

Unwrapping The Northern Sea cheese - Enacting place in the Danish dairy food sector

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"The natural must be made to look surprising"
Bertolt Brecht

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Abstract

The Nordic foodscape has changed radically over the last decade. In Scandinavia there is massive focus on a Nordic gourmet food evolution in general and in Denmark specifically also a cheese revolution.

Notions of terroir and place specific foodstuffs are rapidly gaining interest in Scandinavia. In Denmark this process has been vitalized further by the success of the restaurant NOMA, which was celebrated by the influential Pellegrino as number one on their Top 50 of world restaurants (3 years in a row). Likewise the number of place specific foodstuff, which can be bought locally or in national supermarkets, is increasing. In general a heightened awareness of place as a central term in the making of markets can be found. Focus on cheese per se and Danish cheese in particular has risen considerable in the Danish mediascape (Frank 2009).

Notions of terroir and place specific foodstuffs are rapidly gaining interest in the Nordic countries. In the fall of 2008 Thise Mejeri won an annual Danish gourmet dairy prize with their speciality cheese 'Vesterhavsost'. The judges noted that: "*The cheese has character, and it has the "terroir" that we search for. It means that it is characterized by the origin of the milk, as well as the area of production and maturing. It has a good story*"¹.

The Vesterhavsost (Eng. 'The Northern Sea cheese') was thus inscribed in an (it seems) ever-growing trend towards food related site-specificity.

Even though the Nordic region consists of five self-contained nations, each with its own distinctive geography, linguistics, traditions, cultural and political background the Nordic countries are often seen as one entity with some kind of shared collective temperament or mode of expressions. But - to paraphrase Raymond Carver - what do we talk about, when we talk about 'the Nordic'? And can we follow such a collective temperament or mode of expressions into the world of cheese production?

¹ Source: Thise.dk. Italics added. My translation.

Unpacking a cheese



A trip to the local supermarket back in 2008 sparked a curious interest for a new and already acclaimed product: Vesterhavssosten (The Northern Sea cheese). How did it end up in the fridge? And in which ways (if any) did it bring along the Northern Sea?

In this paper I wish to “unwrap the cheese” and open the black box of the finished product. Drawing on a vocabulary from post-ANT I try to come to terms with how the cheese is blackboxed and wrapped. I claim that this cheese (which has no apparent regional or geographical ties) is enacted as something particular Nordic - a terroir induced Northern Sea speciality. I demonstrate – with the help of STS – that notions of terroir or sitespecificity are not inherently givens rooted in soil and tradition, but elements being made present through ongoing negotiations and translations by different actors.

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The theoretical background

My “cheesy investigations” constitutes a small part of a crossdisciplinary research project entitled ‘MultiTrust’ which focuses on multi-criterial assessment and communication of effects of organic food systems. In this specific part I have decided to centerstage a (widely available) Danish, regional speciality-cheese as a way to enter discussions of place and later trust. I have (thus far) visited the dairy (Thise²), collected all publicly available information about the cheese, I have sourced newspapers, on-line material as well as from different magazines and I have conducted interviews with key persons at the dairy.

In order to denaturalize different organic terms and biases I wish to evoke a ‘performative view’ on terroir and civic food chains in which the ‘naturally included notions’ are “unsettled” and investigated as ‘doings’, ‘enactments’ and ongoing accomplishments in practice. This way of thinking (in my particular case - about organic food) draws on Karl Weick’s theory of ‘organizing’ as well as John Law’s notion of ‘ordering’ (Weick 1979; Law 1994; Latour 2006). The theoretical resources invoked are thus gathered from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

I am trying to unsettle the ‘naturalities’ of the finished products and food chains. Due to the limitations of the paper, the role of alternative food chains will only be touched upon briefly.

² www.thise.dk

How is ANT helpful?

