WARNING : The following text is published by the open access journal Anthropology of Food. The journal allows the right to use, reproduce or disseminate the research article in its entirety or in part provided that no modification is introduced in the process, proper attribution of authorship and correct citation and bibliographic details are given. If the article is reproduced or disseminated in part, this must be clearly and unequivocally indicated.

ATTENTION : Le texte suivant est publié par le journal libre d’accès Anthropology of Food. Le journal octroie le droit d’utiliser, reproduire, ou diffuser l’article dans sa totalité ou partiellement à condition qu’aucune modification ne soit introduite dans le document et que les auteurs et références de l’article soient fidèlement cités. Si l’article n’est reproduit ou diffusé qu’en partie, ce fait doit être clairement et explicitement indiqué.
LOCAL, ORGANIC FOOD INITIATIVES AND THEIR POTENTIALS FOR TRANSFORMING THE CONVENTIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

Considering the ideological origins of organic food production, the local aspects - in terms of the place and space where food is produced, distributed and consumed- is essential for organic food products.¹ Organically produced food has traditionally been distributed locally, outside of the conventional channels. However, as organic agriculture has become more widespread a need for reaching a larger market has emerged during the years. In Norway this development started in the late 1960ties. At first the organic products where sold in specialised shops, but during the 1990ties they where introduced in the ordinary food stores as well. Today organic food is not only sold as fresh produce, but is also processed and distributed by conventional actors in the food industry. An important precondition for this development was the establishment of control- and labelling bodies for organic food, as the Norwegian organic label Debio, established in 1986.

When assessing the sustainability of food production and consumption, both environmental-, social- and economic consequences are taken into consideration². The significance of space and place is relevant for all these three aspects of sustainable development. Food products, including organic food, are transported

¹ See for instance the principles of organic agriculture at the homepage of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM): http://www.ifoam.org/
² Torjusen and Vittersø 1998
across increasingly longer distances, with subsequent environmental impacts. The social and economic consequences of this increasing trade, also with organic products, are less predictable. On the one hand, trade may contribute positively to secure income for primary producers and increase the availability of food for consumers. On the other hand, both import and export of food (cash crops) may contribute to the eradication of vital production for the local market. A development characterised by an increasing degree of disconnection between production and consumption is often seen as a threat to sustainable development3.

These issues concerning sustainable food have been the point of departure of a research project carried out in two Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark, with the aim of studying the contribution of organic farming in developing local, sustainable food systems. We want to discuss some of the findings from the project in this article. 4

The recent emergence of new food products (such as organic and local food) and distribution modes (such as farmers’ markets and box schemes), may be viewed as a reaction to the dominant standardisation of food distribution. 5 However, a concern has emerged over the past years within the organic movement, that organic food may loose its intrinsic values and qualities when introduced in the conventional food system. 6 This development is characterised as a ‘conventionalisation’ of organic food, which means that the special attributes that are connected to organic products diminish or even disappear in the conventional food system. 7 This issue is not unique to organically produced food, but applies to all kinds of food, including local food products. On this background we asked the following questions:

1) In what ways do local, organic food initiatives affect the overarching conventional food system?

2) To what extent are these products ‘conventionalised’, and to what extent do conventions ‘rub off’ from these initiatives to the conventional food system?

Organic and local food products face similar challenges regarding standardisation and conventionalisation in the food system, and we will relate the discussion in this article to a theoretical perspective that is relevant for organic as well as local food products. An interesting feature with the organic food initiatives, like the ones we have been studying, is that they often comprise food products that also are defined as local or typical. This is due to the fact that they

3 Kloppenburg et al. 1996
4 The project was financed with grants from the Norwegian Research Council
7 Hendrickson et al. 2001
are promoted on the grounds of their origins, their special traditional production modes or that they are distributed to the customers fresh from the farm. In Norway organic farmers have been in the forefront regarding developments of local food. This is partly evident to the fact that the members of the most important organisation of local food producers\(^8\) to a great extent are organic farmers.

