

## **Young peoples' voice on organic food and health in schools**

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Adult habits become established during a person's childhood or early youth. The same goes for health habits. Therefore it is important that children are provided with a solid foundation for making sound decisions in relation to health and that health aspects be incorporated into their daily life. In this connection, public schools are important health promoting platforms due to their potential for encouraging interest, knowledge and learning about health related issues.

The central idea for the study has been to address pupil perceptions and not merely to emphasise a narrow professional approach. In order for health initiatives, offered in connection with public schools, i.e. initiatives aimed at the available food selection and class room teaching, to impact children's day-to-day health, the basic assumption has been that pupils must see the initiatives as relevant. Therefore it is important that these initiatives address the children's interests and values in connection with ecology and health. Thus children can be engaged as stakeholders in a way that encourages healthy behaviour and delegates shared responsibility for their own individual health.

Devising and implementing different health promotion efforts often originate in a professional settings and i.e. decision makers such as health professionals, teachers and civil servants approach the tasks according to their professional background and specific agendas. However, in an active social field such as a school, the narrow administrative outlook collides with a completely different and disorganized everyday outlook. It may be assumed that children view issues such as ecology and health entirely dependent on their individual values and attitudes. This collides with traditional administrative logic. An administrative outlook expects strategies and interventions to be governed by rational motives and evidence. Public administrative bodies are expected to be able to provide objective and proven facts that justify strategies and interventions based on well-established expertise within a well defined technical or scientific domain. Such areas of domain expertise are created and justified on the grounds of the traditional scientific disciplines characterized by stable well defined rules determining which theories and methodologies are accepted as making sense. These domains of expertise are furthermore characterized by particular preferences for paradigms from either the natural or social sciences. Such paradigms are seldom compatible with the reality of the everyday life of pupils where concepts and meaning intermingle.

The main purpose of the study has been to shed light on primary and lower secondary pupils' everyday experience with ecology and health in connection with the public organic school food programmes in the municipality of Copenhagen. Moreover the aim has been to investigate to which degree the pupils experience a connection between the organic food program and the underlying organic supply chain and classroom initiatives in subjects related to ecology and health.

In February 2008, we approached a public school which proved willing to participate in our study. Subsequently, over a four week period, we designed an interview guide used to conduct the focus group interviews which were then transcribed.

The findings from the focus group interviews show a broad interest in subjects relating to ecology, organic foods and health. A few of the findings will be reported here. The full analysis will be made available as an iPOPY working report.

The results show that the ecological supply chain behind the KØSS food programme does not seem to have triggered greater involvement on the part of the interviewed pupils regarding the organic agenda. Respondents said that they had felt them selves being involved in the decision making process concerning the school's organic food programme. This was the case for pupils from both the 5th and 7th grades. Most of the 5th grade pupils knew why the food sold in the school food stall was organic and indicated that it was because their school was part of the KØSS food programme because the school is located in Copenhagen. A single pupil knew about the link between the initiatives ties to another municipal campaign: "Ecology is nothing but pure water". The 7th graders similarly agreed that school food is organic due to the fact that the school participates in the KØSS programme. When asked who they thought had made the decision to introduce organic food in schools, the Copenhagen municipality, City Hall and the dairy company, Arla, were mentioned. Likewise, several pupils believed that the school had been part of the decision making process.

The pupils mentioned a number of different courses where the two subjects, ecology and health, had been part of what they were taught. Nevertheless, it was not clear to greater part of the pupils whether these subjects were a regular part of the course or not. They pupils gave different indications of when they had been taught on ecology and health. And they mentioned that the subjects of ecology and health have been introduced in home economics, Danish, math, nature and science, social science and geography.

