Alternative Food Networks and Economic Diversity in the Malmö Ethical Foodscape
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Abstract:
Power and control over global food production and distribution is becoming increasingly concentrated in a small number of multinational corporations. Corporately produced food is not principally produced to be eaten, but to be sold in order to make financial gain as with any other commodity. This endless pursuit of profit is having devastating social and ecological consequences the world over. Groups of concerned citizens are attempting to develop new systems of food provisioning that re-embed food and agriculture in local ecologies and social institutions, in an attempt to regain some control of the food system. These alternative food networks (AFNs) can take many diverse forms depending on their individual contexts. The diverse economies framework, pioneered by J.K. Gibson-Graham, is a valuable tool for analysing the full breadth of economic relationships that make up our societies, outside of mainstream capitalistic social relations. Four examples of AFNs operating in Malmö are used to illustrate the diversity of this movement, they are: two community food growing schemes, a volunteer-run organic food store, and a conventionally run organic food store. Concepts from AFN studies and diverse economies are used to gain a detailed understanding of the socio-economic structure of these projects so as to assess their various strengths and weaknesses. While the material contribution of these projects to the food system might be relatively insignificant, their true power lies in their ability to bring people together.
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Abstract

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The ethos of economic individualism that promotes the right to want and get more and that sees this unchecked desire as a crucial motivating force behind economic health (that is, growth) obscures the social and environmental implications of such behaviour for ‘us all’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 90).

Food, like no other commodity, allows for a political reawakening, as it touches our lives in so many ways... Food citizenship suggests both belonging and participating, at all levels of relationship from the intimacy of breastfeeding to the discussions at the World Trade Organization (Welsh & MacRae, in Hassanein, 2003: 80).

**Introduction**

A browse through the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2009) paints a stark picture of the global ecological degradation resulting from human activities:

- 40-50% of all fresh water running off the land is used by humans
- Roughly 25% of the of the earth’s land surface has been converted into cultivated systems
- In the past 30 years, roughly 35% of mangroves and 20% of coral reefs have been destroyed, a further 20% of coral reefs are significantly degraded
- Biologically reactive nitrogen produced through human activities is greater than all natural processes combined
- In much of the sea the weight of fish available for capture is less than 10% of that before the introduction of industrial fishing methods
- The global extinction rate has been estimated to have been increased 1,000 times the ‘natural’ rate, with 12% of birds, 25% of mammals, and more than 30% of amphibians threatened with extinction in the next 100 years. (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2009)
Alongside this ecological degradation, are entrenched social inequalities. Roughly 0.1% of the global population controls $35$ trillion of wealth, equivalent to more than 50% of the total world income. More than three billion people - roughly half of humanity – live on less than $2.50$ per day (Magdoff and Foster, 2010). “Our most effective international organization – the World Trade Organization – is designed to protect investors and corporate rights, not children and human rights” (Hales, 2009).

Industrial capitalism - and the industrial agriculture that feeds it - has created what Marx referred to as a ‘metabolic rift’ between humans and the ecosystems that support us due to the disruption of ecological processes and cycles. For millennia, most humans have lived on basic foods produced in close proximity to their settlements (Mintz, 2006). This allowed for the recycling of nutrients and biomass within relatively local ecosystems (Magdoff et al., 1997). However, in the current, globalised agro-food system, ecologically valuable biomass and nutrients are no longer recycled, but are transported in a linear fashion i.e. from rural field, to urban dining table, through body, into sewerage system, and out to sea, or into landfill. Modern agriculture thus “hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil” (Marx, in Foster, 1999: 379), which we are dependent on for our survival, thereby making it inherently unsustainable from an ecological point of view. To varying degrees around the world, but most clearly in the North, food systems in which most food was produced by neighbours and kin, in local proximity, have been replaced by systems of trade “that move food as a commodity between anonymous producers and consumers” (Wilk, 2006: 13).

The capitalist mode of production, defined by the on-going conversion of “the common property of all into the private property of a few” (Wilk, 1996: 88), entails that individuals are denied independent access to the means of production and are therefore forced to sell their labour power to whomever controls it in order to obtain the resources they need to survive (Wolf, 1982).
Labour power is not itself a commodity created in order to be offered for sale in a market. It is an attribute of human beings, a capability of *Homo sapiens*. As long as people can lay their hands on the means of production (tools, resources, land) and use these to supply their own sustenance...there is no compelling reason for them to sell their capacity to work to someone else... For labour power to be offered for sale, the tie between producers and the means of production has to be severed for good. (Wolf, 1982: 77)

Those who control the means of production accumulate wealth by appropriating the surplus value produced by individuals. Surplus value is value that is produced above and beyond what is necessary for an individual’s self-reproduction (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Wolf, 1982). There is nothing ‘natural’ about this form of social organisation, or even the concept of private property. It is a social/legal construct meaning that “human beings, at least those with power in society, make it up and then seek to justify it” (Tansey, 2008: 12). That capitalism has been responsible for the greatest rate of economic growth and poverty reduction in the history of human existence, must be acknowledged only with the understanding that it “takes credit for reducing the poverty that it was itself responsible for creating...[and that] poverty is defined in exclusively financial and absolute terms” (Leyshon & Lee, 2003a: 198).

Growing food is arguably our most basic productive activity, along with building settlements. According to Meiksins Wood (2000), the origins of the capitalist mode of production lie in agrarian practices in England in the 17th century. Unlike most of Europe, where most peasants owned the land they cultivated (and were therefore able to support themselves), in England, land ownership was already concentrated in the hands of private landlords. There was therefore competition between landless tenant farmers to gain permission to use the land. To compete effectively farmers had to intensify “exploitation [of themselves, of others, of the land] in order to increase productivity” and therefore profit (Meiksins Wood, 2000: 30). A detailed analysis of these agrarian origins of capitalism is beyond the scope of this paper, but this mode of agricultural production, driven by the endless pursuit of profits has
come far from its (not-so-)humble roots to become the globalised, corporately controlled agro-food system we see today.

The ethic of...productivity for profit is also, of course, the ethic of irresponsible land use, environmental destruction, and mad cow disease. Capitalism was borne at the very core of human life, in the interaction with nature on which life itself depends, and the transformation of that interaction by agrarian capitalism revealed the inherently destructive impulses of a system in which the very fundamentals of existence are subjected to the requirements of profit (Meiksins Wood, 2000: 39).

It is for this reason that I would argue that if we are to produce meaningful socio-ecological change it must start from this same point, ‘at the interaction with nature on which life itself depends’, or as Goodman (1999: 18) puts it, “at the primary metabolic loci between humans and nature”, otherwise we risk merely tinkering at the margins. Food is fundamental to us all, and apart from providing biological sustenance also plays a key role in the formation and maintenance of social, cultural, and religious identities (Tansey, 2008).

The aim of this paper is to explore how people are trying to create more ecologically sound and socially just systems of food provisioning. I will start with an overview of the world agro-food system, using ideas from food regime theory. I will then review current research into alternative food networks (AFNs), and the concepts being debated by academics working on these issues, such as social and ecological embeddedness, reconnection of food producers and consumers, and the conventionalisation of ‘alternative’ foods by the corporate sector. The growing body of literature on ‘diverse economies’ pioneered by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) offers a positive way of seeing the myriad economic relationships that make up our societies. They argue that social change has been hindered by ‘capitalocentric’ thinking, and argue that by “reading for difference rather than dominance” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 54) we can open up the discursive terrain to make space for new and
creative economic possibilities. I will discuss four AFNs situated in the city Malmö as concrete examples of projects that are trying to bring about change in the food system. Two of the projects are community food-growing schemes, one is a volunteer-managed organic food outlet, and the other is a conventionally managed organic food outlet. I agree with Le Heron and Lewis (2009: 347) in that “[a]n exploration of the interplay between diverse economies readings, the AFN descriptions of these economies, and [food regime] thinking promises a productive trajectory that would extend the reach of this work as a whole.”

Our food system

Food regime theorists have identified two distinct historical periods of global food supply and trade (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; see also Friedmann, 2005, 2009; Campbell, 2009). A detailed analysis of food regime theory (FRT) is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will provide a brief account. It should be noted at this point that the concept of food regimes “has comparative macro-status” (McMichael, 2000: 421) and by no means assumes that all food production and consumption follows the same pattern.