**Theoretical perspectives**

In the introduction we implied that there are some qualitative differences between organic food initiatives on the one hand and the overall conventional food system on the other. In this article we want to explore the relationship between these two systems, their mode of production and distribution and how they affect each other. In recent years several studies are carried out in order to analyse the development of new food products and distribution modes. Common for many of these studies is that they have been influenced by convention theory.\(^9\) Inspired by Thevenot and Boltanski, who originally introduced the convention theory, Storper and Salais\(^10\) have developed a general model of different production systems or ‘Worlds of Production’. Murdoch and Miele (1999) have shown that this model also fit with central features of the food system (figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Two dimensions of production following Murdoch and Miele (1999).

\(^8\) Norsk Bygdeturisme og Gardsmat (Norwegian Rural Tourism and Local Food Organisation)

\(^9\) See for example Murdoch and Miele 1999, Murdoch et al. 2000, Stræte 2003,

\(^10\) Storper and Salais 1997, Storper 1997
In this model food products are distinguished along two main dimensions: Whether they are specialised or standardised or whether they are dedicated or generic. These two dimensions make up four different ‘Worlds’, or categories of production and distribution systems. Organic and local food products may here be placed in the Interpersonal World where competition mainly is focused on quality, and the social system is composed by a limited set of actors with an interpersonal communication. Conventional food products in the overall food system belong to the Industrial World where competition centred on price is a main feature. Moving to the Market World, the competition is more focused on product diversification. However both the Industrial World and Market World are characterised by socially disembedded relations where industrial standards, brands and labels are important means in the communication between the actors.

According to the convention theory, a kind of agreement or understanding of shared norms and expectations are developed in order to mediate interactions between the actors involved within a specific social system. Conventions can be understood as such agreements. They are often neither formalised nor explicit, but rather in the form of tacit knowledge and routinised practices. Following Wilkinson (1997) rules, norms and conventions determine the content and the form of the production and circulation of commodities. ‘They are therefore dynamic representations of negotiation and as such depend on the existence of prior commonalities among the actors involved’ (Wilkinson, 1997; 318). According to Murdoch et al. (2000; 114) this approach ‘might be used to understand the differing formation of collective action within food chains, so it is possible to assess different disputes around quality in terms of the main sets of conventions likely to be employed’. Murdoch et al. introduce six different sets of conventions, where each set comprises different valuations and considerations related to food and food systems:

- Commercial (competition on price, search qualities of products, date stamping)
- Industrial (industrial standards, effective logistics)
- Public (branding and trademarks)
- Domestic (interpersonal contact, transparency, traditions, craftsmanship)
- Civic (local employment, rural development)
- Ecological (organic farming, short transport distances, resource efficiency, animal welfare)

It is tempting to place different sets of convention in the different Worlds of Production in Figure 1. However, as we will see from the cases below, it is not always easy to place one convention or valuation solely in one of these worlds. In the following, we will apply this theoretical framework on three different cases in

---

11 Stræte 2003
order to discuss the relations between local, organic food initiatives and the conventional food system. We use the concepts from the convention theory as tools to explore the actors' practices as well as their perceptions of both the products and the other actors they are dealing with.

**Method and data**

The discussion in this article is based on findings from three different cases including two Norwegian initiatives for local distribution of organic food: One in the Hedemarken district and one in the mountain region of Røros. The third case is from Sjælland (Zealand) in Denmark and deals with a small dairy that distributes fresh organic milk products to the local market.

The research started with following the flow of food from the farmer to the market. In this way, we got an overview of the amount of food distributed through different distribution channels, as well as a first hand impression of the role of the involved actors in the different cases. This approach allowed us to let the persons’ actual dealings with the food be our point of departure, not only their thinking about the food. This is in accordance with research strategies in anthropology and phenomenology where the perspective of people’s participating and acting in the world is stressed. As expressed by the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1962, 137): ‘Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of I think but of I can’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; 137). Our relation to the world is primary a doing, not a knowing relation, and our consciousness and ability to think are based on our already being and acting in the world.

