on their ability to innovate from old recipes (Halkier et al., this issue). Remoteness and an agricultural policy both protectionist and supportive are thus a background for the relative success of specialty food in Norway.

Niches, firms and markets

Three articles deal with food transition from the perspective of niches, product categories and firms, and investigate the implications of systemic change and new market conventions for producers and the networks in which they are part. Based on a critical understanding of the current corporate food regime, Jacob von Oelreich and Rebecka Milestad explore how two Swedish organic initiatives possible can challenge this regime. Their discussion is based on a distinction between mainstream organic food and an emerging organic 3.0 challenging the mainstream. Organic 3.0 aims for a new level of sustainability, with a stronger focus on systemic impacts including health, ecology, fairness and trade. A distinction between reformist strategies facilitating niche growth and more radical 3.0 approaches that are likely to challenge the regime is introduced. The firm based on mainstreaming has succeeded in supplying large volumes of organic meat to its retail partners. However, the firm had to compromise its identity and the ambition to create a 3.0 niche within the organic niche is by and large unaccomplished (von Oelreich & Milestad, this volume). The other firm, an organic box scheme, has been more successful in promoting organic 3.0 values along with its distribution of organic food. It seems however, that keeping to values of fairness and ecology has curbed the growth of the firm.

Gunn-Turid Kvam, Hilde Bjørkhaug and Ann-Charlott Pedersen investigate how changes in network relations can influence an organic firm's identity. Like von Oelreich and Milestad, Kvam and colleagues are concerned about the identity of organic firms, in this case an organic dairy starting to cooperate with a major retailer. The ambition of the mid-scale dairy is to retain its core values while growing into a national supplier through establishing business relations with one of the three major retailers in Norway. The industrial marketing and purchasing perspective guides the analysis of network relationships. Authors point out there are few cases of successful growth strategies among Norwegian mid-scale values based organic firms, the case reported on here might be the only one. The study documents the possibility of staying true to organic values while re-scaling operations from a regional to a national supplier of organic milk.

In the article by Martin Hvarregaard Thorsøe, Chris Kjeldsen and Egon Noe the scale of analysis is shifted from the micro to the meso level, more specific to the product categories craft beer, specialty flour and organic broilers. Their analysis is guided by conventions theory where conventions are seen as an organizing element of actors along the food chain. The case studies demonstrate that if transitions within product categories are

to take place, changes have to take place in several domains along the value chain. What the authors term a multidimensional reconfiguration has taken place in the cases of specialty flour and craft beer, but not in the case of organic broilers. Food trends are potentials for change that may or may not find a concrete expression in particular products, dependent on whether quality conventions are interpreted in a way that makes coordinated change possible.

These three papers add knowledge concerning preconditions for successful food transitions and the interdependent re-scaling. Strong organic values and good skills in managing network relations are part of the reason why the mid-scale values based organic dairy in Norway succeeded. The two organic Swedish firms experienced success that is more modest and there seems to have been a trade-off between growth and organic values, in particular the “deeper” organic 3.0 values. The three Danish cases document diversity among transitions of national value chains. The authors emphasize the role of quality conventions, but in their description of why organic broilers so far has not succeeded, material aspects of this particular food commodity, impacting technologies at the abattoirs, are taken into account. Abattoir technological systems are based on economies of scale and are not very flexible for variations in the dimensions of the processed animals. Small batches of organic broilers of varying sizes do not add to the bottom line. In the case of craft beer economies of scale so far has been irrelevant, since consumers are willing to pay a higher price for craft beer. However, this situation may change as the competition amongst the many new micro breweries is supposed to grow and some breweries will be forced to introduce economics of scale in order to survive in the marketplace.

A lesson learned from these micro- and meso level case studies is that there is no one way to a transition of individual products or product categories. Food trends, such as the heightened interest in specialty food in general and Nordic food in particular, help establish an action space that may or may not lead to transitions of particular products or product categories in a particular market. However, it is important to stress that what is ‘specialized’ and what is ‘standardized’ depends on the temporal and spatial context. In a transition theory perspective, standardization of newly developed ‘specialized’ products and technologies, upscaling of niche productions, and diffusion of the now ‘standard’ technologies and products, are crucial elements in the definition of when transition is achieved and realised. In this sense, a food transition has not been accomplished until former specialized, restricted technologies have become standard and cheaper. As exclusiveness and distinctiveness are important goals for producers and consumers of quality food, this might actually constitute a structural market barrier for fully accomplishing a transition of our food systems. Such a large-scale transition would imply that both producers and consumers would lose precisely what constitute them - their exclusiveness.

