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THE POWER OF LOCAL

– sustainable food systems around the Baltic sea

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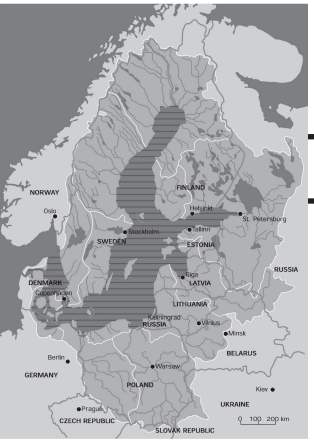
Interdisciplinary Synthesis of the BERAS project



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The photo is taken at a Farmers Market at Katarina Bangata in Stockholm in the autumn 2005.

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Conclusions

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The interdisciplinary conclusions of the BERAS project on enhancing sustainable development of rural food systems through localisation and recycling, are as follows:

- There is *good potential for sustainable localisation and recycling* in rural food systems around the Baltic Sea, through 1) integration of nutrient cycles between crop and animal husbandry and between agriculture and the demand chain, 2) increased reliance on biological N fixation and local renewable energy, 3) reduced transportation, 4) increased local employment and public financing and 5) greater equity in influence and trust in interactions between local actors.

- *Localisation and recycling enhance sustainability in its ecological, econo mic and social dimensions* if firm economy is improved 1) through fair cooperation and/or through 2) public economic interventions or 3) price premium, or all three. From the viewpoint of social sustainability, cooperation and interventions are more beneficial means than price premium. Localisation and recycling decrease nutrient load, global warming and use of fossil energy, and enhance local economy as well as equity, social capital and resilience of the community. Local recycling is essential for ecological sustainability, and localisation contributes to this. Localisation is a key for benefits to the local economy and social sustainability.

- *A sustainable way of localisation and recycling* would be local recyc ling between farms and from the demand chain. Most stages of the food chain, including inputs, would be local. There would be greater shares of local, organic food, for which the markets would extend also beyond the local rural community. Essential to ac hieving benefits in all three dimensions of sustainability is 1) establishment of "local partnership" of actors, 2) "internalis ing of externalities" through taxation, reallocation of subsidies and regulation, and 3) promotion of "learning citizen-consumers" th rough appropriate distribution of information combined with po licy intervention to remove the social and institutional constraints on informed choices.

- For sound conclusions, it is crucial to consider *interactions among the various dimensions of sustainability*, irrespective of, whether the study focuses on one or several dimensions. For the interdiscipli nary process to be successful, to get most use of interdisciplinarity, 1) the project has to be planned in an interdisciplinary manner, 2) all contributors must be committed to the process, 3) research

must be organised around interdisciplinary research questions or hypotheses within an integrative framework, and 4) to interdisciplinary work packages and working groups and to be reported in interdisciplinary publications. Close attention should be paid to interdisciplinary communication.

- *Research needs exist* in regard to 1) the creation of collaborative, re flexive, democratic processes to develop sustainable local food sys tems, 2) the development of effective means to internalise the exter nalities of food and 3) the understanding of aspects of most inte rest to food system actors, and the development of tools, enabling conscious choices. In addition, 4) advanced procedures and tools need to be developed for interdisciplinary communication in re search aimed at promoting sustainable food systems.