

# **Comparing policy strategies to promote organic food consumption in public sector institutions in Denmark and Sweden**

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## Introduction

Organic farm and food policies embody some of the new post-exceptional trends in agri-food policy. In general, organic farm policies are usually motivated by environmental protection, biodiversity and animal welfare. In countries where organic policies go beyond a focus on farmers and organic production, governments have introduced policy measures aimed at increasing the consumption of organic food. Such initiatives have displayed innovative policy making and may potentially can be an inspiration post-exceptional agricultural and food policy which are aimed at promoting more sustainable food production and consumption. The governments in the Nordic countries have launched policy initiatives to increase the consumption of organic food within the public sector. Denmark and Sweden have been most successful in this endeavour.

Denmark and Sweden are often considered pioneers in environmental policy (e.g. Andersen & Loefflerink 1997). However, this overall characterisation hides significant variation in policy design and performance across individual environmental policy programmes. This is particularly true in relation to government promotion of organic farming and food consumption. Though committed to promote organic food and farming, the Nordic countries have adopted different policies, resulting in very different outcomes. Therefore, Denmark and Sweden offer favourable conditions for comparing how different policies can affect performance in terms of growing the organic food market.

Denmark emerged early as the Nordic as well as the global forerunner in growing organic food consumption. By 1997, 2.5 percent of the food purchased in Denmark was organic while Sweden was trailing with 0.6 percent. No data were reported for Iceland, Norway and Finland (Willer & Yussefi 2000, 52). Two decades later (2018), Denmark was still leading with 11.5 percent. Sweden had to a considerable extent caught up and was ranked third globally with 9.6 percent. Finland and Norway were well behind with 2.4 and 1.7 percent respectively (Schlatter *et al.* 2020, 68-69).<sup>1</sup> Growth in organic consumption is mainly driven by private purchases, but consumption initiatives within the public sector have also had an impact. Denmark and Sweden have been the most successful Nordic countries in increasing the consumption of organic food within the public sector but with very different impact. Comparing achievements in 2019, Sweden comes out as the most successful with 39 percent of the food served in the public sector being organic, while Denmark is at 22 percent<sup>2</sup> (Ekomatcentrum<sup>3</sup> 2020, 20).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No data were recorded for Iceland over the two decades.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Denmark reports 23 percent for 2019 (Danmarks Statistik 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Ekomatcentrum is an NGO which organises organic farmers, food processors, food retailers, wholesalers, restaurants and larger kitchens, municipalities, regions and consumers.

<sup>4</sup> Finland reached 12 percent and Norway came out as the Nordic laggard with only 1 percent (Ekomatcentrum 2020, 20).

Organic food policy design can help explain the different performance in relation to growing organic consumption. Comparing national organic policies and organic food consumption in four countries (Denmark, Sweden, the UK and the US), Daugbjerg and Sønderskov (2012) concluded that policy design had a significant impact on consumption levels. With such support for the *policy matters* thesis, this paper undertakes a comparison of policy programmes designed to motivate kitchens in the Danish and Swedish public sector to increase their consumption of organic food products. The purpose of the comparative analysis is to establish how policies may impact on organic consumption in the public sector. Policy programmes are different in the two countries. Therefore, the focus of the analysis is to explore whether a link between programme differences and performance in terms of growing organic food consumption within the public sector can be established.

While Daugbjerg and Sønderskov (2012) focussed on policy design as the explanatory variable, this report takes a broader policy perspective by also including the framing of organic food consumption in relation to other objectives pursued within the public sector. To make sense of a problem and to suggest solutions to the problem, policy actors engage in a process of framing in which some facts are selected over others and linked to political, moral or ethical values (Schön & Rein 1994). Hence, a policy frame is a mixture of facts and emotional appeal which serves to recommend and justify certain courses of action (Baumgartner & Jones 1993; Bomberg 2017).

Promotion of organic food within the public sector in Sweden has been framed broader than in Denmark. The Swedish effort has relied more on appeal by setting a goal for organic consumption (Jørgensen 2012) and framed organic food consumption within the public sector in relation to broader objectives carrying positive valence, i.e. positive emotional appeal. Organic food is framed broadly as a positive contribution to public health and sustainability objectives. While the Danish initiative was also considered a measure to pursue sustainability objectives, no connection to public health objectives was established. The policy strategy adopted by the Danish government has been policy instrument oriented, using a mixture of policy instruments to stimulate kitchen conversions.

