

Organic foods in Danish municipal school food systems – a multi stakeholder analysis of available evidence on constraints and perspectives

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Abstract (1/3)

- Previous studies have shown that organic supply and healthy eating initiatives in school food services share common features. Both types involves changes in supply, the collaboration of a number of different stakeholders and both include a physical food part as well as a non physical symbolic aspect. Studies have shown that introducing organic food in public food systems seems to affect the nutritional profile of the food service and anecdotal evidence suggest that organic supply forces food services to rethink menus leading to healthier menus and that introduction of organic foods often leads to adoption of a food & nutrition policy. The explanation might be that simply developing “food strategy” leads to a raise of awareness in school food services in such a way that both organic food and healthy eating tends to favor and that the notion of organic food and health eating in the minds of the decision makers is perceived as two sides of the same coin. Thus organic food supply and healthier food service seems to thrive in a symbiotic association and it appears that organic food seems to possess a “health improvement” potential that fits well with the prevailing ambitions that exists in many countries of making school settings for healthier eating initiatives.

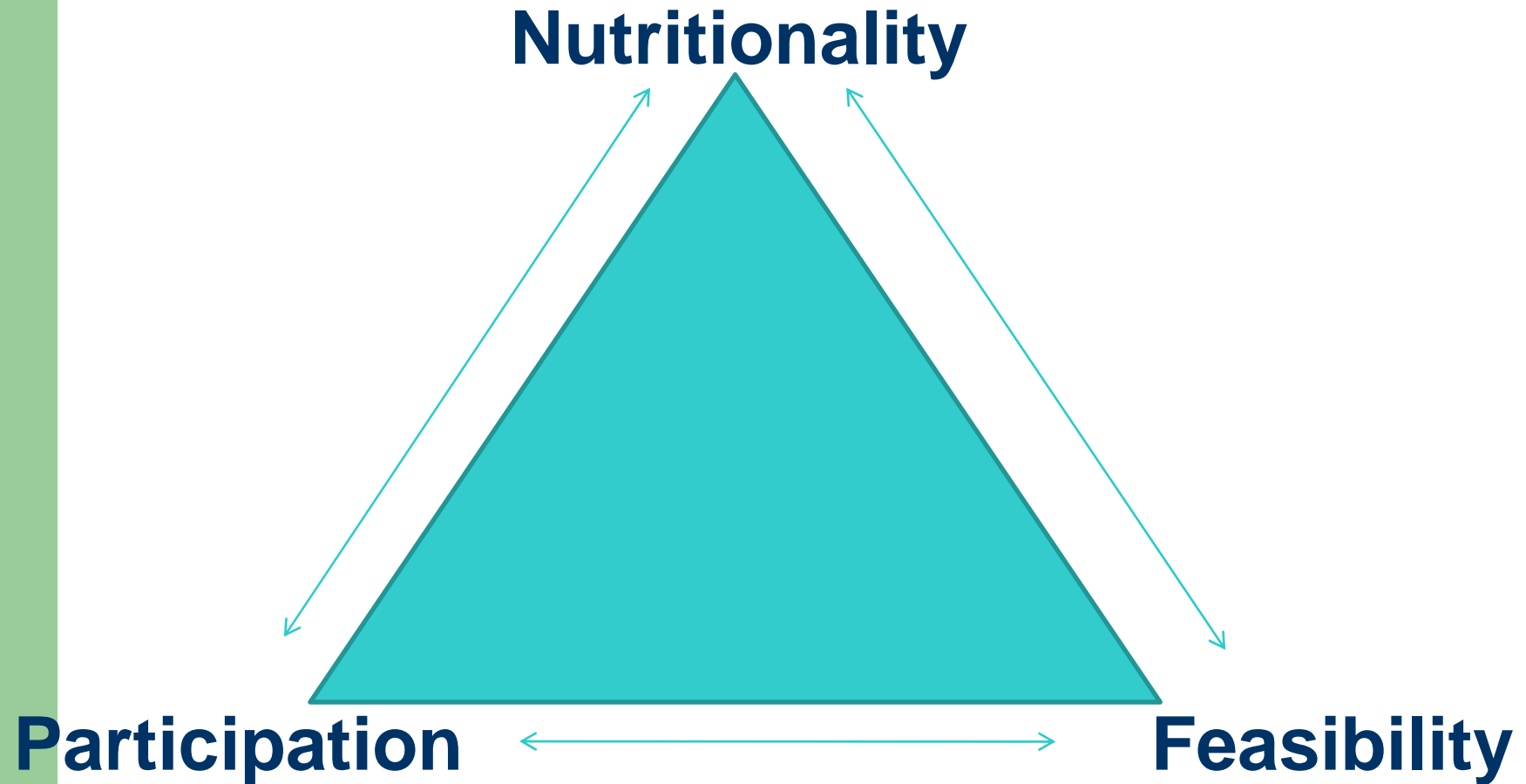
Abstract (2/3)