DTU



# Young peoples' voice on organic food and health in schools.

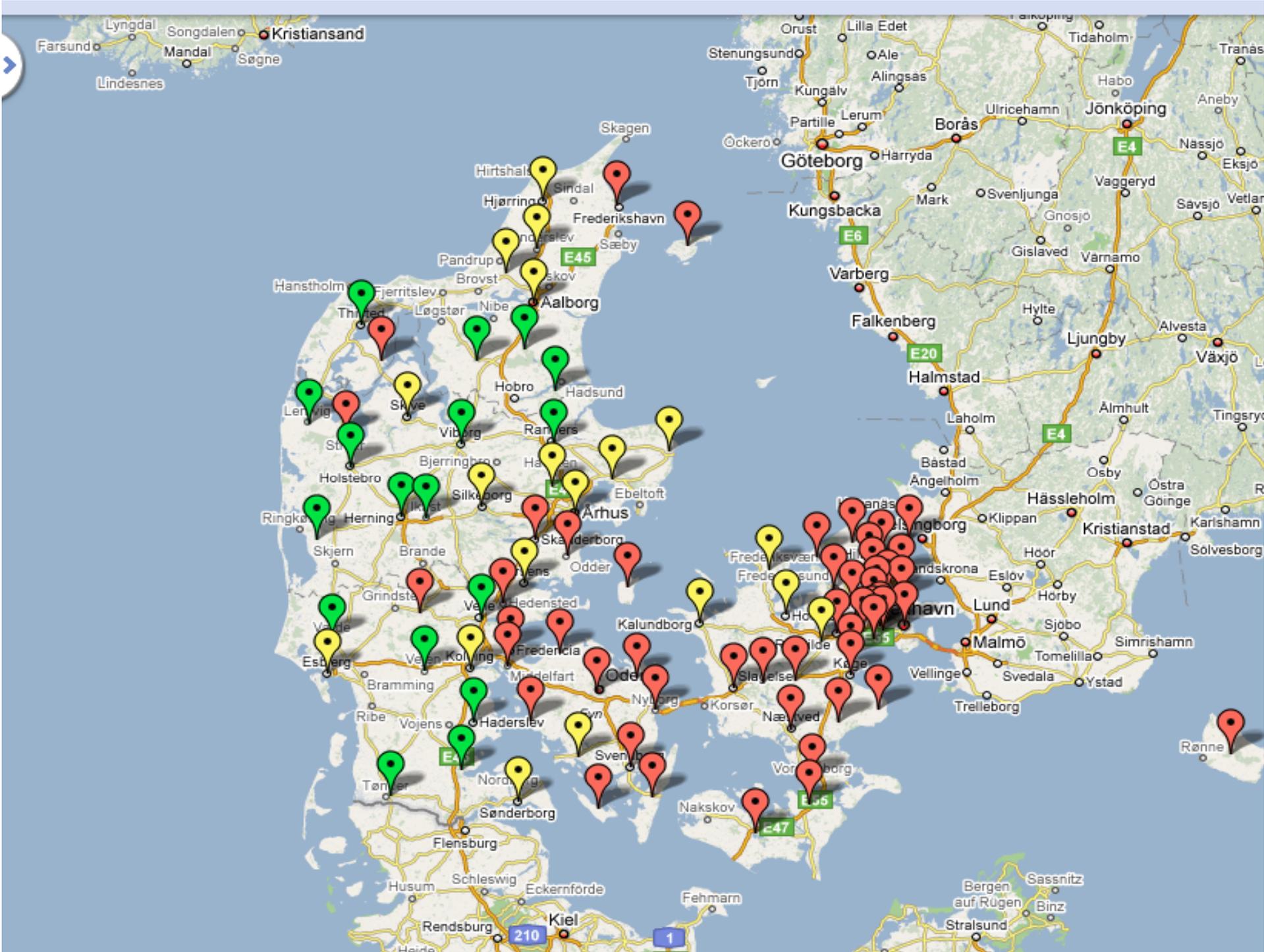
## Casefindings from Heiberg school

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**Organic food, health and sustainable  
development in schools**

21.-22.1.2009, Helsinki, Finland

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- Forside
- Heibergskolen
- Information
- Aktiviteter
- Nyheder
- Ferier og fridage
- Pædagogisk Center
- Skolebestyrelsen
- Skolevejleder
- Sundhedspersonale
- Tandlæge
- Kontakt
- Søg
- Ledige stillinger
- Byens Bedste
- SSP
- IT
- ElevIntra
- Personaleintra
- ForældreIntra



Heibergskolens første terminsprøve - Januar 2009

## Opslagstavle

Ingen aktuelle opslag



| Country | System                | Public engagement | Innovation                                    |
|---------|-----------------------|-------------------|---|
| Iceland | Lunch box             | Increasing        | To public lunch                               |
| Norway  | Lunch box             | Increasing        | To (free) school fruit                        |
| Denmark | Lunch box             | Increasing        | To school fruit and public C/H lunch NOT free |
| Sweden  | Hot free school lunch | 50 years of law   | Quality improvement and sustainability issues |
| Finland | Hot free school lunch | 50 years of law   |   |

## A point of departure

- Food in schools is not only to be *served on a silverplate*
- It is also to be performed – to be enacted using you mind and skills with your *fingers in the dough*

