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## **Regional development platforms and related variety**

*Exploring the changing practices of food tourism in North Jutland, Denmark*

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*Published in:*  
European Urban and Regional Studies

*DOI (link to publication from Publisher):*  
[10.1177/0969776414557293](https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776414557293)

*Publication date:*  
2016

*Document Version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
James, L., & Halkier, H. (2016). Regional development platforms and related variety: Exploring the changing practices of food tourism in North Jutland, Denmark. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(4), 831-847. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776414557293>

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**Regional development platforms and related variety: exploring the changing practices of food tourism in North Jutland, Denmark**

## **Abstract**

There has been growing interest in regional policies that stimulate interactions between different sectors, often based on the concept of ‘related variety’. Harmaakorpi (2006) has described the identification and development of new cross-sectoral growth trajectories as building ‘regional development platforms’. This article contributes to conceptual debates about cross-sectoral regional development platforms and provides empirical analysis of attempts to create and develop such a platform. From a conceptual perspective we argue that the notion of related variety can help policymakers to identify potential combinatorial platform opportunities, but may overestimate the ability of ‘related’ actors to collaborate together in innovative ways, because knowledge is embedded in practice and the process of ‘combining’ knowledge in new activities therefore challenging. The paper illuminates the development of cross-sectoral platforms by examining the creation of new activities from a practice perspective that directs attention to the everyday activities, routines and understandings that constitute the ‘doing’ of economic development. We explore the development of a cross sectoral platform in the North Jutland region of Denmark, which integrates actors from the food and tourism sectors into a new food-tourism platform. We identify the dominant forms of the practices of producing food, retailing, catering, and promoting tourism, and then consider the ways in which these have changed in response to new cross-sectoral initiatives. The analysis shows that some aspects of practice are easier to change than others, and we conclude that an analytical approach inspired by practice theory can identify the requirements in

terms of micro-level change in the practices of actors that is required for an initiative to succeed.

**Keywords:**

Regional development platforms; practice; related variety; food; tourism

**Introduction**

Over the last twenty years regional development policy has been heavily influenced by arguments about the benefits of specialised 'clusters' of economic activity and cumulative knowledge dynamics with policies to support 'Marshallian' agglomeration externalities (Asheim et. al, 2006; Martin and Sunley, 2003; Malmberg and Power, 2005). Recently, however, there has been renewed interest in policies that stimulate interactions between different sectors, building on Jacobs externalities where a heterogeneous mix of sectors in a region 'improves the opportunities to interact, modify, and recombine ideas, practices and technologies across industries...variety in itself may be an extra source of knowledge spillovers and innovation' (Frenken et al., 2007: 687). Cooke (2012) identifies a new dimensioning of industrial knowledge flows in regional economies, from vertical, cumulative and sectorally specialized "silos", to horizontal and combinatorial "platforms". He argues that regional development agencies across Europe are brokering innovation through policies and projects to identify and capitalise on 'related variety': the

presence of sufficient difference between existing economic activities in a region for novel recombinations of knowledge but not so much that communication and collaboration between the relevant actors is impossible (Frenken et al., 2007). The identification and development of new growth trajectories on the basis of related variety has been described as building 'regional development platforms' (Harmaakorpi, 2006; Cooke, 2007).

In this article we aim to contribute to conceptual debates about cross-sectoral regional development platforms and provide empirical analysis of attempts to create and develop such a platform. From a conceptual perspective we argue that the notion of related variety can help policymakers to identify potential combinatorial platform opportunities, but may overestimate the ability of ostensibly 'related' actors to collaborate together in innovative ways. This is because the process of 'combining' knowledge in new activities is not straightforward, even when those involved are working the same sector or firm, (Carlile, 2002; Bechky, 2011). Research in the field of organisational learning and innovation suggests that one of the main reasons for this is that knowledge is embedded in practice (Duguid, 2005; Brown and Duguid, 2001). Reckwitz (2002: 249) defines practice as '...a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge'. In this paper we aim to further

understanding of the development of cross-sectoral platforms by examining the process by which new activities are created from a practice perspective. Using practices as a unit of analysis directs attention to the everyday activities, routines and understandings that constitute the 'doing' of economic development. Where cross-sectoral collaboration requires only moderate adaptations or supplementations to existing practices, the successful development of cross-sectoral platforms is likely to be easier. We argue that more attention needs to be paid to the process of changing practices within and between the sectors involved if these policies are to succeed in furthering regional economic development.

Drawing on the work of Nicolini (2011) we identify three key aspects of practice: sayings and doings, practical concerns; and timing and tempo, which afford a basic set of 'sensitising questions' for the analysis of practices. We use this approach to explore the development of a cross sectoral platform in the North Jutland region of Denmark, which integrates actors from the food and tourism sectors into a new food-tourism platform. We identify the dominant existing forms of the practices of producing food, retailing, catering, and promoting tourism in the region which bring together actors involved in different sectors. We then consider the ways in which these have changed in response to policymakers' efforts to institute new cross-sectoral initiatives. This analysis shows that some aspects of practice are easier to change than others and helps to explain the relative success of some initiatives compared to others.

## **Related variety and regional development platforms**

The concept of 'related variety' refers to the presence of different industries between which there is sufficient difference for novel recombinations of knowledge, but not so much that communication and collaboration between the relevant actors is impossible (Frenken et al., 2007). It has been argued that such recombinations offer opportunities for innovation and the renewal of regional economies: Asheim et al. (2011), reviewing recent research on the importance of related variety for regional growth (e.g. Cooke, 2007; Boschma and Iammarino, 2009), conclude that knowledge spillovers across related sectors is important, and that new industries are 'deeply rooted in related activities that are present in a region' (Asheim et al., 2011: 895). They argue that countries and regions are more likely to expand and diversify into sectors related to existing economic activities, that regional development is likely to be stronger where there are technologically related sectors in a region, and the greater the number of related sectors, the more opportunities for knowledge to 'spill over'.