Amongst other things, ANT attempts to show how scientific truths are contingent upon the capacity of the producers of that knowledge to enroll and align heterogeneous elements in durable networks, consisting of both human and non-human actors³. It is pivotal to understand that these networks exist only as ongoing *achievements* maintained by different actors: “[T]he spread in time and space of anything - claims, orders, artefacts, goods - is in the hands of people; each of these people act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it (Latour 1986 p. 266-267)”.

So, for a Northern Sea cheese to appear as a buyable product in the fridge of the local supermarket, lots of work must continuously be undertaken by many different actors: “coherence is an achievement: it requires lots of work to assemble complex technological objects and ensure their survival; it is never a matter of natural development or simple progress” (Jensen 2004 p. 54). Most of the actors and the ongoing work are not readily available, but bundled. With a term borrowed from cybernetics ANT suggest that different heterogeneous actors can be brought together (through processes of alignment and translation⁴) in a complexity reducing black box. A black box contains that “which no longer needs to be considered, those things whose contents have become a matter of indifference” (Callon and Latour 1981 p. 285). Whenever a black box is closed, the content and participating actors are harder to “unbundle”:[S]cientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become (Latour 1999 p. 304)”.

The different elements of this paper are thus the results of my attempt to unpack the black box of a cheese.

STS and rural studies

Science and Technology Studies (STS) could be described as a way of thinking about and describing how facts and conventions are always situated outcomes of local practices. It offers a vocabulary for de-stabilizing taken for granted notions:

“[A] central, recurrent feature of many different incarnations of STS is the ability to provoke, highlight and challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions, and to unsettle and disturb our inclination to depend on safe formulae and on comfortable analytic perspectives” (Woolgar 2004: 347).

The intellectual tradition of science and technology studies (STS) has demonstrated a keen interest in bringing into light the social practices around the use and production of science and technology. The underlying claim is that science and technology are only meaningful concepts insofar as they relate to ways of *doing* things. STS thus opposes the assumption that technology is an autonomous or neutral tool (Bowden 1995). Within the past couple of decades the focus has surpassed the confines of laboratories and technology, however. STS now engages with a broad set of topics including but certainly not limited to financial markets (Callon 1998; Callon and Muniesa 2005), health (Berg 1992; Berg 1996; Berg 1998; Mol

³ To study how these actor- networks are composed and maintained, actor-network theorists suggest that social scientists should (ethnographically) follow scientists and technologists around as they go about their day-to-day work of constructing networks of heterogeneous actors, and, in so doing, trying not to pre-judge what these networks are constituted of.

⁴ www.thise.dk

2002; Mesman 2008), animals and nature (Haraway 1998), gender (Haraway 1991; Haraway 1997; Gad 2005), notions of quality (Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002) and surveillance (Lauritsen 2011)⁵.

Despite different approaches to and uses of a rather heterogeneous vocabulary - a common denominator (for STS) might be located in a shared scepticism pertaining to the longstanding dichotomy between the social and the material/non-human by locating agency not only in the domain of humans - a pivotal and very predominant argument in the writings of Bruno Latour (e.g. Latour 1987; Latour 1992; Latour 1993; Latour 2005).

When looking at the cheese in the supermarket some information is readily available: It is an organic dairy product, produced by a company called Thise.

First, a look at the Danish dairy business.

The Danish Dairyscape

It is not within the limits of this paper to give detailed insights regarding the Danish agricultural industry in general and the dairy industry in particular. With the term 'dairyscape' I wish to indicate that I have strolled to an imaginary top of this fields' physical layout and gazed shortly at the surroundings. The following depiction should be understood as the result of such a gazing moment and not a thorough investigation of the knots and bolts of the Danish dairy industry.

In general dairy products and dairy farming plays a major role in the Danish agricultural landscape. Due to the climate, soil and geographical layout dairy cattle has been raised in Denmark for millennia. Milk, butter and cheese have formed a natural part of the Danish diet at least since the 700th.

