



The Meaning-Making of Bondens egen Marknad a farmers market organization

April Hammerand

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Uppsala

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Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet (SLU)

Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

Fakulteten för naturresurser och lantbruksvetenskap

Department of Urban and Rural Development

Institutionen för stad och land

Unit for Environmental Communication

Avdelningen för miljökommunikation

Author: April Hammerand

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Supervisor: Lars Hallgren, Unit for Environmental Communication, SLU

Examiner: Lotten Westberg; Unit for Environmental Communication, SLU
Hans Peter Hansen; Unit for Environmental Communication, SLU

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Abstract

The revitalization of farmers markets is a growing alternative to larger scale food systems that connects farmers directly with consumers in urban areas. Why is this important? Why do producers and consumers come to the farmers market? Moreover, what implications will this have on local farmers and the rest of our society? In this study, we look at the perspectives of participants in the “Bondens egen Marknad” (Farmers own Market) in Sweden to understand what the farmers market means for people, who come there, why they come, what interaction takes place and how this meaning is shaped by the larger societal context. Using qualitative interviews and Symbolic Interactionist theory as a guide, we search for the answers to these questions by looking at the communicative phenomenon of meaning-making. We explore different interpretations of the Bondens egen Marknad: what does local food and direct contact mean to the producers, how did the original concept of the farmers market influence the creation of the shared message, how do the farmers describe consumers and producers in relation to their motives and goals, and the perceived significance of trust-building, interdependence, and building a closer relationship between consumers and producers at the Bondens egen Marknad.

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Introduction and Background

Since the late 1970s, the creation of Farmers Markets has become a growing trend in developed countries. This idea is believed to have originated in the United States and later developed in Europe around the late 1990s (Nilsson and Hansson, 2006, p.14). Of course, this is not a new idea. The meeting of farmers and villagers at a market place has occurred for centuries. This revitalized movement focuses on at least two features that separate it from its modern day market competitors. The farmers at this new device of farmers markets sell products that they have produced themselves and they designated a limit on the geographical distance allowed from farm to market. These two distinguishing features have been central in the creation of the “Bondens egen Marknad” (Farmers own Market) the organization focused on within this study.

In 2001, the Bondens egen Marknad was first introduced in Stockholm with the first trial market at Katarina Banagata. It has since expanded to 14 markets across Sweden, from Umea in the North to Malmo in the South. The weekly Saturday markets bring producers and consumers together from mid-May to December, selling everything from everyday goods, such as eggs, cheese, meat, and vegetables to unique specialty products and handcrafted prepared goods.

The Farmers markets are organized by a steering committee for each city market called a farmer board. Representatives from each regional farmer board joins a National Board that sets the criteria for those allowed to participate in the farmers markets under the name “Bondens egen Marknad,” and defines the purpose of the organization for its members (Appendix 2). Producers on the regional farmer boards choose representatives through elections and only those selling at markets may participate.

Recent research has sparked future investigative interest into the communicative aspects of the Bondens egen Marknad. In particular, the symbolic interactionist perspective of the farmers markets organization and the interpersonal interaction between different participants at the farmers market. One report, lead by Helen Nilsson (2006), found that there was more than a mere financial incentive motivating producers and consumers to come to the markets, in fact marketing potential and the opportunity to meet with customers seemed more imperative (p.47). Another report analyzed the learning potential of producers and consumers at the farmers market and found that customers seemed to be more interested in food preparation tips and recipes than production methods and farm practices (Westberg, Björklund, Geber, & Milestad, 2006). A further study about the potential of different local food systems benefiting sustainable development, asked the question, “How much of what is being sold is food,” was the farmers market valued for the actual food it provided or the social aspects attached to the product (Adler, Fung, Huber, & Young, 2003, p.36)? These three articles were a starting point from which this study evolved. This thesis focuses on different perspectives about the meaning of the farmers market created through interaction or the “meaning-making” of the Bondens egen Marknad.

Aim and Research Goals

The aim of this thesis was to understand and analyze the meaning of Bondens egen Marknad (Farmers own Market) by exploring the participants (mostly producers) perspectives about the interaction between different producers and producers with consumers. Mainly I focused on these four entry points:

How do they describe the Bondens egen Marknad?

How do they describe the different participants attending the market?

How do they explain why producers and consumers would come to the market?

How do they perceive the interaction between consumers and producers attending the market?

