



# Direct Markets as Multiple Consumption Spaces: The Case of Two Norwegian Collective Marketing Initiatives

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**Abstract.** Direct markets, such as farmers' markets and farm shops, have in the academic literature been discussed as alternative spaces of food to the conventional food system. Through theoretical perspectives on consumption and recreation, the article adopts a broad view on the development of these markets. It discusses how farmers both through collective organizations and as individual producers market their food products and rural services, and how these marketing initiatives are perceived and used by consumers. In recent years, farm-based businesses have identified tourism and recreational consumption as interesting for marketing of food products. Recreational consumption is one of the most rapidly growing consumption areas and both domestic and international tourism are part of this trend. Two Norwegian examples of farmers' collective marketing are presented in this article. The analysis and discussion is based on several sources: in-depth interviews, the organizations' self-presentations on the Internet and survey material. The article concludes that these direct markets represent an interesting option for consumers both as a leisure experience and as part of ordinary food consumption. An important future task is to better organize the collective marketing initiatives to meet the challenges that these different consumer demands represent in the food and leisure markets.

## Introduction

Collective farmers marketing initiatives (COFAMIs) like HANEN (lit. 'The Rooster') and Bondens marked (BM) (lit. 'Farmers' Market') are in the Norwegian context new forms of organizing the distribution of food directly from the farmer to the consumer. These initiatives attract an increasing number of producers, as well as public attention and political support. There seems to be a growing demand for local products and rural experiences among consumers. The central issue of this article is to discuss the relative importance of recreation and food consumption motives for visiting di-

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rect food markets. Through theoretical perspectives on consumption and recreation, on the one hand, we will discuss how farmers through collective organizations and as individual producers market their food products and rural services and, on the other, how these marketing initiatives are perceived and used by consumers.

During the 1990s, the Norwegian government launched a new policy aimed at the development of niche products and speciality foods that opened up opportunities for small-scale producers to address new markets. Governmental schemes as for example the 'Innovation programme' (Verdiskapingsprogrammet), were designed in order to support small-scale producers. In recent years, these policies have been reinforced by establishing a political goal of 20% local or niche food products in the Norwegian market within the year 2020. Tourism has been a major tool in the development of local food products in Norway. Through innovation programmes and other support measures different marketing initiatives have been established. Tourist routes, similar to the wine and cheese routes in other parts of Europe, and food festivals are supported in order to attract tourists to local direct food markets. Also the establishment of HANEN and BM must be seen in this political context of developing tourism and income opportunities for farmers in rural areas. Norsk Bygdeturisme (lit. 'Norwegian Rural Tourism') founded in 1997, was first started as a bottom up initiative by farm and rural businesses offering accommodation to domestic and foreign tourists. The farm food organization, Norsk Gardsmat, was, on the contrary, initiated in 1998 as part of a governmental strategy for the promotion of Norwegian food. The organization worked to enhance sales among the members by initiating projects for increased co-operation on marketing of their products. These two organizations have later merged and today the organization is known by the name HANEN, and has more than 500 member businesses from all over Norway.

Bondens marked (BM) is a collective marketing initiative launched in August 2003. The concept is inspired by the US and British Farmers' Markets (Jervell and Borgen, 2004; Åsebø et al., 2007). Bondens marked was originally initiated by the Norwegian agricultural co-operatives and reflected an interest in facilitating new marketing channels for agricultural products for the members of the co-operatives. Since 2003, BM has expanded both in terms of the number of markets and the number of vendors (producers participating) at the markets, and today more than 20 markets are operating in various parts of the country.

By combining theory on consumption and recreation, we seek to add new perspectives to the understanding of visiting direct markets as food purchase and experience. Fine (2004) calls for more research on cultural and consumption issues within agri-food studies, and in similar ways Sonnino and Marsden (2006) call for a better understanding of alternative food networks. In the following sections, we address these calls by employing a broad perspective on the cultural and social meanings of food consumption, shopping and recreation. This theoretical overview is followed by a presentation of the research material. Then the results from studies of the two cases of direct markets are presented and discussed. The article concludes by addressing potentials and challenges for further development of direct markets as spaces of food and leisure consumption.

## **Alternative Food Spaces**

Support measures for development of 'quality foods' and local production have been seen as a political strategy for sustainable rural development both in Norway

as well as the European Union (Morgan et al., 2006; Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Amilien et al., 2008). This quality turn (Murdoch and Miele, 1999) in production is paralleled by new trends in distribution towards more localized distribution, such as farmers markets, box schemes, CSAs etc. This again has been theorized as a re-connection between producers and consumers where local networks of producers and consumers create new, alternative spaces of food consumption (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). However, as Sonnino and Marsden (2006, p. 187) point out, this process of re-localization of food is thus far by no means clearly understood analytically.