By mapping the food flow we identified the actors involved in handling organic food, such as farmers, processors, distributors and retailers, both at the local, regional and national level. In Hedemarken, we identified units that dealt with the organic food and quantified the amount that was handled through these units. In Røros and Sjælland we also identified units or actors that were involved in local, organic food initiatives, but did not quantify the distribution of organic food in these regions. All together we carried out 27 interviews including 29 people. The interviews took place in the period June 2000 – March 2002. In the following presentation we will focus on one central actor in each case. In Hedemarken we will present findings from an organic family farm that was involved in different local, organic food initiatives while at the same time delivered products to actors within the conventional food system. In Røros we will focus on an interview with the store manager and fresh produce manager in one of the retail stores in the town. While in the case from Sjælland we

---

12 At two of the interviews there were two people present
interviewed an ‘entrepreneur’ within the organic movement, who has established his own local dairy.

Organic food initiatives in Hedemarke

Hedemarke is situated about 100 km. north of the Norwegian capital Oslo at the east bank of Lake Mjøsa. The region is one of the most important agricultural districts in Norway, and there are a number of organic farms in the area. In Hedemarke there have been different initiatives to organise local distribution of organic food, including vegetables (mainly through farm outlets), milk (a local dairy which however now is closed down) and meat. By tracing the organic food flow from the farm gate to the food outlets we have been able to measure the importance of local distribution of organic food in the region. We found that in 1999 just 7% of the organic milk and 18% of the organic vegetables were distributed locally. However, almost 60% of the organic meat was distributed within the region, mainly due to a special local meat initiative (Rålm, 2000). The meat initiative is connected to a local butcher, complete with a small-scale slaughterhouse. In 1999 about half of the organic meat produced within the region was distributed through this butcher, and equally much through the regional, conventional meat processor, Gilde Hedmark og Oppland Slakterier BA, which belongs to the national meat producer cooperative, Gilde Norsk Kjøtt BA (Gilde).

We will now have a closer look at an organic family farm in Hedemarke that has been involved in the local meat initiative. Apart from meat they also produced milk, grain and potatoes at the farm. The meat products from the farm were distributed through three different channels: The most important was the local butcher, but a great deal was also sent to the meat producers co-operative (Gilde). Recently the farmer had taken a private initiative to sell veal to gourmet restaurants in Oslo. All the milk was delivered to the national milk producers co-operative (TINE), while the grain was delivered to Helios (a bio-dynamic food wholesaler) and most of the potatoes were sold to the national retail chain COOP.

The farmer expressed that he wanted to produce food that the customer may feel safe with and that the products he present live up to the customers' expectations as healthy and good in all respects. The farmer also defined quality more specific according to the different products:

‘About the meat I think that an important argument is that you have an overview of the production from the barn to the table (...) especially when we deliver to the local butcher. When the customers buy these products at the local butcher it says on the package that it comes from (my farm), and

---

13 The Hedemarke region is in this case defined by the municipalities Hamar, Stange and Løten, and is not the same as Hedmark County which covers a much larger geographical area.
for those who have any doubts they can come and look for themselves how I raise my cattle. With the potatoes and grain one of the arguments is that we do not use artificial fertilizers.’

When questioned about how he promoted his products, the answer was:

‘I have no special marketing of the meat that I deliver to the local butcher. About the meat that I deliver to the restaurants in Oslo, I just tell them in a passing that it is organically produced, but what I really have to do, is to convince them that it is of the finest quality, and it is important that they can judge the quality with their own eyes. (...) It is calves that we feed intensively and make sure that they become meaty and good. It is no drawback that the meat is organic, but it is not the main issue, because I do not think that they have organic menus in their restaurants. Rather it is an advantage that the meat is produced locally and not beef coming from Namibia or something (...). They feel more safe with meat that they can control by themselves, even though they actually do not control it, but they are more confident with my meat, especially now after what we experienced the last years with all the animal diseases (abroad).’