Theoretical Framework

The meaning of the Bondens egen Marknad is created through the interaction between different producers, producers and consumers, and the individual self within the larger society. Symbolic interactionists state, “humans act in a world they define, and although there may actually be a reality out there, their definition is far more important for what they do” (Charon, 1995, p.129). The theory used in this thesis is greatly influenced by the symbolic interactionist perspective, the efforts of Herbert Mead and Hermeneutic theory.

Symbolic interactionists are focused on the meaning we create during interaction and the meanings affecting the way we act in interaction with others. “In short, it is concerned primarily with meaning as a product of human interactions and how that meaning influences behavior in social situations,” (Potter, 1996, p. 57). The theory describes two different environments, one entirely physical that we simply react to and another that is symbolic that is given meaning. We are not simply reacting to each other; they are interpreting their environment through their own meaning –making, creating their own reality as they see it, through their interaction with their self and society.

With the use of symbolic interactionist theory, the multiple realities of the Bondens egen Marknad were explored in depth. We attempt to see through their perspective or “their window” as the participant describes the farmers market and the interaction that occurs between people. This is our interpretation of their interpersonal interaction. Each of us defines and interprets situations and no one perspective will be able to capture the whole perspective. The interpretation process is the way in which we gather information of an object or idea, what we notice, and how we make meaning of that information and the action taken within a situation. The way we choose to give specific perspectives and objects (social objects or symbols) meaning within a situation influences our actions.

Symbolic Interactionists acknowledge Herbert Blumer for bringing the interpersonal level process of meaning making into the field of sociology. Blumer, who continued the work of George Hebert Mead, created three principles of symbolic interactionism. “First, human behavior can be traced to the meanings people attribute to their actions, other people, and things. Second,

humans construct their meanings from social interactions, through the creation and use of symbols such as language. Third, humans continually modify their meanings as they check them out in social situations."(Potter, 1996, p. 59). This thesis will focus on the work of these main tenants, as well as, theories from Joel Charon, Erving Goffman, Carl Couch, and Tamotsu Shibutani.

Hermeneutic theory is also very influential to the process of meaning marking. It observes the individual and society as indivisible, in other words, society needs to be understood in order to understand the individual and vice versa. Humans are not easily manipulated, altered, or predictable. "Society makes the individual through creation of the self, mind, symbols, generalized other, perspectives, and symbolic role taking. Conversely, it is the human individual who makes human society through active interpretation, self-direction, role taking, aligning [ones] own acts with others and communicating" (Charon, 1995, p.215). Both society and the individual influence each other and continuing this interaction is important for the continuous existence of society.

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that can be used to look at a situation in a different way. As Erving Goffman states "the purpose of studying social life is to 'cause others to see what they haven't seen or connect what they hadn't put together'..." (Charon, 1995, p.188). As we explore the empirical data with the use of symbolic interactionism, we must treat the theory with the theory itself. Exploring the perspectives of people involved in the Bondens egen Marknad, symbolic interactionism is a way to find details about the interaction that escapes our own view or experiences and allows us to see the farmers market through the eyes of others. This brings us to the methodology of the thesis, which is strongly interconnected with the theoretical framework chosen.

Methodology

The original interest in the Bondens egen Marknad arose through an interest in the communicative phenomenon occurring between different producers and between producers and consumers. A careful process of interviewing and analysis has been planned and reflected upon. Qualitative methods are preferred for studies using symbolic interactionist theory because it is assumed the researcher is part of the interpretation process, in other words, it is important to speak with persons face-to-face in order to reach an understanding of the subject's view of reality.

Interviewing

The Bondens egen Marknad organization was explored by way of 14 interviews with participants. A "participant" is described as different actors involved in the organization, including organizers, non-active producers, a customer representative, and one of the founders of the farmers market. Nine organizers have been interviewed. Some are past organizations and others are part of regional and national farmer boards. Choosing to concentrate on organizers was purposeful for the reason that organizers would be more familiarized to representing themselves as producers of their own company as representatives of the Bondens egen Marknad organization as well. The data was collected mostly in the region of Uppland and in particular

two Stockholm markets: Tessinparken and Katarina Bangata. In addition, two organizers were interviewed from Gothenberg, one organizer from Halmstad, and one organizer/producer was interviewed from Mariefred.

Other than the organizers, other participants were interviewed to dive deeper into the background and circumstances. Two non-organizer producers, a producer not involved in the organizing of the market, were interviewed. A customer representative, a customer invited to join the farmer board without any official voting rights and the ability to influence the decisions of the organization, was also interviewed, as well as one of the founders of the organization who had a great influence on the creation of the farmers market idea in Sweden.