For this line of research, and potential policy applications, much depends on the definition of 'relatedness'. Studies undertaken by Frenken et al. (2007), Boschma and Iammarino (2009) and used the standard classification of industries to define related



industries as those which share the same two-digit coding. Using sectoral classifications alone, however, gives a rather limited measure of difference/similarity. As Boschma et al., (2011: 242) note, it does not 'capture the whole range of possibilities by which products or industries can be related, like similarities in regulatory framework, complementarities in their use, the intensive use of a certain type of infrastructure, the use of advertisement to build trade marks'. They use alternative measures of relatedness: the products' proximity index (Hidalgo et al., 2007) and the geographical correlation of employment across traded industries (Porter, 2003). Other researchers have distinguished further types of proximity/distance that may affect learning and collaboration between actors; for example, cognitive proximity (Nooteboom, 2009), 'organised proximity' (Torre and Rallet, 2005) and social proximity (Boschma, 2005)

The implications of this work for the development of cross-sectoral policies for regional development seem relatively straightforward: firstly, that some degree of cognitive proximity - but not too much - is necessary for people to be able to learn from each other and collaborate together successfully; and, secondly, that other dimensions of 'proximity', such as social, institutional, organisational and geographical proximity, may facilitate this. Regional development policies based on related variety therefore require analysis of the complementarities between existing regional resources and the degree of 'proximity' between current activities. This type of policy has been described as building 'regional platforms of related variety' (Harmaakorpi, 2006; Cooke, 2007; Uotila et al.

2012). Examples can be found in Skåne, Styria, Bavaria and Midi Pyrenees (Cooke, 2012), Tuscany (Lazzaretti, 2010), and Lahiti (Harmaakorpi, 2006). Perhaps the most detailed exposition of this type of policymaking to date is offered by Harmaakorpi (2006) who suggests policymakers and regional stakeholders work through eight phases, in which the underlying potential in the region is explored and exploited.

However, the importance of related variety has been questioned. Desrochers and Leppälä (2004: 859), for example, while stressing the importance of combinatorial dynamics for innovation list several objections. They note that industrial classifications do not always ‘reflect the correlation between the demand for outputs or the various ways in which ideas are used and transferred between industries’. Moreover, they note the importance of generic technologies in different sectors, and various ways of overcoming the challenges of ‘cognitive distance’.

Research from the field of organizational learning and business studies also suggests that we should be cautious in assuming that ‘relatedness’ automatically assures successful collaboration and joint innovation. Many studies have shown that the embeddedness of knowledge - in people, tools, practices or routines - may render social, institutional or even knowledge proximity irrelevant (Cummings and Teng, 2003; Argote and Ingram, 2000; Teece, 2000). Proximity of one kind or another may build trust, reputation and interest in collaboration but where knowledge is deeply embedded in routines and

practices which are not shared, 'these boundaries may prevent communication despite all the obligations of good will and social capital that connect them or, indeed, all the incentives of financial capital that may entice them' (Duguid, 2005: 115). Indeed research has shown that even within organisations the process is difficult when knowledge is at stake within practices in which the different groups have made significant investments of time, money or self-identity (Orlikowski, 2006; Bechky, 2011; 2003). This creates what Carlile (2002; 2004) calls pragmatic barriers. In such cases it is not enough to 'transfer' knowledge between groups, nor even 'translate' it, when they do not share a common interpretive framework. Rather practices themselves must be 'transformed' and/or new ones created, with associated costs. All in all, this body of research suggests a different perspective on the development of combinatorial regional platforms. Rather than focusing solely on initial conditions - relatedness or proximity between existing activities - as the probable determiner of success, it directs attention to how the practices of different actors are (or would be) connected and how they must change in order for new collaborations or combinations of activities to develop. In the following section we set out in more detail how a practice-based perspective sheds light on attempts to initiate and sustain cross-sectoral regional development platforms.

### **A practice-based approach**

Reviews of the 'practice' literature frequently note that there is no such thing as an integrated or unified practice theory but instead a set of distinct traditions which may be loosely grouped together as 'praxeological' (see Nicolini, 2012; Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005; Schatzki, 2001). Most fundamentally theories of practice emphasise that even the most durable features of social and economic life - classes, institutions and organisations - should be considered as 'ongoing routinized and recurrent accomplishment[s]' (Nicolini, 2012:3). This gives rise to the notion of practices, conceived as sets of interconnected 'doings and sayings'; that is, bodily routines, practical and discursive activity. Reckwitz (2002: 249-50) thus defines practice as:

a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice - a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. - forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements.

According to Schatzki (1996:98), doings and sayings are connected together into practices through four mechanisms: practical and general understanding, rules, and teleo-affective structure. Practical understanding refers to knowing how to carry out a specific activity, what 'it makes sense to do' and being able to participate in practice competently. In this sense Nicolini (2012:166) describes practising as a 'form of emergent coping guided by intelligibility'. In addition explicit rules and instructions tie together actions and tasks within a practice. Teleo-affective structure refers to the fact that all practices unfold according to a specific sense of 'direction' and understandings about how a practice should be carried out, what is an acceptable performance of practice. This is reinforced by repetition, sanctions and peer pressure, but may well be contested and negotiated (Schatzki, 2002).

In their recent review, Jones and Murphy (2011) note a recent 'turn' to practice within studies 'striving to explain economic-geographical phenomenon', an epistemological shift which they equate with the analytical foregrounding of the everyday actions of actors which constitute, reproduce, or transform structural forms. Here two main strands of work can be identified. The first is concerned with practice as everyday rules and routines or regularized transactions (Jones and Murphy, 2011) that support production, exchange and learning activities in regional economies.