The distribution of milk appeared to be quite different as compared to meat. Some years ago the organic farmers tried to save the local dairy from being shut down. The initiative did not succeed, and now all the milk from the district is transported to centralised production plants in other districts. We interviewed the manager at one of the nearest dairy plants, and he viewed the organic milk first and foremost as a standardised bulk product. What he considered as the most important was to get a stable quality throughout the year with no seasonal or other variations in quality. We also found that there was really no direct communication between the organic milk producers and the dairy; and as the farmer stated he did not even usually speak with the truck driver that fetched the milk at the farm. All guidance and feedback to the producer from quality controls etc. were channelled through a special centralised unit localised in Oslo.

Following the model presented in Figure 1 it is clear that from the point of view of this farmer he entered into different ‘Worlds of Production’ and played different roles depending on the kind of product and the kind of food system (actors) he was in contact with: When delivering the meat and milk to the conventional food processors, that is Gilde (meat) and TINE (milk), he just delivered the products and made sure that the products fulfilled the necessary quality standards. He associated this situation with a normal state of Norwegian farmers, and as he said: ‘As farmers we are used to just deliver our products - not to sell them.’ When delivering his products to the conventional dairy system he
did not have any impact on how they were processed or promoted. These products entered an Industrial World where the products to a large degree were standardised.

The deliverances of meat to the local butcher and to the chefs in Oslo also represent different settings. The distribution of the meat through the local butcher may be associated with the Interpersonal World where not only the producer personally knows the butcher and the persons selling his products, but where it is most likely that many of the customers also know the farmer. The selling of veal by the farmer to the restaurant chefs in Oslo is an example of a dedicated and specialised production that may be placed in the Interpersonal World in Figure 1, especially in terms of the contact between the farmer and the chefs. As customers, the chefs were very particular in their demands, knowing exactly what kind of quality they wanted. Veal is generally an expensive niche product and not available in the same way as ordinary beef meat. The chefs demanded the veal not only to be tender and meaty, but also to be delivered in the right season – which is the spring. This specialised production meant that the farmer got a better price for the meat compared to what he could expect when delivering through a conventional distribution channel.

However, when considering the whole food chain from production to consumption there was no contact between the producer and the end consumers (restaurant guests) in this case. The chefs were the intermediaries who defined the quality and decided the way of promoting the meat to the customers. In dialogue with the chefs, the farmer felt that he had to emphasise qualities such as texture and freshness before the fact that it was organically and locally produced. The organic aspect was just mentioned in a passing, as he said, and he also expressed a curiosity about how his meat was actually presented to the restaurant customers.

When we compare the distribution of meat and milk through the conventional and local distribution channels, we find some important differences, but also interesting similarities. In this case the organic farmer co-operated with ‘conventional’ actors both when delivering to the ordinary distribution system and when developing alternative distribution channels. In neither of the cases has, what we might call, ‘the ecological convention’ been the most important. When delivering meat and milk to Gilde and TINE, the quality of the products was valued by the same terms and standards as conventional products. In this perspective we may say that the organic products are being ’conventionalised’. When the meat was sold at the local butcher – the local aspect in terms of the interpersonal relationships between the actors was an important factor. In the context of the restaurant, another local aspect came into play: Here the chefs valued the seasonal food coming from the nearby district. However, in both cases the actors conceptualised and valued the local food as safe both in opposition to
food distributed through conventional channels and in opposition to imported food (‘… beef coming from Namibia’).

Organic food initiatives in Røros

Røros is situated in a mountain region close to the Swedish border. Historically Røros was a mining town, while agriculture and tourism are important economic activities in the region today. The region is scarcely populated, and the conditions for agriculture are limited due to the harsh climatic conditions. Dairy products, eggs and meat products from cattle, sheep, reindeer and game are produced in the region. Products of fresh water fish are also produced here. We interviewed several actors within the local food system, including managers at the local dairy and slaughterhouse as well as local farmers. We will here present how local and organic food is experienced and viewed by a local retailer. Both the store manager and the fresh produce manager were present during the interview.