The first regime identified existed from 1870 to 1914, and is referred to as the ‘colonial-diasporic’ regime (Friedmann, 2005). European migrants fleeing from economic deprivation and political persecution back home settled on lands previously inhabited by indigenous peoples (for instance in North America and Australia). They remained economically tied to Europe and were dependent on export markets for their livelihoods. They were heavily dependent on family labour and as such were able to produce food at a lower cost than European farmers (ibid). They grew wheat monocultures and raised livestock to be exported back to Europe (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). The soils cultivated were extremely fertile and were the product of millennia of natural processes and to some extent indigenous management. However, intensive and productivist farming practices mined the soil of nutrients and changed its structure, leading, at least in the USA, to the ‘dust bowl’,
and the collapse of the regime. During this time the colonies of what is now referred to as the ‘global south’ were largely food self-sufficient, exporting some surplus when available (Friedmann, 2005).

The second regime identified lasted from 1947 to 1973, and is termed the ‘mercantile-industrial’ regime. This regime was defined, in part, by the export of subsidized surplus grains from Europe and the USA to the south under the label of ‘aid’ (later critically referred to as ‘dumping’). This process provided an outlet for the surpluses produced by the highly subsidized agriculture of the rich northern countries, and supposedly helped poorer southern countries to feed their hungry populations. However, the flooding of southern markets with cheap, subsidized grain from the north undermined local agriculture, leaving little possibility for farmers to sell their produce at a reasonable price (Friedmann, 2005; McMichael, 2009). This led to the proletarianisation of many southern farmers as they were forced to leave the land and head to the cities to enrol themselves in the growing industrial workforce. It also led to national dependence on food imports in some countries, as their unsubsidized produce could no longer compete in the marketplace. The regime came into crisis after a grain deal between the USA and the former Soviet Union, which cleared US surpluses, caused grain prices to rocket, and suspended food aid to many countries still dependent on it (Friedmann, 2005). We have not yet seen the establishment of a third food regime, but the legacies of the mercantile-industrial regime persist.

As agriculture has become increasingly industrialized in both the north and the south, power and control in the global food system has become increasingly concentrated within a small number of agribusiness corporations.

The top ten agrochemical companies control 81 percent of the $29 billion global agrochemical market. Ten life science companies control 37 percent of the $15 billion per year global seed market. The world’s ten major pharmaceutical companies control 47 percent of the $197 billion pharmaceutical market. Ten global firms now control 43
percent of the $15 billion veterinary pharmaceutical trade. (Rifkin, in McMichael, 2000: 25).

Farmers are increasingly squeezed in between corporations selling industrial inputs (such as seeds and chemicals) and corporations buying their outputs as raw materials for industrially produced food commodities, and other agro-industrial products such as biofuels and bioplastics (Friedmann, 2005; Lewontin, 1998). Farmers often use seed that they do not own, incorporating a ‘terminator gene’ which ensures that they cannot save seed for the next years’ harvest (Tansey, 2008). They must continually return to the seed provider to purchase seed and the cocktail of agrochemicals without which the specialized varieties are unlikely to grow as advertised, in short, “farmer becomes ‘grower’, providing labour and some capital but never owns the product as it moves through the system, or has any control over decisions” (Hendrikson & Heffernan, 2002: 350).

Ownership and control of the food system (and therefore of consumers and profit) is increased through vertical and horizontal integration, and production-related risk is decreased through globalization (Hendrikson & Heffernan, 2002). Corporations are modifying the genetic material of crop varieties developed over millennia through the creativity of traditional farming communities, and then patenting their slightly modified products, putting farmers at risk of patent infringement. Patent infringement can occur even through the unintentional contamination of non-GM crops, which pass on patented traits to their offspring (Tansey, 2008). The encroachment of intellectual property rights (IPRs) into the sphere of living beings has been described as “part of a new round of enclosures in what where formerly the ‘global commons’” (Tansey, 2008: 16). The Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (2002) identified that the direct effect of IPRs is to financially reward those with inventive power and knowledge, such as agribusiness capitals in the north, whilst increasing the cost of access for those without, such as already-marginalised farmers in the south. McMichael (2002: 25) is adamant that this “expropriation of genetic resources developed by peasants, forest dwellers, and local communities over centuries of cultural experimentation amounts to bio-piracy”.

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Countries in the south have to some extent replaced dependence on imported grain for dependence on imported agricultural inputs such as agrochemicals and farm machinery (Friedmann, 2005). Amongst other things, this puts farmers at the peril of highly volatile international fertilizer markets, themselves tightly linked to geopolitical processes (Cordell et al., 2009), hence favouring richer farmers and leaving poorer farmers in debt. It also leads to the loss of agrobiodiversity and the traditional agroecological knowledge associated with that diversity (Altieri, 2009).

The high yields resulting from contemporary agricultural practices, characterised by highly ‘efficient’ technological and chemical innovation can only be seen to be efficient if looking through a lens which obscures the negative side-effects, such as intense use of finite resources such as fossil fuels and rock phosphorus, depletion of soil fertility, ecological devastation, pollution of waterways, antibiotic resistance, degrading animal welfare standards, and the loss of rural livelihoods (Pretty, 2009).

To paraphrase Rosset (2009: 115) the ‘model of life’, peasant and family farm production of food is undermined by the ‘model of death’, agribusiness and industrial monoculture, dependant on the use of toxic chemicals, and with profit topping the hierarchy of needs, above social well-being and ecological integrity.

The specter of a corporate regime organizing world food production and consumption relations via unsustainable monocultures, terminator genes, and class-based diets confirms the limits of development as an inclusive organizing myth of national prosperity, and reinvents it as an exclusive global process premised on eliminating the social gains of citizenship and of national developmentalism. (McMichael, 2000: 22, original emphasis)

This control of world agriculture by what Arran Gare (1995) refers to as the ‘new international bourgeoisie’ is both impoverishing farmers in the affluent north whilst starving to death more people in the global south each year than were being killed during the second world war, as well as “permanently destroying agricultural land at.
a rate which promises a catastrophe unparalleled in human history” (ibid: 12). Hundreds of millions of people go to bed hungry every night, whilst hundreds more millions eat so much or so unhealthily that their wellbeing is being compromised¹ (Pretty, 2009). There is, in theory, enough staple food to feed the global population, however, much of this food is fed to animals - 37% of grains in developing countries, and 73% in industrialized countries (ibid), and also increasingly grown to produce biofuels. “Brazilian agribusiness, for example, is far more likely to feed cattle and cars in Europe, than it is to feed Brazilians in Brazil” (Rosset, 2009: 114). This highlights the fact that we are not facing an inability to produce enough food, moreover, food is embedded in a system which does not allow for distribution to those who need it the most (McMichael, 2000).

The industrialised, globalised, standardised food system has resulted in what has been termed ‘food from nowhere’, (Bové, 2002: 55; see also Campbell, 2009; Dixon, 2009; Scrinis, 2007). What follows is a review of the literature concerning what is becoming a global movement, the aim of which is to replace the ‘food from nowhere’ regime with a ‘food from somewhere’ regime (Campbell, 2009).

Alternative food networks (AFNs)

The trends in global agricultural development outlined above, driven by a productivist ideology and bottom-line profit seeking practices, have resulted in the ‘placeless and faceless’ ‘food from nowhere’ regime, characterised by mass production of standardised food commodities, many of which travel thousands of miles to reach their final loci of mass consumption (Goodman, 2009).

Campbell (2009) has identified several factors which may be contributing to the disruption of the ‘food from nowhere regime’, including:

¹ According to Tansey (2008) roughly 850 million people are undernourished whilst roughly 1 billion are overweight
(1) a general decline in technological optimism and trust of science in the period after the 1960s; (2) the rise of New Social Movements—particularly those with a specific interest in food and the environment; (3) mass media and information technology making it much easier to politicize the previously invisible relations typical of ‘Food from Nowhere’; (4) emerging dynamics of ‘risk’ politics, environmental problems and food scares; (5) the emergence of a popular group of authors like Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan, and celebrity chefs like Rick Stein and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall who have taken strong political positions and popularized the politics of eating (Campbell, 2009: 312-3).

A combination of these factors has led various groups of citizens and grassroots activists (closely followed by transnational corporations on the hunt for profit) to experiment with alternative methods/networks of food provisioning. Although there is a huge diversity of initiatives, these networks essentially aim to re-embed food production and consumption in local social institutions and ecologies and to confront the issues of ecological degradation (and, to varying extents social injustice) seemingly intrinsic to industrialised methods of food provisioning (Watts et al., 2005).

