

# The Public as a Political Consumer

– caseinsights from developing regional public food strategies in Danish Region Nord.

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[www.menu.aau.dk](http://www.menu.aau.dk)

**Abstract.** The captive catering sector is an inherent part of most welfare systems providing food at a daily basis in settings for citizens in places such as school, kindergartens, hospitals and institutions. Although such service provision has a considerable impact on the health of the individual and on the environments the ambitions of this sector has long been limited to produce meals at the lowest possible cost. Public procurement has traditionally been guided solely by EU procurement directives setting strict rules for how to secure the lowest possible prices in the contract and with little room for taking health, sourcing and environment into consideration. However in recent year the captive catering sector has been experiencing a new interest in alternative procurement strategies placing more emphasis on the value of sourcing food in the adjacent local and regional area. This has contributed to development of what has been referred to as the outlines of a new food geography (Renting & Wiskerke). Being responsible for a large food procurement budget the public food sector has increasingly become aware of their power as consumers. And the idea that public procurement can take on a more active consumer role than previously and play a more active role in the local food economy is gaining momentum. Across Europe a growing number of municipalities and regions shows interest in incorporating the public food procurement in new sustainable consumption and healthy eating strategies. In Denmark this development has been particularly fuelled by new developments in the captive catering sector in which public food provision has been introduced in kindergarten and schools. At the same time public food has also been the target of government attempts to boost organic food and farming (Mikkelsen & Sylvest, 2012). This paper aims at giving insight from the case of Region North in Denmark and the experiences so far regarding barriers and opportunities in relation to local food sourcing for the hospitals in the regions. The paper reflect on the opportunities that new cooperative organisational project based frameworks offer in terms of overcoming constraints and barriers and concludes by giving recommendations for actions at short and long term that can facilitate local and regional food sourcing for public food systems.

# Political consumption

used to be unfolding in supermarkets  
where as public procurement used to be apolitical



# The food service chain is but could have been otherwise

“eating is an agricultural act”

Berry, W



“it’s a political act as well,”

Pollan, M



”public procurement is a political act”

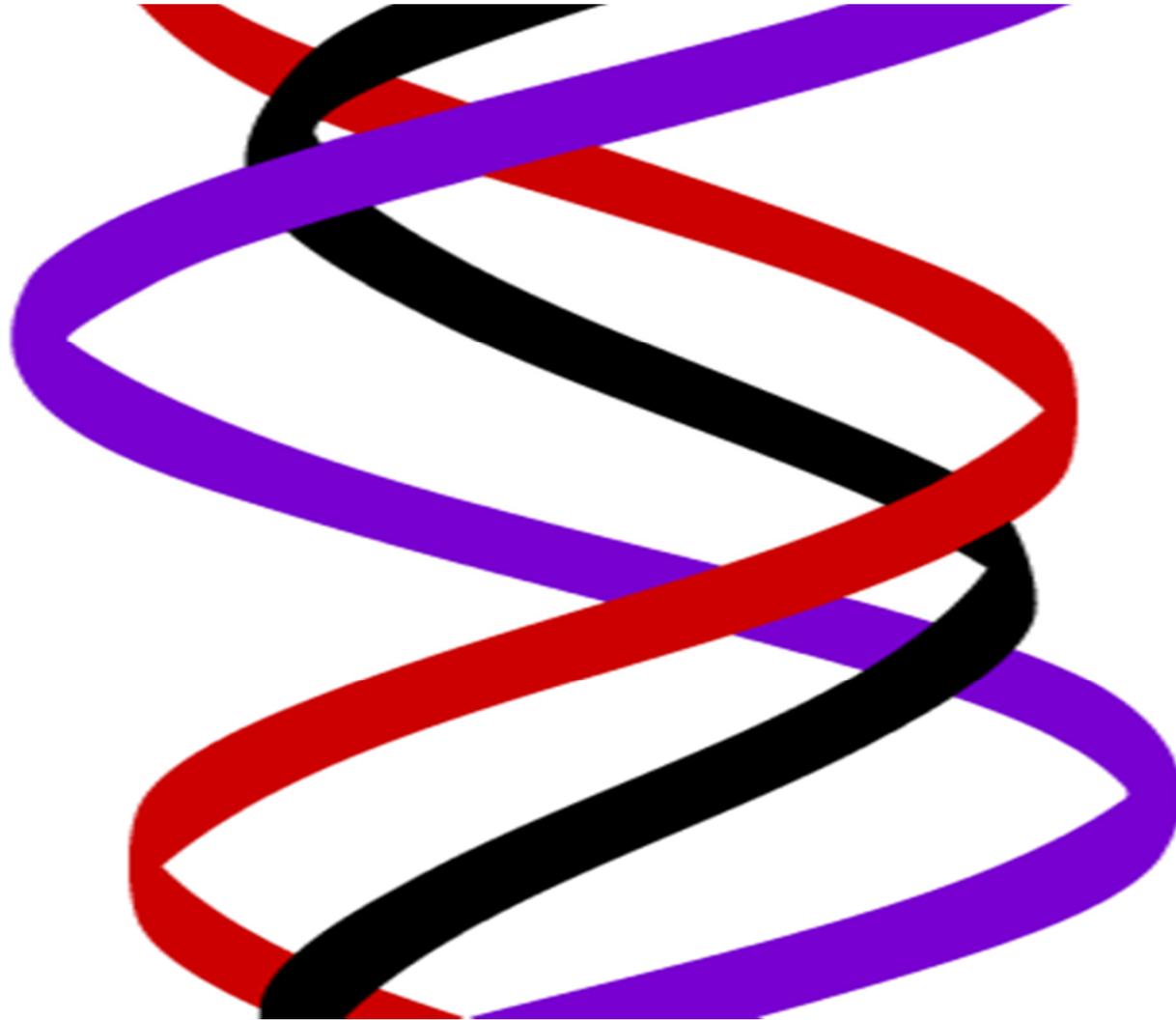
- The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals
- In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto,
- The Pleasures of Eating” from What Are People For? Wendell Berry