- This paper studies the case of Danish school food service. Food service in Denmark follow the same trajectory as in many other countries where school food services increasingly are being implemented on a self service voluntary market based basis. Some of these emerging services adopt an organic supply policy. However where as a number of the local school driven initiatives has proven to be able to successfully develop organic supply, a number of large scale multiple-school municipal attempts have shown to be problematic in terms of participation and in terms of perceive quality. This paper seeks to find an explanation to this difference. Why does large scale school food service with both an organic and healthy dimension experience problems and can an explanation be found by asking the different stakeholders involved in these projects? The paper uses the growing number of empirical studies on Danish school food services that have been profile as both organic and healthy as an offset for an analysis of the different stakeholders perception of the "organicness" and "healthiness" of the initiatives. The paper uses three municipal initiatives as cases.

Abstract (3/3)

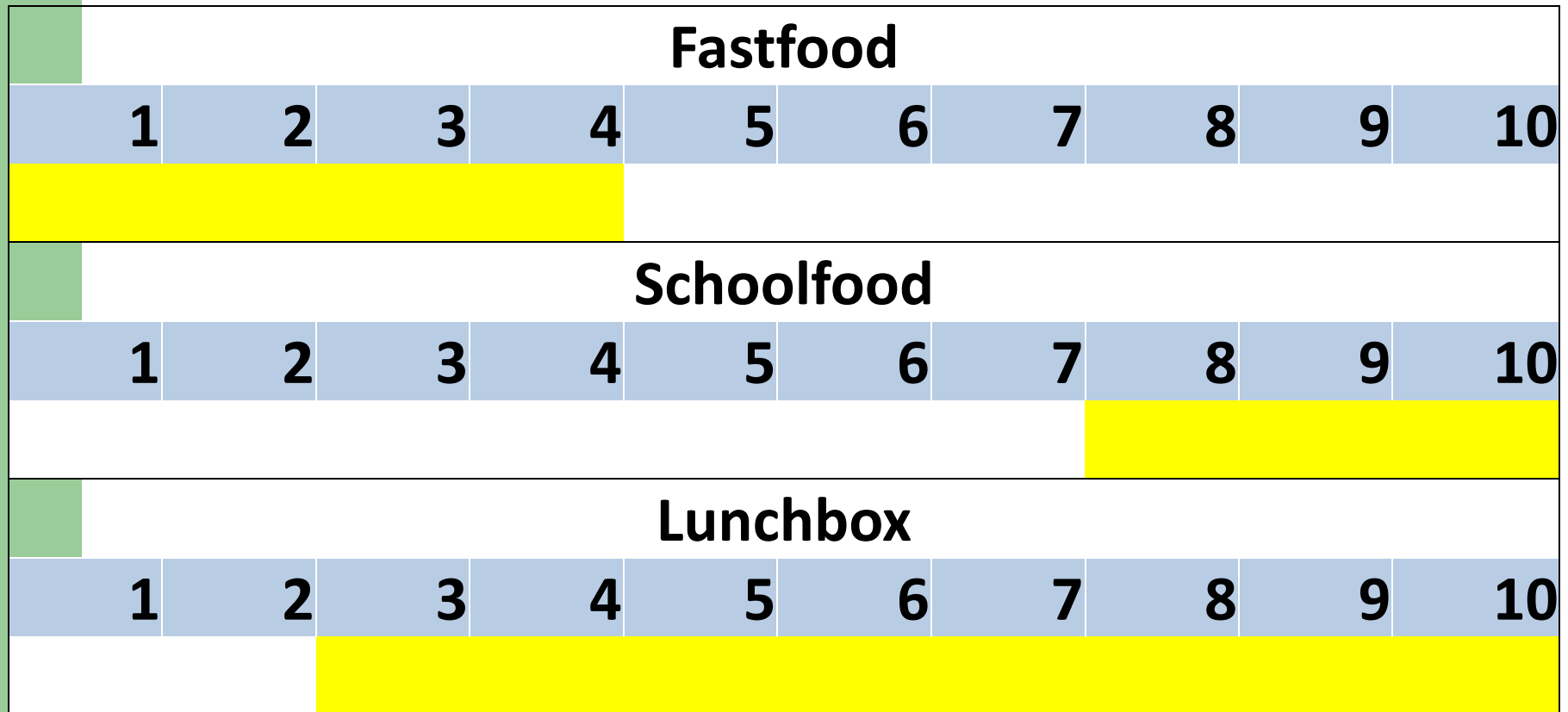
- The paper concludes that a number of ambitious initiatives linking healthy eating and organic supply has been implemented in Denmark, but that a number of constraints seem to hinder the participation in these initiatives and thus to influence the potential “health” impact of the initiatives. It also indicates that stakeholders perceive the quality of the services quite differently and that poor perceived quality seems to be an important challenge. The paper suggest that the size of the systems and lack of agreement and common sense making among the different stakeholders in the system is an important part of the explanation. However it is important to stress that these constraints are not necessarily due to the organic nature of the supply but has got to do with other factors. The paper suggest that the market based “consumer” nature of the Danish school food service is another important part of the explanation. However the paper also suggest that the participation is dependent on the way the school food service is designed and that school driven approaches emphasizing the involvement and participation of the school in the food service seems to be superior to top down central systems.