The store belongs to the Nordic retail chain, COOP, and is the largest retail outlet in the town. Besides the standard assortment, the store offers 120 local products from 10 different local suppliers. However, in the season more than 170 local products are available, most of them marketed with the logo ‘Mat fra Fjellregionen’ (Food from the Mountain Region). Within the store there is a small sausage factory and bread bakery. The local food products covers 2 % of the total sales, while the internally produced food from the sausage factory stands for 3 % and the sales in the bakery 6,5 %. All together these categories of locally produced food represent 11,5 % of the total sales in the store. In 2004 the store was awarded 'Norwegian champion in locally produced food' at a national food festival.14

As part of a Nordic-retail chain, the supermarket was tied up by centralised procurement contracts, which meant that most of the assortment was standardised and thereby out of the hands of the local retailer. In order to get as much of the local products in the store as he wanted, the store manager often had to evade the central contracts. The local retailer often experienced a mismatch between the chain’s assortment policy and local demand:

‘There are 4-5 guys located in Oslo who impose the assortment on us. But I do not want 20 different fresh pasta dishes available all the time. There is a big difference between the COOPs in Bærum15 and Røros. We eat potatoes, you know! (...) But those who decide the assortment do not understand that. They are located in Oslo

---

14 All figures according to Eide 2004.
15 Bærum is a high income municipality close to Oslo
and ‘forecast’ lobster for New Years Eve, but who the h.... knows what lobster is in Røros? Not many, anyway.’

These differences between Røros and Oslo are not only limited to the valuation of food quality and the market demand for special food products. Situated in a district highly dependent on primary food production, they expressed an interest in – as well as an obligation to - marketing local food products. The retailer puts it like this:

‘It is space for local adjustments, and we have to live in a local community. No matter how (...) when you live in a local community you have to relate to what happens in your surroundings.’

‘I think it is incredibly important to contribute to the local community and be able to create something.’

Concerning organic food the retailer claims that food from Røros is inherently “nearly organic”:

‘And the farmers in Røros they almost have no use of pesticides or anything like this. Some might use artificial fertilizers to increase their yields, but we have a harsh climate so this is perhaps a necessity.’

Another interviewee - an organic farmer in the district - disagreed with the retailers on this. He underlined the many differences between organic and conventional production methods. However, when the organic farmers started the promotion of organic food in the mid 1990ties, they deliberately made a link between the organic products and the traditional and local products from Røros. The case of ‘tjukkmjølk’ (thick sour milk) is a good example of this. In this case the local, organic producers have managed to ‘recreate’ and ‘commercialise’ a traditional food product through an innovation process based on a combination of traditional knowledge and skills and the use of modern technology (Flø et al., 2000, Amilien et al., 2005).

On the one hand we might say that the retailer performs his daily routines within the Industrial- and Market Worlds described in Figure 1. He is mostly handling standardised food products in a conventional food system. In spite of this he has managed to create ‘an island’ of local food products – with characteristics of the Interpersonal World - in the store. In the creation of the local, organic food distribution system in Røros, the domestic (traditions, artisan skills, inter-personality) and civic (local employment, rural development) conventions have been central. However, conventions normally associated with the Market- and Industrial Worlds have also come into play. The creation of a common logo and
the emphasis on certification and labels such as Debio (organic) and PGI\textsuperscript{16}, bear witness to a process that involves actors and institutions beyond the interpersonal world of the local community. This has in turn affected conventional food processors and retailers so that they provide local and organic food products to a greater extent in their assortment. On the discursive level, the local, organic food initiative in Røros has been a vital part of the overall political discourse about local food and rural development in Norway (Amilien et al. 2005).

Local processing and distribution of organic milk in Sjælland

The third case deals with local distribution of fresh, organic milk from Øllingegaard, a small dairy located in Sjælland. The dairy is situated in the vicinity of the Danish capital, Copenhagen, thus it is a densely populated area as well as an important agricultural area. This localisation was according to the dairy manager one of the main advantages of the company, and the market proximity was maybe one of the most important preconditions for the success of the dairy. However, in this paper we will not only look into how the dairy has benefited from its localisation, but also how they combine the local aspect with a deliberate focus on milk quality, as a competitive advantage.

