

## Blog Summary of the Webinar: **Denmark's School Food Program**

### **Description**

As part of the webinar series *School Food Around the World: Lessons for Canada*, the webinar on 26th August 2021 covered several aspects of the Danish school food program. The presenters shed light on how the program is implemented and monitored in accordance with Danish nutritional requirements and educational frameworks.

### **Participants:**

#### **Hosts:**

- **Debbie Field** - Coordinator of the Coalition for Healthy School Food
- **Suvadra Datta Gupta** - Ph.D. Candidate of University of Saskatchewan
- **Amberley Ruetz** - Ph.D. Candidate of University of Guelph

#### **Panelists:**

- **Line Rise Nielsen** - Food Policy Director of Copenhagen Food System Center
- **Emil Kiær Lund** - M.Sc. in Integrated Food Studies - Coordinator and Consultant of "Food Schools" in The City of Copenhagen, Denmark
- **Morten Kromann Nielsen** - Ph.D.- Associate Professor, UCL University College in Odense, Denmark

### **Summary of the presentation**

#### **Panelist: Line Rise Nielsen and Emil Kiær Lund**

- Denmark does not have a school food program nor prioritize having one because they have a strong tradition of Danish 'madpakke'. Madpakke is a school-packed lunch that contains a freshly-made sandwich with rye bread and some kinds of protein, a compact lunch meal to be eaten in 15-20 minutes during the break in the classroom. The parents make it in the morning for their children. The tradition is kept as a way to show the love and care of the parents to their children.
- In 2007, the City of Copenhagen decided to have a school food program (within Copenhagen only) with a holistic view on quality, taste, health, and involvement of the students. School food programs in Copenhagen's greater goal is to create a concept that would likely change the mindset of Copenhagen's citizens about eating, starting from pupils and their parents. The concept encourages the youth to think the food they choose, pay for, and eat links to their identities.
- However, there was not a school food culture, and investing in building school food kitchens for 48 schools within Copenhagen was too much. Hence, the Copenhagen Municipality comes up with 2 solutions: Building schools with kitchens for school food and EAT - a central kitchen that provides meals to all schools, where food is packed and transported to each school every day.

- The price for one school meal in Copenhagen is €3.50 - €4.50 per meal. The Copenhagen Municipality now has agreed to fund school meals to make them free, so that low-income families can access school food programs.
- ***Copenhagen's Food Schools:***  
There are currently 16 food schools in Copenhagen, which includes 12 Folkeskolers (public schools) and 4 Danish special schools for children who are diagnosed with special conditions (ADHD, autism, etc.). This has been decided to be the new school model for future investment.
  - The schools provide around 5000 meals per day.
  - The schools are decentralized organizations and productions, occasionally receiving central support and development from the city's municipality.
  - Each school consults private professionals on the menu's gastronomy.
  - The food is 90 to 100% organic, seasonal, and cooked from scratch.
  - The Food School not only provides healthy, nutritious meals for students but also aims to increase food literacy and use food as a learning space for the students.
  - There are venues with tables for children to eat together.
  - Food education: The students participate in the school's daily food-producing process as a way to increase food literacy. A team of 6 students will spend the day with professional chefs, working and giving ideas to the food-producing process, from preparing to serving.
  - The school focuses on building a sense of democracy in the students by educating them and allowing them to participate in the menu planning process with the chefs.
- ***Food Schools' Targets and Initiatives:***
  - Educate the students on Danish's growing gastronomy.
  - Be the tool to solve inequality in health, making sure everyone can have access to tasty and healthy food regardless of social statuses and economic situations.
  - Push the limitations of public food procurement rules and markets.
  - Gradually integrate the food strategy of the city: healthy, green, and sustainable.
- ***Copenhagen's EAT kitchens:***  
At the same time, there are 53 EAT kitchens in the city, providing from 5000 to 10,000 meals per day for 46 schools.
  - Dishes are mostly familiar Danish cuisines, mixed with some other foreign and vegetarian ones. 2 meals per day, one of which is always vegetarian.
  - EAT facilities are designed to provide for at least 30% of the city's students.
  - Meals are almost finished in EATs, then reheated and plated at the school kitchens (which is a large-bedroom-sized kitchen).
  - EAT crews are responsible for preparing the meals, which consists of about 6 students to a whole class. The more students are in the EAT crew, the more meals are sold because there are more people to prepare food.

- EAT kitchens are logistically complex, hence it is expensive to operate. Operations are complex as well, as production planning, menu planning, and meal development have to be detailedly up to the parents' and students' expectations, and the country's nutrition requirements.
- EAT kitchens are equally equipped and standardized (despite different capacities) so that non-culinary professionals can operate the kitchens. Instructions and standard procedures are posted detailedly in the kitchens for food quality standardization and control.
- EAT kitchen staff is centrally employed.

