



Consumers and citizens perception of meat quality: The relative importance of environmental issues

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Can consumers save the world?

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Points of departure

- Consumers do not always act according to expressed interests
- Consumers are often portrayed as emotional or irrational



The question of the study

What happens when people relate to
food in an *everyday context* of
preparing, eating and serving
VS.
a context of food production -
exemplified by the production of pigs
and the processing of pork?



Method

6 focus group interviews (6-7 participants in each group)

November 2001

Sampling criteria

- Age 20-70; Equal representation of men and women
- Persons responsible as well as persons less or not responsible food related activities in the home.
- No close relation to the food sector

The phases of the interviews:

- Food in general and food in an everyday context
- Food in a context of production
- Involved actors.



The interviews: setting up the two contexts

Food in the everyday context:

- What is typical Danish food? What did you eat yesterday/ the other day/ normally? Why? What is the difference between everyday food and party food? What is good and bad food? Why? Discussion of pork dishes.

Aim: to get an understanding of the reflections considered relevant in an everyday context and the role of pork in Danish food culture

Food in a context of production:

- What are your reflections when you think of words like 'pigs', 'pig/pork producer' and 'abattoir'?

Aim: to get an understanding of the reflections considered relevant, when reminded that food is produced.



The everyday context: issues addressed

Food in general

Quality

- Taste, texture, smell, convenience, health (nutrition)

Appropriateness/ status

- When?
- With whom?

Availability

Price

Pork

- Quality

- Like/dislike; easy to prepare; greasy (=unhealthy)

- Appropriateness/ status

- Everyday ingredient, low status
- Never with guests!

- Availability

- Plenty and rich variety

- Price

- Cheap



Pigs and pork in a production context

Pigs (animals) replace *pork* (meat) as the dominant theme.

Issues taken up

- Quality
 - Animal welfare
 - Environmental concerns
 - (Food safety (zoonotic risks))
- Responsibility and power (consumers, food industry, farmers, the state)



Animal welfare

Paradise lost!

“The pigs - I have this image of a romantic farm with pigs sniffing around, rolling over in the dung and feeling really good. But then this bogey pops up: This large... the large houses you see when you drive around. The pig houses, the smell - how do they feel in there?”

In the good old days: Pigs were free and happy – today they are unhappy, maltreated and imprisoned

Free range pigs: The modern paradise!

The dominant dichotomy

- The good: Free range pigs (the curly tail as the important symbol)
- The bad: Industrialised pigs



Pigs and pork as a health risk - An almost absent issue

I can manage the risks in the kitchen or through
my shopping strategy!

The authorities take care of the problem!

“Kate: [Salmonella, it] strikes me from time to time, but if you buy meat of a good quality, then I assume it has been controlled in one way or the other (...)

Kurt: Salmonella!?! Pork is roasted thoroughly. There is no such thing as red pork in my world!”

Salmonella: a natural bacteria - we have to live
with it!



Pigs as an environmental issue

- Discussed in all groups, but not a salient issue
- Manure is the dominant issue!
 - Smell.

“the manure disperser ... that’s the part of pig production I hate the most! I do a lot of cycling in the country side and it’s simply a nuisance, the manure. It smells, it’s dirty and it’s a serious pollutant. It’s an unbecoming side product you want to be without!”

- Less dominant or absent environmental themes
 - Groundwater (mentioned)
 - Eutrophication (mentioned)
 - Ressources - input/output (absent)
 - CO2 (absent)



Two contexts – two agendas

Context

Everyday life

Food (pork) production

Object

Meal/food/product

Process/ animal

Framing

Ingredient/commodity
Food as a solution

Risk
Food as a problem
Industry critical discourse

Quality

Material (the product)

Immaterial (the history)

Arena

Kitchen, dinner table,
(market)

Politics, (market)

Identification of
the individual

Contemplating
consumer

Citizen



Conclusions

What's relevant dependent on the context.

"Consumers"

- Preoccupied with issues related to their everyday life
- Main concern not environment, but to manage a busy everyday!
- De-animalisation (the replacement of animals with meat) a barrier for environmental concerns

"Citizens"

- Preoccupied with how things ought to be
- Industrial discourse an opportunity for political solutions

Methodological issue who we are addressing?

In-between consumers and citizens is the political consumer – but mostly in the shape of a frustration and bad conscience



Politicised consumption: the merger of citizens and consumers

“Considering [the way pigs are raised] makes me say that I am not going to buy an awful lot of that pork! But then again, it is hard to be a consumer, seeing a good offer, isn’t it? They look the same - and if you have a large family it might not be enough. (...) They shouldn’t produce all the ugly stuff. If they didn’t produce it we weren’t forced to buy it!”