In this paper, the Danish and Swedish strategies for promoting organic food within the public sector are compared, and it is discussed whether and to what extent differences in policy strategy can help explain cross-country variation in the shares of organic food consumption within the public sector. The two Scandinavian countries share many similarities. This makes them almost ideal for comparative analysis based on the most-similar systems research design which is used when the scholar wants to explore why different outcomes have occurred in similar contexts. When comparing similar countries, a number of factors which from a theoretical perspective can potentially explain differences in outcomes can be kept constant across the countries. Factors that are constant across cases cannot explain variation in outcomes. Only factors varying across cases can be considered potentially explanatory and should be subject of further analysis. On a fundamental political level, Denmark and Sweden are often considered very similar in terms of their political systems (parliamentary democracy with minority government as the predominant mode of government) and policy styles (corporatist and consensual decision making). They share fairly

similar ambitions in relation to sustainable development in a more general sense and specifically in relation to the agricultural and food sector. In both countries, the government has engaged in promoting organic farming, including expressing aims for organic food consumption in the public sector. Increasing organic food consumption has been motivated in a similar manner as it is seen as a measure to grow the organic farm sector (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2012; Jordbruksdepartementet 2006, 16; Jörgensen 2012, 32). Hence, these factors can be held constant in the comparative analysis. However, the two cases are not completely comparable as there are differences in policy context. Relatively speaking, many more meals are served in the public sector in Sweden compared with Denmark. In Sweden, taxpayer funded meals are served in primary, secondary and vocational schools, while in Denmark most students bring their own food (Koch *et al.* 2018, 39; Risku-Norja & Løes 2017, 112). In the conclusion, it will be discussed what this means for the transferability of policy lessons between the two countries.

The next section of this report outlines the concepts of policy instruments and framing. These concepts are used as the analytical lenses through which the policy programmes in the three countries are analysed in the subsequent section. The final section summaries the findings, discusses the extent to which the different programmes aimed at increasing the consumption of organic food in the public sector can explain the differences in achievements in the two countries and whether the experiences with the programmes are transferable from one country to another.

## **Analytical framework: framing and policy instruments**

Broadly defined, public policy is the government courses of action or inaction directed towards a problem (Heidenheimer *et al.* 1990, 3). Unpacking the concept of policy, May (2003) argues that public policies “typically contain a set of intentions or goals, a mix of instruments or means for accomplishing the intentions, a designation of governmental or nongovernmental entities charged with carrying out the intentions, and an allocation of resources for the requisite tasks.”

In policy analysis, the focus would often be on the policy instruments when explaining outcomes. Policy instruments are the nuts and bolts of public policy as it is through these that government can bring about the desired change of behaviour. Policy instruments can be defined as the “the set of techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social changes” (Vedung 1998, 21). In his classic policy instrument typology, Hood (1983) distinguished between instruments based upon information (informative instruments), authority (regulatory instruments), treasure (economic instruments) and organization (Hood 1983). These types of instruments are based on different motivational rationales. Informative instruments use learning or persuasion to motivate people to change behaviour. Regulatory instruments use rules backed by authority to apply force if necessary to bring about compliance with prescribed or prohibited behaviour. Economic instruments use economic incentives to motivate people to behave in a particular way by rewarding desired behaviour or increasing the cost of continuing undesired behaviour. Finally, organisation uses *architecture*, i.e. building or shaping organisations in a way inducing people to behave in particular ways. Organisation is often associated with the use of one or more of the other three instrument types (Hood 1983; Vedung 1998). For instance, implementing an organic certification and labelling scheme requires an organisation to certify and monitor compliance with

the standards. This instrument typology has proven very robust and continues to be widely used (Hood 2007). Policy instruments can be used to directly affect the motivations of individual target group members in order to change behaviour or indirectly through particular organisational designs which facilitate a certain type of behaviour.

While an instrument perspective would take us quite far in explaining impact, it only focusses on one set of policy-related factors influencing outcomes. Another factor which can influence outcomes is the way in which policy is framed in relation to the ideas and values underpinning public policies. The concept of framing is mainly applied as a perspective to explain why a particular discourse dominates the policy debate. But it can also help us understand policy performance, particularly in situations in which policy applies relatively weak instruments but nonetheless produces a significant impact.

Ideational foundations and framing in relation to these can have an important impact on motivating those who are responsible for implementing policy and those who are the targets of policy, i.e. those whose behaviour must change to bring about the desired outcome. All policies rest on more or less developed and articulated ideas. Policy ideas can be defined as causal beliefs about economic, social and political phenomena. As Béland and Cox (2016, 430) states, “As beliefs, they are interpretations of the material world, shaped as much by the material world as by our emotions and values. As causal beliefs, ideas posit relationships between things and events”. They “help to construct the problems and issues that enter the policy agenda ...” (Béland 2009, 702; see also Béland & Cox 2011; Blyth 2002; Campbell 2002; Hall 1993).