Alternative or local food systems are contested concepts (Tovey, 2009). These local alternatives have often been discussed in opposition to the conventional food system, where the pros of local food and short-distance food supply have been emphasized. It is stated that local food systems may contribute to sustainable development in rural areas both economically and environmentally. One positive effect of local food supply includes increased self-sufficiency of rural regions. It is argued that local foods are transported less than conventional food, which results in lower greenhouse gas emissions. Reconnection of consumers and producers is said to increase the transparency and trust in food production (Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Kirwan, 2006). This type of exchange is said to be beneficial in terms of respect, reputation and recognition on the producers' behalf, and in terms of sociability, attention, acknowledgement and friendship on the consumers' behalf (Sage, 2003; Kirwan, 2006).

These are just a few examples mentioned in the literature as advantages of alternative food systems. Local food system proponents have been criticized for having a 'blind spot' for more problematic issues of local food, and accused of promoting local as an end in itself without actually examining if and in what ways local food systems are more sustainable (Hinrichs, 2000; Born and Purcell, 2006). Organic agriculture has been seen, for instance, as an alternative production system and associated with small-scale farming and local distribution. While in fact, a large share of organic food is produced on a large scale and transported globally in order to reach the supermarkets in different parts of the world (Guthman, 2004, pp. 9–12). Local food or quality foods may maintain or even reinforce social inequalities in food consumption, because it is mostly the well-off segment of the middle classes that benefit from and engage in these new initiatives in the food market (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Tovey, 2009). Finally, local markets are not necessarily more transparent than conventional retailing, because asymmetric and non-reciprocal relations between seller and buyer may also occur at direct markets (Hinrichs, 2000). These are but a few examples to illustrate the complexity of the alternative food system issues. In agreement with Holloway et al. (2007), we will argue that these initiatives must be examined case by case, and that the motivations of the participants are better understood through a deeper analysis of the social framing of consumption.

### **The Social Framing of Food Consumption**

Over the past 30 years, the Norwegian supermarket sector has more than doubled its market share, with the four big retail chains now accounting for about 98% of overall food sales (NILF, 2008). In this context, direct markets may have an important function in being an alternative to the dominant supermarket chains. However, we will not only view direct markets as 'alternative' in the sense discussed above, but aim at a more nuanced picture of the producers and consumers involved in these market initiatives. The conventional / alternative dichotomy 'is problematic when discuss-

ing what consumers actually do and think, (Eden et al., 2008, p. 1046), and often have too strong a focus on the agency and reflexivity of the individual (producer and consumer). Supporting local producers or buying environmentally sound products are of course important motivations for many consumers (Terragni et al., 2009), but these practices must not only be seen as reflexive or politically motivated. Rather, we want to underline that food consumption also consists of more habitual and social forms of consumer behaviour (Gronow and Warde, 2001, p. 219). Thus the producers and consumers involved in direct market initiatives carry out 'collective', social practices that may have different outcomes depending on the social contexts. The initiatives are not only agency driven, but framed by public policies, as well as the structures and power relations in the food market (Jacobsen and Dulsrød, 2007; Halkier, 2009). This social framing of food consumption has to be taken into consideration when analysing the development of COFAMIs and local food systems.

Thus, we want to analyse how the motives and actions of producers and consumers are affected by the social framing of the different marketing initiatives, and view these direct market spaces not only as alternative spaces as opposed to conventional food spaces, but also discuss these as extraordinary spaces in relation to the ordinary spaces of food in grocery stores and supermarkets.

### **Direct Markets as Ordinary and Extraordinary Food Spaces**

Shopping at a farmers' market or in a farm food outlet is by its very nature different from the self-supporting way of shopping in modern supermarkets. Lehtonen and Mäenpää (1998) argue that in the modern department store there is no longer any interaction involved over the quality or prices of goods between seller and buyer. Present-day shopping may be seen as an activity of 'being with things that one wants to buy rather than shopping as interacting with other people' (Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1998, p. 142). This element of interacting with other people is an important feature that distinguishes direct markets from the conventional way of distributing food. Consumption, and especially shopping, has been theorized as an individual and reflexive activity. For instance, the modern department stores or shopping malls have been studied as ideal places where a self-centred, hedonistic, but pleasurable and recreational shopping practice takes place (Hewer and Campbell, 1998; Miller et al., 1998). The shopper is seen in this perspective as an individual consumer who tries to find new ways of self-expression and individual identity formation through the shopping activity. While shopping often is considered a pleasurable, recreational activity, buying food is to a much greater extent associated with obligations and is often an activity that is carried out alone (Miller et al., 1998, p. 96). Food consumption, including the provision of food, has different social and cultural functions in everyday life. Food purchases may be considered as caring work where the main aim is to provide the family with good and nourishing food. However, it may also be an arena for social differentiation. Food may in different ways demonstrate belonging or distance to other social groups (Tovey, 2009; Bugge and Døving, 2000, pp. 68–70).

