

**Local, Natural, Authentic: New Nordic Cuisine as an Economic Trend and Cultural Resistance**

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*Jordnära. Etnologiska reflektioner över ny nordisk mat* discusses the concept and phenomenon of new Nordic cuisine. The phenomenon can be shortly described as a Nordic manifestation of the transnational trend of resisting the current industrial food system by turning towards the authentic, local and natural. As explained in the introduction, the concept was created by a group of Nordic top chefs, who published a manifesto of new Nordic cuisine in 2004. It took on a more political dimension when given over to the Nordic Council of Ministers, whose projects *Ny Nordisk Mat 1* (2007–2010) and *2* (2010–2014) aimed to produce and promote Nordic food, economy and identity at local, regional and international levels. As an ongoing trend and phenomenon, new Nordic cuisine ranges from the production of culinary experiences in fine dining restaurants to media discourse, rural and economic development projects, and local identities celebrated at local food festivals. *Jordnära* provides glimpses of different manifestations of new Nordic cuisine in the Scandinavian countries, Finland and Estonia.

*Jordnära* contributes to ethnological food studies and, more broadly, to the expanding interdisciplinary field of food studies. The aim of the book is to offer ethnological reflections on the subject by bringing together empirical case studies. The selection of the contributing authors and topics is based on encounters in food-related academic workshops and conferences. The authors share an ethnological interest in the phenomenon but approach it with different types of data. The research methodologies vary from textual and cultural analysis to participatory observation and sensory ethnography. Yet the book has a clear focus, which is extremely welcome in the somewhat dispersed field of food studies: these reflections on heterogeneous case studies within the shared framework of new Nordic cuisine open up possibilities for fertile conceptual elaborations.

The book opens with an introduction by the editors Yrsa Lindqvist and Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch. They introduce the reader to new Nordic cuisine and the field of ethnological food studies and thus set the scene for the following seven chapters, in which seven ethnologists and folklore scholars reflect on the phenomenon through their own research. Ester Bardone brings forward a historical change in Estonians' relation to wild berries based on oral history materials and online food blogs. Jón Þór Pétursson discusses the construction of cultural heritage and local food in the rural landscapes of Iceland. Yrsa Lindqvist explores the visual representation of 'pure food' in Swedish and Finnish cookbooks and in a recent booklet presenting local food from Swedish-speaking rural areas in Finland. Hanne Pico Larsen follows snails from their natural habitats to constituents of gastronomic experience in order to investigate the material and discursive production of authenticity in the pioneering Danish new Nordic cuisine restaurant, Noma. Anna Burstedt analyses Swedish restaurant guides and the way they represent and construct good taste and social difference, often in terms of naturalness and locality. The last two chapters focus on locality and authenticity in food festivals, as Connie Reksten discusses the Bergen Food Festival in Norway and Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch the Harvest Festival in Åland, Finland.

*Jordnära* provides insights into various cultural processes related to new Nordic cuisine. Discussions on identity building, place, tradition, cultural heritage, tourism, rural livelihoods and economic processes make it interesting for researchers, students and professionals even beyond food studies. The constant overlapping of these issues across individual chapters weaves together the phenomena under study and makes the book a coherent whole. An even more profound consideration of these issues and their complicated relations would no doubt produce interesting discussions. Although beyond the scope of this book, the subject clearly has potential for more theoretical contributions in the future.

One of the themes that could be further elaborated is the cultural resistance embedded in new Nordic cuisine in its opposition to industrial food, the global food system and market economy, which is an aspect featured throughout the book. On the one hand, the whole phenomenon appears as a critique towards the food system and related realities and must be understood as such. On the other hand, in its various manifestations, new Nordic cuisine is largely dependent on and plays out as part of the competitive market economy, whose consequences it opposes. While maybe obvious, this contradictory relationship is also somewhat difficult to grasp. A contextualisation of the investigated phenomena into the global food system and local contexts of food production and consumption might help to provide a bet-

ter understanding of the issue. For example, to what extent are locality and naturalness mainly images related to marketing and identity building, and to what extent do they materialise in everyday production and consumption practices?

The empirical cases discussed in the chapters show that the resistance in new Nordisk cuisine both builds on and produces dichotomies such as nature-culture, global-local, innovation-tradition and authentic-inauthentic. They also point towards power relations and social distinctions involved in the making of new Nordisk cuisine. A central issue is the power to define, which is focal, for instance, in the production of tradition and cultural heritage. The issue is most explicitly discussed in Anna Bustedt's chapter on Swedish restaurant guides and in Reksten's and Österlund-Pötzsch's chapters on food festivals. In the case of food festivals, a central question is the framing of what counts as local, authentic, traditional and natural. Österlund-Pötzsch investigates the extremely popular Åland Harvest Festival, which takes place on the participating farms all over the island. The geopolitical particularities of Åland make spatial border making relatively easy, but the festival organisers also seek to define the local, natural and authentic by giving detailed instructions on how these should be produced on the participating farms by paying attention to aesthetic details of display and decoration.

Österlund-Pötzsch points out that the Åland Harvest Festival has evoked criticism from local farmers because of its strict instructions and increasing participation fees, which make it unaffordable for some small producers. This raises the question of whether and how underlying contradictions and power relations become visible for researchers through their research methods. Local food production, food festivals and fine dining restaurants are important for both identity-related and economic reasons: how to reach the possibly underlying contradictions when working with such positively loaded issues, and what is the role of ethnologists who consider the related cultural and economic processes? While again beyond the focus of the book, the themes discussed in *Jordnära* would have afforded opportunities for deeper methodological reflection and self-reflection.

Overall, *Jordnära* is fluent and delightful reading that certainly meets the target of offering ethnological reflections on the phenomenon of new Nordic cuisine: the chosen focus generates vivid ethnological description and analysis with a strong emphasis on 'documenting the ongoing trend' (Lindqvist & Österlund-Pötzsch p. 17). In the future, more interdisciplinary and theoretical discussions on the phenomenon might help to contextualise it into the current system of food production and consumption and open doors to a broader

readership. However, there is clearly a place for this kind of more descriptive ethnological work as well.

**AUTHOR**

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