Some ideas have more emotional appeal than others do. To help understand this phenomenon, Cox and Béland (2013) apply the concept of valence, which they define as “as an emotional quality of an idea that can be either positive or negative in its character, or high or low in its intensity” (p. 308). If policies can be based on such ideas or framed in relation to them, they are more likely to generate support. When framing a policy issue in relation to ideas, policy makers “invoke ideas that evoke positive feelings to build support for a particular policy option, and they tend to downplay less desirable aspects of the policy option” (Cox & Béland 2013, 317). Framing a policy in relation to an idea with positive valence can make certain courses of action more appealing to not only the public but also to people with expert knowledge (Cox & Béland 2013, 308, 312). Linking a policy issue to an idea can take place through rhetorical framing in which policy advocates create storylines focussed on using persuasion and argument to legitimate policy decisions (Schön & Rein 1994, 32). Rhetorical frames are selective in terms of which sort of information is given weight in the storylines and what is omitted or downgraded (Nisbet 2009, 16; Whitley *et al.* 2018). As Schön and Rein (1994, 26), point out, “Things are selected for attention and named in such a way as to fit the frame constructed for the situation”.

New policy initiatives can be framed differently and this may have an impact on the performance of policy. Framing policy in relation to an idea possessing a high level of positive appeal may have an independent influence on policy performance. It legitimises policy to staff responsible for implementation, target groups, other stakeholders as well as the public, and creates motivation and engagement within these groups of actors.

Organic food can be framed in relation to a number of ideas with positive appeal. The intergovernmental standardisation organisation Codex Alimentarius Commission (2007, 2) defines organic agriculture as

... a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agroecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It emphasizes the use of

management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems. This is accomplished by using, where possible, cultural, biological and mechanical methods, as opposed to using synthetic materials, to fulfil any specific function within the system.

The definition frames organic agriculture rather narrowly as a production management system which positively affects the agricultural eco-system such as improving biodiversity and soil health. The framing in relation to these benefits has positive appeal, but to a more limited constituency.

While Codex Alimentarius Commission's framing more or less explicitly underpin organic food and farm policies in most countries, organic farming and food can also be framed in relation to a broader set of ideas with emotional attraction. It can be linked to sustainability objectives for the farming industry or the public sector. Sustainability is an idea in which economic growth can co-exist with healthy eco-systems. The idea is based on the presumption that technologies and social organisation can be managed and improved to allow growth in an environmental friendly manner (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This is appealing to most people (Cox & Béland 2013). Organic food can also be framed as measure to promote a healthy diet. The World Health Organization defines a healthy diet as composed of meals which "achieve energy balance and a healthy weight, limit energy intake from total fats and shift fat consumption away from saturated fats to unsaturated fats and towards the elimination of trans-fatty acids, increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, and legumes, whole grains and nuts, limit the intake of free sugars, and limit salt (sodium) consumption from all sources and ensure that salt is iodized" (World Health Organization 2004, 38).<sup>5</sup>

Framing organic food as a contribution to more sustainable food production and consumption and/or as a measure to achieve a healthy diet can generate increased support for government efforts to promote organic farming and food as it would appeal broadly. As sustainability is a policy idea that cuts across all policy sectors, framing organic farming and food in relation to this idea may result in organic farming becoming integrated in other policy domains as a measure to achieve objectives. Framing organic food in relation to a healthy diet could potentially integrate organic food in nutrition policies or food policy strategies. Hence, if such framings succeed, the constituency supporting organic farming and food can be widened and result in a stronger efforts to pursue consumption objectives.

The argument highlighted here is that framing is a political exercise aimed at setting agendas and shaping, justifying and mobilising support for policy. Framing is frequently used as a political tool to generate support for certain policy objectives and to shape policies in ways believed to enable attainment of the objectives. It may also produce a significant impact as it generates support for policy, mobilises the effort of people involved in implementation as well as policy takers through emotional appeal. The alternative policy strategy is to rely less on appeal and framing and focus on using policy instruments to provide incentives, govern by rules or use persuasion and learning to achieve policy objectives.

The remainder of this paper compares how the governments of the three Scandinavian countries have shaped their policy programmes for increasing consumption of organic food within public sector institutions. The aim is to establish whether a link between programme design and effectiveness can be found.

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<sup>5</sup> See also, [https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/nutrientrequirements/healthydiet\\_factsheet394.pdf](https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/nutrientrequirements/healthydiet_factsheet394.pdf)

## Comparative study

Denmark and Sweden have promoted organic farming by supporting conversion and organic production through farm subsidies. They have also launched initiatives to promote organic food consumption within the public sector. These initiatives were based on voluntarism and therefore local and regional government and state institutions have had the final say on whether and how they would respond to the initiatives. Swedish data suggest that there is a huge variation in how and with which intensity local and regional governments have engaged in kitchen conversion (Ekomatcentrum 2020). Hence, comparing central government policies can only tell us how national policies can provide different opportunities to pursue a national organic consumption ambition.