"Archaeological excavations and finds from the stone age show that more than 4,000 years B.C. the first Danes began to burn down forests in order to cultivate land and to keep livestock. The first cattle were probably wild oxen, which were caught and kept in a close. The Vikings kept cows, and medieval frescos show women churning butter. From early on, dairy products formed part of the farmer's tithes to his king, church and lord of the manor. During the 16th and 17th centuries the Danes became increasingly skilled in dairy production, e.g. King Christian IV's letters show that the court farms were well informed about dairy layouts and equipment" (Mejeriforeningen 2012, unnumbered).

Developments gained further momentum in the 18th century, particularly in the manors. Here production was stepped up in order to meet the growing demand from the towns where the population as well as the standard of living were rising. Following the introduction of the agrarian reforms at the end of the century farmers joined in. Especially butter was produced for resale and in the mid-19th century growing volumes found their way to foreign markets. In 1882 a group of Jutland farmers decided to join forces to set up a dairy on a co-operative basis. This would allow them to rationalise dairy operations, to afford buying modern production equipment and to hire skilled dairy professionals. This in turn enabled them to supply high-quality products and to fetch higher prices.

The farmers committed to supplying their entire milk production to the dairy in return for a claim on the profits according to their milk supply. Consequently, a rich farmer with many cows would take home more money than a farmer with a small herd, but at the general

⁵ In general, rural studies have been reluctant when it comes to including and/or expanding the vocabulary developed within STS and ANT. Mutually, the STS community seem to have been equally reluctant in its endeavours to "wrestle food related topics" (Noteworthy exceptions are: Callon, Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2002; Harbers, Mol and Stollmeyer 2002).

assembly they would be equal: one man - one vote. The co-operative movement was democracy at work.

The dispersion of co-operative dairies 1882-1890

The co-operative idea soon spread across the country and in 1900 there were more than 1,000 co-operative dairies in Denmark. Without any sort of central management or control they managed, in a matter of just few years, to reshape a large share of the agricultural production, and the dairy industry found a setting, which has largely applied ever since. Denmark still has some privately owned dairies, but 97% of the milk is now supplied to co-operative dairy companies. The Danish cows produce far more milk than we can consume in the domestic market, so more than 2/3 of the total Danish milk pool go into export products. This share places us (Denmark) among the world's top five dairy exporting nations" (Mejeriforeningen 2012, unnumbered).

In a commercial campaign entitled 'The New Story' (Den Nye Fortælling) from 2011 The Danish Agriculture & Food Council stated that we export more cheese to France (generally acclaimed for their cheeses) than we import. In 2009 we exported circa 26 million €s worth of cheese (180 million DKK) to France while importing "only" 18 million €s worth of cheese (127 million DKK). We exported 7.994 tons and imported 5.724 tons – effectively making the Danish slightly more expensive/exclusive than the French) (The Danish Agriculture & Food Council 2012)⁶.

In general the Danish dairy industry has played a pivotal role in the strengthening of the organic market in Denmark and the cultivation/formation of alternative/short(er) food chains:

"More than 85% of Danish organic farms keep livestock, and a large portion of the organically cultivated land is used for fodder crops like grass and grains. Consequently, the dairy sector has been the single most important driving factor for organic sales. It is estimated that dairy products account for 65% of the total organic production value, followed by vegetables (20%) and eggs (10%)" (Fuchshofen and Fuchshofen 2000, Chapter 3.1.1, unnumbered). Since the end of the 90's, there has been a considerable development within organic farming in Denmark. A report from 2009 states that Denmark with 6% of the total revenue has the highest organic market share in Europe (Willer H. and Kilcher L. 2009 p. 156)⁷.

As the Northern Sea cheese is an organic product, we turn our attention to the organic aspect of farming.

Alternative & conventional farming in Denmark

In Denmark organic farming is a fairly new agricultural concept. Until around 1980, organic farming was practically non-existent, but now, the organic market in Denmark is quite well established and supported (subsidized) and the organic food chains solid.

A report conducted by The Organic Trade Association (OTA)⁸ states that: "Denmark is one of the countries in the world that enjoys the strongest government support for organic

⁶ The Danish Agriculture & Food Council represents the farming and food industry of Denmark including businesses, trade and farmers' associations.