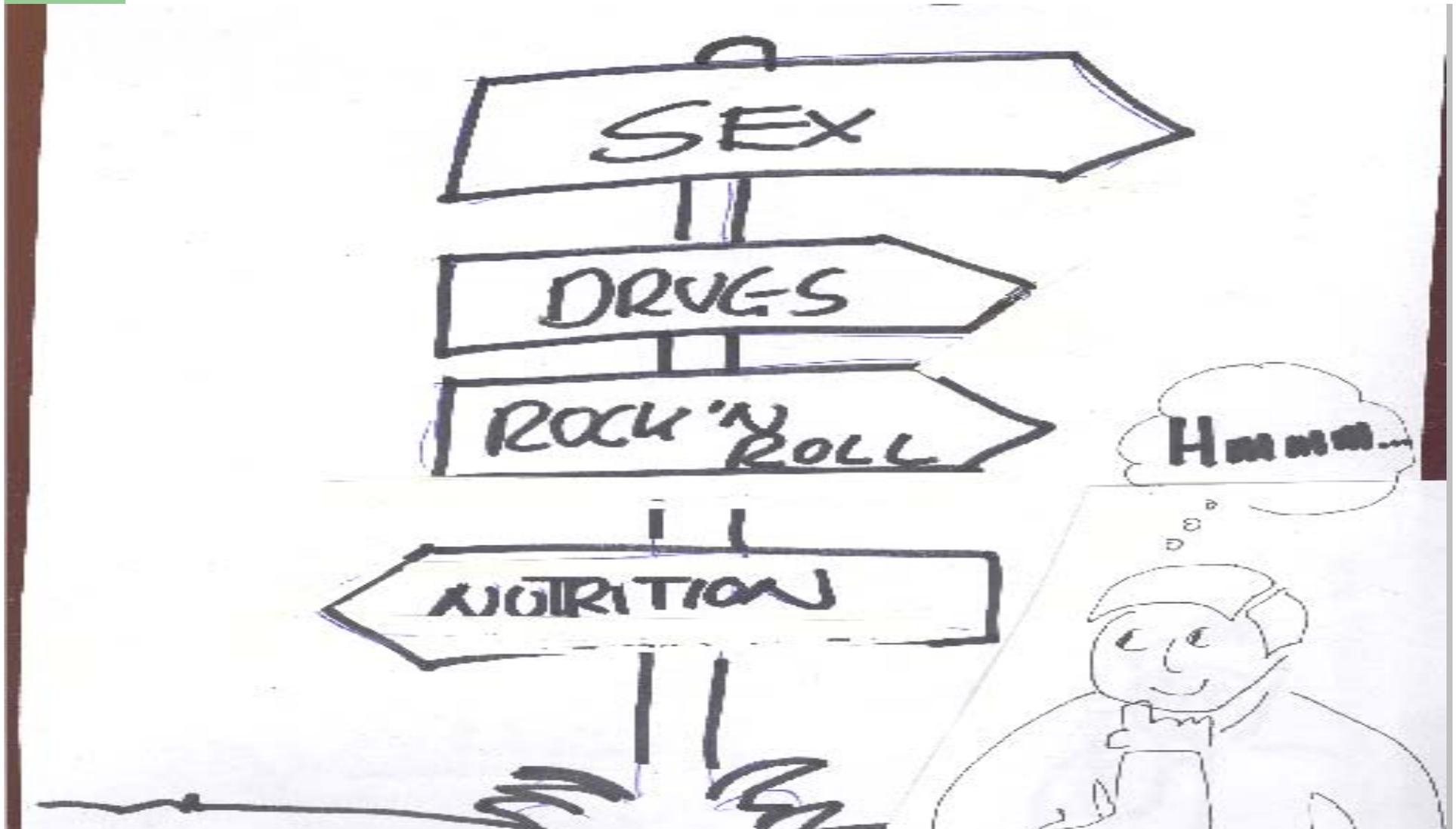
# Food & nutrition at schools

## Two perspectives

**Machine bureaucracy perspective**  
(Weberian approach)

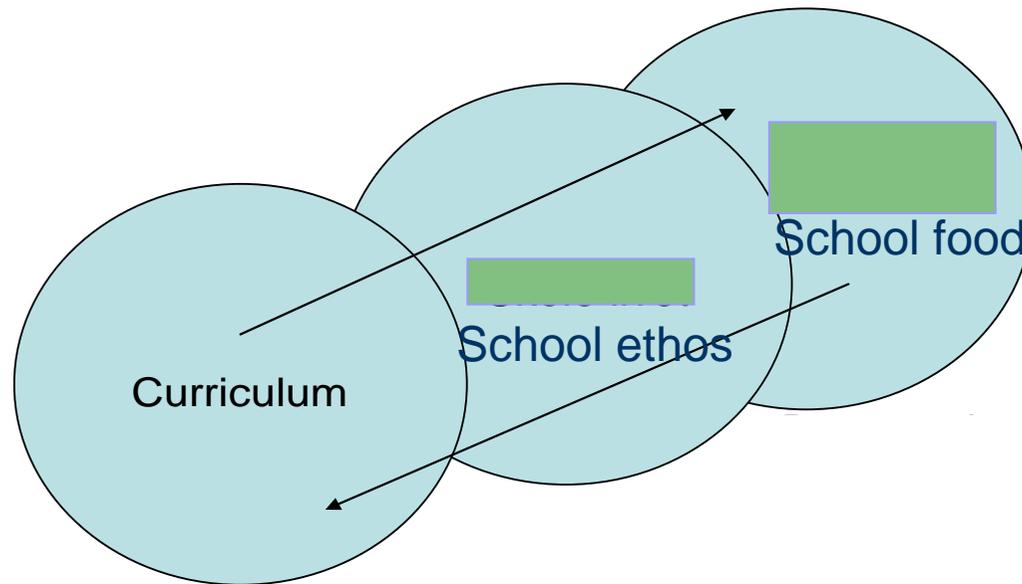


# Nutrition and young people



# Food & nutrition at schools

## three stages



# Different languages

| <b>Food service</b> | <b>Health &amp; nutrition</b> | <b>Home economics</b>    | <b>Everyday life</b>                        |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| GCP                 | Meet nutritional requirements | Recipes<br>Menu planning | Preferences<br>Sociality<br>Values<br>Norms |

# 1 mill Euro question is then:

- Is the highly profiled ambitious visions on healthy and organic food provision and learning at school
- mirrored
- in positive perceptions, attitudes and ownership among young people at school?