LIVE  
LOCAL  
LOVE  
LOCAL  
SHOP  
LOCAL



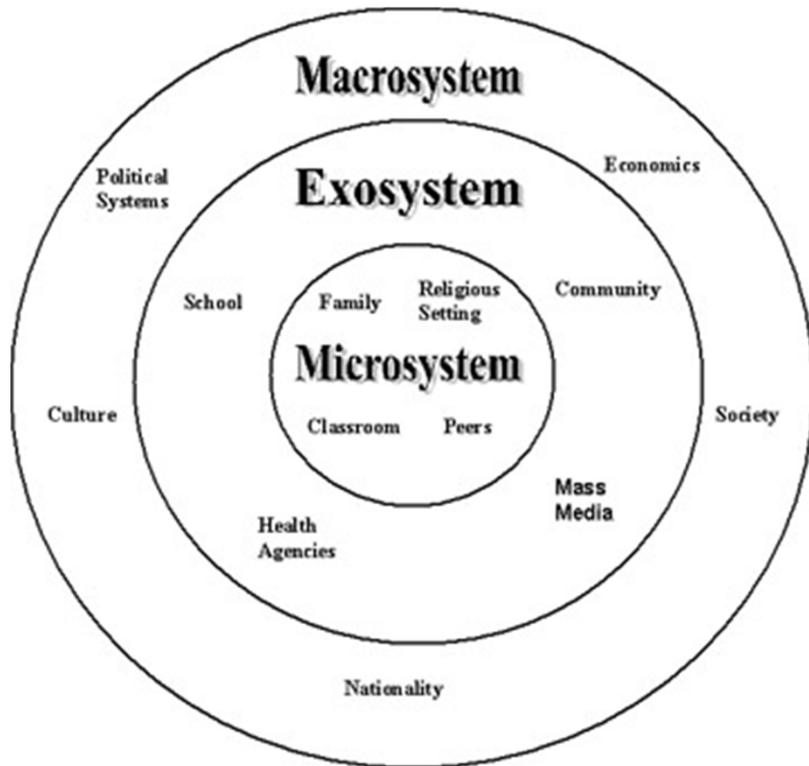
# **A new local foodscape mindset**

shaped by social, mental, physical influences



# From macro to meso

## Small is beautiful



”There seems to be a growing interest and belief in the values of local community interventions.”