In a conventional distribution system milk is usually seen as a highly processed and standardised bulk product, as described in the Hedemarken case. Bulk products are not normally diversified according to taste or freshness, but rather according to qualities such as fat content and consistency (e.g. thick sour milk). However, the dairy manager at Øllingegaard had a quite different perspective on milk quality. Concepts such as “care” and short distance in time and space were central to his understanding. According to him, a crucial precondition for achieving the best quality was a gentle treatment of the milk all the way from the farm to the bottling of the milk. The dairy manager described the production process in this way:

‘The most important thing about milk is to pump as little as possible and transport it as little as possible. (...) The most important thing in improving the milk quality is to keep the molecules as intact as possible. Otherwise you open up for blending it with oxygen, which causes rancid taste.’

The dairy manager emphasised the achievement of first class quality as important both in the marketing strategy for the milk products as well as for the promotion of the dairy itself. Entering the dairies home page\textsuperscript{17} we got associations to modern design and high quality. The picture at the first page illustrates a cow

\textsuperscript{16} Protected Geographical Indication (Beskyttet geografisk betegnelse)
\textsuperscript{17} at http://www.oellingegaard.dk/
lying on a couch in a modernistic interior. The strong references to famous Danish designers and architects signalise that they wanted to distinguish their products from mass-produced milk. The dairy has based its concept on short transport distances all the way from the milk farms via the dairy to the market. The other important aspect have been the small-scale processing and the careful treatment of the milk. The fresh milk was promoted as ‘15 hour milk’. This product has succeeded in challenging the conventional milk companies. At one point the managing director of one of the largest Danish dairy companies, was interviewed in a consumer program on TV. The dairy manager at Øllingegaard told the story as follows:

The TV-reporter: 'There is a small dairy north on Sjælland that has introduced fresh milk. Why do you not do the same?' Whereupon the managing director replied that: 'Freshness is not an interesting aspect. It is only the stable and constant quality that is important, and we are capable of making milk that has the same quality both on the first and the seventh day.'

However, still according to the dairy manager at Øllingegaard, soon after the TV program the conventional milk company started to distribute so called ‘24 hour milk’. They wrote on the cartons that it was only 24 hour since it was bottled and they even printed the time of bottling on the cartons. The Øllingegaard manager continues: ‘When we begun to bottle in the middle of the night, they soon did the same as well.’

This case illustrates two points. First, how the localness and quality of a product may be defined by the framing of space and time, and second, how - as in the other two cases - the local organic initiative may be ‘situated’ in different ‘worlds’ simultaneously. To comment on the last point first: The organic dairy products from Øllingegaard were entering both an Interpersonal- as well as an Industrial/Market world. That is due to the fact that they were distributed through conventional sales channels such as supermarkets in Copenhagen, as well as by means of direct, local distribution to day cares, kinder gardens etc. On the one hand the marketing was rather impersonal using the Internet with symbolic references to Danish design etc. On the other hand the Internet was also used as a tool to achieving direct communication with the customers, inviting them to visits and excursions to the dairy etc.

However, the most important aspect that made these products both specialised and dedicated was the deliberate emphasis on quality and the way in which this was related to space and sustainability. In this case the quality of the products was defined by direct reference to short transportation distances and the small scale processing. This is also an example of an organic food initiative affecting a
conventional competitor in the food system. However, we are inclined to characterise the introduction of the ‘conventional 24 hour milk’ as a superficial change in the distribution and logistic routines, more than a profound change in the valuation of milk quality. On the other hand, for the conventional milk company it represented a move away from a pure production orientation (Industrial World) towards an orientation to the market.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Following the model presented in Figure 1, a conventionalisation of food products means that dedicated products such as organic and local products, lose their special features when they are distributed through conventional channels. This is due to the standardisation of products in the Industrial or Market World. However, the findings from the three cases suggest that we have to nuance these simplified notions of the conventionalisation process. Even though the farmer in Hedemarken, retailer in Røros and dairy manager in Sjælland was actively working for the development of local, organic food initiatives, they were all strongly embedded in the of the overarching conventional food system. In different ways their products where handled both through the conventional and local food system. In this respect, “the conventional” and “the alternative” food systems did not appear as separate, but rather as intertwined, entities.