**Corporate-organics: the conventionalisation of the alternative**

As Guthman (2003: 51) notes, “[i]n the early days of the organic movement, the shared meanings of organic food suppliers and eaters made for a reasonably coherent movement politics”. However, since then the strong (as in Watts et al.,’s (2005) definition) vision of organic agriculture and food democracy, defined by

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2 In recent years there have been a host of popular documentaries exposing the negative social and environmental repercussions of the globalised industrial food system, for example: Bananas! (2009); Food Inc. (2008); Life and Debt (2001); Our Daily Bread (2005); Super Size Me (2004).
shared meanings and “values of trust, place-based knowledge, ecological diversity, and social justice” (Reynolds, 2004: 738) has been slowly weakened by the industrialisation, and ‘yuppification’ of the organic food sector (Guthman, 2003). What was originally seen as an ethical and systemic alternative to industrially produced food, is now being appropriated by the corporate food sector, leading it to be termed ‘organic lite’ by critics due to the neglect of the deeper social and agro-ecological vision intrinsic to the earlier organic movement (Adams & Salois, 2010).

“Dimensions such as community food security, farm-worker welfare, animal welfare, land stewardship, resource conservation, preservation of heritage breeds and sustainability are no longer strongly associated with organic foods” (Reynolds, 2004: 333). This corporate-environmentalism indicates a new round of accumulation for global agribusiness, “based on the selective appropriation of demands by environmental movements” (Friedmann, 2005: 229, my emphasis).

Industrial organic production is driven by the same ethic of profit as conventional production and is therefore equally dependant on marginalised labour to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace. Hence it is also inclined to favour large-scale, efficient and cost saving production methods, marginalising small-scale producers who are unable or unwilling to adopt the industrial mantra. Agro-ecological practices have been replaced by dependence on allowable inputs to sustain “organic monocultures, in flat contradiction with agroecological lore, and a cynical regard for the philosophical and ethical foundations of sustainable agriculture” (Goodman, 2000: 216).

The concentration of power within the organic food sector is comparable to that of the conventional food system, with over 70-80% of organic food in countries such as the UK, Sweden and Denmark being sold through corporate retailers (Renting et al., 2003). As with the conventional food system, the “increased corporate control over [“alternative” food] brings with it the danger of a downward pressure on producer prices and a dilution of quality standards, thereby undermining the raison d’être of [these products] as such” (ibid: 408).
Unsurprisingly, the marketing strategies deployed by the corporate-organic food sector to sell their products draw heavily on themes from the earlier organic and food democracy movements. These include references to: humble beginnings; family farms; personal stories of farmers; and references to specific geographical places (Johnston et al., 2009). In a Debordian sense, the vision of ecologically and socially sound agriculture that “once was directly lived has become mere representation” (Debord, 1994: 12) in the form of corporate-organics. That “[t]he supply logistics of interregional and international organic trade replicate the energy-intensive patterns of conventional agribusiness” (Goodman, 2000: 216) is left to the more questioning consumer to discover for themselves.

Adams and Salois (2010: 333) quote a mournful member of the movement in saying:

‘When we said organic we meant local. We meant healthful. We meant being true to the ecologies of the region. We meant mutually respectful growers and eaters. We meant social justice and community. In other words, industrial organic farming isn’t really organic”; organic is ‘more about fairness and respect than it is about parts-per-billion of pesticide residues’.

**Theorising alternative food networks**

There has been much academic research into alternative food networks (AFNs) in recent years, and several special editions of journals dedicated to the subject (see Venn et al. (2006) for a comprehensive discussion). As a result of the significant diversity of these projects, there has been debate over how to properly define an AFN. This umbrella term covers groups such as, but not restricted to, farmers markets; organic box schemes; community supported agriculture (CSA); specialist retailers; food cooperatives; community kitchens; fair trade enterprises; agro-ecological farming practices; permaculture; ‘people’s’ supermarkets”; and organisations such as Via Campesina, Reclaim the Fields, and landless workers’ movement in Brazil (MST).
Probably the most important discussion in current alternative agro-food studies is whether the term ‘alternative’ is even useful at all. As Kneafsey et al. (2008: 27) put it “[w]e have a situation where one contested and fuzzy concept (‘alternative’) is used to stand for other contested and fuzzy concepts” such as “‘local’, ‘organic’, ‘specialty’ or ‘community’, and... ‘low food miles’”. These terms are all:

...highly contestable, and potentially non-definable. How far can we go before food stops being ‘local’? How are ‘organic’ standards defined and by whom? How are they regulated? What foods should be labelled as ‘specialties’? Whose ‘community’ are we talking about? Are high food miles always a bad thing? And so on. (Kneafsey et al., 2008: 27)

The vagueness of these concepts makes them particularly susceptible to cooption by corporate retailers as discussed above.

The huge diversity of different agro-food projects that are attempting to create systems of provision that diverge from the hegemony of corporate control elegantly reflects Paul Kingsnorth’s (2003) notion of ‘one no, many yeses’ which he uses in relation to the anti-globalisation movement (to use a fuzzy concept), of which these networks could be seen to be a part of. However, if we are to really understand the dynamics of this diverse and growing segment then we must be clearer about how we define these projects. We need to ask ourselves - to quote Whatmore et al. (2003: 389) - “[w]hat’s alternative about alternative food networks?”

Watts et al. (2005) make the distinction between strong and weak alternatives. Stronger alternatives are more concerned with the wider process of food provisioning, whilst weaker alternatives focus more on the final product. For example the sale of organically-certified produce through supermarket chains would be seen as a weaker alternative compared to a community-supported farm enterprise. However, this stronger/weaker continuum still lacks the descriptive
power needed to understand the variation between and within these networks. Different enterprises have different strengths and weaknesses and therefore whether they are described as weaker or stronger depends on the eyes of the beholder; would a democratically managed CSA which produces food in a non-organic manner be seen as necessarily stronger than a cooperative of organic food producers who sell their produce through mainstream retail outlets?

Schools of thought

Most of the academic research carried out into AFNs has been in North America and Europe, and the forms that AFNs in these regions take (and therefore the academic research into them) differ in a few significant ways (e.g. Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Holloway et al., 2007; Marsden & Smith, 2005; Maye et al., 2007; Watts et al., 2005). One of the points at which they diverge is the position in which they situate themselves in relation to the ‘mainstream’. North American AFNs tend to take a more oppositional/activist stance towards the corporate agro-food regime (i.e. stronger), “whose scaling-up, it is argued, would create an ecologically sustainable, egalitarian, and socially just food system” (Goodman & Goodman, 2009: 213).

European AFNs tend to take a more ‘alternative’ (as opposed to ‘oppositional’) stance. The emphasis is on sustainable rural development through the “strengthening of historical and cultural traditions of product and place” (Maye et al., 2007: 4). The status of PDO (protected designation of origin), PGI (protected geographical indication) and TSG (traditional speciality guaranteed) have been assigned to nearly 1,300 products across the European Union such as Parmigiano-Reggiano, Champagne, and Cornish Pasties (European Commission). “Entrepreneurially minded individuals are seen as able to carve out niches for speciality food enterprises in a demanding business environment” (Holloway et al., 2007: 4). Goodman and Goodman (2009: 215) make the comparison of imaginaries of ‘just values’ in the North American AFN movement versus the emphasis on ‘just value’ in their European counterparts. Venn et al., (2005) identify four criteria by
which to identify AFNs in the European context, alignment with any one of which is enough to qualify. These are:

- An attempt to connect consumers, producers and food, in a new economic space which re-embeds food production and consumption.
- Non-conventional supply/distribution channels – detached from industrial supply and demand distribution and corporately controlled food chains.
- Adopted principles of social-embeddedness – founded or working on the principles of trust, community and often linked with a specific geographical location.
- Based around a notion of ‘quality’ – promotes quality, either conventional or alternative, preserving traditions or heritage. (Venn et al. 2005: 253)