## Main purpose of the study

- Do pupils experience a connection between the organic food service/underlying organic supply chain and classroom initiatives in subjects related to ecology and health?

# Methodology

- KØSS Schools approached February 2008
- Chose a public school which proved willing to participate in our study.
- Focus group interviews originate in Krueger and Morgan's methodology
- Build on Kvale's writings on question guide
- Processing of collected data conducted with Kvale's writings on meaning condensation in mind.

# Methodology

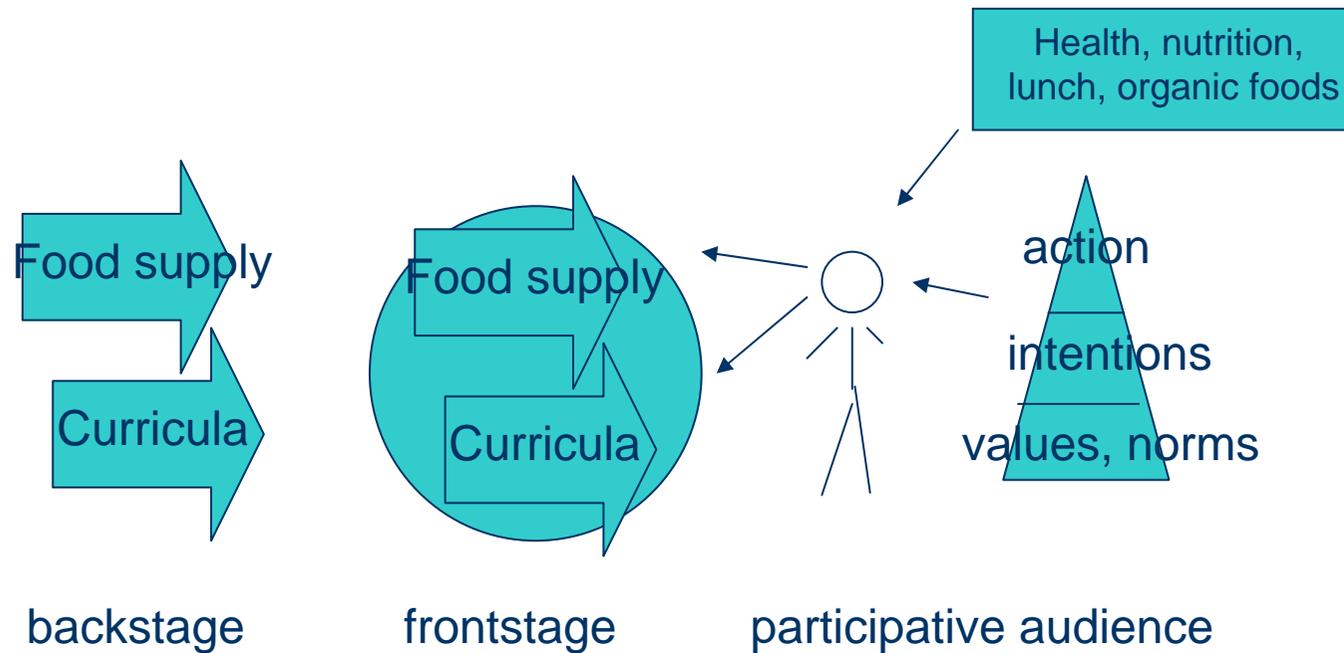
- Pupils aged 11 through 15 (n = 21).
- Pupils recruited from the 5th and 7th grades
- Participants from the 5th grade were from two separate homeroom classes
- Participants from 7th grade were from the same homeroom class.
- Homeroom teachers selected pupils for interview participation.
- Participants grouped in four different focus groups homogeneous in terms of sex and age.