Miller (1998, 2001) argues that contrary to recreational shopping that aims at fulfilling individual wants and needs, family shopping is characterized by moral concerns connected to family obligations and socially constructed virtues, such as thrift and utility. In his fieldwork among working-class and middle-class families in London, Miller found that shopping had a profound social meaning in creating

and maintaining social relations – especially within the family. The relational content was not attached to the shopping activity per se, but to abstract social relations, such as kinship and friendship. Thus, shopping became primarily an act of love and devotion, in other words, a social activity with the ultimate aim of creating a happy family life. Following Miller, these family obligations have primacy before the more ethical and political motivations connected to food choices. From this perspective, it may for instance be morally wrong to buy expensive organic vegetables if it comes at the expense of other necessary purchases within the household (Miller, 2001, pp. 133–137).

While Miller focused on the ordinary consumption of everyday life and shopping routines in ordinary food stores, shopping as recreation may also be seen as a socially integrating activity where necessary purchases are combined with a pleasurable experience (Bjørkum, 1996). Visiting direct markets such as a farmers' market on a Saturday morning or to stop by a farm shop when on holiday may also be seen as recreational activities taking place in the leisure time. In his book *The Tourist Gaze*, Urry (2002) analyses tourism as a specific leisure practice that involves pleasurable experiences that are out of the ordinary compared to everyday life. A central part of these experiences is to gaze upon attractions whether these are monuments, buildings, landscapes or sceneries (Urry, 2002, p. 1). Urry states that the countryside, besides being a common 'stage' for the tourist gaze, is an important arena for other leisure activities, such as hiking, cycling and skiing. This observation fits the Norwegian leisure tradition with emphasis on outdoor recreation and vacations in cabins, caravans and similar 'second homes' in the countryside.

The family obligations that Miller focused on are most prominent in everyday life, while leisure time is usually considered as more free of moral obligations and social norms. To have a break from work, routines and rhythms of everyday life may be seen as an essential aspect of leisure and recreation. Although leisure time is considered as 'time out', it is by no means free in the sense that one may do as one likes regardless of traditions, social norms and expectations. Miller (1998, 2001) and Klepp (1993) have made similar observations of modern Western societies where the family and the wants and needs of the children have become increasingly important. Spending time together and doing activities that the children enjoy are idealized as the proper way of organizing 'family leisure' (Jensen, 1993, p. 113). To take an example from one of the most common Norwegian holiday activities: a successful vacation at the cabin usually includes that the family share common outdoor experiences such as skiing, boating or hiking in the woods (Vittersø, 2007). Rural tourism and farm experiences, but also visits to farmers' markets in an urban context, may be activities that resonate with this present leisure mentality focusing on family leisure and spending time together.

Considering these different social meanings of shopping and leisure, we will view the development of direct food markets both from the perspective of food provisioning and as a recreational experience. When analysing the two different collective marketing initiatives, we look for how these different aspects are emphasized by the farmers (organizations) and consumers. Is it the symbolic values of the products and experiences, the reflexive, alternative consumer, or values of family obligations that are emphasized in the different contexts? Our aim is to understand how these different aspects of food and leisure consumption are framed and experienced within the different direct marketing initiatives.

## Data Material

The material used in the analysis and discussions is derived from several sources of qualitative data related to the two cases. First, we analyse the content of the BM and HANEN organizations' home pages on the Internet. These pages (<<http://www.hanen.no>> and <<http://www.bondensmarked.no>>) act both as direct links to the customers and as important communication channels for the members and producers. Here information about the marketing concept, marketing material, labelling and other relevant issues are posted. These pages include several documents dealing with the use of marketing logos and labels as well as handbooks and guides for the producers, vendors and market managers.

For the HANEN case, we also draw on material collected in 2007 and 2008 for a farm tourism project<sup>1</sup> in two different geographical areas. The data material consists of 18 in-depth interviews with customers recruited from different farm shops and interviews with 11 farmers offering products in farm food outlets in two different geographical areas. Customer informants (tourists on holiday, day-trip visitors or local customers) represented both blue- and white-collar workers, 25–70 years of age.