Nelson and Winter (1982: 14) define routines as a 'general term for all regular and predictable behavioural patterns of firms'. However, as many writers have noted, routines have both a behavioural and cognitive dimension (Becker, 2004). Routines act as organizational memory, a mechanism to coordinate the collective actions of employees, as well as in a political/governance role, acting as a means of internal control (routines as *truce*). Nelson and Winter (1984:16) also argued that there are different classes of routines. Some relate to the daily reproduction of core tasks ('operating characteristics'), some to strategies that are deployed in response to, e.g., changes in the economic environment. They also identified 'routine-guided, routine-changing processes'; i.e. meta-routines for changing lower level routines. In his review of the literature on organizational routines, Becker (2004) identifies a number of key features: recurrence, collectivity; processuality; specificity and path dependence. He also notes that routines may be 'mindless' in the sense that individuals follow rules, but may also be creative and adaptive. The variation of routines between organizations as a basis for selection is a fundamental assumption of evolutionary economic geography (Boschma and Frenken, 2006; 2009) and underpins the concept of related variety. Routines, for example, form a key part of what Nooteboom (2009) terms 'organizational focus', which has a competence/cognitive dimension and a governance dimension. Following the related variety literature, Nooteboom argues that the ability of organisations to collaborate together requires some, but not too much, difference in focus. Often the terms routine and practice are used synonymously, as in Jones and Murphy's contribution, or are not

clearly differentiated. For the purposes of this article the key difference is that, as Becker (2004: 651) puts it, ‘routines are embedded in an organization and its structures’ while practices are much broader and may cross over organizational boundaries to be shared among a wider community (Brown and Duguid, 2001).

The second strand of research identified by Jones and Murphy draws explicitly on the communities of practice literature (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and has explored the way in which shared practice within a geographically dispersed community supports successful learning and innovation. It also shows how common social practice within multinational firms helps coordinate business activities and build tacit knowledge despite a lack of physical proximity (Faulconbridge, 2010; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Jones, 2008). Our focus in this paper, however, is neither institutional practices (alone) nor the activities of globally dispersed professional communities. Rather we are concerned with identifying key dimensions of particular practices that are important constituents of specific economic activities - food production/retailing and hospitality/tourism – and the way in which policy makers have attempted to initiate changes in these practices and the relations between them in order to develop a cross-sectoral platform around a new activity: ‘food-tourism’.

This directs our attention to the tension between reproduction and change in practice theories, which tend to emphasise habituation, routine, and the reproductive character of

practices (Schatzki et al., 2001; Warde, 2005; Nicolini, 2012). One reason for this is the way in which learning and knowledge is conceptualised. In their classic text, Lave and Wenger (1991) outlined a theory of learning in which individuals become competent practitioners through a process of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. In this way practice is developed incrementally and cumulatively as it is reproduced through different generations of a community (Østerlund and Carlile, 2005; Orr, 1996; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Cook and Brown, 1999). This means that it is often difficult to share knowledge between different communities and/or create new cross-community practices because knowledge cannot be separated from an individual's engagement with the conceptual and material tools, practical understandings and rules that form a given practice (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002). However, practice theorists also stress that the performance of a practice is not simply mindless repetition or routine. Since practices must be constantly performed anew, there exist possibilities for adaptation, improvisation and change. Established understandings, procedures and objectives may be challenged and contested by practitioners; for example through the introduction of new tools and concepts (Magaudda, 2011). Furthermore individuals are involved many different kinds of practices, which may also be connected by shared use of objects, places and institutions. These connections and collaborations are means through which practice change internally and in relation to one another (Wenger, 1998; Carlile, 2002; Brown and Duguid, 2001).



The crossing of boundaries between practices continues to be debated within the fields of organisational and workplace learning, for example, “knot-working” (Engeström 2008), inter-agency collaborations (Edwards et al. 2009) and the “recontextualisation” and “reconfiguration” of practice in creative and innovative ways (Guile 2010), but from the perspective of cross-community practices – e.g. cross-sectoral policy platforms – the work of Paul Carlile (2002; 2004) is particularly instructive because he distinguishes between three types of boundaries between practices: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. These are defined by the extent to which the differences and dependencies between the practices are known and the extent to which the communities trying to collaborate will have conflicting interests as result of changing existing knowledge (e.g. about how to produce food or cook a meal) and creating new practices. In the case of a syntactic boundary exchange of information and objects may be sufficient. A semantic boundary indicates the need to develop common understandings that reach across the ‘thought worlds’ associated with different practices. The development of joint practices is most difficult in the case of pragmatic boundaries where differences in practices results in conflicting interests,. Here the different actors must not only be able to represent differences and dependencies through common meanings but also be able try alternatives, make trade-offs and negotiate new practices.

In summary, practice-based approaches direct our attention towards the everyday ‘saying and doing’ of economic development and the material practices through which change is

effected 'on the ground'. This forms a complementary perspective that can be used in addition to analyses of governance structures, regional networks or quantitative measures of relatedness. Policymaking involves the creation of incentives and rules through which the behavior of economic actors is influenced (Halkier, 2006). By highlighting the ways in which economic knowledge is bound up in different practices, this approach sheds light on the challenges to successful cross-sectoral innovation that reaches across the boundaries between existing practices. Equally, however, the indeterminacy of practice, which must be constantly renewed, opens up space for adaption, change and the creation of new joint-practices, as in the creation of a regional platform.