In order to see the situation from the participant's perspective, questions were formulated to be as open-ended as possible. Interviewees were encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences of the situation. The typical introduction question was, "How did you come to be involved in the Bondens egen Marknad?" Assumptions and generalizations from the researcher's experiences was avoided, in order to concentrate on what the interviewee felt was important and relevant to discuss.

Interviews were planned with an informal structure and kept as flexible and adaptable to the needs of the interviewee. Interviews started with the background information about the history of the farm or past career experiences. After this base was created, only then did the subject move on the farmers market. Symbolic interactionists "want to know what the actors know, see what they see, and understand what they understand" (Potter, 1996, p.59). Throughout the interview, the way the participants described the farmers market, other producers, consumer, and the producers themselves was captured. It was important to keep aware of the reasoning or logic of the interviewee and ask questions based on this interpretation of their logic. As a result, the interviewee's line of reasoning could be followed correctly and questions could be asked in a way that did not make judgments based on this line of reasoning.

Role as Researcher

Acting naïve as a researcher was an important way of building up more understanding about the way the actors viewed the situation. Participants often made assumptions about the researcher's general knowledge about the farming context or technical data. Instead of informing them that researcher was already aware of the background, the researcher did not interrupt as the participant shared the information, in order to understand why they felt it was important to tell me that story and how they connected it with the situation.

After the participants fully answered the question, the researcher was able to bring in their own insights and experiences into the situation. The definition of "fully answered" is important here, as we must be careful not to pose questions and jump to conclusions before the answer is thoughtfully constructed. In order to understand each other, it was important for the researcher to add their own insights, especially when the interviewee has a particular theme in mind. This experience allowed the interviewee to gain more confidence in the researcher was following what the interviewee has said. In order to avoid offensive comments or generalizations being

made, questions were posed as the interviewer reflected upon the different international contexts. Never taking for granted what the researcher thought the interviewee already knew.

Introducing the researcher to the interviewee was an important first step as well, in order to make the necessary connection and understanding between interviewer and interviewee. This was especially the case for the researcher's educational background and personal interest in the topic, thereby creating a "romantic interview" or attempting to create a feeling of "genuine interaction, establishing rapport and trust, exploring meanings, feelings, ideas and attempting to understand their social world and reality" (Alvesson, 2003, p.2). Initiating storytelling during the "romantic interview," allowed this to occur as the interviewee to spoke from their own experience and perspective, instead of trying to speak from the experience of the interviewer.

At the end of the interview, it was important to reflect on the main themes that were immediately apparent to the researcher, but listen again to the questions that the interviewees asked themselves. To reflect upon what questions were open, when did the questions become closed, and when during the interview were the questions leadings. In the early stages of the process, this helped the interviewer stay aware of how they were acting during the interview and influencing the interaction with the interviewee. It was as important to reflect upon what the researcher had observed and said and how the interviewee acted and they did so.

Investigation of Interviews and Research

Weaving back and forth between context and theory is important when looking at a communicative phenomenon. Commonly symbolic interactionist "Theory is inductive and grounded in its ability to yield generalized statements, rather than a deductive axiomatic system that would require some a priori reasoning" (Potter, 1996, p.60). In methodological terms, it could be said that the researcher becomes more inductive when looking at the context and back to a deductive approach when looking at the theoretical material, in order to find a balance, striving to become as abductive in the approach as possible. While investigating the data collected, it was common practice to go back and forth, first drawing common themes from the context from the interviews and then reading theory and making connections between theory and context. It is important to keep in the "frame of mind" of the interviewees and reflect on how they defined their own situation, afterwards investigating the researchers own reasoning for why that association was made.

During the project, the researcher was assumed the expert of theory, while the interviewees were believed to be experts of their experience or context. Thus, reading theoretical research, either theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and general literature of farmers markets, was purposely avoided until most interviews were conducted and analyzed. This allowed the researcher to make connections between the themes that were noticed within the data collected, assumptions and preunderstanding of the situation. The exception was a review of past research and literature about the history and context of the Bondens egen Marknad and farmer's market schemes in Sweden. This was done to avoid the pre-understanding of the placing of the farmers market in the USA context.

Only after analyzing the data collected from the interviews and themes were found, further theoretical material was sought out. Once the researcher had formulated a “red line,” through the context, only then were they prepared for taking in other research judgments. Connections were then formulated between the theoretical and contextual material using the theoretical framework. After general conclusions were made from this theoretical framework, again the contextual and technical information was reflected upon to gain more understanding of the material from an outside (as possible) point of view.