As the geographical and social patterns and structures of domestic tourism are quite different along the coast compared to the inland, the research took place in one coastal area in Vestfold county, south-west of the capital Oslo, and in one inland area in Buskerud county, west of Oslo. The farm shops we visited differed according to their products, services and marketing profile. In the coastal area they mainly offered potatoes, vegetables and berries while three farm shops in the inland area marketed different local foods such as: fresh eggs, herbs, smoked sausages, thin pastry, crisp bread, juices, jams, jellies, etc. Interviews with tourists and local inhabitants focused on the experience of buying local/localized products from these farm shops and the appropriation of these products on vacation and when back home.

From this farm tourism project, we will also refer to survey data concerning customers' visits to farm shops. These results are drawn from two different surveys including a customer survey in 10 different farm outlets, geographically spread throughout Norway (the HANEN survey), and a national statistically representative survey (the SIFO survey). The results referred to in the article are previously published in Terragni et al. (2009) and Vittersø and Schjøll (2010).

For the farmers' market case we primarily use results from two focus-group interviews with customers recruited at the Oslo BM in 2006. This includes 12 consumers recruited for two focus groups, one with younger participants (20–45) and another with older customers (40–65). The consumers were asked to discuss main differences between shopping at farmers' markets and in supermarkets and the importance of the information that one receive at the farmers' market.

We also draw on results from two major evaluation projects of the BM: first in 2003 and a follow-up study in 2006 (Svennerud and Jervell, 2004; Svennerud et al., 2004; Åsebø et al., 2007; Flaten et al., 2007; Jervel and Vramo, 2007). The evaluations included mail surveys of vendors, and observations and interviews with customers in markets.

## HANEN

HANEN states in the 2006 Annual Report that the general interest in rural tourism and farm food is increasing (NBG, 2006). During the year 2007, about 7% of the

Norwegian population had visited a farm tourism enterprise, which was twice the number from 1991 (Blekesaune et al., 2010). Only 3% of all Norwegian farms have their own processing of food or sell products directly to the consumer (Forbord and Straete, 2008), and farm sales are often combined with other tourism activities on the farm. In 2006, almost 60% of the members of HANEN offered accommodation, 40% had a farm shop/outlet and about a third of the members offered different kinds of activities/experiences (Fjellhammer, 2006; NBG, 2006).

In the 2006 Annual Report, it is underlined that what HANEN defines as 'rural tourism' is described in other contexts as 'green tourism', 'sustainable tourism', 'eco-tourism' and 'geo-tourism'. Likewise, what HANEN defines as 'farm food' is frequently recognised in other contexts as 'short-distance food', 'slow food', 'local food', 'small-scale food' and 'organic food' (NBG, 2006, p. 28). It seems that these concepts are interpreted as the same by HANEN without considering the contested and conflicting content of some of these concepts. In the Annual Report, it says that HANEN bases its work on three core values: culture, care and experiences. Important elements included in culture as a core value are local food, history, tradition, atmosphere and distinctiveness. The elements related to care are genuineness, quality, personality, care for the individual human being and responsibility for the natural environment. Elements connected to experiences are activities, contrasts, diversity and closeness to people, animals, farms and nature (NBG, 2006). The organization issues an annual catalogue, *Rural Tourism and Traditional Food*, which is distributed in 40 000 copies and written in the Norwegian, English and German languages and aimed at domestic as well as foreign travellers. All member businesses are listed in the catalogue with the name of the farm, postal address and telephone number. This information is supplemented with information in the form of pictograms that show the kinds of services the different farms offer. HANEN has developed an own logo, the rooster, which is presented as 'a sign of quality and excellence. Genuine food from the farm – when taste, experience and heritage are important!' (HANEN, 2009). This logo is to be found on labels on local food products and as signposts alongside country roads. One special task has been to support the farmers in the transition from producing standardized products for the food industry to the production of unique or singular products for a tourist and local market. This process of specialization may include developing new products, new recipes or special packaging, labels and logos on the products (Kaland, 2007; Lotti, 2010).

What is evident from the self-presentation of HANEN on the Internet is that the central organization directs its information and marketing to the travelling tourist who seeks out new experiences in rural areas of Norway. The Annual Report, for instance, emphasizes the visual attractions such as the beautiful nature and landscapes, but also common experiences as farm activities and contact with animals etc. This emphasis on tourism, experiences and accommodation is understandable considering that many of the member businesses offer accommodation as their main service.

### Bondens marked (BM)

More than 20 local BM markets are operating in different parts of the country. The markets are only open part of the season and mostly less than once a week. This distinguishes the BM from earlier town markets that were open on a daily basis. The markets are mainly held on Saturdays (with some exceptions), which situates the

phenomenon in the consumers' leisure time and adds to the experience of visiting the market as something festive rather than an everyday activity.