## **Methodology**

The plurality of practices theories is matched by a plurality of methodological approaches to studying practices empirically. These range from the extreme micro-scale, as in conversation analysis, through participant observation of small communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to interview-based studies (Halkier and Jensen, 2011) and mapping the connections between constellations or networks of practice, which stretch across space. Recognising this, Nicolini (2010) describes a variety of strategies for studying practice under the headings of zooming in and zooming out. Mapping the boundaries of practice is extremely difficult given that they overlap through multiple membership and shared objects and discourses. As Jones and Murphy (2011: 382) note, the demarcation of

practices is not a process by which they are fixed permanently but ‘an analytical strategy that seeks to temporarily stabilize them such that their cognitive, structural and spatial characteristics can be understood more clearly’. In this study we have analysed a constellation of key production practices that are connected together by their association with food and tourism in North Jutland in Denmark, a region in which both coastal leisure tourism and food production play major roles, as illustrated by Table 1. These were identified through a review of the literature on food tourism, and the practices are: ‘producing food’, ‘retailing food’, ‘catering’ and ‘promoting tourism’ and are described further in the following sections.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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Empirical research was designed as a case study of food tourism platform initiatives in the region of North Jutland in Denmark, covering both regional initiatives and initiatives in two coastal tourist destinations, Jammerbugten and Hals (see Figure 1). Both of the local destinations are important in the regional visitor economy with a main focus on German, Norwegian and Danish families with traveling with kids, but Jammerbugten, a local authority area facing the North Sea, has a richer local offer of quality food compared to Hals, a fishing village with a large adjacent area of holiday homes, at least in terms of members of the regional quality food network *Smagen af Nordjylland*. The

empirical material included relevant regional and local policy documents as well as in-depth interviews with participants in each of these practices, including public policy professionals working with tourism and/or food (5), food producers (6), caterers (7) and retailers (4). Taken together the policy professionals represented all the organizations involved in the North Jutland food tourism platform at the regional level, and the private sector representative were chosen on the basis of their prominence in the two selected coastal localities as producers, retailers and caterers of quality food services.

The interviewees were asked to reflect on their own practices, how they were connected to other practices, and how they had (or had) not changed as a result of attempts to develop a food tourism platform. Drawing on Nicolini (2012: 220) we explore four dimensions of practice. Firstly we identify the key (and marginal) actors within each practice and their relations to one another. Secondly we analyse ‘sayings and doings’, that is, what activities are undertaken as part of the practice. Thirdly we discuss the practical concerns, that is the objectives of those engaging in the practice, and what concerns them in day-to-day activities. Finally we explore the temporal organization of the practices, the sequence and rhythms of doings and sayings. In the following sections we examine the dominant form of existing practices and then consider how these changed – or not – as a result of policy initiatives.

### **Food tourism: Exploring combinatorial knowledge dynamics**

The food and tourism sectors are complex and diverse economic activities centered on related product groups – sustenance and travel respectively – that each have areas of core knowledge, namely agro-science and visitor experience management, and different forms of innovation. The food sector is dominated by systematic R&D efforts and the tourism sector relying more on interactions between small firms and publically initiated network activities (Manniche, 2010; Halkier, 2013).

In any tourist destination food is important in the sense that travelling humans need sustenance, but is often sourced through international supply chains and/or local culinary traditions play a limited role in tourist experiences. In contrast to this ‘feeding tourists’ paradigm, food tourism is defined as travel informed by “the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region” (Hall & Sharples, 2003: 10). In some localities – e.g. Tuscany – food tourism is well-established, but in most European regions cross-sectoral relations are either limited or not systematically exploited (Therkelsen and Blichfeldt, 2012). Offering local products and culinary traditions to visitors does, however, add the image of tourist destinations while supporting economic activity in adjoining rural areas (Sims, 2010; Halkier, 2012). Thus cross-sectoral platform policies focusing on food tourism are attractive to public policy-makers.

Food tourism involves four central practices:

- producing food (produce and products) either by specialist professionals or by the tourists themselves through hunting or gathering,
- retailing, through a range of distribution channels, food is sold to consumers or restaurants
- catering, either by specialist chefs or the tourists themselves, raw materials must be transformed to in meals
- promoting the possibility of attractive food experiences to existing and potential visitors.

The configuration of these practices will vary between localities; however, it is possible to identify three main ways in which policymakers have tried to link the two sectors. The first is *destination branding* where local culinary/food-related practices are highlighted in order to market the destination on the basis of their particular qualities (authentic, exotic, creative, etc.). Typical platform initiatives include market communication and increasing visitor accessibility, e.g. by spicing down or making iconic dishes available outside the festivities with which they are traditionally associated (Parrott et al., 2002; Ilbery et al. 2005). The second approach involves the *creation of new food tourism experiences*. Typical platform initiatives include attempts to ‘localise’ restaurant menus, food fairs making local products available for visitors, or establishing of visitor ‘trails’ through the

destination to locations associated with particular food or drink (Montanari and Staniscia, 2009; Gyimóthy and Mykletun 2009; Blichfeldt and Halkier 2013). Finally, the third group initiatives aim to *localise food consumption* so that purchases by visitors in supermarkets and eateries have a higher content of food products from the local area. Typical initiatives involve the creation of local networks, either between food producers to increase their market profile, or between suppliers and caterers/retailers to further direct trade (Renting et al. 2003; Holloway 2006).

While the two first types of initiatives attempt to create a very visible form of food tourism, increasing the local content of tourists' food consumption can be seen as a more low-profile activity that promotes local food production through increased visitor consumption. However, no matter what food tourism strategies are being pursued, their success will depend on the extent to which they are able to change – adapt, supplement or replace – existing practices with regard to producing, retailing, catering and promoting food as part of the visitor economy.

### **Existing practices: 'Feeding tourists' in North Jutland**

The dominant practices with regard to food tourism in North Jutland can best be captured under the heading ‘feeding tourists’, reflecting a producer-oriented approach delivering standardised services to a mass-market of predominantly self-catering visitors.