⁷ Retail sales include sales in multiple retailers, specialized retailers (including processors like butchers and bakers), mail order and direct sales. Not included are sales through catering and exports.

⁸ The Organic Trade Association (OTA) is the membership-based business association for the organic industry in North America. OTA's mission is to promote and protect organic trade to benefit the environment, farmers, the public, and the economy. Source: www.ota.com.

agriculture, in terms of subsidies for conversion to organic, marketing efforts and general PR endeavours” (Fuchshofen and Fuchshofen 2000 Chapter 5, unnumbered).

In 1981 the private certification body LØJ (Landsforeningen Økologisk Jordbrug [The national union for organic farming]) was established and started to promote organic farming and organic products. At this early stage, the co-operated supermarket chain FDB (founded in 1896)⁹ got involved in selling organic products – thus they introduced the first organically produced cheese from Grindsted Mejeri on the market in 1986.

In 1987 the Danish government established the certified Ø label (Ø standing for Økologisk, equivalent to ‘ecological’ or organic in English – explained later) and began introducing support for organic farming through legislation, funding research and extension, and subsidies.

Agricultural rules & regulations

According to OTA’s study, Denmark “claims to be the first country in the world to enact a law governing organic plant and livestock production, processing, and labelling” (Ibid.) with the legislation passed in 1987.

The organic certification system is entirely based on state supervision, and Denmark has no private certification bodies. On farm level, the Plant Directorate of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Fisheries carries out inspections. On processing and manufacturing level, the Inspectorate of Organic Production (an integral part of the regular food industry inspectorate) carries out the inspections. The same authority awards the red Ø label (Ø for økologisk = organic), which can only be carried by products that have been *inspected* in Denmark. This means that products carrying the red Ø label either have to be produced or packed (!) in Denmark, which renders importing finished and packed organic goods difficult. The Danish organic standards in the plant and livestock area are practically identical with EU regulations with two exceptions: In Denmark, individual farms must convert completely to organic, and a maximum of 25% of the fertilizers applied may originate from a conventional livestock operation in the form of manure (Fuchshofen and Fuchshofen 2000, Chapter 3.1.1, unnumbered).

The package of the cheese mentions Thise as the producer.

The producer: Thise

Thise is Denmark’s 2nd largest dairy. It was founded in 1988. Thise has a product range around 100 different, but all organic products and yearly revenue of more than 500 million kroner (around 67 million euro¹⁰). Despite their size and highly technical facilities Thise has managed to construct an image of a rural, down to earth, artisanal, “handicrafter” which continuously battles big business. Based on a review of 124 media occurrences, gathered through Infomedia¹¹, it is fair to say, that this is primarily obtained through a very deliberate use of storytelling and humour.

The name of the cheese – The Northern Sea cheese – and the wrapping openly invites to considerations about place and geographical ties.

⁹ FDB is Denmark’s largest membership organisations with approximately 1.7 million members. FDB was founded as a co-operative in 1896, as a result of wanting to supply consumers with lower prices and higher quality. Today the members of FDB own Coop, Denmark’s largest chain of grocery shops. Source: www.fdm.dk.

¹⁰ Source: www.thise.dk (Revenue is from 2008).

¹¹ <http://www.infomedia.dk>

Images of sitespecificity

Over the past decades, STS have contributed to clarifying the importance of “representation in scientific practice” (Lynch & Woolgar 1988). Through their focus on the process of *re*-presentation they highlighted how specific practices of making things visible (or making them present) were pivotal to ‘doing’ science.

In this paper I follow this way of thinking about ‘doings’ as a helpful way to understand the acclaimed Danish terroir-cheese.

Like any other trade the food & dairy business is saturated with images, pictures, signs, wrappings and containers (e.g. websites, commercials, leaflets and all kinds of packaging to name a few) that impact on many different aspects of everyday consumption (e.g. what we buy, where and why). There are many ways in or entry points to this imagery. Images are central to the performance of all kinds of activities, which may encourage different intensities of active engagement, beliefs and passions. In this sense, images, as signs and inscriptions, can be viewed as mediators, invitations and/or barriers making others do things (Latour 2005).

