

## Mapping the 'New Nordic Food' phenomenon, its diffusion, development and socio-technical variation.

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With the publication of the Manifesto for a New Nordic Cuisine in 2004, the gastronomic potentials of the Scandinavian flora and fauna became the basis for a social innovation project with ambitions far beyond fine dining and select produce. The proposed project will trace the evolution of the 'New Nordic Food' movement and chart the ways in which it has managed to hardwire the notion of 'terroir' and local typicality into a wide array of otherwise non-culinary agendas spanning from sustainable development to public health. In doing so, the project will make important contributions to the study of issue-driven politics and nature-making practices in contemporary democracy, and explore what happens when complex and often diffuse societal concerns are made palatable and manifest through the food we eat and the geographies from which we source it. In particular, the project will raise questions about the role of experts and the conditions of expertise in situations where knowledge is highly heterogeneous and experiments take place if not literally 'in the wild' among foragers and huntsmen, then to a large extent outside the confines of formal research, namely in the fields of growers, in the kitchens of chefs and on the plates and palates of the consumer.

### **Methodology and research plan**

The project will proceed to do so through a two-pronged methodology: Firstly, it will use digital tools and online resources to survey the spatiotemporal diffusion of key concepts and technologies associated with New Nordic Food (e.g. growing techniques, criteria for quality, etc.) in order to find out when and where they emerge and travel, and how they transform and amalgamate. This work is already being undertaken and is showing promising initial results. Secondly, based on the insights gained through this digital cartography, the project will use a combination of qualitative interviews and participant observations to produce a series of ethnographies which account in depth for the ways in which these travelling concepts and technologies become materialized and diversified in specific local practices. This fieldwork requires a series of research travels which would be made possible with a grant from the Carlsberg Foundation.

The project will run for 2 years and be based partly with the section for Innovation and Sustainability at the Danish Technical University, where the applicant is an assistant professor and can devote his free research time (6 months per year, 1 year total), and partly at the at the Technological Natures Cluster at the School of Geography in Oxford, where the applicant has been awarded a visiting research associateship (see appendix 3). The ability to make practical use of this visiting position in Oxford also depends on a possible grant from the Carlsberg Foundation to cover travel.

### **Background and potential contributions to research**

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the configuration of democratic publics strike root within the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS)<sup>i</sup>. Faced, as we are, with an ever more diverse array of uncertainties concerning new knowledge, technical expertise and pressing societal challenges, the public does no longer figure as a stable aggregation of competent subjects, each carrying with them onto the political arena an already articulated identity and a derived set of priorities. Instead, it is argued, publics (now multiple, changeable and rarely aligned with formal electorate demarcations) assemble in different ways around different 'issues'<sup>ii</sup> or 'matters of

concern<sup>iii</sup> through which our understanding of both ourselves and the things we have at stake in the political process emerge and become concrete. Be it debates about nuclear waste, financial regulation, climate change or new immunization schemes, we now know that risk related controversies in which clear and unambiguous knowledge is in short supply tend to spawn new interest groups which challenge the existing agenda by contesting established claims to knowledge and/or engage actively in the production of new ones. The result is a kind of ‘hybrid forums’<sup>iv</sup> in which experts play an instrumental role in the efforts of such groups to be recognized and taken into account. The implication for research is a renewed attention to the ‘ontological politics’<sup>v</sup> of different knowledge practices and the ways in which they co-create concerned subjects alongside their objects of concern, an attention which seems to warrant questions like: How are the members of a public and the things they care about constituted? What causes this relationship to change? What causes it to stabilize? And with what effects for the worlds they inhabit?

The New Nordic Food phenomenon offers some interesting angles on this strand of research. *Firstly*, it suggests that an issue does not have to be particularly risky or hazardous to start with in order to have productive effects on the formation of publics around it. Compared to debates like those unfolding around nuclear waste or financial regulation, there has so far been a relative and somewhat obvious lack of controversy. Yet, New Nordic Food has still managed to become a key platform for articulating concerns about (and discuss solutions for) more divisive or contentious topics like the lack of development in peripheral Scandinavia, the relationship between diet and critical diseases like cancer or diabetes, or the environmental consequences of an unsustainable food production system. This is interesting in itself because it suggest a more complex relationship between different kinds of issues and thus different ways of configuring the public than what we have hitherto been able to observe. *Secondly*, the inherently sapid and edible character of the issue introduces some interesting synergies with related work on bodily registers and their affective capacities<sup>vi</sup>, and points attention to the ways in which more diffuse and complex issues become, quite literally, digestible and ‘metabolized’<sup>vii</sup> through their partial mergers with the New Nordic Food agenda. *Thirdly*, and like so many other contemporary concerns, New Nordic Food brings to the fore our relationship with nature, except here as a promising and comforting rather than a threatening and uncertain liaison. When the Nordic landscapes and their flora and fauna become in this way ‘the stuff of politics’<sup>viii</sup>, it warrants an exploration of both their co-constitutive role in the formation on publics and the ways in which they are themselves reconfigured as matters of concern in this process. The project will deliver 3-4 papers on these topics in leading international journals.

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<sup>i</sup> E.g. Barry A. (2001) *Political Machines*, Continuum, London; Latour, B. (2004) *The Politics of Nature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge; Weibel P.& B. Latour eds. (2005) *Making Things Public*, MIT Press, Cambridge

<sup>ii</sup> Marres, N. (2007) *The Issues Deserve More Credit*, Social Studies of Science, #37

<sup>iii</sup> Latour, B. (2003) *Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?* Critical Inquiry, #30

<sup>iv</sup> Callon, M. et al (2009) *Acting in an uncertain world*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA

<sup>v</sup> Mol, A. (1999) *Ontological politics: A word and some questions*, in J. Law & J. Hassard (eds.) *Actor Network Theory and After*, Blackwell, Oxford

<sup>vi</sup> E.g. Latour, B. (2004) *How to talk about the body?* Despret, V. (2004) *The body we care for*, both *Body and Society*, #10; Thrift, N.J. (2008) *Non-Representational Theory: Spaces, Politics, Affect*, Routledge, London

<sup>vii</sup> Whatmore, S. & P. Stassart (2004) *Metabolizing Risk*, Environment and Planning A, #35

<sup>viii</sup> Braun, B. & S. Whatmore eds. (2010) *Political Matter*, University of Minnesota Press