Agriculture in North Jutland is dominated by the production of standardized foodstuffs for global food chains, with the key practical concern for farmers being the maximization of revenue from sales and EU subsidies. A minority of actors produces food on a small scale for a local/regional niche market, often on a semi-artisanal basis and with high degrees of seasonality. These life-style businesses are typically concerned with subsistence rather than business growth, and producing according to specific quality standards, e.g. organic, place of origin, authentic production methods (Manniche, 2010; Eliassen and Raakjær, 2008).

In the traditional feeding-tourists paradigm the transformation of raw materials into meals involves two very different types of catering practices, namely self-catering and eating out. For tourists in North Jutland self-catering has been the predominant practice (Hjalager, 2009): most visitors stay in holiday homes with kitchen facilities, cooking with ingredients bought in local supermarkets or brought from home (Hagedorn, personal interview), “because when you travel with kids, eating is expensive and may conflict with bedtime routines” (Sandahl, personal interview). The occasional alternative to this dominant practice is eating out, and most restaurants produce standardised affordable



fare that appeals to the dominant visitor segment, families with children, where “food most not only be tasty but also served in large quantities” (Tømmerby, personal interview). Using input from national suppliers rather than dealing with a large number of small local suppliers, their main concern is profitable catering, and pre-fab ingredients play an important part of a rather industrialised cooking process, with seasonality limited to temporary inclusion of e.g. traditional Christmas fare on the menus (Hem, Slott, Tømmerby, Vitaljevic, personal interviews). A minority of restaurants emphasise creativity and quality in their menus, often run as lifestyle businesses with creative cooking from first principles and a strong seasonal character. They appeal to a minority of visitors, often travelling without children who are willing to pay more for quality and creative cooking where food with special qualities is part of the tourist experience (Toftelund Madsen, Sandahl, Hagedorn, Tømmerby, personal interviews).

Until recently food production in general and local quality food in particular played a very limited role in North Jutland development strategies while tourism promotion within the region was much more prominent. The core activity has traditionally been to market Danish destinations to prospective visitors abroad through VisitDenmark and the regional body VisitNordjylland, with local tourist offices providing visitor information services. The main concern was visitor numbers, with an important task for the public bodies to maintain the financial and organisational support of local stakeholders for these activities (Halkier and Therkelsen, 2013). Timing in terms of seasonality has been

important in tourism promotion: a longer season has been a long-standing ambition, but in North Jutland this is still far from being achieved although attempts have been made to develop new visitor experiences.

Given these well-established practices of producing, retailing, catering, and promoting within the boundaries of the feeding-tourists paradigm, introducing food tourism in North Jutland is clearly challenging. However, marginal food-related practices do exist in the region, producing and catering for a smaller quality-oriented market. Thus, actors that could contribute to a new food tourism paradigm exist.

### **Changing policy practices: towards a North Jutland food tourism platform**

The attractions of creating a food tourism platform in North Jutland are clear: quality food is a potential additional attraction for visitors, and tourists constitute an additional market for food producers. The ideal outcome would be expansion of quality food production and extension of the tourist season – with improving the brand of the North Jutland region as an added bonus. The first formulation of a platform policy approach can be found in the 2005 strategy of the North Jutland Growth Forum. Here the aim of the initiative were summarized as:

establishing a network of quality food producers (in North Jutland) ... in order to facilitate joint marketing, and inter-firm collaboration and learning... Associating the region with quality food will, in due course, help market the region to visitors and increase the use of local quality ingredients in the region's restaurants (Det Midlertidige Nordjyske Vækstforum, 2005, 19).

The regional tourism development body VisitNordjylland, primarily sponsored by the Regional Growth Fora, also focused increasingly on the role of food in regional tourism. Its efforts were clearly inspired by VisitDenmark's attempt to counteract stagnating visitor figures in coastal leisure tourism by extending the season beyond the three summer months (VisitDenmark, 2007), resulting in one of VisitNordjylland's strategic priorities being to

develop and market relaxing and pampering holiday experiences, based on regional food products and framed by the nature of North Jutland (VisitNordjylland, 2008, 13).

These parallel objectives were advanced through a combination of business-oriented profiling measures such as a website and networking events for producers and

professional users of quality food, as well as events aimed at the wider public within the region. Our analysis will focus on three initiatives:

- The *Smagen af Nordjylland* (Taste of North Jutland) network was established to “promote North Jutland as a region known for production of food and specialities of high culinary standard” ([www.smagen.dk](http://www.smagen.dk)), defined as quality raw materials and innovative experiences. Its members are predominantly food producers.
- *Hals Råvaremarked* (Hals Food Fair) was initiated by the local DMO *VisitAalborg* in collaboration with stakeholders from the local business association as a specialist Food Fair in a coastal holiday destination during the high season of July. The food fair comprises producers from all over North Jutland, brought together via the Smagen af Nordjylland network, and thus creates an opportunity for locals and visitors to access quality food from across the region.
- *Smag for Jammerbugten* (Taste for Jammerbugten) was initiated by VisitJammerbugten in 2011 as part of the national/regional strategy to prolong the season by appealing to new visitor groups (VisitDenmark, 2007; VisitNordjylland, 2008). The initiative involved the development by local chefs of six signature dishes based on ingredients from local producers, with associated

story-telling about aspects of life in Jammerbugten, with recipes available for visitors to cook themselves

All in all the North Jutland policy platform comprised branding, experiences and (to a lesser extent) localizing supply chains – and thus a comprehensive approach had been outlined that, if implemented systematically, would affect all the key practices, from producing, via retailing and catering, as well as promoting food tourism. In the following we first analyze how key aspects of these practices have changed as a result of initiatives associated with food tourism initiatives.