Despite the use of somewhat fuzzy concepts, these guidelines are useful in identifying potential candidates for AFNs. The authors go on to suggest that AFNs can be located in one of four categories linked to, but not directly translated from, the above criteria, which express the level of connectedness between the processes of production and consumption. The first of these categories, signifying the highest level of connectedness is *producer-as-consumer*, which, as the term implies, refers to schemes where food is produced and consumed by the same people; this category applies to community gardens, allotment groups etc. *Producer-consumer partnerships* constitute the next level of connectedness, and include schemes where the consumers are closely linked to producers such as in the form of a CSA; this implies that consumers have some level of agency in the production process in that they can advise and request certain products to be grown or processes to be undertaken. *Direct sell* initiatives are the third category, and they include farmers’ markets, farm-gate sales, box schemes and any other means by which consumers come into close contact with producers. The fourth category, representing the lowest level of connectedness is that of *specialist retailers*, and includes organic food shops, online retailers, tourist attractions etc.
Embeddedness

The exceptionalism of agricultural production in relation to other sectors of production, in that it is intimately dependent on biophysical processes, has been argued as being responsible for the “persistence of exceptionally heterogeneous and diverse practices encompassing labour processes, social relations, farming styles, craft skills, institutional forms, and a preponderance of non-corporate family units” (Goodman, 1999: 19). The encroachment of transnational corporate capital into the sector and its pursuit of profits has resulted in these “pre-industrial production processes and agricultural products [produced by them to] remain as enduring sources of competition, benchmarks of quality, and as culturally potent alternatives to the industrial paradigm” (ibid: 20, original emphasis).

It could be said that it is the circumvention of this biophysical exceptionalism that lies at the heart of the project to industrialise agricultural production, that is, “the desire by industrial capitals to ‘outflank’ the biological systems that traditionally have lain at the heart of food production” (Murdoch et al., 2000: 109). Murdoch et al. (2000), drawing on earlier work by Goodman et al. (1987), discuss two processes through which this ‘outflanking’ is achieved/attempted. These are appropriation, which refers to the replacement of natural processes by industrial (and therefore highly controllable) processes (e.g. pollination management, artificial insemination), and substitution, which refers to the attempts to replace natural products with industrial products in the food system (e.g. pesticides, growth hormones, the use of industrial oils in animal feed manufacturing). These two processes are steps taken in the attempt to ‘domesticate’ nature, but nature has consistently behaved in unexpected and alarming ways in the face of attempted human domination, driven by reductionist scientific practice and cost-saving industrial production techniques. The appearance of a rogue type of protein, the prion, leading to BSE in cattle, and CJD in humans is a salient example of this.

The outflanking of natural processes by industrial agribusiness, coupled with the fetishisation of the food commodities produced, combine to create the placelessness
and facelessness of the corporate food system. As discussed above, the desire to re-embed food in local social institutions and ecologies, to reconnect food to faces and places lies at the heart of the diverse movement to “perform the [food] economy otherwise” (Watts et al., 2005: 24).

However, this drive to re-embed food systems socially and ecologically, has been met with some criticism due to its potentially unreflective tendencies. Winter (2003: 24) warns us to use the concept of embeddedness “in a cautious and critical fashion” due to its vagueness in order to go beyond simplistic use, so as to assess “different degrees and qualities of embeddedness” (ibid: 24, my emphasis) within networks. Some critics are keen to point out that ‘the local’ has a tendency to be given unquestioned moral high ground, without taking into account other factors necessary to genuine social and ecological change. That ‘the local’ is inherently more socially just and ecologically benign is contested; “differentiations of labour, power, gender and race [do not] disappear if tied to local places” (Winter, 2003: 30, see also DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Hinrichs, 2000). Local food networks can involve a wide variety of different production styles, consumer motivations, and politics (Guthman, 2000; Winter, 2002). The term ‘defensive localism’ has been used to describe the conservative tendencies of some local food movements. More work needs to be done to assess who benefits from AFNs, i.e. whether local elites are able to enrol and ‘quarantine’ themselves from risks associated with industrially produced food, without addressing issues of unequal access to fresh, healthy and safe foods. It is useful to note, as Guthman (2003: 55) reminds us, “[t]he fact that many of those who eat organic food came into their wealth from some of the very processes that enabled the fast food industry’s growth”. This point highlights that the industrialisation of the food system and the growth of the organic food market, are in many ways, two sides of the same coin, and one more expression of rising social inequalities.

There has been concern that AFNs have a tendency to reproduce the ‘neoliberal subjectivities’ that they oppose by emphasising the importance of entrepreneurial freedoms and consumer choice, and shifting responsibilities away from the state and
on to local communities (Guthman, 2008). However, Harris (2010) argues that this critique “may limit the opportunities for constructive socio-environmental change that might emerge through such networks”, and suggests that we find new ways to analyse them. He suggests, and I agree, that by using Gibson-Graham’s framework of “reading for difference rather than dominance” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 54) we may put ourselves in a more fruitful position for analysing these projects, and open up new arenas of discussion.

**Diverse economies**

The ideas in this section draw heavily from scholars such as J. K. Gibson-Graham and others involved in the Community Economies Collective ([www.communityeconomies.org](http://www.communityeconomies.org)) who argue that the binary framing of the dominant (capitalist) against the alternative presents the alternative as unsubstantial and powerless; “as the same as, a complement to, or contained within” capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 56; see also Community Economies Collective, 2001; Healy, 2009). This discursive hegemony, referred to as ‘capitalocentricism’ can be debilitating to the process of imagining novel economic spaces and relationships. Somewhat disillusioned by Marxist analysis in that it “seemed to cement an emerging world in place rather than readying it for transformation”, Gibson-Graham (2008: 2) pose the question: “How can our work open up possibilities? What kind of world do we want to participate in building? What might be the effect of theorizing things this way rather than that?” (ibid: 3).

Some have argued that referring to a society as ‘capitalist’ is “an act of categorical violence”, as it obscures from view the economic activity which people are engaged in “for more hours of the day [and] over more years of their lives than any other” (Community Economies Collective, 2001: 4). They call for a more detailed discussion of the myriad economic relationships which exist in so-called capitalist societies (see table 1), and to focus on the areas that are worth celebrating and growing, as opposed to dwelling on what we already know to be true: “that the world is a place
of domination and oppression” (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 7). In the opening pages of their book *The End of Capitalism (As we knew it)*, Gibson-Graham ask:

Why might it be problematic to say that the United States is a Christian nation, or a heterosexual one, despite the widespread belief that that Christianity, and heterosexuality are dominant or majority practices in their respective domains, while at the same time it seems legitimate and indeed ‘accurate’ to say that the US is a capitalist country? What is it about the former expressions, and their critical history, that makes them visible as ‘regulatory fictions,’ ways of erasing or obscuring difference, while the latter is seen as an accurate representation? (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 2)

By using a framework of economic diversity (see table 1), that is, “reading for difference rather than dominance” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 54) the ‘mainstream’ can be dismantled, reducing this dominance and allowing for the investigation of the full array of economic relationships that already exist and opening up the terrain for experimentation and creativity (Cameron and Gordon, 2010). The analogy of an iceberg is used to represent the diversity of economic relations, with capitalist, waged labour, and profit-seeking enterprises and transactions inhabiting the fraction of the iceberg which is visible above the surface of the water, and all other transactions, of which there are potentially infinite variation, are located underneath the surface, seemingly invisible to mainstream economic evaluation. When economic activity is seen in its broader, feminised sense, (i.e. as the provision and organisation of goods and services not merely defined by monetary transactions), it becomes clear that the economic “terrain is littered with...‘economic’ identities that are largely acknowledged as social identities – houseworker, giver of gifts, volunteer, cooperator, petty trader, home producer, artisan, member of a kin network, indigenous hunter, migrant, public servant, community worker, peasant, social entrepreneur” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 77, original emphasis). These activities are invaluable to the maintenance and reproduction of communities and individuals, to the extent that the market-based sector of the economy would not function without
their contribution (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003). This (re)reading of the economy also shows the dangers and injustice of using the label ‘economically inactive’ to refer to those who are not officially employed.