The central organization has trademarked the BM label and developed a logo and a handbook as guidance for local managers and farmers (Jervell and Borgen, 2004). The BM manual emphasizes values such as quality, trustworthiness and that the products have a certain distinctive stamp. 'Fresh and tasteful – straight from the farm' is the vow that is given to the customers. In the manual, it is said that BM contributes to reducing food miles, which is to the benefit of the individual farmer as well as the local community. BM supports increased food diversity and 'not least saves the environment by reducing the need for transport' (Bondens marked, 2006). The vendors' guide is illustrated with pictures of how to place the products and with short texts that point out the importance of presenting the products in an appealing way, reminding the vendors of the aesthetical aspects as well as the importance of smell and taste in the promotion of food products, thus it must rather not be 'mucky carrots' or other products with soil at the market. Finally, the guide underlines that the BM first of all shall be a nice meeting place between the producer/vendor and the consumer, and that creating the right atmosphere is important in giving the customer a unique experience. The unique products are central in this – the vendor should know and be able to give the history of the product in the dialogue with the customer (Bondens marked, 2006). BM clearly distinguishes itself from ordinary food shopping. On the Internet home page, it is stated that "Cheap food" will not be the main theme at the Farmers' Market, however, but rather quality and diversity' (Bondens marked, 2010).

BM seems, on the one hand, to cater for the ordinary family shopper looking for fresh, healthy produce at reasonable prices. On the other hand, BM seeks to present itself as an 'alternative' food space underlining the environmental benefits of less transportation and establishing separate organic food markets. We also notice how BM is staged in order to create and attract customers that seek extraordinary products and experiences.

### **Recreational Experiences at Farmers' Markets and Farm Shops**

Both the farmers' markets and many of the farm shops have directed their opening hours to the weekends (Saturdays) and seasons (summer, December) when people enjoy their leisure time or holidays. Visiting a farm shop may be seen as part of family leisure where the social aspect of sharing nice experiences is important. More than 80% of the respondents in the HANEN survey stated that they visited the farm shop in company with others, and 54% totally agreed with the statement that an important part of visiting the farm was 'to do something nice in company with others'. More than 67% visited the place 'because it is a nice experience'. The survey also indicates that families with children to a greater extent than other families visited the farm in order to see animals and take part in activities at the farm, while customers of 60 years or older appreciate the surrounding landscape. Local and more regular customers to a lesser extent than tourists emphasise these experience values (Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010).

These findings point to the fact that a variety of offers and experiences may be important to attract visitors as part of family leisure. There are reasons to believe that the element of a unique experience is a greater motivation when visiting a farm outlet in the countryside than a market centrally in a town or city. The farmer can

utilize many different elements of the farm environment in the marketing in addition to the food products. This is evident in the interview with a female farmer in the inland area: 'On the farm, I have all the animals, always popular, and the old-style shop, and coffee to serve and food. I plan to offer pick-your-own corn-cobs and fishing. You can go for a pig safari or just sit here and enjoy yourself. At least I think people enjoy it'.

She had a lot of different food items of local origin in her shop, some of which were produced on the farm, but she wanted to promote more than just the food. The farmer told the customers many stories about the food products, the animals, the buildings, the landscape and the life at the farm. She was well aware of what kind of customers fitted to her concept: 'I put so much of myself into it, and many customers appreciate this. But sometimes, when I have visitors that I feel could just as well be sitting at home watching TV, I am provoked'.

This farmer initially got started with selling organic eggs directly to local customers, but in order to expand the business and get more customers, not least to attract tourists who passed by the farm, she started to focus on experiences and activities at the farm. This shift in focus increased the sales of farm products, probably because she managed to attract customers motivated both by the possibility to buy some food specialities and to have a nice (family) leisure experience at the same time. Customers in farm shops typically talk about how they got introduced to visiting and buying food at farms either as a child taken to the farm by their parents, or as grown-ups taking their own children to a nearby farm 'in order to see the animals'. The grown-ups get the opportunity to do some 'shopping' and the children get a nice farm experience and come in contact with animals. The trip made by car, bicycle or on foot may be both a social as well as a physical and recreational event in itself. Thus, it combines both the elements of the tourist gaze and the more exploring and playful activities (Urry, 2002, p. 89).

The farmers' most important motivation for participating at BM in the fourth season was the possibility of direct contact with consumers (Flaten and Svennerud, 2007), both the valuable feedback on products and the enjoyment of consumer evaluation of their products. Customers also appreciated this contact:

'I have a feeling that from their perspective – the vendors, that is – they are also very interested in asking you as a customer (Why do you come here? Or what is so special about these products?), that you easily start to chat with them. And they take the initiative. So it is not like a normal store where I just go there and it is me who wants something, and I shop, and then I leave. And the people in the retail store, they just hand out things. But I have a feeling that the vendors at the farmers' market really like it, and they are interested in the people they give their products to. There is much more of an exchange' (Woman, focus group 2).