Walter Willets keynote address on World PHN congress, 2012 in Rio

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

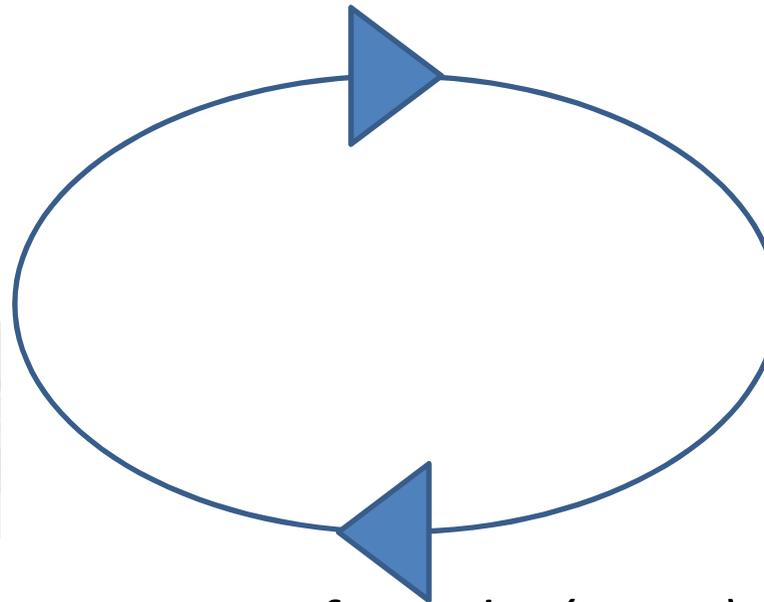
# A new local food connectedness

School Gardens. Farm2School Links, School Food, Public Procurement

Public food system



Local food system

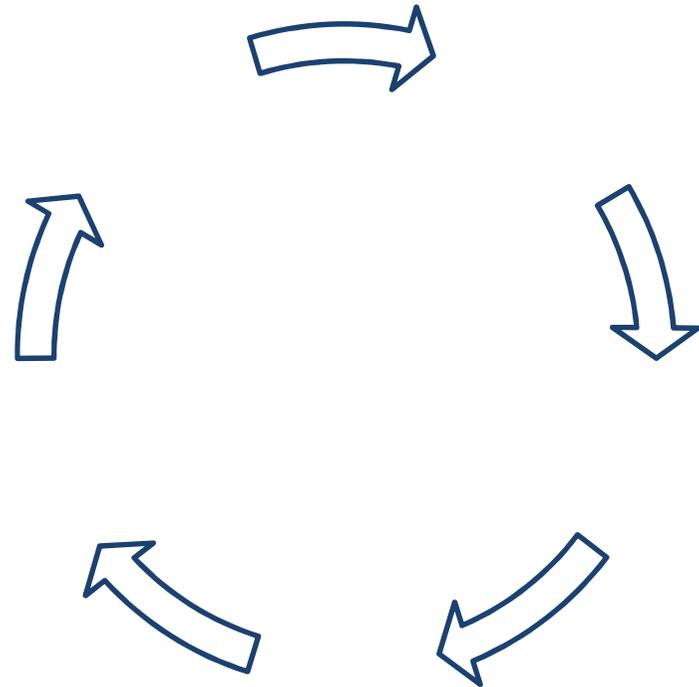


*a shift in food governance from the (supra) national level to the regional and local level is occurring*

Bock & Wiskerke, 2011

# Methods & steps

- Developing definitions
- Pilot study 3 local Hospitals
- COP development
- FoodServInspire funding
- SME involvement
- Maintaining SME's interest
- Regional Policy proces
- Research interest and synthesis



# What is local food?

In general definitions of local food is usually related to an effort to promote sustainable development:

*“Local food or the local food movement is a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies –*

*One in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution, and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place”*

*(Feenstra 2002)*

# Levels of localness

## from whole foods to ultraprocessed



- As a label for an entity instance that is located in e.g. Region North of DK and hence contribute to providing local jobs. I
- Local origin of raw materials
- Another use of 'local' is linked to marketing and seen exclusively by the packaging that signals a local origin without having a lasting ties with local ingredients.
- 'The local recipe' even though the raw materials does not originate from the region.
- At the moment it seems as if the 'local whole foods raw materials' are the most difficult to get into the supply chain.

# Pilot project

## Main conclusions

- Locally produced foods studied at hospitals in Aalborg, Hjørring and Thisted.
- Purchase agreements are the main barrier - smaller suppliers find it difficult to meet requirements in the tender for the volume and day-to-day delivery demands of modern hospital food service
- It has been possible on an ad-hoc basis to integrate local food that has been purchased in pilot projects for sub-areas, in addition to procurement.
- Main drivers
  - champions,
  - commitment
  - and evidence
- It is easier to make the sourcing strategy work in small hospitals.
- Patients have expressed great satisfaction in hospitals using local food in several small trials.