Table 1: A diverse economy (adapted from Gibson-Graham, 2006: 71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For profit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Capitalist</td>
<td>Alternative Market</td>
<td>Alternative Paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State enterprise</td>
<td>Sale of public goods</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green capitalist</td>
<td>Ethical ‘fair-trade’ markets</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially responsible firm</td>
<td>Local trading systems</td>
<td>Indentured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Alternative currencies</td>
<td>Reciprocal labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Underground market</td>
<td>In kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-op exchange</td>
<td>Work for welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Capitalist</td>
<td>Non-Market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal</td>
<td>Household flows</td>
<td>Housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Gift giving</td>
<td>Family care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudal</td>
<td>Indigenous exchange</td>
<td>Neighborhood work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave</td>
<td>State allocations</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State appropriations</td>
<td>Self-provisioning labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gleaning</td>
<td>Slave labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hunting, fishing, gathering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theft, poaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Central to this project of ‘rethinking economy’ is the construction of a language of economic diversity and possibility. Gibson-Graham (2006) argue that the development of the culture of capitalocentricism has been aided by the globalisation of capitalism since the demise of state socialism as an actually-existing alternative. Of course, as Leyshon and Lee (2003b: 1) acknowledge, it is not that we should lament “the passing of [these] undemocratic and authoritarian social formations...[which prioritised] perpetual reinvestment of surplus within the means of production” over increasing social well-being and living standards, except in that they represented alternatives to capitalism, thereby showing that alternatives are indeed possible. This ‘victory’ has led to a discourse in which capitalism is seen as the most ‘natural’ form of human organisation, accompanied by:
[A] distinct social imaginary – a heady mix of freedom, individual wealth, unfettered consumption, and well-being trickled down to all – [which] convenes a series of myths that constitute the (illusory) fullness and positivity of ‘capitalist’ society, masking the social antagonisms on which this presence is posited (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 55).

Surplus possibilities

Gibson-Graham (2006; 2009; see also Roelvink & Gibson-Graham, 2009) identify four variables, the ethical negotiation of which lie at the core of any socioeconomic project. These are:

1. Necessity – what is necessary to personal and social survival
2. Surplus value – how is surplus appropriated and distributed
3. Consumption – whether and how social surplus should be produced and consumed
4. Commons – how a commons is produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 88)

For the purpose of this paper I am most interested in the idea of surplus value, as “[a] focus on surplus suggests analytical tools for harnessing social wealth in new ways and directing it toward the building of different kinds of economies” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 68). As discussed in the introduction, workers tied up in capitalist class relations have no direct access to the means of their own production, and as such are compelled to sell their labour time to employers in return for a wage that they may then use to obtain the goods and services they require for their own reproduction. The wage that they receive represents some but not all of the value which they create, the remainder, the surplus value, flows to the employer (Wolf, 1982). “In this sleight of hand, a ‘fair exchange’ delivers a portion of social surplus that could support the community of ‘us all’ into the hands of individual capitalists who see this surplus as rightfully and individually theirs” (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 91).
The production of surplus value is key to any society as it allows for the nurture of non-producers such as children, the elderly, and the sick as well as the general maintenance of the natural environment and the commons. These activities need to be undertaken somehow, which is why citizens are taxed, but in the current system individuals pay twice, once to the tax man, and once to their employers. This flow of value out of communities and into private hands is what a diverse economies approach to community development tries to prevent, a process the New Economics Foundation has termed ‘plugging the leaks’ (Ward & Lewis, 2002). The idea is that the more wealth that is kept within communities, the more potential is available for growth of local enterprises. The key questions that need to be resolved in an ethical and postcapitalist discussion of surplus value are:

Who is to be included in decision making over the rate of appropriation of surplus and its distribution? Is there a maximum size of enterprise or social grouping in which such hands-on involvement is not feasible? Under what conditions might surplus appropriation be seen as nonexploitative? How might nonproducers of social surplus have a say in how surplus is generated, appropriated, distributed? And, of course, what are the social destinations to which surplus is to be distributed, and those to which it will not? (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 93)

Examples of AFNs in Malmö

Below I shall give a description of the four examples I am using to demonstrate the diverse ‘ethical foodscape’ of Malmö. To date, there has been little research published which attempts to combine concepts from AFN studies and diverse economies, yet some have seen the potential of this marriage as an analytical tool.

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3 The term ‘ethical foodscape’ originally used by Goodman et al. (2010) is used here to avoid the complications with the term ‘alternative’. The term is suitable in this context as the one thing that all these projects have in common is a belief that there should be factors other than bottom-line profit seeking at play in our food system. Whether or not the enterprises are themselves profit generating (e.g. Morrot & Annat) they still share these ethical values.
By combining these two exciting areas of research, a more detailed socioeconomic analysis of projects is possible.

Methods

The four examples of AFNs used were chosen partly through snowball sampling. I was previously aware of Morot & Annat (hereafter referred to as M&A) and Mykorrhiza, and through speaking to members of Mykorrhiza I was informed of Barni Stan (BiS) and Ekolivs. The methods of data collection varied slightly between the projects as some individuals could spare more time than others. Information about M&A was obtained through a questionnaire sent through email, as the owners were not available for an interview. Data regarding Ekolivs was obtained through a questionnaire sent out on the members’ mailing list, and through semi-structured interviews carried out with two long-time members of the organisation. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with the two employees of BiS, and a founding member of Mykorrhiza. These methods were deemed appropriate for the research as the aim was to get a broad overview of the economic and social structure of the enterprises.

For descriptive purposes the projects were assessed according to the seven variables identified by Holloway et al. (2007: 8) (e.g. table 2). And the economic relationships existing within the projects were mapped out using the diverse economies framework discussed in the previous section (see table 1).
Ronnebygatans Ekolivs

Table 2 – Descriptive data for Ekolivs (adapted from Holloway et al. (2007: 8))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical field</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site of food production</td>
<td>Local, national, and internationally produced food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food production methods</td>
<td>Organic and/or biodynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain</td>
<td>Local farms, wholesale procurement, international supply chains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arena of exchange</td>
<td>Shop outlet, events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – consumer interaction</td>
<td>Little interaction with producers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations for participation</td>
<td>Environmental/social concerns, access to healthy food, meeting like-minded people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of individual and group identities</td>
<td>Members, under 35 years, not in full time employment, also non-member citizens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ekolivs (www.ekolivs.se) is a small organic food shop located near Folkets Park (see table 2 for descriptive data). It has been operating as Ekolivs since 2006 (see figure 1), although the property has been used as an organic food shop for over 10 years. It is run solely by volunteers; there are no paid employees. It is organised through a membership scheme, where each member must pay a SEK 200 deposit on joining, plus a SEK 100 annual membership fee. In addition to this, each member must work two three-hour shifts in the shop during each period, which last either three or four weeks. There are roughly thirty members. Members are entitled to a 17% discount on food, and a 10% discount on non-food items such as cleaning products. This discount is also extended to anyone living in the same household as a member. Although the shop is open to the public, the majority of sales are from members.
The governance of the shop is democratically organised; there are monthly and annual meetings for members. Members are able to choose their level of involvement. Each member must also be a part of one of four sub-groups, which take care of aspects to do with: economy; public relations; store management; and procurement of goods. In addition to selling products from the shop, the Ekolivs members regularly provide prepared food and tea/coffee at events in Malmö. Without this additional source of income the shop would not be able to support itself, as sales through the shop are too low to keep up the rent on the property (SEK 2,000/month).

To find out more about the profile of the members, a questionnaire was sent out to the mailing list. Of the nine people that replied, eight have been members for less than eighteen months. All responders were less than 36 years old, two were younger than 25. They all joined as they wished to contribute to improving the food system, and to support the enterprise as they shared the same values. Nearly all (8/9) emphasized the social gains from joining, i.e. meeting like-minded people in the area. Seven have also introduced other people to the project. Three people bought
more than half of their food from the store, three people bought less than a quarter of their food from the store. None were in full-time employment, six were in part-time employment, and three were students. There were equal numbers of male and female responders. Six people were also involved with other organisations dealing with environmental issues, two had formal education in environmentally related fields. Most stressed the benefits of learning more about food and running a project such as Ekolivs. In terms of negative aspects, half of the people said that the project was time-consuming.

Figure 2 – Ekolivs interior

Table 3 shows the diversity of the economic relationships involved with the running of Ekolivs. The produce in the shop is sourced from a variety of places. The wholesalers from whom much of the food comes are also wholesalers of non-organic food, so in this way the shop remains somewhat embedded in conventional supply chains. Although they prioritise the procurement of Swedish vegetables during the growing season, most vegetables are imported from abroad. Their emphasis is on food produced in accordance with organic guidelines, and as such they do not have an explicit social agenda. However, they stock a variety of Fair Trade products, and
also have two ‘solidarity products’. The solidarity products are Palestinian olive oil, and Zapatista coffee; there is no mark-up on the price of the coffee so there is no discount passed on to members.