To the extent that the articles deal with transition of food systems, they focus on social, cultural and economic aspects and drivers of food transition rather than on environmental aspect. The discussions in the papers are not whether the studied food approaches are more sustainable and environmental friendly than the dominating food models. Instead, the papers investigate topics such as social just trade and work relations, consumer experiences and rousing forms of place branding. This reflects the interests of the contributing authors, but also seems to mirror a more general characteristic of the emerging food approaches in Scandinavia. Regrettably, consumers’ concerns for environmental sustainability seem to be subordinate to concerns for individual freedom, feelings against social and economic inequality and individualized preferences.

Food as a means for innovation in tourism and rural development

In the last two articles, the focus is lifted from exploring changes and innovations inside the traditional agri-food sector of farmers, manufacturers and distributors to the investigation of food as a means for tourism innovation, place-branding and economic restructuring of rural areas. The chosen topics of the two papers, storytelling in meal provision and food-based place promotion of rural areas, in themselves are indications that the social and economic landscape for food production and consumption in Scandinavian countries have changed during recent years and new commodification strategies have consolidated. Consumption, including the processes of selecting, purchasing, preparing, consuming, evaluating, and memorizing specific goods, is an important part of identity formation and social positioning of individuals and groups (Lash & Urry, 1994; Arnould & Thomson, 2005; Miele 2006). In transition theory terms, this is an indicator of changes at the landscape level of the present food regime.

The food and drinks sector is an excellent example of such macro trends, inciting innovations at niche and regime levels. The majority of consumers may still consider foods and drinks mainly as tangible goods serving functional purposes (hunger and nutrition) and as indicated by the analysis of Halkier et al (this issue). Measured in statistical, quantitative terms the industrial food regime may seem only marginally impacted by the introduction of varying types of 'alternative' products in terms of economic structures, power relations and carbon dependency. However, we should not overlook the implications for both small and large producers and retailers of the fact that for a growing minority of consumers food have become a cultural identity marker, loaded with a variety of symbolism and meanings. Storytelling and dialogue with consumers and other stakeholders through packaging, the internet and other channels are today imperative for actors along the supply chain. Furthermore, as evidenced by the two last papers, the creation of supplies of food with a local and regional profile and the establishment of an internationally trendsetting gastronomic sector, have provided opportunities for new tourism products and changed the identity and self-promotion strategies of many rural areas.

In their analysis of restaurants and caterers serving tourists, Lena Mossberg and Dorthe Eide retain a basic production-side perspective. However, their theoretical approach differs from most agri-food studies as they apply the 'Experience Economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) as an overall analytic framework for understanding of value creation and strategic management of restaurants and tourist attractions. Through three case studies from Sweden and Norway Mossberg and Eide explore how tourism-based restaurants and attractions in practical terms use storytelling for provision of meal experiences for their visitors, and to what extent storytelling contributes to local socioeconomic development.

Although the cases all connect to the 'New Nordic Cuisine' as they use local food products and emphasize the freshness and seasonality, they are not the usually researched and media-hyped types of up-market, highly specialized and dedicated gourmet restaurants such as NoMa (Petruzzelli & Savino, 2012; Leer, 2016), with appeal mainly for the segment of 'foodies'. On the contrary, the studied cases target a broader segment of consumers, and rely on a limited offer of standardized, unsophisticated menus, based on traditional Nordic recipes and served to a large number of guests. This allows the restaurants to stick to their respective concepts and control the quality of their offerings. Reliance on, on the one hand, scale, standardization and efficiency, and on the other hand the abilities of delivering unique stories and experiences to consumers with

dedicated demands may seem contradictory, but reminds about the usefulness of the World of production model of Storper and Salais (1997), applied in numerous food studies (e.g. Murdoch & Miele, 1999; Morgan et al., 2006; Manniche & Testa, 2010; Stræte, 2008). The model outlines four action frameworks for firms of which the standardization-dedication market world encapsulates the balancing of the above contrary demands. More importantly, the case illustrates that standardization of products, technologies and services is an integral phase of any product/technology life cycle, including the specialized markets for 'unique' New Nordic Food.

Tourism-based activities also forms the context for Szilvia Gyimóthy's paper. The object of study here is the food-place promotion of rural tourist destinations in Denmark, especially regarding the construction, legitimization and representation of 'terroir' qualities of local food. Hence, food and food sector activities are studied indirectly via an analysis of the rhetorical approaches applied in diverse tourism promotion materials. Despite this analytical 'outsider' perspective, Gyimóthy connects directly to one of the key questions in the issue, namely what characterizes the emerging Nordic approaches to develop, produce and market local, artisanal food as compared to the approaches applied in other parts of the world such as Southern Europe or North America? Gyimóthy asks the following way: How should we conceptualize Nordic place promotion strategies and terroir constructions? What rhetoric approaches and ideologies position Nordic regions as food places against more established Mediterranean competitors where gastronomic cultures have evolved over centuries?