From the consumer point of view, a large majority of visitors (80%) at the BM say that they would still visit the market if the same products could be bought in ordinary supermarkets or retail stores (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Even customers who mostly buy ordinary fresh foods or who know that the special cheese also can be bought in a specialty shop, go to the market to enjoy the nice atmosphere. The market is considered a social event, where not only the vendors but also other customers contribute to the communication about food. One older woman in one of the focus

groups expressed it like this: 'It is a social meeting place. I don't think I have met people that I know of beforehand, but one always starts chatting with anyone there'.

The stories told by the producers at the market are also valued, and the sellers are often very interested in the customers, 'who we are, how we use the products, and what we think of them' (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Farmers' market managers acknowledge the importance of creating an experience for visitors and attempt to add to the experience value of the markets by arranging food related activities like chef's demonstrations or thematic markets (such as all organic markets), or by adding food service and places for visitors to sit.

There is also a challenging side to promoting BM as a pleasurable experience. Some of the variety-seeking customers in the urban market are the same informants who commented that 'there are few new things at the market' and when you have visited it several times 'you see the same producers every time' (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). These customers emphasise the experience part and to find extraordinary products, products that are new and 'exotic' to them. Following the home page, these are among the customers that BM wants to attract to the markets.

### **Food Purchase at Farmers' Markets and Farm Shops**

In a national survey conducted in autumn 2008, 26% of the respondents stated that they had visited an open air market in the last month, while only 11% had bought food from a farm outlet (Terragni et al., 2009). Surveys show that the typical customer at the farmers' markets and in farm shops are women in their fifties (Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). We found a clear social differentiation in that the customers represented the most well-educated part of the population. The customers had a great interest in food and cooking, a preference for nutritious food, but also new and traditional food (Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010).

Food provisioning seems to be an important motivation for repeat customers at farmers' markets and in farm shops. A number of the BM informants go to the farmers' market for 'ordinary food'. They want more and a larger variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, potatoes, meat and dairy products; things they use every day: 'I buy a great deal of vegetables there, if it is available... but I wish there were more vegetables and I miss Norwegian fruit' (focus group participant). These customers also indicate that the market has taken a place in their shopping habits. They go regularly, every two weeks (when the market is open) and shop 'enough to last a while'. Farmers' markets have been compared with food purchase in the past before modern supermarkets became the dominant way of food provisioning, and customers at BM and in Norwegian farm shops describe it as an old fashioned way of shopping. In this way, direct markets may be viewed as a nostalgic or reactionary food space (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000). However, among our informants we found a recurrent contrasting of both the quality of foods and the shopping experience at direct markets with ordinary, conventional shopping in supermarkets, which we believe expresses more than just a feeling of nostalgia.

Several surveys indicate that the most important reasons for buying food in farm shops and other direct markets is to get fresh and healthy products. Taste and other intrinsic and visible qualities are often seen as important by these customers (Feagan et al., 2004; Jervell and Vramo, 2007; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). However, also when buying food in ordinary supermarkets, consumers in general value the same intrinsic qualities such as freshness, taste, appearance and healthiness as the most

important when purchasing food (Weatherell et al., 2003; Vittersø and Schjøll, 2010). Thus, it may seem that independent of where consumers make their food purchases, intrinsic qualities are more important than credence qualities such as local, organic or animal-friendly production. Food purchases in farm outlets are often contrasted with ordinary shopping, as by this customer in a farm shop in the coastal area: 'No, because here they have fresh, good vegetables, and I know what I get. Things like strawberries, for instance; if you buy them at the store, they're often watery and distasteful, but here you always get good things' (Woman, coastal area).

The woman in the farm shop expresses a concern for the fresh produce, which she finds ill treated in the ordinary food store, especially when contrasted to the products she procures in the farm shop ('here the products are always good'). This careful hunt for quality foods may be balanced against a moral obligation to be economical. For many customers, the price of the produce is a main issue, as for this woman in the coastal area: 'I don't even know if these are organic, but I suppose they probably are. I don't know. But I'm not that interested in whether it is organic or not... I go by price, really' (Woman, coastal area).