Skilled packaging

As Sylvander, Porin & Mainsant have pointed to (1998) – there is a distinction between the properties that consumers might identify and assess themselves (e.g. taste and the practicality of a given product) and those properties that the producers make claims about, but the consumers cannot check themselves (e.g. traceability, locality, race, organic status etc.). The practicality of the matter makes packaging pivotal with regards to such claim-makings. A bare block of cheese does not convey much about itself. Some distinctions are readily available: size, category or class and to some degree age for example. A connoisseur might even be able to recognize and name the specific cheese type. But when it comes to ‘invisible’ attributes such as place of origin, producer, name etc. consumers rely heavily on packaging - written words and imagery.

In order to make any external (absent, invisible or somehow hidden) qualities of a certain product *re*-present along with the product – packaging skills are required.

Thus, the *doing* of a cheese includes wrapping it (the right way). This is why I have chosen the cheese and it’s wrapping as the focal point for my investigations.

Sitespecificity - Inventing the local

On a very general level, there seem to be a growing interest in different notions of sitespecificity in relation to food and produce (e.g. expressed through customer awareness about short and alternative production chains, locally grown produce or terroir-induced products). As stated above, there are different strategies for making such external elements present or making geographical claims. Very often it is done through:

- a) The use of (presumed recognisable) official international labelling such as EU endorsed PDO/PGI certificates.
- b) The use of official national schemes such as the Danish Nøglehullet (the keyhole) and Ø-mærket (the red organic label).
- c) Through private protective communities (e.g. The German VDP - The Prädikat Wine Estates¹²).
- d) Simply through (more or less fitting) geographical naming and imagery.
- e) Or through specific points of sale (e.g. farm shops).

Included in these strategies are different modes of making sitespecific claims.

In Europe sitespecificity is most widespread and acknowledged in relation to the wine industry (e.g. the French AOC and the Italian DOC) and the dairy business (e.g. the Greek Feta, the

¹² www.vdp.de.

Italian Gorgonzola or the French Comté) – making the European Union’s official labelling of great importance¹³. So despite the fact that the cheese in question is not EU-certified I will shortly digress and describe the designations before continuing my unwrapping of the Northern Sea cheese.

Protected Geographical Status

The



European Commission seeks to “promote and protect names of quality agricultural products and foodstuffs” (European Commission 2010) through – amongst other initiatives - three different labels: PDO (protected designation of origin), PGI (protected geographical indication) and TSG (traditional specialty guaranteed). The labels are thought to encourage diverse agricultural production, protect product names from misuse or imitation and help consumers by giving them information concerning the specific character of the products: “The scheme logos and registered names allow consumers to choose authentic and traditional product. [T]he logos identify products linked to a territory and so help maintaining a market identity for that product” (European Commission and 2011 p. 4).

The overarching argument is, that in order to sustain competitiveness and profitability EU farmers must build on high quality *reputation* – partially dependent on stringent requirements, exact specifications and standardized means of production and geographical affiliations (European Commission 2010).

Thus far, 965 different articles (2010) - ranging from German ‘Bremer Bier’ to Italian ‘Gorgonzola’ cheese or French ‘Foin de Crau’ (hay) - are identified and registered within the general category ‘agricultural farm products and food stuffs’. The number of articles is expanding rapidly. In 2010, 201 new (mostly European) products were listed as ‘Applied for’ (divided between 112 PDO’s, 83 PGI’s and 6 TSG’s).

PGS in Denmark

The Danish PDO/PGI denomination has thus far not played a major role at a national level. As already mentioned only 3 products carry the PGI-label in Denmark: 2 cheeses – Danablu and Esrom - and carrots from the small geographical area ‘Lammefjorden’¹⁴.

When I ‘followed the cheese’ around it became clear, that professionals (e.g. chefs and large dairy producers) were not aware that we even had PDO/PGI in Denmark. The impact on the export market and the great success for Danish cheese abroad is, on the other hand, well recognized within the dairyscape.