### Sweden

In 2006, the Swedish government expressed concern that only 35 percent of the organic production was marketed as organic and therefore it was keen to ensure that a larger proportion would be marketed as certified organic. Swedish organic farmers were not required to be certified to receive organic farm subsidies as long as they complied with the EU regulation on organic farming. Most organic food products marketed in Sweden were certified by the private, state-recognised certification body KRAV (Jordbruksdepartementet 2006, 6-7). To create incentives for farmers to become certified, organic farm subsidies were partially reshaped. Another measure to promote organic food was to adopt a goal for consumption of certified organic food in the public sector. It was stated that the organic share of food purchases in the public sector should increase to 25 percent by 2010 from around 6 percent in 2006 (Jordbruksdepartementet 2006). It would be a major task as approximate 3 million meals are served on a daily basis within the Swedish public sector.<sup>6</sup> This proved too ambitious as the organic share had reached only 15 percent by 2010, but the 25 percent goal was achieved in 2013 (Koch *et al.* 2018, 22, 38, Jörgensen 2012, 28). There was no follow-up decision on a consumption goal until it was revived again in 2017 as part of the Swedish government's new food strategy.

In the government's proposal for a food strategy put forward in early 2017, it was stated that more organic food should be purchased by public sector institutions (Näringsdepartementet 2017a, 66); however, no specific measures were suggested to assist the conversion of kitchens in the public sector. In the government's action plan following the adoption of the food strategy, it was stated that by 2030, 60 percent of the food purchased in the public sector should be certified organic (Näringsdepartementet 2017b, 5), but there were no specific proposals on instruments to back the objective. Sweden set national goals for consumption of organic food within public sector institutions before any other country. The Swedish government used the ambitious goals adopted by the Municipality of Copenhagen as an example which could inspire Swedish municipalities (Jordbruksdepartementet 2006, 99) and to show that it was indeed possible to achieve high organic consumption levels (Miljö- och jordbruksutskottet 2010, 25, 116).

Both consumption goals adopted by the Swedish government were voluntary, and therefore local and county governments and state institutions were not obliged to reach them. Discussing the importance of the 25 percent goal, Jörgensen (2012, 73) argues that local politicians and public servants do take such goals set by

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.livsmedelsverket.se/matvanor-halsa--miljo/maltider-i-varld-skola-och-omsorg/fakta-om-offentliga-maltider#:~:text=Antal%20m%C3%A5ltider%20i%20v%C3%A5rd%2C%20skola%20och%20omsorg,-l%20Sverige%20serveras&text=Skola%20cirka%201%2C3%20miljoner,cirka%2074%20000%20m%C3%A5ltider%20Fdag>

central government seriously and strive to achieve them. This argument is supported by the Environment and Agriculture Committee in the Swedish Parliament which reported that counties and municipalities expressed a positive view on the consumption goal and found it helpful in increasing organic food procurements (Miljö- och jordbruksutskottet 2010, 122). By 2013, 85 percent of the Swedish municipalities had adopted goals on organic consumption (Riksrevisjonen 2016, 82).

The way in which organic food is framed locally and regionally is to a large extent influenced by the framing of central government policies. Organic farming was originally framed as an environmental policy measure in the late 1980s (Daugbjerg & Møller 2010). In a government commissioned report on sustainable consumption published in 2005, organic food was framed as a measure to achieve sustainable consumption. To promote sustainable consumption, the report recommended the adoption of an objective stating that 25 percent of the food purchased in public sector institutions should be organic by 2010 (SOU 2005, chapter 3). The argument for considering organic food as an example of sustainable consumption was that “organic production to a high extent promotes national environmental quality objectives and includes ethical values and global solidarity” (ibid., 65, author’s translation). The government document announcing the consumption objective in 2006 subscribed to this argument and linked organic food to sustainability, arguing that “to stimulate a positive development of the market and a sustainable development, the consumption of certified organic food in the public sector should increase” (Jordbruksdepartementet 2006, 15, author’s translation).

As argued above, organic food can also be framed in relation to a healthy diet. Such a link was established in the government commissioned report on sustainable consumption in 2005. The report highlighted the organic food consumption component of the S.M.A.R.T. human nutrition concept (SOU 2005, 79-83). The S.M.A.R.T. concept recommends reducing meat consumption; minimising empty calories; increasing the amount of organic produce; carefully choosing the right sort of meat and vegetables from an environmental and health perspective; and increasing transport efficiency.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the S.M.A.R.T concept is closely aligned with the World Health Organization’s definition of a healthy diet.

Though the Swedish government did not link organic food to the S.M.A.R.T. concept when announcing the 25 percent consumption goal in 2005 (Jordbruksdepartementet 2006), it has figured frequently in government publications. For instance, it was discussed as a framework for promoting more sustainable food habits by the Swedish Food Agency (*Livsmedelsverket*) in 2007 (Livsmedelsverket 2007b, 20) and is still considered a sound dietary guideline by municipalities. Most municipalities describe their public health priorities in a municipal public health plan, and it is recognised by the Food Agency that this can include the municipality’s objective for organic food consumption (Livsmedelsverket 2007a, 5; 2016, 44; 2019, 46; see also Jørgensen 2012, 31).