**Panelist: Morten Kromann Nielsen**

**Three central topics related to school food in Denmark**

- **Typologies - history, ideologies, and paradoxes in Danish school food**
  - Despite our highly developed welfare society, the packed lunch culture persists in most towns, and food in schools remains a parental duty.
  - The Danish National Board of Health created a typology in 1999 that helps us understand how the region has changed over time.
  - Food is shown as a social welfare project in which food is provided as a method of promoting health equity - students are mainly recipients of a public benefit in this case. Food is a pedagogical endeavor in which food is not only prepared with student involvement but also presented as a didactic resource.
- **Trends - food as a vehicle for learning?**
  - While school food in the form of 'feeding programs' has not achieved national traction, a growing number of projects view food as a **vehicle for learning**.
  - Home economics has been renamed 'Food Knowledge', requiring additional lessons, instructor credentials, and perhaps an exam in older grades.
  - A new discipline founded on sensory research, taste didactics encourages us to view taste as a vehicle for fostering critical awareness rather than something to be 'fixed' so kids make the correct choices.
  - Food is also addressed in the UN-SDGs and a politically emphasized objective to open schools to the local community.
  - A national food 'bildung' program for teachers was also launched by the government.
  - LOMA-local food is an innovative school food concept that involves students in the production kitchen using local ingredients.
- **Concepts – 'food bildung', 'food literacy' or 'food systems'?**
  - In the professional community around school food in Denmark, the term 'food bildung' is a central concept.
  - **Benn (2014)** describes 'food bildung' as 5 different competencies that all should be addressed in the learning process: **To know** – the sense of coherence, knowledge and decision making, **To do-** everyday life competencies, practical skills, **To sense-**

aesthetic and expression – ‘food courage’, **To want** – responsibility/willingness to participate – citizenship & democracy, and **To be** – carefulness – care for and care of – ethics, oneself, society, environment.

- **Carlsen (2011)** stresses the role of food ‘bildung’ in six dimensions:
  1. A pleasure and sense-oriented treatment of own body
  2. Productivity in a craft and technical way for home
  3. Cognitive possibilities
  4. Aesthetic observation ability, design ability, and judgment
  5. The ability to make ethical and political decisions and to conduct ethical and political actions
  6. Possibilities of relations to fellow human-beings: the sociality
- **Benn (2014)** addresses the two general approaches to the term food ‘bildung’, which also refers to 'Food Literacy' as either broad and narrow. Whereas broad understandings emphasize the contextualization of food and the empowerment of students on a collective or societal level, and the narrow understandings of food literacy are primarily directed at individuals and limited to microlevel settings that are also gendered and a topic reserved for girls.

### **Q&A Session - Key Takeaways**

- COVID has been a big setback at schools. When schools were open, food was served in portions in a box and everyone ate it together. But with all the restrictions brought by COVID that was not possible anymore.
- “Food Schools” in the City of Copenhagen do not work with post-secondary schools or external organizations. There are only a few high schools and colleges that help in providing organic and vegetarian food for students that is why there is a need for a national school food program.
- Schools in Copenhagen have a diverse culture and they take that in consideration to the food they cook. Some schools sometimes have a theme for their food each week to learn more and celebrate each culture. Also, almost 100 percent of the meat served is halal butchered so everyone will be able to eat.
- There is no national funding for school food. Instead, the municipality of Denmark helps with the funding of around eight to ten million Canadian dollars per year. The standard price that each parent pays is around \$5 Canadian. But the actual price of food if production cost is included is around \$8 to \$10 Canadian. dollars. On top of that, the food school production kitchens are fully equipped and would be a total of around ten million Canadian dollars spent by the municipality.
- Denmark has a national nutritional guideline that has a larger focus on plant-based.
- The food schools are different based on how they produce food. There are more food buildings in food schools and they also decide among themselves what to put on the menu. Furthermore, students are participating through apprenticeships in the kitchen with the chefs, and food schools have canteen spaces where all students can sit together and enjoy their food. While the eat schools have a fixed menu for three

months at a time. They also have to portion size their food, put it in the boxes, and be brought to the classrooms where they eat, which is a more traditional Danish way.

- By using the Loma model, the municipality of Svenbo used the space of EU regulations to make tenders that can end up with local sourcing being arranged. Producers of food are able to not only take part in the learning process and teaching but also open their production sites for schools and tours.
- There is a need for funding for the teachers to learn more about food building.

**For more resources and information on the webinar please follow the links below.**

[Denmark's School Food Program Webinar](#)

[Line Rise Nielsen and Emil Kiær Lund Presentatiom Slides](#)

[Morten Kromann Nielsen Presentation Slides](#)