Probably due to the country’s relative modest size, products which claims strong geographically ties are - compared to other European countries - not yet particular

¹³ In 2007 PDO and PGI agricultural products (excluding wine and spirits) had an estimated wholesale value of 14.2 billion €. Cheese accounts for a third of the total PDO/PGI turnover. 8% of the cheese produced in the EU (i.e. 3 to 4 % of world production) is protected. Source: <http://ec.europa.eu>.

¹⁴ At the moment EU is processing applications for ‘Vadehavstude’ (steer from the tidal flats) as well as ‘Vadehavslam’ (lamb from the tidal flats). Furthermore applications for three cheeses: Danbo, Havarti and ‘Fynsk Rygeost’ (Funen smoked cheese) have also now been sent to the EU.

widespread in Denmark. As mentioned above, only 3 products have been PGI certified and only one of these products is geographically framed - the Lammefjordsgulerod (a carrot from Denmark's lowest point the reclaimed area of the Lammefjord, tidal flats, which is physically delimited by the Ringkanal and the Audebo dam¹⁵). This modest occurrence of geographical enactments also holds true, when looking at the Danish dairyscape. The 2 remaining PGI certified products are cheeses – Danablu and Esrom – but in general site-specificity still plays a rather modest (albeit evolving) role in Danish agriculture and in the Danish 'Dairyscape'¹⁶.

Vesterhavskosten

*"Feel the wind – Listen to the ocean – Taste the cheese"*¹⁷



Vestehavskosten - The Northern Sea cheese - is a firm, hard Goudastyled cheese. The cheese is produced at Thise dairy in Roslev (located centrally in the northern part of Denmark) and ripened for a minimum of 26 weeks at a storage facility in Bovbjerg close to the seashore at the western coast of Denmark (by the North Sea, circa 100 km from the production facility). The texture is slightly grainy and the taste a bit salty. The cheese thus bears resemblance to the Italian Grana Padano and the

Parmigiano Reggiano.

As indicated by the name, the slogan and as can be seen on the picture above, the cheese is in multiple ways sought connected to the North Sea.

According to Mogens Poulsen (chief of marketing at Thise) the concept of this cheese was decided upon on an international dairy conference where a French colleague tried the cheese and claimed that "C'est ne pas un fromage organique, mais une spécialité régionale – un fromage 'De la mere du Nord'"¹⁸. The cheese had earlier been subtitled 'Gammel Damsgård' (Old Dam Farm) and the wrapping depicted this farm. At an early stage this was replaced with the one presented here.

Cheese enactments:

In a STS perspective, following a cheese as *doings* also means following its spokespersons – how is it talked about, where and by whom (Callon 1986; Latour 1986)? An InfoMedia scan reveals that the Vesterhavskosten is mentioned more than 100 times in different written (printed and online) media since the launch in 2008. But how is it talked about, how is it enacted?