The Swedish government has very much relied on the consumption goal and framing as measures to promote consumption of organic food within public sector institutions. Policy instruments to support the goal were calibrated at a very modest level, and there was no specific policy programme designed to support conversion of kitchens in the public sector. There was modest funding available from 2008 to 2010 under the rural development programme which was administered by the Swedish Board of Agriculture (*Jordbruksverket*). Kitchen conversion projects could obtain government funding for up to 50 percent of the costs

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<sup>7</sup> **S** = Större andel vegetabilier, **M** = Mindre andel "tomma kalorier", **A** = Andelen ekologiskt ökar, **R** = Rätt kött och grönsaker, **T** = Transportsnålt.



(Jordbruksdepartementet 2008). 14 projects obtained funding over the three-year period, and the government grants amounted to a total of 9.2 million Swedish kronor of which 2 million kronor were granted for the collection of consumption data and a conference (Miljö- och jordbruksutskottet 2010, 101-103). No single central government agency was granted responsibility for coordinating efforts to reach the consumption goal in the public sector. It has been mainly private organisations and NGOs, such the certification body KRAV, Ekomatcentrum, Ekocentrum, Hushållningssällskapet and Miljöresurs Linné which have delivered education and advisory services related to kitchen conversion (ibid., 122; Koch *et al.* 2018). Under the food strategy adopted in 2017, the Board of Agriculture spent a total of 3 million Swedish kronor on organic education activities within the public sector in 2018 and 2019 (Burman *et al.* 2020, 93).

After the funding programme expired in 2010, the government has refraining from providing subsidies for kitchen conversion. Asked in Parliament in 2014 about government's position on setting a new consumption goal and on introducing new kitchen conversion measures after the 25 percent goal had been achieved in 2013, the Minister for Rural Affairs (Centre Party) replied that the government had decided not to set a new goal and neither was it considering to introduce further measures to support kitchen conversion. The argument put forward by the minister was that "the Government does not see it as its role [to promote kitchen conversion in the public sector] but would leave it to each municipality and county to choose whether or not to set such goals" (author's translation).<sup>8</sup> Asked a similar question in 2018, the subsequent Social Democratic and Green Party coalition government stated it wanted to maintain the existing goal of achieving 60 percent in 2030, but did not commit to introducing new measures to support the goal.<sup>9</sup>

To explore whether the framing of organic food consumption at the central government level has trickled down to the local government level, local government documents in four selected municipalities were examined. Two of the municipalities, Lund and Malmö, are at the top in the list of the organic food league table which ranks municipalities according to the share organic food purchases measured as a percentage of total food purchases, based on purchasing prices. The two other municipalities, Umeå and Ystad, were ranked lowly in the league table in 2018 when evidence for this report was collected in mid-2019 (Ekomatcentrum 2019). Since then, Umeå has doubled its share and moved up the ranking (Ekomatcentrum 2020).

The Municipality of Lund in Southern Sweden topped the organic food league table with an organic share of 83 percent in 2019. Despite being at the top of the list, the municipality has only published limited material on its organic food programme. Organic food consumption is framed as a measure to achieve sustainable consumption. In its nutrition policy, it is argued that to promote continuing sustainable development, it is important to require organic food products in public procurement (Lunds Kommun 2014). Similarly, in the municipality's programme for ecological sustainability, organic food purchases are seen as a measure to achieve sustainability (Lunds Kommun 2018, 13). Neighbouring Malmö was ranked third in the organic food league table in 2018 with 65 percent of the food purchased being organic. The foundation of its nutrition policy is the S.M.A.R.T. concept which provides a guideline for a healthy diet and urges increased use of organic food products. As stated in its policy for sustainable development and food, "all in Malmö has a right to good food as part of an economically, socially and ecological sustainable development. This is possible by following the 'Eat S.M.A.R.T.-model' which aligns health and environment without increasing expenditure"

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/interpellation/mal-och-stod-for-ekologisk-produktion-och\\_H110362](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/interpellation/mal-och-stod-for-ekologisk-produktion-och_H110362).

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svar-pa-skriftlig-fraga/malen-om-ekologisk-odling-och-konsumtion\\_H612881](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svar-pa-skriftlig-fraga/malen-om-ekologisk-odling-och-konsumtion_H612881).

(Malmö Stad 2010, 11, author's translation). In other words, organic food consumption is framed in relation to a healthy diet and sustainable development (ibid., 7).