### *Producing Food*

Since the mid-2000s alternative food production practices, have expanded in North Jutland, both in terms of the number of producers and to some extent in the scale of their activities (Madsen, personal interview; [www.smagen.dk](http://www.smagen.dk)). Food is being produced with specific non-industrial ‘qualities’: using particular local natural resources (e.g. *Vildmose* potatoes, *Kildens* smokehouse), small-scale production techniques of a traditional or creative nature (e.g. *Åbybro* dairy, *Munch’s* Skagen sausages), often also based on organic ingredients (e.g. *Baksminde* orchard, *Aurion* flour). Most of these SMEs primarily serve local markets via their own (farm) shop or by supplying local supermarkets/restaurants. A few have gained a regional (e.g. *Ryå* ice cream) or national

(e.g. *Munch*'s Skagen hams and sausages) reputation. For these small producers there are concerns regarding the extent to which subsistence-type businesses can expand and prosper while maintaining quality standards. Association with similar businesses can reinforce their quality reputation and help them reach a wider market through participation in collective marketing and events.

The production of quality food in North Jutland has been supported by regional policy in a variety of ways. Firstly, the *Smagen af Nordjylland* initiative has helped build an image of quality food from North Jutland through its website, food-related events within and outside the region, increased collaboration between members across the region ([www.smagen.dk](http://www.smagen.dk); Madsen, Sandahl, personal interviews). This has helped create a greater awareness of quality products among individual consumers and professional users such as high-end restaurants. Activities that expose potential customers to the sensory qualities – seeing, smelling, tasting – of various food products are very important. The platform included new initiatives in retailing – e.g. *Hals Råvaremarked* and other local food events – and in catering – e.g. *Smag for Jammerbugten* and other attempts to increase the use of local produce by restaurants in the region – which make it easier for tourists to encounter quality food from North Jutland during their stay. However, policymakers have not attempted to stimulate innovation in the ways food is being produced within the region. Given the diversity of quality produce, food technologies and business concepts in the region, this was perceived as challenging (Madsen, personal interview).

Instead the policy platform concentrates on growing the market for quality food advertising, event-making and building of supplier-relations, something which helped to maintain the relative advantage of Jammerbugten as a ‘foodie’ destination compared to Hals.

### *Retailing*

Alternatives to the dominant way of retailing food have also developed in the region. Small producers had generally relied on direct sales (e.g. farm shops) supplemented by local restaurants and nearby-supermarkets, but found it difficult to cope with demands for large quantities and regular deliveries of the national supermarket chains (Madsen, personal interview), and for some producers maintaining a direct involvement in retailing is even seen valuable in its own right, like the orchard owner arguing that “it is important for us to present our apples ourselves to the consumer” (Thomsen, personal interview). Since the mid-2000s the market for quality food has increased in two ways. Firstly, these producers have grouped together which made them more accessible for quality-oriented eateries throughout and beyond the region (Madsen, Sandahl, personal interviews). Secondly, new food markets and other food-related events brought potential customers in direct contact with products from North Jutland and constituted attractions in their own right. This included experience-economy activities such as ‘food theatre’ with storytelling about ingredients, and recipes by producers and chefs ([www.smagen.dk](http://www.smagen.dk);

Madsen, Sandahl, personal interviews). These events follow potential customers. Thus food markets in selected coastal towns take place in the busy summer season (Ry Jensen, Madsen, personal interviews), while indoor events like the ‘food theatre’ can be found in cities in the winter ([www.smagen.dk](http://www.smagen.dk)). Participation in these new ways of retailing requires that producers engage in new practices: trading outside their local area with professional users, being present at local markets across the region, and entertaining potential customers rather than simply handing products across the counter. But unlike distribution through the national supermarket chains, the new ways of retailing require consumers of quality food to be present at a particular place at a specific point in time.

These new retailing practices have been supported by policy in a variety of ways. The regional *Smagen af Nordjylland* initiative stimulated new supplier relations with professional buyers such as restaurant chefs, and the initiative also facilitated local events by making it easier for local organizers to get in touch with quality producers from across the region (Madsen, Sandahl, Ry Jensen, personal interviews), and thus made it possible also for ‘less foodie’ localities like Hals to increase the role of food in their tourism offer.

Conversely, local organisers are still needed to coordinate physical aspects of the food market; for example *Hals Råvaremarked* shares a harbour-side space with the weekly all-purpose market in the main tourist season (Ry Jensen, personal interview). The motivation of public bodies and local businesses for engaging in this is clearly to increase the attractiveness of their particular destination vis-à-vis other localities, because markets



are events that create a local buzz that bring in additional visitors also benefit the stationary shops in the market town. It is also worth noting that the North Jutland food tourism platform largely ignored the main retailing channel for food, the national supermarket chains, although some local supermarkets are able to source some goods locally. One of the major producers interviewed said that “for years I have promoted the idea of *Smagen af Nordjylland* buying a warehouse and setting up a joint North Jutland quality food distribution system” (Lindhart, personal interview) – something that would make it easier for supermarkets and restaurants to handle an array of small producers – but this has not been pursued because it is seen as undue competition with private wholesalers (Sandahl, personal interview). Thus the changes to retailing primarily involve geographical extension of existing practices – supplying restaurants further afield, creating food-related events such as markets and festivals in more localities.