The three cases illustrate how qualifications and conceptions of food products are affected by the various distribution channels. On the one hand, organic products that were distributed solely through the conventional system were subjected to the ruling valuations, norms and standards of these systems and in this sense they became conventionalised. On the other hand, some of the organic products that were distributed locally were conventionalised, due to the application of communication- and marketing tools usually associated with the Industrial or Market World.

As observed in the Danish case, local, organic food initiatives may have important impacts on the overall conventional food system. In this case the conventional dairy company tried to imitate the Øllingegaard concept. When challenged by the Øllingegaard dairy, they had to consider the market demand for products with different qualities, and in this sense they moved from the Industrial- to the Market World. In a similar way the Røros case has become an important symbol in the political food discourse in Norway, with the consequence that conventional actors within food processing and retailing emphasise organic and local products to a greater extent than before.
Even though different modes of food production and distribution have a mutual effect on each other, we must not underestimate the fundamental differences between them. This is especially evident in the Danish case where the logistic routines and industrial quality standards acted as a profound structural barriers against the conventional dairy’s possibilities to copy its local competitor.

Finally we want to consider the experiences from these three cases in the light of the overall discussion of the possibilities for developing sustainable food systems. The success of these local, organic food initiatives is to a great extent related to the fact that they have combined ecological conventions (environmental sound farming practices, short transport distances, resource efficiency) with other conventions such as domestic- (inter-personality, transparency, local traditions, craftsman ship and food quality (taste)), civic- (local employment and rural development) and public conventions (labelling, brands and Internet communication). This indicates that in order to succeed with local, organic food initiatives, both social and cultural aspects of the local context have to be taken into consideration.

In this article we have used ‘Local Food’ as a rather broad term including both place and space as important aspects. Place includes the cultural aspects such as traditions, artisan skills, know-how etc. that originates from a particular locality. These are crucial elements of the ‘terroir’ products well known from countries like France and Italy. Even though we have been more concerned about the aspects of space and the consequences of the increasing distance, both physically and socially between production and consumption, the notion of place remains important for the development of local food initiatives. The importance of both place and space, underlines the alternative character of the organic food initiatives as a whole, including their ecological, domestic and civic conventions. While maintaining that proximity is an important aspect of a sustainable food system, we must not forget that proximity is not the only attribute of sustainability. A further important question is how organic food initiatives emphasising the value of proximity can attain a wider network of alliances outside the local context in order to succeed in transforming the conventional food system.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

AMILIEN V., TORJUSEN H. and VITTERSØ G., 2005, “From local food to terroir product? - Some views about Tjukkmjølk, the traditional thick sour milk from Røros, Norway”, Anthropology of Food (this issue)


FLØ B.E., FORBORD M. and STAVRUM T., 2000, Interorganisatorisk samarbeid ved omstilling i en samvirkebedrift – eksempelet Røros-meieriet. Notat nr. 1/00 Centre for Rural Research (CRR), Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.


RÅLM P.C., 2000, Mange bekker små ...? En varestrømsanalyse av økologisk mat fra Hedemarken og Indre Østfold, MSc thesis in Agroecology, Department of Plant- and Environmental Sciences, Agricultural University of Norway.


ÖSTERGAARD E. and LIEBLEIN G., 1994, *Converting to ecological agriculture in practice and research. Proceedings from the conference "converting to organic agriculture“. St Michel, Finland. NJF- report no. 93, 128-135*, Nordic Association of Agricultural Scientists (NJF).