In this thesis, the researcher has created micro-theories based on the data gathered through interviews. Acting as a researcher, during the data collection stage, interviews were not reflected upon until most of the interviews had been finished. In this way, the researcher resisted the temptation to allow themselves to go deeper into the interviews or theory. Speculation about cause and effect in behavior was avoided. Instead, the researcher forced themselves not to read, in order to stay in the local perspective and not to adapt to grand theories. This was thought to bring better reflection and allowing the researcher to be aware of their subjectivity. Although the researcher and research can never be fully disconnected, using the theoretical framework allows the researcher to analyze how they first drew conclusions about the contextual material and find where their preunderstanding had influenced their reasoning and connection building.

Scope and Limitations

The data collection has been somewhat limited by the inability to attend a Bondens egen Marknad farmers market before analyzing the empirical data collected and writing the thesis. In view of the fact that most of this research was done taking a symbolic interactionist perspective, which normally should work with qualitative interviews along with field observations, this issue was problematic. The first farmers markets of the season in Stockholm start in mid-May and it was then that the first draft of this thesis was due. Lack of participant observation may have influenced my investigation in terms of my capacity as a researcher to understand the producers. To compensate for this and to feel confident the participants actions could be understood from their point of view, it was important to never take what happened for granted, questioning what they were doing, and never taking the interaction of the researcher and participants for granted. In fact, this also proved as a way to reflect on the researchers own objectivity in the situation.

Throughout the process of writing, I have chosen not to include the name of the participants, therefore I title those quoted as organizers and producers, except for the customer representative and one of the founders. This is due to a privacy concern of some producers. Consequently, I was limited by the amount of context and background I am able to reveal about the participant's statements. Although, when the context was crucial, the context and background in the situation was noted in comparable way to the original examples.

Capturing the “whole picture” of the different perspectives of the producers was an important part of the methodology used. Despite this fact, I was limited by the contacts I received from organizers, which lead me to interview mostly KRAV certified producers (the Swedish organic certification) or those using organic practices. Although I was not asking questions directly concerning organic issues, I felt that it was important to bring in all perspectives possible. Reaching non-ecological producers proved to be difficult because organic producers tended to

refer me to other organic producers. At last, I was able to interview a couple farmers who are not organic certified and do not use organic practices. Therefore, I am satisfied that I have heard the different perspectives of the group, although this thesis does not have the potential to show one solid perspective about the organization it does highlight communicative aspects of perspectives found during interviews.

Reflection on Assumptions

One of the hardest parts about doing research is letting go of your own ideologies and philosophies and facing your own pre-understandings about the situation. Researching the Bondens egen Marknad was no less difficult. I have been working in the local food movement since 2005 and my past knowledge about the benefits and limitations of eating local food has in some ways complicated my own association chains, especially in the case of organic and local food in connection with sustainable development.

Growing up in a rural town, north of Chicago, I have seen what happens when farm communities are destroyed in the wake of the uncontrolled development. Part of my original interest in choosing the Bondens egen Marknad was to understand how these markets are created, in order to learn if these markets could potentially boost the economic stability of farming community in Northern Illinois.

Although I have faced this difficulty head on, I sincerely believe no one can ever be objective. If someone else had chosen to research this organization, they may have seen it in a completely “different light,” coming to different conclusions and insights. My greatest assumption that I still believe is that every perspective has merit and a right to exist; therefore, I hope this research will be used to give others another perspective on the Bondens egen Marknad, in order to improve the organization and other similar organizations in the future.

Empirical Data and Interpretation

The participants expressed what the Bondens egen Marknad meant for them through the way they described and explained the farmers market, the original message crafted by the founder, the classification and motives of participants, the goals of consumers and producers, the perceived trust-building and interdependence of the producers, and the interaction between consumers and producers. Throughout their explanations, participants used symbolic words and stories to illustrate a verbal picture of the situation. This discussion is an interpretation of the situation occurring as consumers and producers meet at the Bondens egen Marknad through the perspectives of the participants.

Orange Marmalade: Producers descriptions of the Bondens egen Marknad

The Bondens egen Marknad has two distinctive features, local food and direct contact with producers. Both are captured in the conversation regarding Orange Marmalade as described by one of the organizers. Orange Marmalade is a symbol or social object used by the producer to help them explain the meaning of the Bondens egen Marknad to others. The meaning found in

this story creates the reality in which the producers and consumers interact and where a sense of security is found within this reality.