Table 3 – The diverse economy of Ekolivs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Surplus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capitalist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Food wholesaler</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>• Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food from corporate</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Democratically Negotiated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wholesalers</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintenance of commons, i.e. rent, bills etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative capitalist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organic food wholesalers</td>
<td>Alternative market</td>
<td>Alternative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Local farms</td>
<td>• Food from organic</td>
<td>paid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Solidarity product’</td>
<td>wholesalers</td>
<td>• Store</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suppliers</td>
<td>• Food from local farms</td>
<td>discount</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Solidarity products’</td>
<td>for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from suppliers</td>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-capitalist</strong></td>
<td>Non-market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ekolivs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Volunteers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mykorrhiza

Table 4 – Descriptive data for Mykorrhiza

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical field</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site of food production</td>
<td>Urban community garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food production methods</td>
<td>Organic, consumer participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain</td>
<td>Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arena of exchange</td>
<td>Community space, soup kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – consumer interaction</td>
<td>Producers-as-consumers, soup kitchen run by growers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations for participation</td>
<td>Environmental/social/political concerns, access to healthy food, meeting like-minded people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of individual and group</td>
<td>Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mykorrhiza is a group of food activists working in and around Malmö (see table 4 for descriptive details). On their website (www.mykorrhiza.se), their stated aim is to “highlight solutions for local food production and create meeting places for exchange of knowledge and inspire those who want to create a new way of living”. The project officially came into being in March 2009, and was originally concerned with rural agriculture, and issues relating to access to land and seeds. Mykorrhiza’s
aim is to raise awareness of the negative social and ecological effects of industrial agricultural production, and to train and inspire a new generation of farmers (Britta Nylinder, personal communication). The group consists of roughly twelve active members, but there are many more who attend working days. Decisions regarding management of the project are made by consensus. Table 5 shows the diverse economy of Mykorrhiza.

Table 5 – Diverse economy of Mykorrhiza

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Surplus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>• Food and fixed assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 part time employees</td>
<td>• Food is eaten by members or given away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative capitalist</td>
<td>Alternative market</td>
<td>Alternative paid</td>
<td>• Maintenance of commons e.g. healthy(er) soil, raised beds etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• State funding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-capitalist</td>
<td>Non-market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mykorrhiza</td>
<td>• Food donation through soup kitchen</td>
<td>• Volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-provisioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 - Raised beds ready for planting at Mykorrhiza’s growing site, spring 2011.
The food grown by the group is either eaten by the members, or distributed through soup kitchens at events such as Klimaforum (an alternative conference running in parallel to the COP-15 climate negotiations), Climate Action Camp, and Malmö Festival. Their soup kitchen operates on a donations basis, with customers donating whatever they wish/are able to. Somewhat ironically, they reported that there was a seeming distrust of their food at Malmö Festival, as they were not requesting money for it, despite it probably being some of the healthiest food on offer, being both vegan and organically produced.

In 2010 the Malmö municipality gave the group access to a piece of land in Enskifteshagen (see figure 3) - they wanted to create a community garden, so an allotment plot was unsuitable. The municipality also erected a fence and provided a lockable container for storage of tools. After one season of cultivation, the results of soil tests carried out many years ago were found, leading to the discovery that the soil was contaminated with polyaromatic hydrocarbons (which are carcinogenic) and heavy metals such as lead and cadmium. The group had requested for there to be soil tests before they started growing, but the municipality encouraged them to go ahead.

Figure 4 – Plots prepared for soil cleaning project, spring 2011
The municipality has now awarded Mykorrhiza a grant (compensation?) of SEK 245,000, to implement a soil-cleaning project (see figure 4). Until now all work has been voluntary but by a twist of fate this will now enable the group to employ two of their members to work part-time.

Barn i Stan

Table 6 – Descriptive data for Barn i Stan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical field</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site of food production</td>
<td>Community gardens, private leased plots around housing blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food production methods</td>
<td>Organic, consumer participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain</td>
<td>Local neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arena of exchange</td>
<td>Community spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – consumer interaction</td>
<td>Producers-as-consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations for participation</td>
<td>Access to healthy food,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of individual and group identities</td>
<td>Local residents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barn i Stan (BiS) (“Children in Town”) is a project trying to promote socio-ecological change in the area of Sofielund in Malmö, by bringing together people of all ethnicities, abilities, sexes, and particularly ages (see table 6 for descriptive data). Originally they used activities such as baking food to bring people together. After noticing the maize growing in front of their HQ, some local residents inquired whether they could grow food in their gardens; this set off a chain reaction and led to the formation of a growers’ network, which now comprises of roughly one hundred members, of whom thirty are actively growing food. They hold monthly events and run weekly evening classes where people can learn and share techniques. They make sure that there is always someone available to give advice during the growing season. They provide support for both communal and personal growing areas (see figures 4 and 5), and they also keep bees.
**Figure 4** – Communal growing areas outside Barn i Stan HQ, spring 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Surplus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Capitalist</em></td>
<td><em>Market</em></td>
<td><em>Wage</em></td>
<td>• Food and fixed assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Alternative capitalist</em></td>
<td><em>Alternative market</em></td>
<td><em>Alternative paid</em></td>
<td>• Maintenance of the commons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Non-capitalist</em></td>
<td><em>Non-market</em></td>
<td><em>Unpaid</em></td>
<td>• State funding used to pay rent and staff and organise workshops for members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barn i Stan</strong></td>
<td>Exchange of food between growers • ‘Foraging’ from communal gardens</td>
<td>Volunteer • Self provisioning of network members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They have a contract with the municipality allowing them to grow food in the square next to their HQ. They are also in close dialogue with the owners of the housing blocks in the area, many of whom have lent out some areas of land to be cultivated by residents, and replaced the old soil with KRAV certified organic soil. BiS also work
with schools in the area to help set up school gardens, and plant fruit trees with the children (in 2010 they planted over 200 fruit trees at schools). Their funding comes from the municipality and also from the Swedish Inheritance Fund (a fund created with money from people who have died without having left a will). There are two full time employees and the rest of the work is done on a voluntary basis.

The growers’ network is comprised of a great variety of people. Roughly two thirds are native Swedes, and the remaining third is made up of people from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Age-wise, the group is evenly spread across age groups, from 20 years old and upwards, roughly half are over 50. There is an even gender balance in the network. Most of the members are in full-time employment, but there are also students, unemployed, and seniors. Members join for a variety of reasons, such as: wishing to garden but lacking access to land; a desire to actively participate in improving the environment in the neighbourhood; to learn about organic food growing; to provide food for themselves; and to meet other local people through engaging in fun and rewarding activities.

**Figure 5 – Strawberries growing in a personal plot of a Barn i Stan member**
**Morot & Annat**

**Table 8 – Descriptive data for Morot & Annat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical field</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site of food production</td>
<td>Local, national and international farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food production methods</td>
<td>Organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain</td>
<td>Local selling, wholesale procurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arena of exchange</td>
<td>Shop outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producer – consumer interaction</td>
<td>Close interaction between shop owners and local farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivations for participation</td>
<td>Access to healthy food, environmental concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution of individual and group identities</td>
<td>Ecologically conscious citizens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6 – Morot & Annat shop front**

Morot & Annat (“Carrot & Other”) is an organic food shop (see table 8 for descriptive data). The original outlet was located in Limhamn and was started in 2001. In 2004 they opened a second store in Drottningtorget; after one year the original store was closed down leaving only the one located in Drottningtorget (see figure 6). It is registered as a limited company, run and managed by the owners. The owners are
self-employed and additionally employ two people to work on Saturdays, and one person on Sundays; the employees are paid in wages and in addition receive a store discount.

