

# The iPOPY project

## and how to communicate with the young generation

*At the NOC session "Organic to the people – Through education and communication" Gun Roos presented results from the international CORE Organic project "iPOPY" – innovative Public Organic food Procurement for Youth". iPOPY explore dimensions of communication with young people about organic food and sustainability in school and festival settings.*



*One of the iPOPY case studies is the Øya music festival where organic food is served. Photo: Julie Loen.*

The aim of the iPOPY project (2007–2010) is to study how increased consumption of organic food may be achieved by implementation of relevant strategies and instruments linked to food serving outlets for young people in some European countries (Denmark, Finland, Italy and Norway). Supply chain management, procedures for certification of serving outlets, stakeholders' perceptions and participation as well as the potential of organic food in relation to health and obesity risks are analysed. Because schools are central arenas for public food procurement for children and adolescents the project focuses on organic food served in schools. In addition to schools/municipalities in Denmark, Finland, Italy and Norway, a Finnish congregation and a Norwegian

music festival are used as cases for public serving outlets for young people.

The study presented here explores communication about organic food to young people on two arenas where organic food is served either as public or commercial service: a Finnish upper secondary school and a Norwegian music festival. The study is based on focus group discussions with young people (aged 16–25 years), individual interviews with caterers and observations conducted in 2008.

### **Finnish school meals – institutional message and pupils' experiences**

The Finnish school meal system represents a highly regulated practice aiming at academic performance and public health, and already in 1948 free school

meals in primary education became the statutory liability for municipalities.

The 'institutionalised' offer of free school meals represents national food culture (rotating menu) and follows national nutritional recommendations. The school meal is also meant to be a relaxing and revitalising social break. Furthermore, the "whole school approach" aims to connect education in biology, geography, health and home economics with school meal implementation, with a model meal in the dining hall visualizing the "proper balanced meal". More specifically, education includes some knowledge on agriculture including organic food as well. The implementation of the school meal presents an institutionally powered message of healthy, nutritional,

tasty, hygienic, free and scheduled warm lunches as an epitome of well-being for young people.

The handbook for school meals in Finland refers to the concept of sustainable development and recommends, if possible, to use local food. Organic food is not mentioned in the handbook. However, there are public caterers who express their concerns for both young people's health and depletion of natural resources and who use domestic or organic food for school meals. In this way, the "institutional organic message" can be described as basically positive, to some extent reserved, and ambiguous about organic food; simultaneously, there is in some cases critical relation towards conventional food. This message is mixed, but it gives room for the use of organic food as a material and experiential message as well as information through text books, projects and lectures.

Young people's experience and interpretation of the organic message have several analytical dimensions. First, they referred to particularly nice occasions in one's life history such as participation in organic meal preparation with particular persons. The school meal was, when compared with these experiential memories, suspected to be non-organic due to the low cost focus of Finnish school food service. The young people also expressed that they did not see a point in asking whether



*The school food is often discussed among the pupils. Photo: Martin Skoog*

it was organic, since this hardly would change the way the procurement was run. However, school food seemed to have rather high relevance to the everyday well-being of the young people because they discussed it intensively and made detailed evaluations of it.

The pupils reflected on organic food as compared with conventional food and concluded, that the crops must be smaller than in conventional agriculture since organic is more pricey. They were aware and saw it as positive that no pesticides and fertilizers had been used in production; this fact also raised questions about the necessity of pesticides. The

somewhat ambiguous understanding of organic food was also connected with curiosity about its quality. The commonplace expression of 'future with organic' appeared to attract them. The announcement of an organic trial in the school caused welcoming applause and suggestions for what the organic foods could be.

The content of education seemed to be restricted to organic labels, learning about organic foods in the local supermarket and project work. The young people themselves paid attention to the neutral content of education without



*Photo: Erik Moholdt*

any attempts to 'influence' their buying behaviour.

The organic message, received both in and outside the school where young people are exposed to many competing messages, was interpreted positively, with some ambiguity in terms of quality and the selection on the market. However, there was no big contrast to the culturally powerful institutional message of healthy school meals.