For these women who visited farm shops that mainly offered fresh produce, the relation between quality and price was important and subject to comparisons with the offer in ordinary food stores. Like in the farm shops, customers at BM also contrasted the quality of the products with those bought in ordinary food stores. The vegetables in the supermarkets are found to be not as fresh and not as local as those procured at BM (Jervell and Vramo, 2007). Caring for food, but also caring for the family, seems to be an important element underpinning the customers' search for quality foods at direct markets (Kneafsey et al., 2008, p. 26). Fresh and tasty products ensure that the household members enjoy their foods, and freshness is perceived as more healthy and to generate less waste because fresh vegetables do not perish that easily (Vittersø et al., 2005). Likewise Kneafsey et al. (2008, p. 163) found that provisioning and preparing of fresh vegetables 'straight from the soil' was undertaken in order to benefit those who were cared for, thus, this careful search for and preparing of quality foods may be interpreted as an act of love and care for the family (Miller, 1998, pp. 23–36).

From this perspective of family care, the direct contact with the vendor/producer becomes an important part of the valuation of food qualities and prices. The interactions with the personnel in ordinary retail stores are characterized as 'they just stand there', as opposed to the farmers' market where it is often the vendors 'who take the initiative', and in a farm shop you talk to the seller as opposed to an ordinary store where 'you walk about just picking things from the shelves'. Customers at the direct markets express that here one can get information on when and where the produce was harvested, and how and by whom the cured meat or strawberry jam was processed, while supermarkets provide information through impersonal and disembedded information such as food labels or food assurance schemes. But, following Eden et al. (2008), this type of knowledge provision is problematic. Consumers in many cases lack the ability to determine the truth of the information they are given (Miller, 2001, p. 135). To the customer the information received in a farm shop or at farmers' markets seems more transparent (Eden et al., 2008). This strong element of trust in direct markets that customers express is found in several studies (for example, see Sage, 2003; Kirwan, 2006; Moore, 2006). However, Hinrichs underlines that one has to examine critically the reciprocity of producers and consumers at direct

markets, thus, there will always be an element of both instrumentalism and asymmetry in the relation between producer and consumer (Hinrichs, 2000).

From the interviews with customers, we found differences in motivations for visiting direct markets between those who emphasized the search for qualities such as freshness and taste and those who particularly sought for credence qualities such as organic products. The customers in the focus groups discussed the importance of different quality aspects, and primary, intrinsic qualities such as freshness and taste were juxtaposed to credence qualities such as local and organic. Some stated explicitly that it did not matter whether the products were organic or not as long as the quality was good: 'As long as the quality is good I am willing to support farmers' markets, but I do not care much if it is locally produced or not' (Younger man, focus groups). 'I do not care if it is organic or bio-dynamic as long as it is good quality' (Woman, focus groups). However, other customers in the focus groups emphasized that BM provided both good quality and products with special credence qualities:

'I think it's really exciting, because many times that's the only way I can get both organic produce and particularly good raw materials... So I try to go there every time and stock up so that I have enough for the next two weeks, all that I need. I find it very useful... There are some stalls that I go to regularly' (Woman, focus group 2).

Some customers came to the market to get organic food, partly because organic vegetables on the BM market are very competitive compared to organic vegetables in other market outlets with regard to both price and quality. For these customers, the BM functions as an alternative food space where to express their ethical concerns and get hold of products, e.g. organic food, local or typical food, that are difficult to get elsewhere (Terragni et al., 2009). The difference between those who emphasize price and quality and those who focus on ethical shopping, demonstrates what Miller sees as a contradiction between 'care' and 'justice/'ethics'. If ethical shopping is found to be at the expense of family care it may 'be regarded as a form of extravagance that betrays the underlying morality of shopping' (Miller, 2001, p. 134). Miller argues that this contradiction could have been resolved if the responsibility for ethics were transferred from the individual to the political level, implying that there is a greater potential for 'ethical consumption' than what is currently realized.

However, when seeking food specialities in a tourist setting other aspects than quality, price and ethical concerns also become relevant. For instance, a male tourist in a farm shop in the inland area stated that he was looking for 'something that not everyone has got'. He clearly expressed the symbolic value of the local products and when having guests for dinner, for instance, these products were something he could 'brag about' and thus became a subject of conversation. However, there was a limit to how long these products could stay special, and he did not buy them at any cost: 'In the long run you must feel that this cheese is better than a similar cheese from Tine (the largest Norwegian conventional cheese manufacturer). I do not buy expensive products just because they are expensive' (Man, farm shop inland area).