Table 9 – Diverse economy of Morot & Annat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Surplus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>• Private appropriation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food from corporate wholesalers</td>
<td>• Shop employees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative capitalist • Morot I Annat</td>
<td>Alternative market</td>
<td>Alternative paid</td>
<td>• Self-employed owners • Store discount for employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Food from organic wholesalers • Food from local farms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-capitalist</td>
<td>Non-market</td>
<td>Unpaid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the owners grew up on an organic farm, which the shop keeps close ties with. They also have close relationships with other farmers in the area, from whom they collect produce on their way to work, during the growing season. During the winter most of their vegetables are imported. The criteria for their products are prioritised as: firstly they must be organic, then they try to source locally, then fairly-traded products. According to the owners, their customer base is mixed, all ages, men and women. They acknowledge that their shop is not very central so customers potentially have to travel out of their way to shop there. They believe that most customers shop there for reasons of personal health rather than planetary health.

**Discussion**

Ekolivs is a unique enterprise which in some ways is more similar to a food buying group than a shop. In a recent paper, Little et al. (2010) note that buying groups are a form of food network that have been largely neglected in agro-food literature, and which may hold a potential for the scaling-up of local and organic food provisioning
which the formal retail sector lacks. They can “be viewed as a microcosm of the ‘diverse economy’...encompassing both corporate and not-for-profit, waged labour and payment-in-kind, and personal and communitarian gain” (Little \textit{et al.}, 2005: 1802).

The great merit of these groups lies in their flexibility; the only materials needed to start up are: some people, some space, some money to buy food, and someone to sell them food. The logistics are therefore constantly open to negotiation, and if the group has come to an agreement on what food to buy and what quantities, and people have paid in advance, then there is no risk of not being able to sell food. Depending on the size of the group, the labour required is likely to not be constant and can be distributed between members in space and time. All this is in contrast to running a conventional retail outlet whereby the enterprise is under constant strain to keep up payments on rent, and to pay members of staff that are necessary to keep the shop open regular hours. The additional money required to keep up these costs will be reflected in the increased price of the goods, reducing the ability of poorer customers to afford them and thereby lessening the democratic accessibility of the food.

Food buying groups offer a way of re-embedding food in social relations which has particular value in urban areas where community garden plots are unlikely to be large enough to supply a significant amount of food to growers. The responses to the questionnaire sent to members of Ekolivs echoed the findings by Little \textit{et al.} (2005) in terms of the importance members placed on the social aspect of buying groups. As the price of the food in the shop is comparable to that of organic food found in supermarket chains, it is these additional social incentives that are attractive to members. “In essence, the food is transformed into a vector which carries with it additional signals of beliefs, motives, and ethics that are conveyed through the purchase of the goods” (Little \textit{et al.}, 2005: 1807).

In terms of reconnection of food with people and place, we can see a variety of different connections at play in the Malmö ethical foodscape. The closest
connection, producers-as-consumers, is seen in both Mykorrhiza and Barn i Stan where food is grown more-or-less collectively and eaten by the community. A difference is that Mykorrhiza occasionally operates a soup kitchen whereby food is provided for the public. In the case of Ekolivs, the connection between consumers and producers is minimal, but what is significant is the close connection of consumers to each other, forged through managing the project collectively. At M&A, the connections between producers and consumers and between consumers themselves can also be seen to be minimal, and no more established than in a conventional retail outlet, selling food, or anything else. That is not to say that they do not share some of the same values, and it must be acknowledged that, whatever their level of involvement, through shopping at the store they are helping to contribute to building a more ecologically benign food system.

How strong or weak each project is, in Watts et al.’s (2005) terms, or in other words, whether the focus is on process or product, oppositional or alternative to the mainstream, also varies between the enterprises. M&A is the most ‘conventional’ of the cases, with the use of waged employees and a focus foremost on product. It is worth mentioning that it is also the only example that is economically self-sustaining. Many of the products for sale in both M&A and Ekolivs, bar some exceptions, are the same as the organic products sold in the supermarket chains and therefore might be labelled ‘organic lite’ as they are likely to have been produced under the ‘corporate organic regime’ discussed earlier, i.e. with little regard to issues of social relations within production. However, Ekolivs, being democratically managed by volunteers, represents a (very) strong alternative to the corporately controlled supermarket organisation of food retail. The volunteers who run the shop have prioritised things other than profit making, such as democratic participation. That the shop can survive despite low turnover is testament to the dedication of the members more than a sign of its success as an enterprise.

Mykorrhiza and BiS both represent strong alternatives to the mainstream, in that the emphasis is on the process of production, and the reconnection of people with the food they eat. However, when using terms like strong or weak, it is imperative to be
clear in which context it they are being used; for example, we might ask how genuinely strong is an alternative which cannot survive without municipal grants, and many hours of volunteer labour (over 1,500 hours per year in the case of Ekolivs). In terms of its ability to survive in the current system, the strongest alternative is that which is most conventional. To be strong both in terms of its social and ecological agenda and in its ability to sustain itself is the real challenge to AFNs.

Although BiS and Mykorrhiza may seem like similar enterprises in that they are both community food growing projects, they differ in some key aspects. BiS was established in order to bring people together in a poor area of the city with high crime rates and little social integration. It made sense to use food as the tool to create an inclusive social environment, as food is something that everyone could relate to, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity etc. Mykorrhiza, on the other hand, with its roots in agro-food activism, has served mainly as a means to bring together like-minded people in productive activity that is seen to be pursuing their goal of regaining some control of the food system. In other words, BiS is intended to bring together dissimilar individuals in a politically neutral environment, whereas Mykorrhiza brings together similar individuals in a politically charged environment. This further highlights the power of food as a tool for achieving diverse ends.

The two projects also differ in how they are embedded socially. All of the members of the Barn i Stan growing network are local residents, and if they are cultivating a personal plot, it is usually located within a few metres of their apartment block, otherwise they use the communal plots outside BiS HQ or in the square. This means that the act of growing food is very much embedded in the local socio-ecological landscape. Mykorrhiza is organised differently in that most of the people (approximately 80%) who are involved with working on the site are not local residents, but variously live in and around Malmö and travel to the area specifically to volunteer. In this way the site can be seen as somewhat less embedded in the local community than the BiS plots.
Surplus value created by each enterprise takes heterogeneous and largely non-commensurable forms. As an enterprise run on (alternative) capitalist principles the surplus produced in M&A, is privately appropriated.\(^4\) In the case of Ekolivs, as all work is conducted on a voluntary basis, we can conclude that all value created is surplus value (as no-one’s survival depends on them working there). The revenue which is generated is used to maintain ‘the commons’ which in this case takes the form of keeping up the rent on the property and any maintenance which may need to be carried out to keep the store running smoothly (for instance replacing the front window which was smashed by vandals in 2010). The store itself is therefore a manifestation of social surplus in the neighbourhood.

Surplus produced in BiS and Mykorrhiza is non-financial. It is used for the development and maintenance of fixed assets such as productive community and personal garden plots. I would also argue that the social relationships forged through participation in these projects (including Ekolivs) represent a form of surplus value. These projects demonstrate the possibilities available when the power of social wealth is harnessed and put to positive use in communities.

By using the diverse economies framework in addition to concepts from AFN studies we can get an idea of the myriad socioeconomic relationships that exist in the ethical foodscape of Malmö. It becomes clear that different enterprises can be engaged in a variety of different forms of transaction. Just because an enterprise is not capitalist, it does not mean it is completely free from engagement with enterprises that are, and vice versa; capitalist supermarket chains can engage in transactions which have an ethical dimension, such as stocking products which are fairly traded, and organic, or donating food to charitable causes. Of course scale is important, and as Cameron (2010) reminds us, the diverse economies framework may be criticised for ignoring the scale of activities in each sector; however, this is surely a logical outcome of a project explicitly concerned with reading for difference rather than dominance.

