iPOPY – innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth. School meals – and more!

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Abstract

One of eight pilot projects in the European CORE Organic programme, innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth, (iPOPY) will study efficient ways of implementing organic food in public serving outlets for young people (2007-10). By analysing practical cases of school meal systems and other food serving outlets for youth, we will identify hindrances and promoting factors in the participating countries (Denmark, Finland, Italy and Norway). Policies, supply chains, certification systems, the young consumers' perception and participation, and health effects of implementation of organic policies and menus are focussed in iPOPY. The main aim is to suggest efficient policies and comprehensive strategies to increase the consumption of organic food among young consumers in a public setting, and fostering sustainable nutrition. Interdisciplinary project tools under development will be presented along with the first project results, which will be available by June 2008.

Introduction

The project innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth (iPOPY) is one of eight pilot projects conducted under CORE Organic (www.coreorganic.org); a joint funding research programme among 11 European countries (2007-10). The iPOPY project is funded under the thematic area "Marketing research". The CORE Organic funding body network demands knowledge and practical evidence that will contribute to increase the consumption of organic food. Governments, companies, producers and caterers are increasingly committed to public procurement of organic food, but many challenges remain. The iPOPY project will analyse systems of public organic food procurement in four countries and suggest, on the basis of these empirical results, efficient policies and instruments for increased consumption of organic products in public food serving outlets for youth. In this paper, the project is presented in its initial stage, emphasising the goals and methods to achieve them. By June 2008, results will be available from the project work packages and presented.

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Project background, goals and structure

Many European countries aim at an increased organic production and consumption, and the responsibility of the public sector to buy organic is recognised. Whereas organic food and - production have traditionally been linked to bottom-up processes, national and local public top-down policies are gradually developed on public procurement of organic food. However, national level decisions are often tackled inappropriately when implemented on a more local level (Kristensen et al. 2007). To be realised, political decisions are dependent on the enthusiasm of many secondary actors which have the power to contribute to, or hamper an implementation of organic food. Further, political aims are often conflicting and may counteract each other. Hence, knowledge is required about strategies and instruments that may increase the efficiency of national POP policies when these are implemented on a local level.

The aim of iPOPY is to study implementation of relevant strategies and instruments linked to food serving outlets for young people in some European countries. School meal systems are the most important way of public food provision for youth, but other areas such as kindergartens, hospitals and music festivals are also of interest. Within this field, the supply chain management, procedures for certification of serving outlets, stakeholders' perceptions and participation, and the potential of organic food in relation to health and obesity risks will be studied in four explorative work packages (WP2-5), whereas WP1 takes care of the project co-ordination.

The research project is a co-operation between Norway, Denmark, Finland and Italy. German researchers also participate, funded by the Research Council of Norway. The project coordination is placed at Bioforsk Organic Food and Farming Division (NO).

Methodology: An interdisciplinary analytical framework and national comparisons

Public organic food procurement for youth (POPY) is a complex phenomenon that varies considerably across European countries. There is a need for cross-national comparisons of POPY systems to reveal determinants that are central for the development of such systems, as well as experiences and best practices that may be adopted by other countries and regions. National reports are developed for this purpose and published on the project web site. Furthermore, a complex reality calls for interdisciplinary research integrating diverse disciplinary knowledge about policies, supply chains, perceptions and learning as well as health and nutrition. To synthesize these diverse results, a common analytical framework is under development, using the methodology of constellation analysis (Schön, 2007). Due to the large variety of POPY systems in the four project countries we initially focus on school meals. In the first stage of this work, the project team has suggested central actors and framework conditions and described their relations, which make up a POPY constellation. This preliminary version was visualised and "mapped" (Fig. 1). It serves as a heuristic tool for the research project. The visualisation points out central actors and framework conditions of the system, and allows for describing sub-constellations that form coherent sections of the overall constellation. Four sub-constellations, reflecting the four explorative iPOPY WPs, seem to shape the outcome of public organic procurement: policies of POPY, providing a regulatory framework; supply chain management; consumer perceptions, practices and learning; nutrition and health (Nölting et al. 2007).

An important aspect of the mapping of constellation and sub-constellations of the POPY phenomenon is that connections between actors as well as framework conditions are identified and described. Further, the visualisation may reveal "blind spots" and possible dynamic and feed-back loops between the sub-constellations. An important part of the procedure to develop the framework is to stimulate the discussion in the project across work packages, and to formulate hypotheses for further research.