A simple model

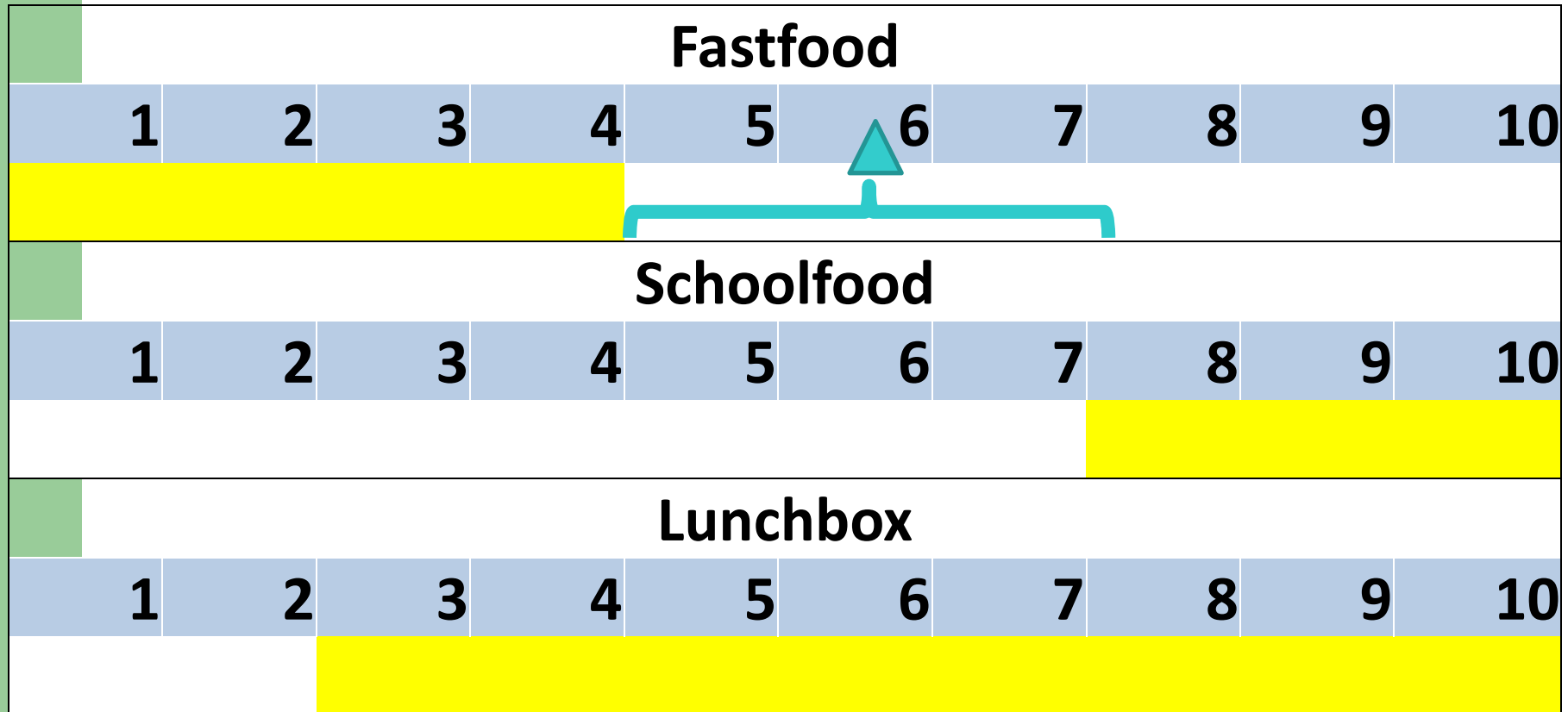


"Nutritionality" of school food

Meal quality index



Difference in "Nutritionality" = 



Purpose

- To investigate constraints and perspectives related to development of organic “versions” of municipal school meal provision in Denmark.
- Based on existing expert literature along with empirical statements from meal planners, dinner ladies, students and decision makers.
- To indicate potential solutions for how organic school food can be implemented