Gyimóthy's point is the fact that the exploitation of regional gastronomy and culinary heritage in place branding is a relatively new phenomenon in the Nordic countries, but during the last decade have become widespread among rural tourist destinations. On the basis of a review of literatures on strategies of commodifying food and rural terroir, which are heavily focussed on Mediterranean countries, Gyimóthy classifies two different types of narrative commodification strategies, both 'conservationist' and reflecting contexts where terroir stories are nurtured by arguments of longevity and traditions: accreditation and patrimonialization. According to Gyimóthy, none of these are capable of describing the distinct food commodification strategies applied in Scandinavian contexts, as presented in promotion materials. To close this gap she suggests a conceptualization of 'narrative strategies framing touristic terroir' in which the two above conservationist approaches are supplemented with two 'transformational', exotising and enterprising strategies. Notwithstanding the current success of such terroir constructions, in which the story-motifs of playful and innovative Nordic gastronomic entrepreneurs have replaced the clichés of agricultural traditions and romantic countryside idyll exploited in South Europe, Gyimóthy also warns they may fall into a conformity trap and fail to single out a distinct identity against more established culinary destinations.

Towards a Nordic food transition?

In analysis of comparative developments in Denmark, Sweden and Norway questions concerning a possible Nordic model are frequently raised. The content of such a model is fluid, but often includes discussions on the welfare state, economic policy and women's rights (Engelstad & Haglund, 2015). In a discussion of Nordic food transformations it is tempting to look for evidence of a Nordic model of food transformation. In their discussion of a Scandinavian model, Halkier et al. open up for the possibility of such a model of food governance, distinguished by "...extensive interaction between central government, local government and

private firms to stimulate growth of specialty food” (Halkier et al., p.xx, this issue). Indeed, government involvement has been visible particularly on the supply side of specialty food since the 1990s, e.g. in relation to organic food, but we are not able to identify anything near a complete Nordic model of food transitions, unique to this part of Europe. The emergence of specialty food probably has been helped by more systemic characteristics of the Nordic countries that have supported innovation in general. According to one commentator this includes “...a high degree of labour force egalitarianism and engagement over labour relations as well as technical issues; a strong commitment to high levels of welfare provision and expenditure; a pronounced localism in service delivery in otherwise centralized states and a commitment to often quite radical or communitarian forms of social democracy in the political sphere” (Cooke, 2016, 192). We may add to these conditions the widespread public concerns for and policy and regulation schemes in support of the environment, even though, as mentioned before, the issue of environmental sustainability certainly not always is the main priority of Scandinavian producers and consumers.

These qualities of Nordic societies are however not articulated into any sort of action plan to challenge the current food regime. We consider the current food regime with its major actors including retailers, food processing industry and industrialized agriculture to continue “business as usual”, controlling something like 95% of the market among them. There does not seem to be major cracks in the regime that cannot be adjusted by regime actors themselves. Nevertheless, even though a diminishing number of actors control a growing part of the value chain, the conditions for competing on markets for foods and drinks unquestionably have changed since the 1990s. Even a large transnational corporation like Carlsberg has not been able to control the taste of beers of consumers in its home market. Danish beer drinkers have demonstrated that they are willing to pay more for craft beer and that economy of scale is not always the most profitable strategy for producers. The case of Danish craft beer and several other cases discussed in this special issue warns researchers that figures of market shares among the big processors and retailers only tells a part of the picture. Even the largest retailers have had to make adjustments to allow small, local or organic producers to offer their products in their stores. These examples clearly illustrate that the lines between what once were two distinct supply chains, the conventional and the alternative, have become blurred and no longer should be considered in dichotomist terms (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

The articles in this special issue explore how these lines have become blurred but surely do not present the concluding answers. The editors propose comparative research across Europe to learn more about the regional differences in what seems to be an omnipresent but slowly emerging food transition. Such research should include efforts to establish better, and publicly available, quantitative data on this transition. While there is a lot of interest in questions concerning possible transformations in sectors such as energy and transportation, no issue or “sector” is actually more encompassing than the food we eat. Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach formulated this quite eloquently already in 1863; “Der Mensch ist, was er ißt.”

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