The Municipality of Ystad could be found towards the end of the organic food league table with an organic share of 12 percent of the food purchased. Despite its modest achievement in a Swedish context, its sustainable food policy is well-described. The policy links organic food to health, arguing that "the food should largely be ethically and organically certified, seasonal, locally produced and based on the S.M.A.R.T.-model" (Ystads Kommun 2016, 7, author's translation). As part of implementing the S.M.A.R.T. model, Ystad aims at achieving an organic share of 35 percent by 2020. In addition to linking organic food to public health, the 35 percent target is framed as a measure to achieve sustainable food consumption (ibid., 5, 9). The Municipality of Umeå ranked lowly in the 2019 version of organic food league table with 15 percent. The local government had set high ambitions, aiming to reach 25 percent in 2020. It is likely to achieve this as it reached 24 percent in 2019. The desire to increase organic food consumption in Umeå was framed under the heading "Climate smart, organic and locally produced food" and the effort to reshape menus and adjust them to seasonal supply is guided by the S.M.A.R.T. model (author's translation).<sup>10</sup> This framing of organic food consumption in the two municipalities demonstrates that even low achievers subscribe to central government framings.

## Denmark

The Danish organic food policy is unique compared with other countries. It applies a wide range of policy instruments that affects both the supply and demand-side of the organic market. Comparing the impact of national organic policies on organic food consumption in four countries, Daugbjerg and Sønderskov (2012) have shown that the Danish organic food policy with its relatively strong focus on demand-side policy measures had a significant positive effect on consumption.

Some municipalities experimented with organic food already in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but it was not until 1997 the government allocated 39 million Danish kroner for the promotion of organic food consumption within the public sector. This resulted in a number of regional and municipal organic procurement projects. In 2001, the Innovation Law was altered in order to allow applications for funding of kitchen conversion projects in the private as well as in the public sector (Kristensen *et al.* 2002, 15-21). While there were grants available for kitchen conversion, the government did not develop a kitchen conversion programme at that time and did not set a consumption goal for the public sector. It was not until 2011 that the newly elected Social Democratic led coalition government considered a kitchen conversion programme.

The Municipality of Copenhagen had emerged as a pioneer in public kitchen conversion in the mid and late 2000s. The appointment of the former social democratic Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and former EU Environment Commissioner, Ritt Bjerregaard, to Lord Mayor of Copenhagen in 2006 had provided a conducive political environment at the top of the municipal organisation to promote organic food (Daugbjerg 2020).

This inspired the Minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Mette Gjerskov, to communicate her plans for a kitchen conversion scheme in November 2011. Her aim at that time was that all kitchens in the public sector should have achieved certification under the government cuisine label at silver level by 2020, implying that

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<https://www.umea.se/umeakommun/utbildningochbarnomsorg/matlunch/materviserverar/klimatsmartekologiskochnarproduceradmat.4.16f6133114e3fb40885c76e.html> , Link no longer active.

at least 60 percent of the food purchased should be organic. It was estimated that public kitchens served 500,000 meals a day (Fødevarerministeren 2011). However, in comparison with her initial intentions put forward in November 2011, the 60 percent goal was severely watered down in the conversion programme launched in June 2012. Participation in the conversion programme was voluntary and state institutions, regional and local governments participating were only required to *work towards* the 60 percent objective (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2012, 12). Nor was there a requirement for the kitchens to obtain certification under the organic cuisine label. Making the participation mandatory was strongly opposed by the Ministry of Finance as it feared that local and regional governments would use such a requirement to demand that central government compensated them for extra expenditure associated with kitchen conversion (Interview Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (DVFA), May 2019).

The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (DVFA) was given responsibility for designing and implementing the kitchen conversion programme. A combination of policy instruments were introduced to motivate more kitchens to use organic food products. Economic subsidies for training and advice of kitchen staff were combined with informative tools in the form of information dissemination and persuasion. Further, the desire to promote the organic cuisine label as part of the conversion programme added a regulatory layer to the programme, though not a formal requirement. The government granted 28 million kroner annually for the activities supporting the conversion of kitchens in 2012 and 2013 (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2012, 32). 29 million kroner were later granted for 2014.

There were legal restrictions on how to use the grants as they were allocated under the Organic Promotion Scheme which was co-funded by the European Union and the Danish government. Municipalities and other public authorities were not eligible to apply for subsidies under the scheme. Under the scheme, funding could be provided for information, advisory and educational activities. As the Organic Promotion Scheme was mainly directed at farmers and smaller food manufacturers, kitchen conversion projects in the municipalities or regions had to include such entities (Fødevarestyrelsen 2012a, 4, 6-7; 2012c, 6; Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2012, 12). The design of the funding scheme meant that subsidies did not provide direct economic incentives for municipalities and public sector kitchens to sign up to conversion projects. Some of the funding was used for information activities, but a considerable share was used to pay conversion consultants for running kitchen conversion projects and vocational educational institutions for offering courses for kitchen staff.

These achievements were not only a result of policy instrument design. Building capacity to implement the instruments effectively was also a key factor. There was a strong reliance on information dissemination and persuasion as the means to activate various types of organisations to engage in kitchen conversion efforts. It required significant assistance from the DVFA's partners to bring about behavioural change which would work either directly towards the aim of conversion or provide the conditions enabling conversion. Organic Denmark, which represents organic farmers, consumers, food companies with an organic production line and food retailers, had a pivotal role in the implementation stage. Therefore, the DVFA coordinated a number of activities with the association (personal communication DVFA, 21 November 2019). People with expertise in kitchen conversion were important actors as they had to be engaged as consultants to provide practical advice and organise and lead conversion projects which could obtain government funding for the training of kitchen staff (Fødevarestyrelsen 2012a, 5-7).