### Organic food in a Norwegian festival context

Festivals are collective events that can be understood as arenas for social learning and opportunities to experiment with pleasure and meaning. Being at the Øya music festival, one of the cases in the iPOPYPY project, provides young people an opportunity to taste and experience organic food, which may effect perceptions and learning about organic food.

Since 2003 Øya has aimed at serving organic food prepared by local restaurants. The menus are certified and labelled ([www.debio.no](http://www.debio.no)). In addition, posters with a text informing what organic food is, have been placed by the food booths and special stands can be visited for more information. The festival magazine and the book to volunteers include information about organic food. The volunteers have access to free organic food when working.

The young Øya participants described the festival as a positive experience, and thus organic food got a positive association. Organic food was viewed as different from conventional food, and there seemed to be an expectation that it would be better for themselves, animals or environment, or taste better. But not all were sure about what made organic food different and why. There was a shared opinion that organic food

is more expensive, and that the food sold at Øya festival was small portions for a lot of money.

Some of the participants, especially the volunteers, had noted the information on organic food, but others had not registered the posters or even that the food was organic. It did not seem like the experiences with organic food at the festival had had a direct effect on their consumption of organic food. There were mixed views on the transmission of organic food from festival to everyday context; some thought organic festival food had a positive effect, whereas others described festivals as separate worlds with limited influence. Festival food was mainly associated with necessity, fuelling the body and high price.

### Conclusion

Two cases from the iPOPYPY project demonstrate that when communicating with the younger generation organic food messages are competing with other messages also in protected food environments, and the sender and receiver attach different meanings to organic food. Our findings contribute to emphasizing the relevance of holistic approaches (e.g. whole school approach) and experiential activities in introducing organic food to young people. ■

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*A longer version of this article with references is published in the NOC Conference Report, p.55. ([www.nordicorganic.org/NOC-report-web.pdf](http://www.nordicorganic.org/NOC-report-web.pdf))*

## Gun Roos studerar vad som styr vårt ätande

*Gun Roos, seniorforskare vid Statens institutt for forbruksforskning (SIFO) i Oslo, har ägnat en stor del av sitt yrkesliv åt att studera varför vi äter det vi gör och vilka faktorer som påverkar vårt ätande. Sedan 2007 deltar hon i iPOPYPY-projektet (se föregående artikel).*

**G**un Roos har alltid varit intresserad av mat och hälsa så när hon hade gått ut skolan bestämde hon sig för att studera näringslära.

– Under studietiden var jag forskningsassistent och kom på det sättet in i forskningsvärlden. Jag jobbade några år med både forskning och näringsterapi i slutet av 1980-talet. Därefter fick jag ett



Rotarystipendium för ett års studier i antropologi vid University of Kentucky.

– Jag valde att studera antropologi eftersom jag var intresserad och ville lära mig mer om varför vi människor äter

den mat vi äter. Tack vare finansiering av Finlands Akademi kunde jag stanna i Kentucky och ta först en master och sedan en doktorsexamen.

Efter sin examen har Gun Roos arbetat med forskning om mat, hälsa och konsumtion. Under ett år i Skottland arbetade hon med ett projekt om nordisk kostpolitik och var sedan på finska Folkhälsoinstitutet där hon arbetade med ett projekt om ojämlikhet i födointaget. Sedan 1999 arbetar Gun Roos på SIFO i Oslo.

**Hur ser du på framtiden för ditt arbete och utvecklingen inom området? Vilken utveckling är troligast?**

– Mat och hälsa är väldigt aktuella ämnen i dag med ett växande fokus på övervikt och fetma. Även i fortsättningen är det viktigt att försöka förstå varför människor äter den mat de gör. Hur det sociala, strukturella och kulturella spelar en roll och hur man kan problematisera det.

**Vilken roll hoppas du kunna spela inom området i framtiden?**

– Jag hoppas att jag kan delta i debatten om mat och hälsa och bidra med forskning som visar att vår vardag och våra matvanor styrs av både strukturella, kulturella, sociala och individuella faktorer. Jag tror att det är viktigt att se på hur mat och hälsa inte bara handlar om ett individuellt val och ansvar. Myndigheter, industri och handel spelar också viktiga roller. Detsamma gäller sociala relationer och sammanhang. Och hur vardagslivets rutiner och praxis övergår i värderingar och normer. ■

Åsa Eckerrot