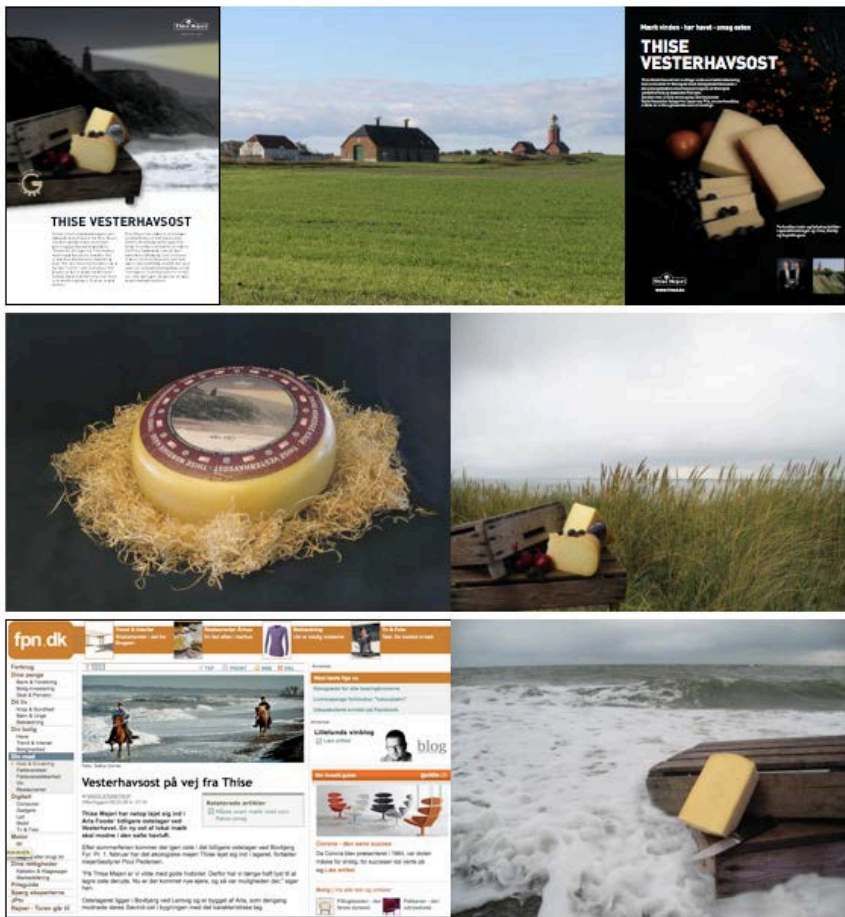
A predominant and recurrent representation is that of a particular Nordic and at the same time local product.

¹⁵ One of the PGI-conditions for the approved washing enterprises is that records are kept of growing locations and there is a clear physical separation of Lammefjord carrots from any other carrots.

¹⁶ Even though these cheeses are PGI protected, the milk for the production is only geographically delimited by national borders. Or in other words as long as Danish cows, - somewhere in Denmark – produce the milk the product is approved.

¹⁷ "Mærk vinden – Hør havet – Smag osten" – quoted from a Thise commercial. My translation.

¹⁸ Personal conversation/Interview 25/04/2012. In a typical manner it is thus claimed that the concept of the cheese was pure happenstance.



Place
 Sitespecificity and notions of terroir are traditionally connected to the place of production and very often the soil is mentioned as a pivotal element. This is not the case with Vesterhavssosten. The cheese is (as mentioned above) intensely sought connected to the Northern Sea. In general there is almost no mentioning of the area of production (at Thise), but numerous accounts about the ripening facility by the seashore.

Almost all commercials and information about the cheese includes pictures of the North Sea (often with the cheese placed very close by or even in the sea). This suggests that the salty air of the area affects the salty character and the general quality of the cheese: “Even though it cannot be scientifically proven” (as they often shrewdly add)¹⁹.

The local (place) – it seems – is a collective national notion covering most of the country. Vesterhavssosten is thus represented as something local in various parts of Denmark and could be understood as a very flexible or fluid – no pun intended - boundary object in the sense of Mol (de Laet and Mol 2000). The cheese could be read as a ‘collective of fat and protein’ able to make multiple connections with heterogeneous local actors. Notions of terroir is thus “derooted” from the (typically French or Italian) soil and re-enacted as something typical Nordic.

Gourmet and “Parmigiano-like”

As mentioned in the beginning – Denmark has experienced a growing interest for nationally produced gourmet cheese. Restaurants now serve Danish cheeses along with or even instead of typically French and Italian cheeses. The legacy, however, is very predominant in representations of the cheese.

A recurrent notion of the cheese is as a ‘Nordic Parmigiano’ suitable especially for Nordic versions of the classic Italian pesto (the classic Italian version is based on basil, Parmigiano,

¹⁹ It is (far) from the scope of this paper, but it could be interesting to see how salt and processes of salt curing are connected to ‘the Nordic’. For an interesting, albeit “popular”, treatment of the world history of salt see (Kurlansky 2002).

pine nuts and olive oil – the Nordic adaption often includes nationally available ingredients like ramson, Vesterhavssost, hazelnuts and rapeseed oil).