The orange marmalade scenario follows: A customer asked a producer, why they did not sell orange marmalade. The producer explained that the farmers market had two strict rules: first, the producer could only sell products that had ingredients grown on their own farm and second, the producer was only allowed to sell products they produced themselves. The conversation about orange marmalade helps the producers explain two key rules of the Bondens egen Marknad concept: there must be “direct contact,” or producers must have grown or raised everything sold in the market and the products must be “närproducerat,” (locally produced) all farms must be within a 250 km radius from the market (bem, 2009). For further reference, the complete set of rules can be found in Appendix 1.

Joel Charon explains (1995), “This interaction that gives rise to reality is symbolic – it is through symbolic interaction with one another that we give the world meaning and develop the reality toward which we act” (p.60). When describing the meaning of the orange marmalade, this symbol is used to give the Bondens egen Marknad meaning and this helps the producers explain why this interaction between producer and consumer was important.

The producers described the Bondens egen Marknad as a “real” farmers market. For the producer, a “real” farmers market sells seasonal produce that is fresh and tasty. Selling direct to the customer was often discussed. One producer stated that, “doing it yourself from beginning to end is important.” To satisfy the desire of the consumer for the best quality produce, we grow our produce with care. The producer emphasized that there is no middleman at a “real” farmers market and the producer must follow all the steps from growing to selling and between. The producers ranked direct contact with the consumer as one of the most important aspects of the farmers market. The discussion about this relationship will be continued further below.

Explaining orange marmalade and what a “real” farmers market allowed the producer to define Bondens egen Marknad. This allows consumers to know what to expect when they come to Bondens egen Marknad and sets the stage for their interaction. This was understood when one producer stated, “I wouldn’t have been interested in coming to the Bondens egen Marknad in the first place, if more than producers were allowed to sell.” The producers feel more secure when working together under the same frame and boundaries. This helps the producers attract and keep the type of producers that are qualified to sell at the Bondens egen Marknad.

The Founder’s Communication Platform

Before the first farmers market in 2001, the founders of the Bondens egen Marknad organization created a clear message to promote the market to consumers. This message or communication platform was used by producers to create a shared meaning of symbols, for themselves and for consumers to understand the meaning of Bondens egen Marknad. The communication platform was designed by branding consultant John Higson to market unique values of the farmers market that could not be easily imitated by competitors. He trademarked the slogan, “Bondens egen Marknad” in order to protect the farmers market idea. According to Higson, this communication

made it possible for the producers to shape the way the consumers saw them and shape the way producers interacted together.

The unique values that created a message about this idea, included “local”, “diversity”, “direct contact”, “transparency”, “freshness”, and starting in the second year “grassroots” (relationship building) (John Higson interview, 2009). The goal of John Higson was to empower farmers to capitalize on the added value that they themselves create. This mix of six unique values created a rich picture of what consumers could and could not find at the Bondens egen Marknad.

As the producers started to communicate with each other using these shared values or symbols, they started to view and experience their interaction with customers as an “imagined” member of the organization. John Higson believes that this standard communication platform was one of the greatest successes of the Bondens egen Marknad because it gave the consumer a clear message about what they could expect at the farmers market. Shibutani called this organization of people a “reference group” or in other words Bondens egen Marknad society. The “Individuals are able to see their own actions “from the generalized standpoint, anticipate the relations of others, inhibit undesirable impulses, and thus guide [their own] conduct” (Charon, 1995, p.163). We explore the relevance of the reference group when we introduce how this changes the actions of producers as they build a relationship with consumers. All farmers would send the same message with the same unique values to the consumers. This organization used the communication platform to set a standard for the Bondens egen Market and to separate themselves from the competitors.

Role Taking and Exploring Motives: Getting to know the other

In the case of the Bondens egen Marknad, the producers described at least four characteristics of those who might come to the farmers market. Producers were described as “social people” who enjoy selling their goods to consumers and who enjoy being “experimental” and the most common consumers were said to be elderly women and young families. Both the producer and the consumer have the ability to move outside their own view of reality and take on the view of someone else. Not only did people create symbols to describe what the farmers market is or who to communicate it with others, but also they create symbols to understand other people. As producers take the role of the others and describe their motives, they create identities to describe the other participants of the farmers market.

“We know what we are doing as we communicate, we intend our communication to be understood by the one to whom we communicate; as we communicate we imagine our own communication from the perspective of the other. We are understood because we try to share a message; we are understood if and when the other sees our symbols as we see it.”