Methodology

(1)

- Open analysis of extant literature on organic food in schools
- Analyses of extant empirical case material.
- Selected case material has been restricted to cases from the municipalities of Copenhagen, Roskilde and Gladsaxe respectively

Methodology

(2)

- Students (from three schools in Copenhagen; from the 8th-9th grades and 5th - 6th grades respectively)
- Persons responsible for school food tuck shops/teachers in Copenhagen
- Municipal meal planners (Gladsaxe, København, Roskilde)
- Local school food coordinators (“Dinner ladies” / cafeteria assistants in Gladsaxe)
- School food suppliers (123 School Food and Copenhagen)

Findings

for large municipal organic food systems

- Differences & similarities
- Long way from back to front stage and different views
- Signs of lack of coherence

Findings (1) Low participation

- For all three municipalities: less than a quarter of the student body in all three municipalities actually, uses the school food program.
- This pattern seems to be identical in spite of the relatively different approaches to the implementation and maintenance of the school food programs in practice.

Findings 2

- Developing and operating a large scale municipal school meal service successfully is a serious challenge and that it is especially challenging in an organic version.
- Taken into account that a number of smaller school driven meal provision systems based on organic supply have proven to be able to survive, the findings suggests that it is the “architecture” and the size of the municipal systems that is challenging.

Findings 3

- The presence of a large number of stakeholders with different views and expectations and the need to make a complicated supply chain work are some of the problems as well as the in-built weakness of the school provision- its consumer orientation.
- However data also suggest that even large scale municipal systems show differences in its appeal to a broad range of involved stakeholders and that the Gladsaxe approach with decentralized kitchens seems to create more ownership and alignment of expectations.

Themes

- Theme 1. Price, Portion Size, Selection, Wrapping, Taste and Quality
- Theme 2. Ordering and Payment
- Theme 3. Time, Socializing and Dining facilities
- Theme 4. Administration and Communication
- Theme 5. Ownership and Shared Responsibility
- Theme 6. Parental Influence
- Theme 7. Organic vs. Conventional?
- Theme 8. Integrated Education

Theme**Copenhagen****Roskilde****Gladsaxe**Central
municipal
productionExternal
commercial
productionDecentral
production
at schoolPrice, Portion Size, Selection,
Wrapping, Taste and Quality

X

x

x

Ordering and Payment

X

x

x

Time, Socializing and Dining
facilities

X

x

Administration and
Communication

X

x

x

Ownership and Shared
Responsibility

X

x

x

Parental Influence

X

x

Organic vs. Conventional?

X

x

x

Integrated Education

X

x

Greater focus on the social needs among students in relation to school meals (1)

- Establishment of better dining facilities for the students
- Development of a system of involvement and shared responsibility for the students
- Greater possibility of involvement for the students in the preparatory stages
- Greater focus on the preparation of the food from scratch (possibly at the schools)

Greater focus on the social needs among students in relation to school meals (2)

- Development of a better food quality, presentation techniques, packaging/ serving options/ dining facilities
- Development of a flexible ordering and payment system for greater benefit and use of the students
- Greater focus on purchase behavior in connection with specific environments

Greater focus on administrative communication systems behind school food

- Development of a communications model aimed at several actors on different levels
- Greater focus on involving and informing parents and students
- Greater focus on involving the school and teachers

Focus on certifying organic school food

- Greater focus on promoting an organic strategy towards parents and students
- Greater focus on the communication value through the preparatory methods, sales environments, packaging, presentation, servicing and dining facilities

Greater focus on integrated education in health issues, ecology and food culture

- Development of a model for implementing general knowledge of food in all school subjects
- Development of an interdisciplinary profile that ties the relevance of the school's food to the education

Conclusion

- Organic food supply in large municipal systems is a challenge
- Organic supply \neq perceived organicness
- Organic food risk being perceived associated with poor quality
- Organic food risk being perceived as associated with poor nutrition
- Successful school food (=participation) is a requirement for health impact

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