Governance innovation cases in coastal tourism
Manifestos as governance principles: New Nordic Cuisine

Anne-Mette Hjalager
hjalager@sam.sdu.dk
University of Southern Denmark
August 2017

InnoCoast project website: http://www.cgs.aau.dk/forskning/projekter/innocoast

Research outputs from the InnoCoast project are supported by

Innovation Fund Denmark
Manifestos as governance principles: New Nordic Cuisine

In the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, gastronomy has undergone a veritable period of revolution. Over the past two decades, the positive reputation of these countries as culinary hotspots has increased dramatically. Gourmet restaurants have emerged particularly in metropolitan areas, but also in smaller places in coastal regions, and the number of Michelin stars awarded to establishments in the Nordic countries rose from next to none to several. The culinary landscape has become far more heterogeneous, and food has become a reason to take vacations in the Nordic countries, which was not previously the case.

There is not one single reason for this development—factors include demand structures, people issues, and food supply changes. However, that is not all. The development was rapidly expanded through the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto, which was formulated by leading chefs and other food experts, food enthusiasts, and media actors. The manifesto emerged out of a profound frustration with the low and declining food standards in the Nordic countries, a negative development that was an astonishing and grotesque paradox considering the climatically and economically excellent conditions for food provision in the Nordic countries and the long traditions for efficient and knowledge-based agriculture and food industries.
The creation of a food and cuisine manifesto is very similar to what happened in the movie industry. In 1995, Danish filmmakers made the “Dogma.” No longer did they want to imitate the glittering and artificial Hollywood productions—they wanted to go their own way, but with a comprehensive direction. The rules formulated in the DOGMA95 included, for example, that lighting should be natural, that shooting must take place on location, that optical work and filters were forbidden, that the camera must be hand-held, etc. This vow of chastity, as it was called, led to the production of 10 hardcore Dogma films, which occupied the full attention of critics at the international film scene. The Dogma changed the producers’ and audience’s attitudes on the national film scene and, in subsequent years, many award-winning film and TV-series paid tribute to the anarchistic turnaround. Danish and Nordic films have been exported massively to foreign screens, and the tourism in these regions has also benefitted from the image of “Nordic Noir.”

Much like the DOGMA95, the New Nordic Cuisine manifesto can be considered a governance innovation, as it changes the rules and perceptions of Nordic gastronomy tourism and directs the behavior of food producers and consumers in new directions.

The Manifesto

The New Nordic Cuisine manifesto, which somewhat rejects the tenets of French haute cuisine, includes the following stated purposes:

1. To express the purity, freshness, simplicity, and ethics we wish to associate with our region.
2. To reflect the changes of the seasons in the meals we make.
3. To base our cooking on ingredients and produce whose characteristics are particularly in our climates, landscapes, and waters.
4. To combine the demand for good taste with modern knowledge of health and well-being.
5. To promote Nordic products and the variety of Nordic producers—and to spread the word about their underlying cultures.
6. To promote animal welfare and a sound production process in our seas, on our farmlands, and in the wild.
7. To develop new applications for traditional Nordic food products.
8. To combine the best in Nordic cookery and culinary traditions with impulses from abroad.
9. To combine local self-sufficiency with regional sharing of high-quality products.
10. To join forces with consumer representatives, other cooking craftsmen, and agriculture, fishing, food, retail, and wholesales industries, as well as researchers, teachers, politicians, and authorities on this project for the benefit and advantage of everyone in the Nordic countries.

How could such principles, on-the-surface simple, even self-evident, change the culinary scene? The biggest effect may be psychological. The manifesto is comprehensive, but it is not at all binding - enforcement is not cited by dedicated authoritative bodies. The publication and promotion of the manifesto opened up the local peoples’ eyes to the particular Nordic, first to the elites, and later it diffused to the spheres and layers of the average daily life. Just as important, it started a process of opening toward the international food scene. Crucially, the food actors in the whole food chain (from agricultural and food producers to restaurants) became more curious and ambitious. A demand for quality food products emerged across the country; particularly, small-scale producers were willing to deliver. The large producers in the meat, milk, cereals, fruit, vegetable, and drinks sectors, as well as the large-scale retail stores, were far slower in their reactions.
Feeding the tourists in restaurants is critical for a country’s culinary image, and the portfolio of restaurants and their status may be important. NOMA has been the signature restaurant referred to in international media—it has been gossiped about in every sense. NOMA eagerly took on the New Nordic Food concept and insisted on a steep learning curve in the inventions and reinventions of Nordic ingredients. Its location on the harbor front in Copenhagen consisted of the NOMA restaurant, while the upstairs rooms were used for systematic food innovation activities. The activities benefited the restaurant, as well as the food sector more generally, because many food providers were invited to co-create with the NOMA staff.

NOMA worked with interns, food specialists, and chefs from all over the world who wanted to follow the processes and deliver inspiration. In this sense, the internationalization of Nordic food and the concept expressed in the manifest gained speed and refinement.

The variety of food products has increased in supermarkets that supply tourists

Photo: Anne-Mette Hjalager

Many of the up and coming restaurants that subscribed to the manifesto cultivated close collaborative alliances with local food producers. The mutual benefit was that the restaurants accessed new and interesting products and ingredients, and that the producers could use the restaurants as “test benches” and marketing platforms for their products. Thereby, tourists and restaurant goers had a wider impact on the innovative milieu in the food sector, which was an impact that is not always fully recognized.
The impacts on tourism

However, most Nordic restaurants have nowhere near the quality and sophistication of restaurants like NOMA. The majority still deliver a modest, even mediocre food choice. In surveys, tourists keep asking for a wider dissemination of the qualities suggested by the manifesto, as well as less pricey outlets. This illustrates that it might in fact take quite a long time for a manifesto to become a veritable social movement, and that rural and coastal food actors are late adopters. As a governance measure and instrument, a manifesto can create a momentum, when integrated with clever narratives. At best, customers will become ambassadors. A manifesto is, however, not a compulsory governance instrument, and its enactment can be delayed by the counteractive endeavors of the mainstream food industry.

The New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto remains a foundation for the Nordic food movement. It is interesting to notice that the implementation is not dependent on touristic demand alone. Its emergence as a social movement comes from other angles, such as in the format of demand from catering in schools, hospitals, etc. Years after the publication of the manifesto, such demand and innovation drivers have become more important.

A manifesto will not achieve anything without active media attention. One of the initiators, Claus Meyer, was a TV chef who published cookbooks, gave many talks to the sector about his ideas, and delivered collaborative assistance with universities to research health and nutrition. The manifesto thereby found a way to common knowledge through many platforms. On the Nordic scene, Eldrimmer in Sweden became a location where food people gathered every year for the purpose of knowledge dissemination and innovation. Eldrimmer is perhaps the closest that the manifesto has come to an institutionalization of the manifesto in time, place, and structure.

Further reading and viewing


www.eldrimmer.com