

THE POWER OF LOCAL

– sustainable food systems around the Baltic sea



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Interdisciplinary Synthesis of the BERAS project

Baltic Ecological Recycling Agriculture and Society (BERAS) No. 7



Centrum för uthålligt lantbruk



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Cover photo by Hans Månsson, Bild & Mening.
The photo is taken at a Farmers Market at Katarina Bangata in Stockholm
in the autumn 2005.

ISBN: 91-576-7160-5
Antal sidor: 67
67 pages

Ämnesord/Key words: Organic farming, Organic food, Local food, Sustainability,
Resource management, Food systems, Rural development



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Abstract

This report presents the interdisciplinary synthesis of the multidisciplinary BERAS study. The research questions for the interdisciplinary work were as follows: Do localisation and recycling in rural food systems enhance sustainability, and what are the prerequisites for this? What are the obstacles to and the means for promoting sustainable localisation and recycling? Thus, what would sustainable localisation and recycling look like in Baltic rural food systems? There was also a methodological interest in developing interdisciplinary approaches for research on food systems.

Food system provided the integrating framework for the various stages of the food chain, production of inputs, waste management, the actors within the chain and in interaction with it. It included ecological, economic, and socio-cultural and value dimensions. The sustainable development of food systems was sought in all the dimensions of sustainability simultaneously. Localisation was interpreted as an increased share of the rural local demand being met with local resources with maintained export to urban areas. The geographic dimension of locality was considered relative. Recycling of nutrients from consumption to agriculture and from animal husbandry to crop production to reduce emissions was also seen as a means of localising inputs and enhancing the diversity of local production. Case food systems and farms in eight Baltic countries were studied on the basis of actor interviews and workshops, as well as through analysis of environmental and economic parameters. The interdisciplinary process followed a classic generic model of problem definition, division of tasks, and evaluation and integration. The quality criteria were: consistency with disciplinary antecedents, balance in weaving together perspectives and effectiveness in advancing understanding.

The potential for sustainable localisation and recycling in rural food systems around the Baltic Sea was demonstrated. Localisation and recycling can enhance sustainability providing that firm economy is improved. Localisation and recycling decrease emissions and use of energy and enhance local economy, equity and trust. Recycling is important for ecological sustainability, and localisation is contributory. Localisation is key for benefits to local economy and social sustainability. A sustainable way of localisation and recycling would be to recycle locally between farms and from the demand chain. Most of the food chain, including inputs, would be local. Demand would be higher and the markets both regional and local. The keys to sustainable localisation and recycling, from viewpoint of all three dimensions of sustainability, are partnership of actors, internalising of externalities in price, and learning citizen-consumers. Interdisciplinary research requires an interdisciplinary plan and project organisation, communication across the disciplines being the learning challenge.