### *Catering*

In North Jutland the prevalent form of tourist accommodation is holiday homes, and therefore self-catering is the dominant practice among tourists while eating out is the exception. While self-catering has been discussed in the previous section under retailing, this section concentrates on professional catering where it is generally agreed that restaurant visits are predominantly driven by convenience – not having to cook – rather than a search for new culinary experiences (Sandahl, Tømmerby, Hem, Hagedorn, personal interviews). While the majority of catering has an ‘industrial’ character with

emphasis on quantity – large portions at small prices – a minority engage in more creative practices where the individual chef is in complete control of menus and the running of the kitchen. While practices of preparing food differ between average and high-end restaurants – pre-fab industrial versus first-principles creativity – both groups have relied on a limited number of suppliers as a way of economising resources. However, in recent years high-end restaurants have started to integrate local quality products in their dishes as a supplement to their mainstream suppliers, arguing that customers have become increasingly interested in the extra dimensions that local ingredients create in terms of perceived authentic qualities and possibilities for story telling around the meal (Hagedorn, Madsen, Tømmerby, Madsen, Slott, Viltaljevich, Pedersen, Christensen, personal interviews). The concern here is clearly to maintain their competitive edge vis-à-vis other above-average eateries. Moreover, it is clearly paramount to make these inputs – types of butter, local game, fish, or ice cream – visible to guests through menus and the storytelling of waiters. The seasonality of some of the local ingredients helps support another hallmark of quality eateries, namely menus that change over time. Interestingly, aspects of this is also mimicked by some average eateries that may include the locality in the name of some dishes, although “the meat is not different from what is otherwise used” (Hem, personal interview), thereby buying into the new quality paradigm without having the hassle and cost of dealing with, e.g. a small local producer of organic beef.

The increased use of local food in catering North Jutland has been supported by the regional food tourism policy platform in two ways. Firstly the regional *Smagen af Nordjylland* initiative encouraged new supplier relations by making producers of quality food visible to professional buyers such as restaurant chefs who could identify suitable ingredients in their creative efforts (www.smagen.dk; Madsen, Sandahl, personal interviews). Secondly, this creativity was encouraged by *Smag for Jammerbugten* which introduced new place-bound items on the menu of a group of high-end local eateries, creative variations on traditional dishes which included local ingredients – e.g. game, fish, ice cream – and accompanied the serving (and the recipes available to customers) with stories about local culture regarding fishing, hunting and producing food (Visitjammerbugten, 2013). Although these signature dishes were not shared between the restaurants – each had their own one(s) – the initiative created indirect links between the participating restaurants in that they all became stakeholders in the same territorial label and hence depended on each other in terms of maintaining quality and image. Most of the catering businesses interviewed saw the initiative as something that could potentially be good for business in relation to a particular customer segment (Haugaard, Hem, Slott, Tømmerby, Viltaljevic, personal interviews). However, while putting local story-telling on the menu generally appears to have unproblematic for restaurants that wanted to signal distance from standardized industrial catering, the linking of competing creative restaurants with independent-minded chefs and introduction of fixed items on the menu with publically available recipes was more challenging. Moreover, change with regard to

the suppliers has been more limited: “VisitJammerbugten did not try to force new suppliers on the participating eateries” (Hagedorn, personal interview), and as the participating restaurants were quality-oriented in the destination and to some extent worked with local speciality suppliers. In short, the policy platform initiatives provided additional momentum for including local quality products in the menus of high-end restaurants in a locality with a relative abundance of quality food producers, but did so in ways that left the original practices of individual chefs largely intact – while, at least at the local level, still creating new possibilities for associating local destinations such as Jammerbugten with quality culinary experiences.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, a practice oriented analysis of the cross-sectoral food tourism platform in North Jutland suggests that the sectoral classifications often used in research on related variety are not necessarily good predictors of the ability of actors to collaborate. In the case of ‘food tourism’, attempts to initiate platform initiatives involved two very different sectors, which were nevertheless already connected through input-output relations.

However, while the platform is presented as comprehensive, the main focus has been on creating food-related events, and branding of destinations through food has been low-

key. Efforts to localize suppliers are limited to restaurants and have ignored supermarket retailing. The overriding practical concern has been to increase the market for quality food from the region among tourists, and hence extend the turnover of existing producers, and this has been translated different platform strategies depending on whether (Jammerbugten) or not (Hals) local quality food producers were present locally in sufficient numbers. But even this fairly conservative cross-sectoral strategy has required adjustments of existing practices and introduction of new ones: producers have had to increase their geographical scope of operation outside their local area by trading with restaurants and attending specialist food markets and other events across the region, high-end caterers have had their freedom to set their menus somewhat restricted by signing up to signature dishes with associated local story-telling, and tourism promoters have become involved in developing new experiences rather than simply marketing existing ones. Several sources of the conservatism of the platform have been identified: some aspects of practices are seen as too difficult to change (e.g. centralized buying practices of restaurants and supermarkets), and the political context (rebrand peripheral region, extend tourist season) meant that practices that were visible (markets and other events) or have a new temporality (fine dining outside the main tourist season) were given priority over low-key measures such as increasing the amount of local quality produce on supermarket shelves in coastal destinations despite the vast majority of visitors staying in self-catering accommodation. From a food tourism perspective this underlines the importance of being able to distinguish between different types of

initiatives within the overall policy platform. Branding, event-making and localizing suppliers each require different changes to existing practices which the actors involved may be more or less inclined to embrace.

This strongly suggests that in order to understand the development of cross-sectoral policy platforms it can be fruitful to adopt an analytical approach inspired by practice theory, because this allows us to understand the requirements in terms of micro-level change in the practices/activities of groups of actors that is required for an initiative to succeed.

In relation to debates about related variety our findings raise two further questions: is it possible to identify under which circumstances practices likely to be compatible with one another and, secondly, how can the path dependency of practices be broken in order to develop combinatorial activities? The case study of food tourism initiatives in North Jutland has demonstrated that in order for cross-sectoral policy platforms to succeed, different types of boundaries will have to be navigated in order to create new practices, Returning to the boundary concepts of Carlile (2004) and Østerlund and Carlile (2005) discussed earlier,, it appears that in some situations syntactic boundaries have been overcome simply by exchanging information, e.g. by alerting restaurants to new suppliers, or inviting a producer who already sells at markets to add a new venue to their itinerary. In other cases semantic boundaries have had to be addressed, e.g. by setting up a joint

task force to develop common visions of food tourism and what it means for actors involved in different practices. Finally, in case of pragmatic boundaries with potentially opposing interests between the actors involved, the creation of common meanings has also entailed making trade-offs and negotiating new practices, as illustrated by the attempts to create 'brandable' signature dishes with only limited infringement of the autonomy of the participating chefs with regard to suppliers and menus. All in all this underlines the importance of knowing more about the differences and dependencies between the key practices involved when probing the potential of cross-sectoral synergies on the basis of e.g. quantitative studies of related variety. Moreover, it also highlights that negotiation of joint goals and transformation of existing knowledge is required, possibly through the work of boundary spanners and brokers (Wenger 1998), individuals who undertake the complex job of translations, coordination and alignment of different practices in which they are more or less peripherally involved. Here there would seem to be a potential role for sector organisations or public policy makers to help transfer, translate and transform practices as part of regional platform policies.