- George Herbert Mead (Charon, 1995, p.111)

Producers taking an imagined perspective of others by characterizing producers as experimental or social and consumers as young families or elderly women is what George Herbert Mead called, “role taking.” Taking the role of the other is a way of imagining the meaning behind why someone is acting in a certain way. Participants verbalize motives as reasons for acting in a certain way or the reason they have gone in a certain direction and use them to rationalize and

justify their own actions...to be truly understood they need to be placed into the larger context or the definition of the situation (Charon, 1995, p.134). By putting themselves in the position of the other, they start to describe the motives of other.

Social People and Experimental Farmers

The producers described the other producers as social people and producers who like to experiment on their farm. All of the producers stated that the direct contact with customers was more important than the financial benefits of the farmers market, even when a producer was completely reliant on the farmers market for their income. One producer said that he believes other producers come to the Bondens egen Marknad because when they are closer to the people, they are also closer with the money, and closer to their product.

The producers said that their first interest in the market was to earn more money and sell more products, but they stayed because they like to sell their produce and enjoy seeing who is buying their produce. The producers described themselves and other producers as social people. They admitted that coming to the market is heavy work and it isn't easy working the entire day Saturday, but once they are at the market they enjoy the social atmosphere. One producer said, "This idea of a farmers market would not exist, if it wasn't for producers who wanted to meet their customers." Producers said that they enjoyed the act of selling their produce to consumers and talking to other people about their produce.

The farmers markets are also an opportunity for producers to experiment with the varieties of produce they sell and their prepared goods. In the case of two producers who sell prepared foods (marmalades and pickled vegetables) this is a very important aspect of the farmers market for them. One producer said, "I am able to be more creative with my marmalade, have more fun and enjoy making it." Another farmer explained that he is able to use "his fantasies" when creating new products. The farmers market gives him the freedom to grow what he wants and gives him freedom to do what he likes on his farm.

Out of these discussions, an important motivation for producers was revealed. The farmers were able to receive immediate feedback about the popularity and quality of their products from customers. This aspect was accentuated by one producer who said, "I don't just sell any tomato, I sell 'Per's Tomato' and I'm proud of my produce." The producer said that they feel that they are not just selling their produce at the farmers market, but actually selling themselves. They are a piece of the produce they are selling, especially when they give out information and spread their knowledge about what they are selling.

Consumers as Young Families and Elderly Women

Elderly women, sixty years plus, were said to be the most common consumer at most markets. The producers believe they often buy traditional foods. One producer described a situation when elderly women bought an apple from one of the producers and enjoyed the taste of produce. The producer recalls the elderly women saying, "I haven't tasted an apple this good since I was a child." Some producers thought that elderly women are unknowledgeable or even avoid certain unfamiliar varieties of produce such as heirloom tomatoes or yellow carrots that they found

strange or assumed were lower in quality. While other producers emphasized that elderly women were the most knowledgeable about quality produce and traditional types of cooking.

The producers described young families as consumers who were the most interested in where their food was coming from. This was the only group of consumers that would consistently ask about the production methods used on the farm. The producers say that the number of young families has been growing over the years. Some producers said that there are a large number of young families coming to the markets, and others said that the number was quite small.

Producers were surprised to hear that other producers thought the number of young families was substantial and said that it must be because it is exciting for the producers to see more young people coming to the market and that it is now a trend. The producers also like the idea of young families bringing their children to the markets to see what local food looks like and tastes like. Later we will talk about what goals the farmers have that motivate this perspective.

Analyzing Role Taking and Exploring Motives

While taking the role of the other, the producers described motives the other participants had for acting this way. These common themes connect back to the characterization they made about why producers or consumers might come to the farmers market. For example, the growth in large scale agricultural production that has made it harder for smaller farms to compete and has caused the farmers to have less freedom in what they grow on their farm. Another impact has been the popularity of grocery store chains, which forces suppliers to sell in larger quantities and increase the distance between producer and consumer. The producers described the movement in the food industry toward growth in quality and a reduction in quality products causing the consumers to be less knowledgeable about regional varieties of products. The producers also described a rebirth in interest about where food comes from due to food security scares like glass found in chicken and a lack of fresh and tasty produce available in the urban areas. These were all topics the farmers brought up to explain the categorization that had made and helps us understand how they see from the others point of view.

Shared and Divergent Goals: The Farm Production Dilemma

Despite the Bondens egen Marknad organization's attempts to increase transparency at the market through discussions about farm practices, the producers observed that the consumers were more interested in talking about the food preparation techniques and recipes with the producers. According to the producers, consumers rarely take this opportunity to talk directly to producers and they admit to being unsure about why consumers act this way. This situation may be perceived as a dilemma of the farmers market. The market rules dictate that at least one producer should be available at the point of sale that is knowledgeable of the farm production and the producers should guarantee the origin or traceability of their products (appendix 1).