Food wholesalers held the key to the success of the conversion programme, and therefore the DVFA and Organic Denmark jointly met with wholesaler executives to activate them. It was essential that the

wholesalers offered an organic product assortment and that they agreed to assist kitchens in calculating the organic share to document that they had increased the share of organic food purchases or if certified under of the organic cuisine label to meet its requirements (Interview DVFA, September 2019; Fødevarestyrelsen 2012b). Though it did not become the official objective, the initial statement by the Minister in 2011 that 60 percent of the food served in the public sector should be organic as well as the fact that the programme was backed by 56 million kroner to be spent in 2012 and 2013 was an important motivational factor for the food wholesalers to engage in implementing the programme (interviews DVFA, May and September 2019). It conveyed a message that the government was serious about converting public sector kitchens and that there would be a new and potentially large market for organic produce. This effort was successful already by early 2013 as it was possible for kitchens to source all the organic food products that they demanded from the wholesalers (*Økologi & Erhverv* 2013, issue 518, 9; Operate 2014, 109).

To support the implementation of the conversion programme, work on developing tools and methods for kitchen conversion was initiated. For this task, the DVFA relied on Organic Denmark and the Agriculture and Food Council as well as the Copenhagen House of Food (Fødevarestyrelsen 2012a, 9; 2012c, 9). The last mentioned organisation had relevant practical and specialist knowledge obtained when supervising the conversion of public sector kitchens in Copenhagen. Food fairs were an important venue for information dissemination to kitchens and food wholesalers and for connecting the two parties (*Økologi & Erhverv* 2012, issue 503, 8; 2012, issue 511, 7; 2013, issue 518, 8-9). The DVFA took part in various food fairs to promote, inform and advise on certification under the organic cuisine label. A public servant in the DVFA asserted that the high level of visibility was important in conveying the message that there was considerable political and administrative determination to make the conversion programme successful (personal communication DVFA, 21 November 2019). Training and motivating kitchen staff to use organic produce without exceeding existing catering budgets were important components in supporting kitchen conversion. In addition to providing kitchen skills, an important dimension was to change the mind-set of kitchen staff (Interview DVFA, September 2019). To engage the food wholesalers, Organic Denmark built on its expertise previously obtained from demand-side activities directed at food retailers over a number of years (interview Organic Denmark, June 2019).<sup>11</sup>

In parallel with the kitchen conversion programme, two other government initiatives supported the promotion of organic food consumption in the public sector. In 2006, the then Ministry of the Environment established a partnership on responsible public procurement with municipalities, regions, state and other public institutions.<sup>12</sup> Another government initiative to promote of organic food in the public sector was the *Wise Food Procurement* project which was granted 12.4 million Danish kroner over the period 2013-2016 for establishing a task force to provide advice and information on public procurement of organic food products. The task force was operating under the auspices of the Food Culture institution which is an independent institution under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries (Nationalt Center for Miljø og Energi 2017).<sup>13</sup>

As the analysis above shows, the policy programmes aimed at increasing consumption of organic food in public sector institutions relied to a large extent on various sets of policy instruments. Framing of organic food in relation to broader ideas with positive appeal played a limited role. In comparison with the framing in Sweden, organic food is more narrowly framed in Denmark though there are similarities. In both countries,

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<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of Organic Denmark's collaboration with retailers, see Schwartzman (2012).

<sup>12</sup> <https://ansvarligeindkob.dk/partnerskab/>

<sup>13</sup> See this source for an evaluation of the project.

increasing organic consumption within the public sector was motivated by a desire to grow the organic food and farming sector (Fødevarerministeren 2011; Fødevarestyrelsen 2012d).

Though there were references to healthy food in the government's *Action Plan 2020*, which launched the kitchen conversion programme, organic food was not an integral component of a government recognised healthy diet concept such as the S.M.A.R.T. concept in Sweden. However, the communication plan, which was part of the conversion programme, did set out to link the promotion of the organic cuisine label to the Keyhole label (*Nøglehullet*) (Fødevarestyrelsen 2012a, 10-11). This label was originally Swedish and was later developed into a joint Nordic scheme operated by the governments of Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and introduced in 2009. The purpose of the label is "to help the consumer ... to choose the healthier alternatives with less fat, salt and sugar, more dietary fibre and more whole grains" (author's translation).<sup>14</sup> As the Keyhole label does not include organics as a component, it could not be used to establish a direct link between organic food and health. However, there was an attempt to promote the keyhole label in parallel with the organic cuisine label to signal a link between organic food and a healthy diet. The initiative was terminated because of low interest in the food service sector (personal communication with DVFA, 16 November 2020).