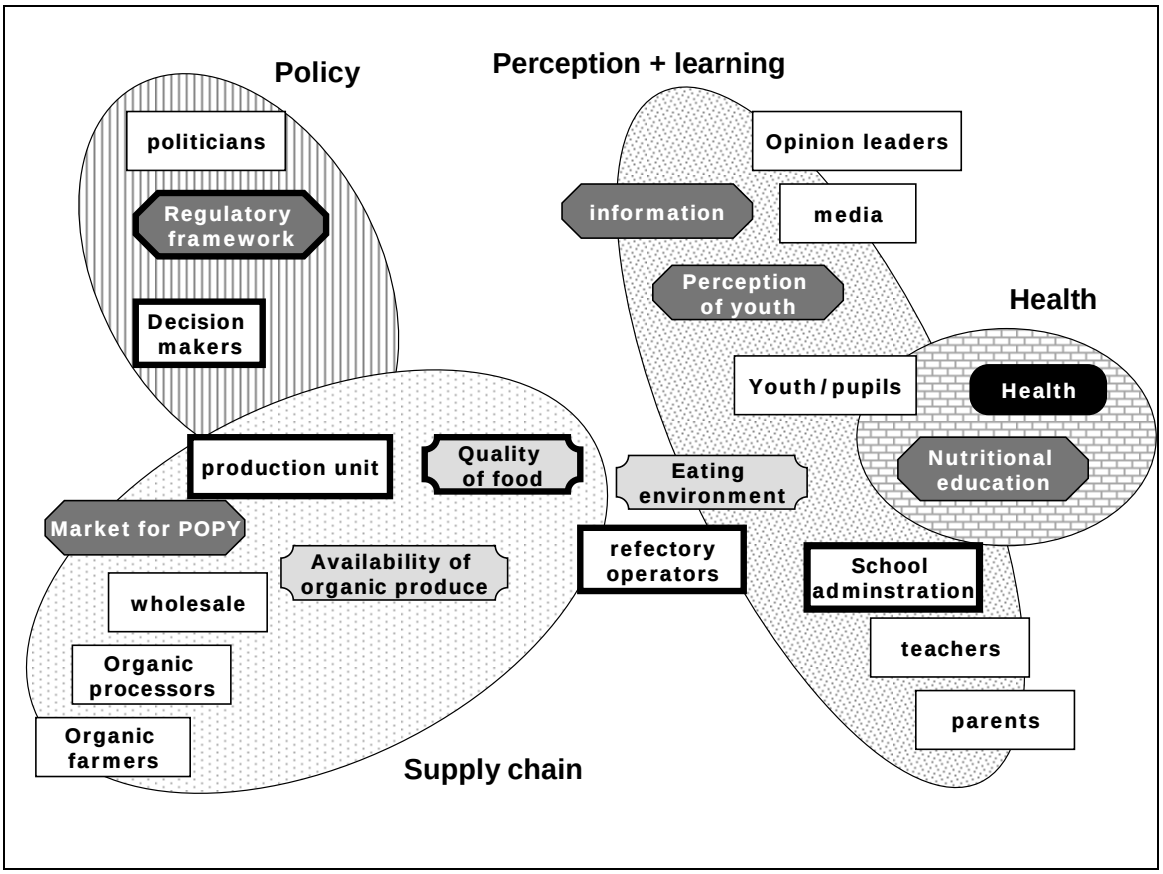

Figure 1. Mapping the constellation of public organic food procurement linked to school meals

A coherent common terminology across work packages and disciplines is an essential part of this bridging concept. Altogether, the mapping process, the identification of central actors and framework conditions as well as common and clearly defined terms will provide an analytical framework to serve as a common point of reference for the research conducted in the work packages and ensure the comparability of national analyses and case studies.

Coming results

The first outcome of iPOPY will be national reports describing the situation with respect to school meals (WP2), and to which degree organic food is included in school meals, in the four iPOPY countries. There is a huge variation between the countries with respect to school meal traditions, ranging from Italy, where all children receive a subsidised warm lunch daily and both local and organic food is heavily supported by public legislation (Morgan and Sonnino 2005), to Norway, where children may subscribe to daily milk and/or fruit servings. In Finland, warm lunch is served for free

but the share of organic food is low. In Denmark, various approaches to cold and warm lunch meals are being developed, with a considerable public support for organic; however, the implementation of organic food still has a long way to go.
The certification systems of organic production, processing and serving outlets in DK, FI, IT, NO, Germany and the EU in general will also be described in national reports (WP3). The aim of this work is to discuss and suggest general regulations and certification procedures for food serving outlets. By June 2008, initial results will also be available about supply chain management (WP 3), and relations between organic food and healthy eating (WP5). Positive attitudes towards organic procurement among catering managers have been shown to be associated with healthier menus in worksite canteens (Mikkelsen 2006), and iPOPY-WP5 will study whether this pertains also to young people, where a positive attitude towards organic food would be especially important to establish.
The overall iPOPY perspective is that food policies are crucial to achieve efficient public procurement systems of organic food, and analysis of actor networks (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Scott 2001) will be performed in WP2 based on information from other WPs. Drivers and constraints for public organic food procurement will be studied, as well as best practice cases, to develop and propose comprehensive strategies for POP that are practically and contextually adaptive. By responses from municipal stakeholders as well as actors in the school environments, these results will highlight the relationships between organic procurement polices, food and nutrition policies and the actual serving practices.

Conclusions

At the ISOFAR conference, the project will be presented emphasising the instruments developed to analyse and synthesize results across WPs. Results from national descriptions of public organic food procurement systems for youth will be presented and compared, and a first discussion will be raised about how these results can be utilised to describe and explain each other.

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