We may analyze this dilemma by exploring the perceived goals of the producers, as producers define the exceptions to this dilemma and when the goals of the organization differ from the individual goals of the producer.

The producers primarily focused on two goals: one from the producer's perspective and one consumer goal described by the producer. The goal most producers acknowledged is stated in the purpose of the Bondens egen Marknad organization: to "disseminate knowledge on the interactions between food and environment in the production of food and build bridges between urban and rural areas and thereby help to create a positive orientation to the local-produced raw materials, food and garden products" (Appendix 2). Most of the producers expressed a goal to educate urban residents about the benefits of buying locally. Producers perceived, consumers come to the farmers market to support the health and well-being for themselves or their families. Producers explained their reasoning for perceiving this goal by explaining exceptions to the dilemma: why did producers not ask about farm practices?

As we move from exploring motives to introducing the defined goals of different participants, defining the difference between motives and goals becomes necessary. Symbolic interactionists make a clear distinction between goals and motives. Within the realm of social science, motives are underlying traits that are brought into the situation by the actor. Symbolic interactionists believe that participants often overemphasize the importance of motives in a situation (Charon, 1995, p.134). This is because goals, unlike motives, are thought to be ever changing, defined in relation to the situation and constantly being redefined.

Exceptions to the dilemma became apparent on two occasions – speaking with meat producers and conversations with young families. Meat producers felt that consumers talked about the farm practices, comparing the large price difference between conventional meat sold at the grocery store and the meat sold at the farmers market. The producers perceived that the consumers were concerned about their health and safety because they spoke about the how the quality of meat differed, for example one customer was looking for chicken without a chemical additive, normally used in large-scale processing plants. Producers explained the importance of sharing their knowledge about farming practices with the consumers because it was crucial to them to produce that way and they were proud of the difference between small-scale and large-scale production.

Producers also believed that young families were asking, more than other consumers were, about different production methods, as stated earlier in the discussion on role taking. The producers described conversations they remembered with customers about two books written by Mats-Eric Nilsson "Den hemlige kocken," and "Äkta vara." For the producers these books increased the awareness about the food industry for consumers and made them more conscious about the food they bought. The producers felt that this was an opportunity for them to share their knowledge about how they overcome these dangers by using small-scale production, such as taking more time with processing and focusing more on quality rather than quantity. This was the way they proved that the consumer were looking for ways to learn more about how they could improve their health.

In one case, a producer did not agree with the goal of the organization. Instead of creating an "ideological" message about local food and direct contact, the producers wanted to focus on a less-alternative message about the quality of the good. Consequently, appealing to the apparent goals of the consumer. As stated above, the producers are not only selling food, they are selling themselves. The producers are learning what the consumers want. One farmer said, "we need

teach ourselves more about these things – nutrition etc – so we are to talk with consumers.” As consumers ask producers for food tips and recipes, the producer realized that this goal is important to the consumer and the producer describes a change in their own actions to fit the goals of the others. In this case, the producer noticed that the consumers were more interested in finding quality, fresh, and tasty produce and not very interested in being educated about why they should eat local food.

When consumers ask producers about their farm production this allows the producers to fulfill their goals to educate the consumer and the consumer has the opportunity to feel more secure about the food they are eating. These goals described by the producers are important to them because they would like to build trust between consumers and producers and feel a sense of interdependence between the participants. These two themes are elaborated upon in the next two sections.

“Farmor Marmelad”: Trust-Building

When consumers come to the farmers market, they need to trust that the producers will tell them the truth about how their products were produced. Otherwise, as the customer representative on the farmer board noted, “people think it is too expensive and they think they will be cheated by the farmers.” This worry presented by a customer is exemplified by a story a producer about a brand of marmalade that stole the “farmer brand” or the added value of a product made directly by farmers.

This marmalade, lets call it “Farmor Marmelad,” Grandma’s Marmalade in English, was sold at a market (not Bondens egen Marknad) in a booth next to a producer who sold homemade marmalade made from local ingredients. Farmor Marmelad is made in a large factory and the product is packaged to look like it is homemade, “Just like grandma made it for you.” The producer was upset because it was sold at a cheaper price than she could afford to sell her product.

Throughout the discussions with producers, they often signified trust-building as a necessary precondition and recurring phenomenon of the Bondens egen Marknad. The Farmor Marmelad is special to the producer and the producer hopes the consumer will realize this too. This makes talking about the farm production used even more relevant and necessary. Consumers need to trust that the producers will tell them the truth about how their products are produced, and that the product has extra value because of the difference in the farm practices used.