# Methodology

- **Questions concerning**
  - Ecology/organic food & farming
  - What is taught about ecology
  - Health
  - Food & nutrition
  - School meals

# Methodology

## A model for analysis



## Results: the answer to the 10<sup>6</sup> € Q

# ● No!

- The ambitious KØSS visions on healthy and organic food provision and learning at school
- is not mirrored
- in positive perceptions, attitudes and ownership among young people at school

# Results

- The organic supply chain behind the KØSS food programme does not seem to have triggered greater involvement in the organic agenda.
- Poor sense of involvement in the decision making process concerning the school's organic food programme.
- Most of the pupils knew why the school food was organic
- But they did not seem think of organic consumption when buying
- Only a single pupil knew about the link between the initiatives ties to another municipal campaign: "Ecology is nothing but pure water".

# Results

Positive attitude of toward health and ecology

- The majority of the pupils indicated that they found the subjects personally relevant
  - *“It's all about our world, right? What we put in our mouths, our body and environment, that's pretty serious” (7th grade girl)*
- Another participant pointed out that the subjects make up part of the concept labelled general education.
  - *“It's something you just gotta know” (5th grade girl)*

## Results

Students argue school can do more teaching

- . One pupil expressed the following:

*“I think we need that course, or whatever you wanna call it”*(6th grade girl)

- A girl from the 5th grade put it thus:

*“If you ask me, I think the teachers could teach us a bit more about it [ecology and health] than they do”*

## Results start early

- *“It's important to know already from the kindergarten grade how important it is to eat healthily and how important it is to take care of the environment and stuff like that”  
(7th grade girl)*
- *No one has ever made it clear why it's so important that things are organic. They only just started explaining what it all means, now, in the 7th grade ” (7th grade boy)*

## Results start early

- *“It's something you can experience in your next-door supermarket – you have to make choices, whether you'll choose this or that...and I think it's too bad they don't teach us about that in school.” (7th grade girl)*
- *“[...] learning about ecology [as] more relevant than learning about population pyramids in Egypt (7th grade girl)*

## Results

### Negative attitudes toward food at school

- The general opinion among the older students is that the food served at school is boring and expensive.
- Prefer to buy food outside of school grounds.
- *“It may very well be that you can by better food in the cafeteria, but when you are allowed to leave school grounds, then that's just exactly what you end up doing.” (7th grade girl)*
- *“It's a bit more “ordinary” buying your food in the school food stall. That's why it's cooler to exit school grounds” (7th grade girl)*

## Results

### Negative attitudes toward food at school

- The visual appearance of the food did not live up to expectations.
- The students typically see the food on display as being wrapped in a boring way and uninspiring to the eye compared to the visual impressions the information material distributed by KØSS:
  - *“[...]if you had been served the food in a more appealing way, but all you get is a bun. It's not wrapped or anything – it's like, just a bun”* (7th grade girl)

## Results

Price plays a strong role for food choice

- Pupils told that they often bought unhealthy food because the healthy food most often is the more expensive.
- Provided that healthy and unhealthy food were priced equally, all pupils said they would prefer buying healthy food.

# Suggestions

- Appear to be untapped possibilities for learning.
- Appear to be untapped potentials for creating a clear connection between the organic and healthy food procurement and what goes on in class room teaching.
- Need for greater involvement on behalf of the pupils and on-the-scene actors when planning activities related to the curriculum and the food procurement.
- Appears to be a need for reorientation in the instructive platform in home economics and the subjects of ecology and health.
- A cross-curricular approach which involves the essential subject areas in connection with food culture, eating habits, ecology and health.

# Four types of learning

1. order – one way



2. order - do



3. order - eating



4. order – speak about





# Thanks for your attention and to my coworkers

Anna Burkal

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Sanne Larsen



**The full  
analysis will  
be made  
available as  
an iPOPY  
working  
report.**