STRESS-TESTING LOCAL FOOD NETWORKS
AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
THE CASE OF DENMARK

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Local Food Networks

• **Aim**
  – Present findings from a study of 10 Danish local food networks
  – Identify differences/similarities in key features and development paths
  – Policy-learning through comparative stress-testing

• **Local food**
  – Geographical (terroir, food miles)
  – Social relations (alternative production/distribution practices: farmers’ markets, vegetable box schemes, farm shops)
  – Values (health, authenticity, quality)

• **Networks**
  – Mostly small producers with limited resources
  – Joint place-based marketing, distribution, certification, food/gastro events, innovation
The development of food networks

• Drivers & supporting factors
  – Existing informal networks
  – Consumer demand
  – Shared values and trust
  – Entrepreneurial individuals (possibly ‘outsiders’)

• Barriers
  – Lack of consumer awareness
  – Small number of producers
  – Lack of intermediaries – wholesalers, abattoirs,
  – Poor infrastructure, distance from market
  – Higher prices, niche products

(Sources: Ilbery et al., 2004; Rikonen et al., 2013; Eriksen, 2015)
Moving towards an evolutionary approach

**An institutional perspective**

**Inter/national contexts**
- Global agro-food system
- Transnational regulation
- National governance

**Local food networks**
- Organisation/resources
- Discourse/Activities

**Local/regional contexts**
- Producers, consumers/users
- Local governance
- Socio-economic environment
- Food and gastronomy

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Ten case-studies of local food networks

• Contexts
  – Increasing consumer focus on local food
  – Strong agro-industry
  – Government support for local food networks

• Five Danish regions

• 50 interviews (members, organisers, policy-makers)

1. Perikum
2. Smagen Nordjylland
3. Gourmet Vest
4. Regional Madkultur Vestjylland
5. Sønderjyske Madglæder
6. Sønderjyske Fristelser
7. Kulinarisk Sydfyn
8. Smagen af Fyn
9. Regional Madkultur Sjælland
10. Smag på Nordsjælland
Results: Network diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>5 private</th>
<th>5 public</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network structure</td>
<td>4 nodal</td>
<td>6 decentralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key funding sources</td>
<td>3 activity income 3 membership fee</td>
<td>6 public projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key activity targets</td>
<td>Consumers/users: 10 marketing/branding 7 interactive</td>
<td>Producers: 2 competence development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Network evolution
Conclusions and perspectives

• **Sustainable local food network characteristics**
  – Private initiatives drawing on initial public funding
  – Strong orientation towards income-generating activities
  – Private network node important

• **Stress-testing policies**
  – Short-term public project funding with shifting themes undermines continuity
  – Making small firms competent as producers and networks
  – Need for core funding for coordination of non-nodal networks
  – Early shift towards activity income more important than membership fees

• **Next steps**
  – Stronger embedding in wider literature on regional development networks
  – International comparison of local food networks important for policy learning