## **Interviewees**

Mikael Christensen, Kopp & Ko, Hals (restaurant)

Finn Hagedorn, VisitJammerbugten, Jammerbugten (local DMO)

Jimmy Lunde Haugaard, Rævhede Naturprodukter, Jammerbugten (producer, deer and other meat products)

Christian Hem, Restaurant Nordstjernen, Jammerbugten (restaurant)

Kim Højen, Schulstad Brød, Jammerbugten (industrial bakery)

Hardy Jensen, Nordjysk Fødevarenetværk (regional food traceability organisation)

Kim Ry Jensen, VisitAalborg, Hals (local DMO)

Henrik Lindhart, Åbybro Mejeri, Jammerbugten (Ryå Icecream)

Bente Albæk Madsen, Smagen af Nordjylland (regional quality food network)

Rene Toftelund Madsen, Det Skæve Køkken, Hals (restaurant)

Morten Pedersen, Rashus Klump Familierestaurant, Hals (restaurant)

Mette Sandahl, VisitNordjylland (regional DMO)

Inger Herdis Slott, Pandrup Kro, Jammerbugten (restaurant)

Susanne Thomsen, Æblegården Baksminde, Jammerbugten (orchard)

Jakob Tømmerby, Strandingskroen, Jammerbugten (restaurant)

Maxim Vitaljevic, Saltum Kro, Jammerbugten (restaurant)



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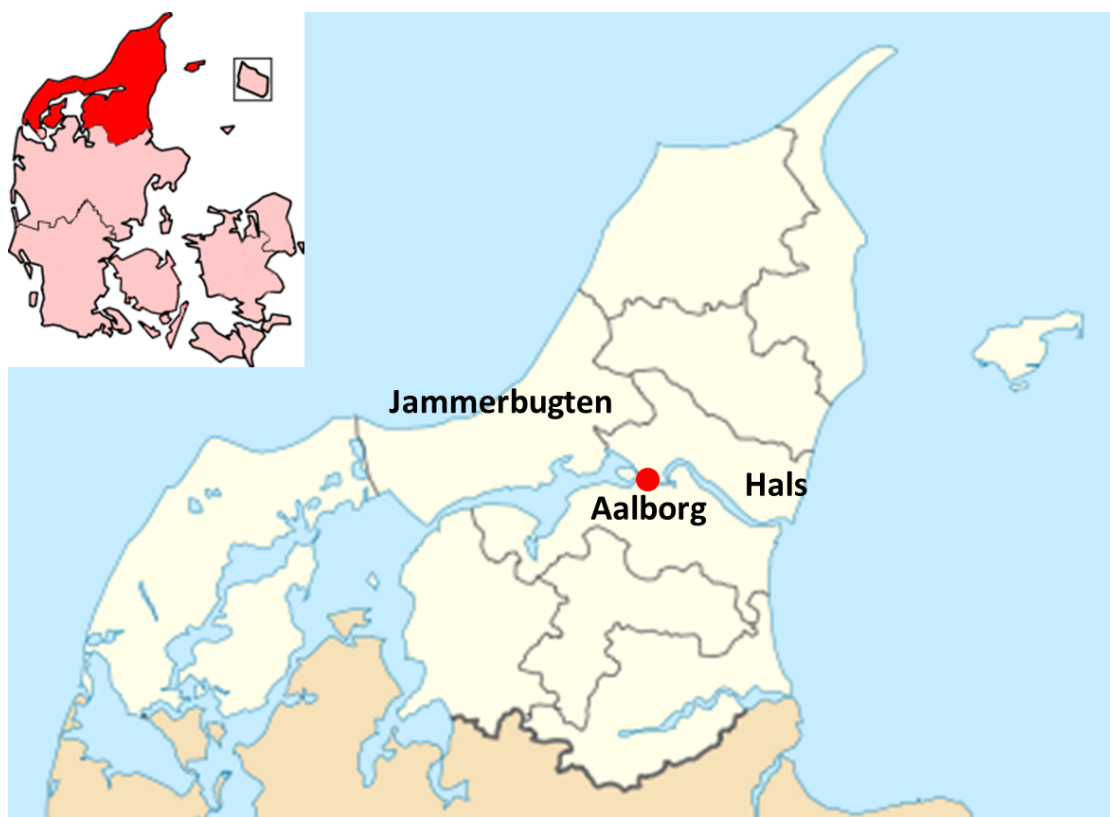


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FIGURES

**Figure 1: Map of North Jutland with case-study areas highlighted.**

*Source:* Wikimaps.



TABLES

**Table 1: Overview of the North Jutland Regional Economy**

	North Jutland	Denmark
Population 2014 (million)	0.58	5.63
GDP 2011 per capita (EUR)	37,700	43,200
Food/drink share of total employment 2013 (per cent)	5.75	3.63
Visitor nights (millions, 2013)	7.0	44.6
Tourism turnover as share of the regional economy 2011 (per cent)	2.4	1.9
<i>Sources:</i> Statistics Denmark, Eurostat, Napier & Bjerregaard 2013 p11, VisitDenmark 2014 p12, VisitDenmark 2013 p19.		