Organic food was not explicitly framed as sustainable consumption, but the *Organic Action Plan 2020* linked organic farming to sustainability. The minister of food, agriculture and fisheries stated in the action plan that organics was a cornerstone in the green transition of the Danish farm industry (Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri 2012, 4). Further, she highlighted that transition from conventional to organic farming means that "biodiversity increases, the drinking water is not contaminated [*belastes*] by pesticides and animal welfare improves" (Ibid., 4, author's translation). Later on, the DVFA and Organic Denmark followed up on the minister's message by launching the joint information campaign *Choose Organic Because ...* which also added less food additives and no pesticide residues in food as important reasons to buy organic (personal communication with DVFA, 16 November 2020).

## Conclusion and policy considerations

In both countries, there has been a political desire to promote organic farming as well as organic consumption, but the way in which they have gone about it varies. Promotion of organic food within the public sector was seen as a measure to increase the consumption of organic food, and in turn the increased demand could be a driver for conversion of more farm land into organic production. But the Danish and Swedish government have shaped their policy programmes differently.

The policy strategy in *Sweden* has to a considerable extent relied on setting a consumption goal and importantly on framing the issue of organic consumption in relation to broader concerns - public health and sustainability. By framing organic food consumption in relation to such broader ideas possessing a high degree of positive valance, the Swedish programme has relied on emotional appeal aimed at reaching out to public health, human nutrition professionals and frontline staff as well as to environmental policy makers and administrators. Policy instruments designed to create incentives to convert kitchens played a modest role. While the *Danish government* also established a relationship between organic farming and sustainability, the attempt to link organics and public health remained much weaker. In comparison with the Swedish strategy, the Danish strategy has been strongly policy instrument oriented, using a mixture of policy

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/retsinfo/2019/9665>

instruments which would create incentives and motivation for converting kitchens in the public sector to use more organic food product. These instruments were backed by considerable capacity to implement them.

The Swedish case highlights the power of framing in pursuing policy objectives. This strategy appears to have been the most effective in terms of growing organic food consumption in the public sector. However, on the basis of the findings of this report, it cannot be firmly concluded that a framing strategy is better than a policy instrument strategy. In addition to different policy strategies, differences in context can most likely contribute to explain why the Swedish government was more successful than the two other governments in increasing the consumption of organic food in public sector institutions. An important contextual difference is that taxpayer funded meals are served in Swedish primary, secondary and vocational schools, while in Denmark, most students bring their own food. Hence, it can be assumed that there are better conditions for increasing organic food consumption in Sweden since a larger share of younger people (pupils and indirectly their parents) are targeted by policy than in Denmark. It is typically the younger parts of the population who have preferences for organic food and therefore can be assumed to be more supportive of organic food promotion initiatives.

Another contextual factor which could possibly have impacted positively on the ability of the Swedish government to reach a higher share of organic food in the public sector is the legitimacy of central government objectives in local and regional government. As suggested by Jørgensen (2012) and by the Environmental and Agricultural Committee (Miljö- och jordbruksutskottet 2010) in the Swedish Parliament, in general the national goal on organic food shares was positively received by local and regional governments. Whether Danish local governments would have received similar official goals just as positively is difficult to predict. Establishing whether national policy goals adopted by central government would have similar or different impacts in Denmark requires further research comparing the relationship between central and local government in the two countries more generally and specifically in relation to organic food promotion within the public sector.

While this report has identified national policy strategies as an important factor explaining cross-national variation in increasing organic food consumption in the public sector, conditions at local or regional level can potentially contribute to explain variation across the two countries. These could for instance be differences in public procurement rules, budget conditions or subcontracting to private partners. As highlighted above, there is significant within-country variation in organic food consumption across municipalities and regions particularly in Denmark and Sweden. Therefore, cross-jurisdictional research within each country may also contribute to identify conditions for successful conversion of kitchens in the public sector.

The contextual differences across the two countries raise questions about the transferability of policy experiences and designs. Though Denmark and Sweden share ambitions in promoting organic farming and food, the policy context in the two countries is not entirely similar as argued above. Studies on policy transfer show that an important factor influencing whether transfer of a policy programme from abroad will be successful is the comparability of the political, institutional and economic contexts in the host and receiving country (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). Given that Sweden seems to have benefitted from a policy context more conducive to increasing organic food consumption within the public sector than in many other countries, it is unlikely that the Swedish framing strategy can be directly and successfully transferred to other countries. Relying on policy instruments in combination with building capacity to implement the instruments, as practised in the Danish case, appears to be a more transferable policy strategy.

Theoretically, it can be argued that a combined framing and policy instrument strategy would prove the most effective to grow the consumption of organic food within the public sector. However, we would still find significant variation between countries as the contexts within which such a strategy would be implemented are different. Some contexts would be conducive to successful implementation of a combined framing and instrument oriented strategy, whereas other contexts would have a dampening effect, resulting in weaker policy impact.

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