# What is a COP?

*"people who are together on a common idea and who share a common vision to practice this idea and thereby become more competent."*

*Learning is situated*

*Can occur outside classroom*

*Driven by mutual commitment to change*

*Linking researchers "to know" with practitioner "to do"*

*Wenger & Lave*

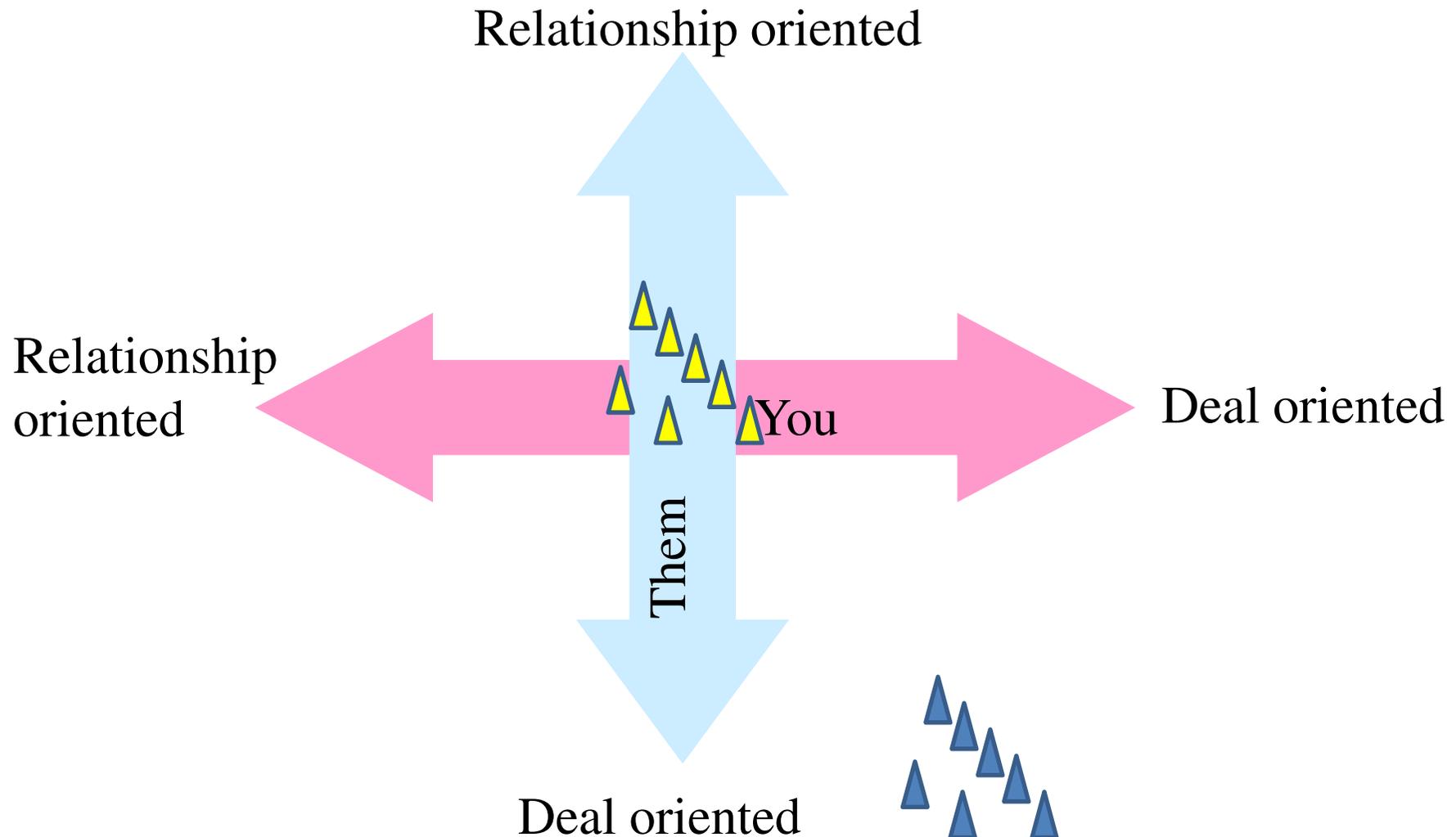
## **Social capital as a driver for relationships**