\(^4\) It is worth noting that as M&A only employs people at the weekends, the owners themselves produce the vast majority of surplus value.
Table 11 – The diverse Malmö foodscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Capitalist**   | • Nationally/internationally based supermarket chains (e.g. COOP, ICA, Hemköp, Willys, Lidl, City Gross, 7-Eleven, etc.)  
                   • Local retailers (e.g. private shops, market stalls, restaurants, cafés etc.) | • Supermarket workers  
                   • Workers in local shops  
                   • Workers on local farms |
| **Alternative Capitalist** | • Organic/ethically oriented businesses (e.g. Moron & Annat, Mossagåden)  
                                | • Purchases from local farmers (e.g. box schemes, farmers markets)  
                                | • Purchases from ethically driven stores | • Workers at Mykorrhiza and Barn-i-Stan paid through municipal grants  
                   • Ekolivs members store discount  
                   • Moron & Annat employee discount |
| **Non-Capitalist** | • Community food growing projects (e.g. Mykorrhiza, Barn-i-Stan)  
                   • Volunteer-run food enterprises (e.g. Ekolivs)  
                   • Community kitchen (e.g. Bröd och frihet)  
                   • Food distribution projects | • Food donations from supermarket  
                   • ‘Dumpster diving’  
                   • Gift of free dumpstered food in community kitchen  
                   • Mykorrhiza soup kitchen | • Ekolivs volunteer labour  
                   • Self-provisioning of Barn-i-Stan growers  
                   • Volunteers at Barn-i-Stan  
                   • Mykorrhiza volunteers |
| **Non-Market**    | • Purchases from supermarket  
                   | • Mykorrhiza soup kitchen | • Mykorrhiza volunteers |

Watts et al. (2005) argue that any economic activity which is unable to ‘make a living’ for those performing it will fail. This may be true through the lens of conventional economic analysis whereby making a living may be seen as earning money in order to materially provide for oneself and/or others. However, an analysis using a framework of economic diversity would look further than the idea of ‘making a living’ in monetary/material terms, and extend economic activity to that which ‘sustains lives’. The rewards for labour expended can come in many diverse forms such as a feeling of purpose, companionship, self-esteem, emotional support, love, friendship etc. which contribute to individual and communal well-being in fundamental ways which could not be achieved through financial means.
The rewards also come in the consumption or enjoyment of what has been produced... To include all of this work in a conception of a diverse economy is to represent many people who see themselves (or are labelled as) ‘unemployed’ or ‘economically inactive’ as economic subjects, that is, contributing to the vast skein of economic relations that make up our societies (Gibson-Graham, 2006: 63).

The survival of the projects outlined above can thus be explained by the ability of the labour performed to sustain peoples’ lives “beyond the merely material” (Lee, 2000: 140). These are activities that directly contribute to social wellbeing, which, however rarely achieved, is a goal of conventional economic development (Community Economies Collective, 2001).

Research into the social economy, which has much in common with a diverse economies approach, has shown that, as with localism, the social economy should be analysed with the same degree of scrutiny as the ‘mainstream’. Amin (2003: 32) notes that a positive aspect of the social economy is that community-run enterprises are “answerable only to the local community”, and not to shareholders or taxpayers, and in such a sense they are able to be more sensitive to the needs of the local people they serve. However, the social economy is not intrinsically inclusive, and living in the same physical area does not automatically mean individuals share communitarian camaraderie. It must be acknowledged “how problematic the idea of local community remains in areas already divided on racial, class and other grounds” (ibid: 36).

The social economy may automatically favour the participation of those already in a privileged position in society, such as those with the economic means to be liberated from full-time waged employment, whilst further marginalising those who have less control over their time such as single working parents. This is a potential shortfall of Ekolivs whereby the initial payment of SEK 300 will automatically prevent some from participating in the project, regardless of whether they are have the time to spare. In the extreme, it is possible that those already dominant in society will flourish in the
social economy at the expense of those less fortunate. This is a major concern voiced by critics of the UK’s Prime Minister David Cameron’s ‘Big Society’ project (New Economics Foundation, 2010), which is devolving responsibilities from the state down to local communities. At the opposite end of the spectrum, “grassroots participants [in the social economy] might actually dream of mainstream consumption, but for reasons of social and economic exclusion find themselves in a niche instead” (Seyfang and Smith, 2007: 592). This may apply to some members of the BiS growing network and Mykorrhiza, who may lack the economic means to purchase the organic food they would ideally like to eat.

Food related projects are particularly potent in their ability to achieve multiple beneficial outcomes in urban areas. Increasingly, urban inhabitants lack the opportunity to interact with non-human nature. It has been suggested that humans have an innate attraction to nature referred to as ‘biophilia’ (Wilson, 1984). Interaction with non-human nature has been found to reduce stress levels, increase concentration in ADHD sufferers, and relieve depression, amongst other things (Frumpkin, 2003). Low-income households tend to buy cheap, bulky staples that fill up hungry stomachs quickly (Bellows, 2004), but are often poor nutritionally, lacking vitamins and other essential micronutrients. Even a small, cultivated plot can provide a valuable source of ‘nutrient dense’ vegetables, contributing to the overall health of the household (ibid).

Growing food reconnects people with the ecological cycles which all life is dependent on and from which we have only in the past few centuries become alienated through rapid urbanisation. “[W]e have paved over the land and sealed off the earth, and, thus, gardens can help us restore our ecological connection: Gardens connect us to nature and nature connects us to the universe” (Hanna & Oh, 2000: 210). Engaging with the complete life cycle, from seed, to fruit, to harvest, to compost is an explicit aim of Barn i Stan, and the ripping up of the lifeless paving stones in the street outside to make way for a community garden is as much symbolic as it is functional, the result representing “a small piece of liberated

In a system where most individuals receive no direct benefit from the material process of their formal employment, save a wage package, it is easy to see the attraction of projects involving human scale activities which have direct relevance to the well-being of individuals and communities, such as growing food. McClintock (2010), building on Marx’s theory of the metabolic rift, discusses what he refers to as ‘individual rift’, the process whereby humans are alienated from the fruits of their labour. He believes that urban agriculture has the potential to partly heal this rift:

> From the Marxian perspective, the de-alienation of humans both from the fruits of our labour and from the natural or biophysical world depends on our active metabolism of nature through labour. By physically labouring the soil, sowing seeds, cultivating, harvesting and preparing food, [urban agriculture] mends individual rift by reengaging individuals with their own metabolism of the natural environment. (McClintock, 2010: 202)

Whether or not these grassroots projects have the potential to bring about broader socio-ecological change is yet to be seen. ‘Militant particularism’, a concept originally used by Raymond Williams, but more recently developed by David Harvey (1996), refers to the particular forms that localised struggles necessarily take due to their unique circumstances. Goodman (2000: 215), acknowledges that individual alternative food networks, and their militant particularisms, are part of a “common worldwide struggle... to sustain and create alternatives to the centralizing strategies of agri-business capitals” and that there is a need to unlock the “global ambitions” of the “militant particularisms” of these alternative food networks through the acknowledgment that the “defence and advancement of certain particular interests, properly brought together, are in fact the general interest” (Williams, in Harvey, 1996: 32).
Concluding remarks

The alternative agro-food movement is testament to growing unease in civil society regarding the future of who has power and control over the process of feeding our species, and in whose interest they are likely to act. In exploring some concrete examples of this movement from the city of Malmö I have shown the dynamism of these grassroots projects, and the diversity of the economic relationships of which they are comprised. I am inclined to agree with Seyfang and Smith (2007: 590) in that, while “grassroots innovations are not the exclusive, powerful vanguard for more sustainable futures”, they represent invaluable spaces and opportunities for socio-economic and socio-ecological innovation and experimentation, and can have significant positive effects for the individuals and communities which are a part of them and of which they are a part. As grassroots projects are implemented by groups of citizens and not by the state, they are able to be adapted to local conditions and do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. This can be seen through the diversity of the projects in even a small city such as Malmö. The material contribution to the food system in terms of mass of food produced/distributed might be insignificant, but one would hope that even walking past a community garden or an organic food shop each day on the way to work would encourage individuals to be more reflexive about the food they eat.

The projects investigated by no means show the full extent of food and agriculture projects in Malmö, but are merely representative. I have not, for instance, discussed the extensive network of allotment plots in the city, organic food shops, or peri-urban farms. A comprehensive review of all such enterprises would be illuminating but is sadly beyond the scope of this paper, and would need significant time and resources to complete.

In terms of broader social change, whilst these enterprises are small and humble, by engaging in such projects people contribute to building a society in which less economic activity (at least in relative terms) is solely concerned with the accumulation of wealth. Seeing as we all live this world, we all benefit from a world
less centred on this premise. If we wish to live in a world where “access to safe and nutritious food is a basic right - a notion that fundamentally contradicts the corporate vision where food is principally viewed as a commodity produced for sale” (Johnston, 2009: 514) - then we must actively seek to produce such a world in our daily lives.

That the possibility of alternatives is at best constrained leads to the conclusion that, precisely because [they] are difficult to achieve and may not even be possible, they are ever more necessary. (Leyshon and Lee, 2003a: 198)
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