Caters to the restaurant business

When going through the material it becomes obvious that the cheese in particular caters to the (gourmet) restaurant business. There are numerous occurrences in relation to restaurant reviews – where the cheese is talked about as a local alternative to the traditional French and/or Italian dominated cheeseboards.

But it is also suggested that the cheese is very suitable for cooking, thus many occurrences of the cheese are in relation to new Nordic inspired recipes (very often a Nordic version of classic Italian recipes like pasta).

The North (Sea)

To gather insights about something 'particular Nordic' one can look in many directions. In this paper I have chosen to pick a few inspirational moments from the world of arts and exhibitions.

The idea of something particularly Northern, itself a greatly contested notion prone to many ongoing negotiations (See for example R. Tuchenhagen in Fülberth, Meier and Feretti 2007) has developed through many stages and intricate paths. Somewhere along these paths Denmark was established as small, idyllic and rural setting (Tuchenhagen in: Fülberth, Meier and Feretti 2007 p. 131).

The North (and in particular The Northern Landscape) was in the late 19th hundreds in many ways constructed as an assemblage of many disparate elements from different regions and nationalities: "Das Produkt »nordische Landschaft« war jedoch nicht nur ein Ergebnis skandinavischer Pinsel- und Federarbeit. Es entstand vielmehr einer Synopse, aus einer Synthese der Einzeldarstellungen über verschiedene nordische Landschaften" (Tuchenhagen in: Fülberth, Meier and Feretti 2007 p. 140).

The typical northern ethos was thus enacted by a multitude of different actors – including, but not limited to: local northern artists, painters, writers and international German "salon-intellectuals" describing their exotic travels. The northern was generally described as "[...] hart, abweisend und beständig wie skandinavischer Granit" (Ibid.)

In an anthology on northern imagery in the 18th century numerous depictions of a particular northern ethos can be found: "cold and harsh" (p.59), "the north was mostly associated with coldness, brutality and barbarism" (p. 64-65), "North represented the unknown [...] it was characterized by wilderness and distance" (p. 83), "[...] a depressing feeling of loneliness takes possession of the soul; it seems as if the earth is nothing more than a dark spot, with which fogs might shortly mingle" (p. 82) (Povlsen 2007).

It is thus obvious that the imagery and the setting in which the cheese is enacted relies heavily on a particular northern ethos that can be traced historically. The colourrange of the pictures are in general douched and cold, they are often set on an "uninviting" black background, the sea is never warm and calm but cold and rough. The setting for Bovbjerg fyr (Bovbjerg lighthouse) depicted on the wrapping is not that of cosy summer leisure, but rather dark, gloomy and ominous.

Conclusions

A wind of change has swept across the Nordic foodscape. The cold, harsh and uninviting North has not only been reinvented on the plate, on canvas and on the screen (as Nordic Noir or the Scandinavian crime fiction wave), but also as a reservoir for unique food products.

With the help of ANT it has been possible to unwrap and unsettle the doings of a cheese and investigate how it ended up in the fridge of a supermarket – and how it brought the Northern Sea along. Through imagery, naming, and “salty storytelling” Thise has managed to include the Northern Sea in the blackboxing of their cheese. They have thus invented the sea not only as a place, but also as a terroir without the usual dependency on soil and tradition. In a Nordic setting, where geographical ties are rare, they have found a way to align heterogeneous actors and invite different spokespersons to talk about the cheese as something placespecific and uniquely Nordic.

As such, the product is very much in line with the general image of Thise. Just as Denmark through different negotiations was established as ‘a small nation’ (Fülberth, Meier and Feretti 2007), Thise tries to maintain the role of the small alternative to large corporations. The economic appeal of small-scale is tied to its marketability as a local, somewhat traditional and unique dairy producer with short food chains less prone to errors, mistakes or fraud.

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