**“The sum of present and  
potential resources  
resulting from being a  
member of a permanent  
network”**

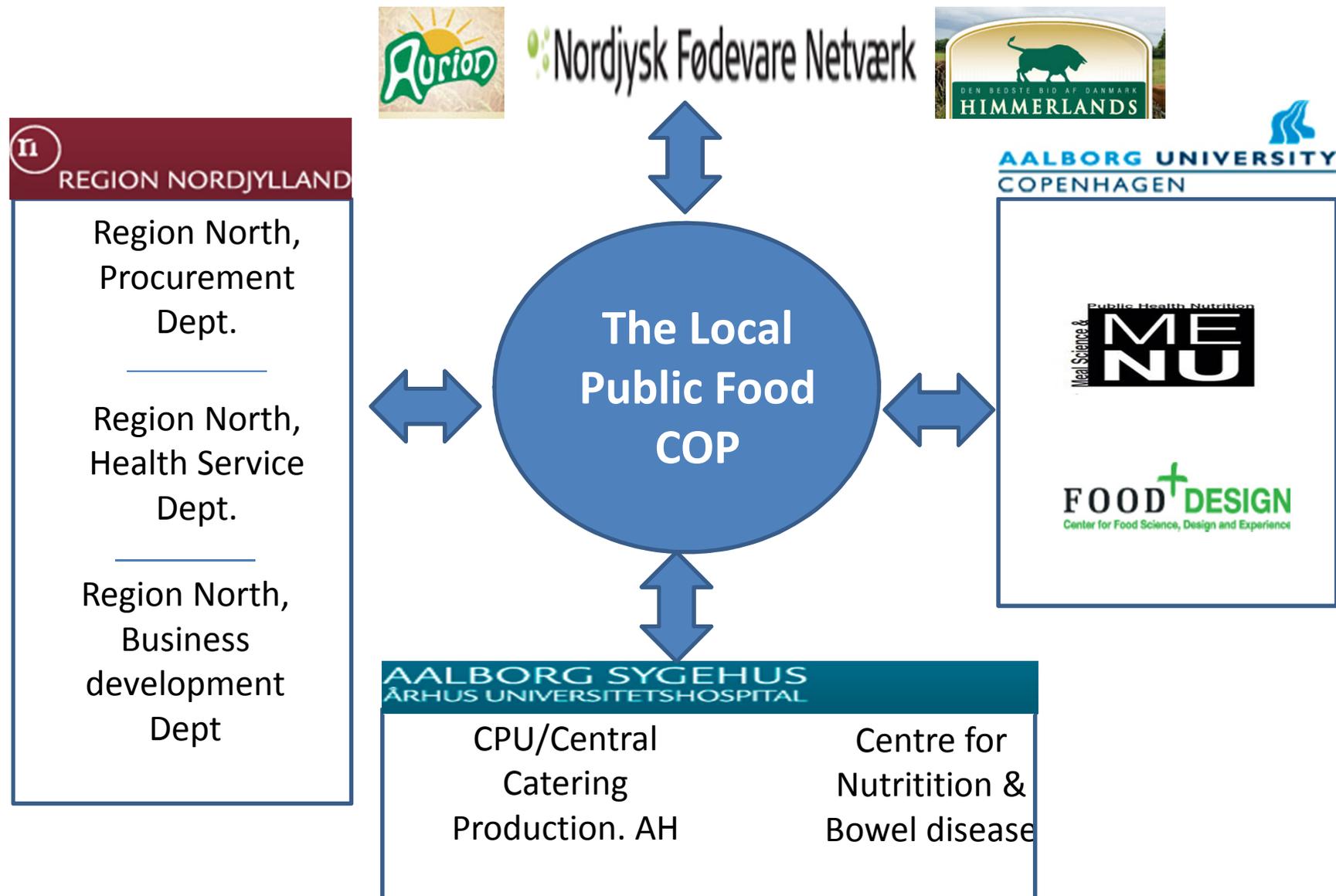
Bourdieu: Forms of capital

# Social capital

## Successful relationships



# The COP learning environment



# Legal framework

## Re-localising food sourcing

- Public procurement must comply with EU legislation
- Ensure the public pay the right price for foods
- Ensure free competition in the market place



- Few SME's has know-how for the call4tender loop
- Only few (4) larger suppliers meet requirements
- Most foods purchased on the global market

# Results

- COP established as a resource centre
- Public Procurement dialogue initiated
- Policy process up and running
- Outline of COP consensus:
  - Commodities/raw materials/whole foods should come from the Northern Region
  - In case of processed food the company should have its manufacturing address in the area.

# Conclusion

- **Mediators**
- Simple and clear idea
- Win Win situations
- Trust and Social capital
- Time, Time & Time
- Seed money
- Evidence
- Political support
- **Constraints**
- Supply chain
- Logistics
- Legal matters
- Traditions
- Mentality
- Organisational change

# Public Private Partnering

## Unfolding Knowledge Innovation Communities

- By being a demanding, vigilant costumer
- Producers will be forced to do their best



- Resulting in a competitive advantage leading to a changing public food geography

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- *Foodserveinspire project* ([www.Foodserveinspire.aau.dk](http://www.Foodserveinspire.aau.dk))
- *inSPIRe food* ([www.inSPIRefood.dk](http://www.inSPIRefood.dk))

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