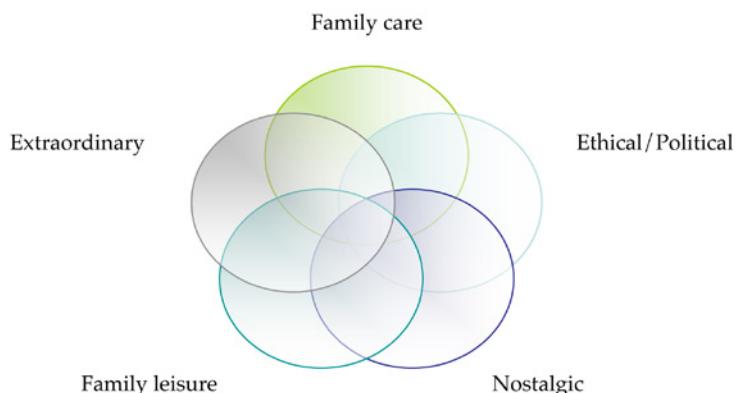
These examples show that motivations and valuations of quality and prices of food vary with the type of products and the contexts in which they are sold. Farm tourism is an opportunity for tourists to have a 'backstage' view on food production. It is, however, not necessarily an authentic picture of the local agriculture that tourists get from these visits on farms or urban farmers' markets, and in many respects the local products are idealized by the tourists. Like farm tourism also BM focuses

on the experience value of farmers' markets and emphasizes quality and diversity rather than 'cheap food'. In this way, BM clearly distinguishes itself from ordinary food retailing, and caters for customers with a special interest in food. This preferably means the well educated middle-class consumer, and for some these products and markets have become a 'signifier of taste and social status' (Tovey, 2009, p. 26). Thus, marketing of local food in these extraordinary tourism food spaces seem to give the products a certain stamp as niche products, which are reserved for extraordinary occasions and not as ordinary food for everyday consumption (Vittersø and Amilien, 2011).

### Direct Markets as Multiple Consumption Spaces

Our findings from studying the two Norwegian direct markets resonate with the conclusions of other researchers that point to the heterogeneity of alternative markets (Holloway et al, 2007; Tovey, 2009). The way these direct markets are framed, both as spaces of food purchase and of leisure experience, makes it pertinent to analyse them from the perspective of multiple consumption spaces (Figure 1).

Following Figure 1, direct markets may be seen as ethical or political spaces of food where consumers consciously seek these markets as an alternative to conventional markets. Farm shops and farmers markets may also, as Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) have pointed out, be seen as a nostalgic/reactionary space appealing to and reminding of an old fashioned way of shopping. But as several authors have recognised, visiting these markets and searching for food specialities are increasingly seen as a signifier of social status and a modern urban lifestyle (Tovey, 2009). In this way, direct markets represent an extraordinary food space for the well-off urban consumer. Seen in a tourist context, local products are bought as part of an extraordinary tourist experience and taken home as souvenirs. In Norway, there is a strong link between the development of local food, direct markets and rural tourism, among others due to government involvement in and support for COFAMIs such as HANEN and BM. The focus of this policy involvement has to a large extent contributed to frame these direct markets within an extraordinary, tourism context (Vittersø and Amilien, 2011).



**Figure 1.** Direct markets as multiple consumption spaces.

The visit to the farm or the market may also be part of a broader social, family experience in which buying food is only a part of the total leisure experience. The latter exemplifies that the development of direct markets must be seen in the context of more general changes in consumption. Leisure and tourism are fast-growing consumption areas, and leisure gains an increasingly important position – both economically, socially and culturally in the present way of life of Norwegians. As seen from this study of farm shops and farmers' markets, food is increasingly linked with these new trends in leisure consumption.

In the HANEN and BM cases, we see a tension between developing these direct markets as exclusive niche markets aimed for the well-off customer and tourist, on the one hand, and the ordinary customer searching for less available, fresh and local products on the other. There is a limit to how much local customers and tourists are willing to pay for food products, and there might be a danger that the products are found too exclusive or too exotic in order for customers to buy and use these. There is a question if a too strong focus on local food as niche product may contribute to a greater social differentiation in the food market, and that these direct markets may primarily act as exclusive and extraordinary food spaces for a marginal, well-off customer base.

On the other hand, from the perspective of rural development and the individual producer, introducing local food in a tourism context may be especially important in rural districts distant from larger urban centres. In these areas, the local market is small, thus tourism may have an important function to develop viable markets of local food. Research is required in order to gain more knowledge about these different challenges for the development of local food and direct markets in rural and urban areas. The strength of the two concepts of direct markets studied seems to be that they appeal not only to consumers seeking alternatives to conventional food, but also to the ordinary family shopping for quality food products and to a socially motivated family leisure demand for pleasurable and novel experiences. The customer attitudes indicate a continued growth in consumer interest in direct contact with farms and farmers. The economic sustainability and the continued development of these direct food markets and farm tourism will, however, depend on how well initiatives like HANEN and BM are able to meet this demand, the competition from alternative leisure and food purchase alternatives, and on how they manage to adapt to increased demand and continuing changes in consumer behaviour, both in urban and rural settings.

## Note

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