“Julskina” Christmas Ham: Importance of Interdependence

All of the producers stated that their relationship with customers was even more important for them than the financial benefit. One producer said, “The customer has to understand our situation because we don’t know what will happen in the future.” After stating this, the producer explained that it is important to build a relationship between consumers and producers. If there was a crisis and the large-scale agriculture system failed, it was important to have small links made between consumers and producers for food security. The story of the Christmas Ham illustrates the producers want to be needed by the customers and the perceived interdependence

on each other. Carl Couch defines interdependence as cooperative symbolic interaction. As the producers attempt to coordinate their action with the consumer, they perceive this interaction as interdependent (Charon, 1995, p.161). This shared perspective between producers and consumers is an interdependence perceived by the producers: the producers need to feel validated by consumers and the producers reliant on producers that excel at attracting consumers.

Many of the producers told a lyrical story about the popularity of the Christmas ham, “Julskina,” in Swedish. The story goes as follows. The Saturday before Christmas Eve, the producers have the last farmers market of the season called the Julmarknad, Christmas Market in English. Many customers come to buy what they need for the Christmas holidays and the most popular producer is the one who sells the Christmas ham. Customers start a line up in front of the ham producers table long before the market is officially open and within a couple hours of selling, until all of the ham sold out.

In order to show that customers need them, the producers told stories about customers reaching into the baskets of food, pulling out their favorite products before they have time to set up their market table. One producer said, “Sometimes we have to ask them to wait, so that we can enjoy a cup of coffee before we start the busy day.” We may interpret this description of interdependence as the need for producers to feel validated for their hard work. If they feel appreciated now, they will feel secure continuing producing for the farmers market in the future.

The Christmas Ham story also demonstrates to one of the hardest parts about organizing a farmers market: finding and keeping producers. Producers that attract many customers are hard to find and hard to keep. Since the organization has kept strict standards on what kind of producers can come to the market, it is very difficult to keep the number of producers at the market growing. The organization hopes to find producers that can build up a good reputation with the customers, so that the customers will continue to come back year after year. Many producers gave an example of a perceived decline in customers when a well-known apple producer left the farmers market. This is a problem for the farmer market because producers depend very much on other producers to come because consumers get used to shopping with certain producers and when one of them leaves, there is a chance that they will lose the customer entirely. For that reason, the Christmas ham exemplifies the perceived interdependence between participants at the farmers market and, the importance of educating consumers about their goal, why what they are doing is worthwhile.

Building Relationships through Interaction

One of the unique qualities of the Bondens egen Marknad is the ability for customers to have direct contact with customers. Producers feel that this is important because consumers can ask questions about the food, for example farm practices, food tips and recipes. The interaction also brings consumers and producers closer to one another. They are able to observe the other, act towards each other, create each other’s identities, and form closer relationships.

The customer representative said, “I think we are both curious of each other. The customers are curious about the farmers and the farmers are curious about us.” When producer and consumer meet at the farmers market for the first time, they are searching for information about the other

by observing their manner, appearance, and the setting of the situation. This occurs at the market before the producers even start to speak with customers. It is important for consumers because they can start to feel comfortable in the situation. "The consumer needs to be able to look into the eyes of the farmer and to see how they look and act and see how they are," said a producer.

Humans are aware this occurs and we change ourselves so that others see us the way we want them to see us. The activity of managing, influencing, and affecting others impressions of us is what Goffman calls, the "performance" (Charon, 1995, p.175). The producers explained that certain farmers enjoy, "putting on a show" by acting more farmer-like. In some cases, the opposite occurred and the performances of producers were found unacceptable by the organization. Producers described some farmers who wore filthy clothes, smoked or even came drunk to the farmers market and the organization later agreed that smoking and drinking would not be allowed in the farmers market area. These were both ways for the producers to act in a way that was accepted in the eyes of the organization or "society" with consumers in mind.

After interacting together for some time, the consumer starts to see the producer beyond their appearance. This is what Erving Goffman described as creating identity or others as a social object, like producers categorizing customers into elderly women and young families. Goffman insisted that creating identity is not simply the individual deciding how they are going to act by themselves. Charon states, "Creating identity is an active negotiation process between who others tell us we are and our continuous attempts to present who we think we are to others" (1995, p.152-153). People are dependent on the interaction of each other, in the creation of one another's identity.

The customer representative described customers who attempt to, "get to know the human being, behind the farmer." There was a "stereotypical farmer," a big burley man who wore overalls and flannel, and once she started getting to know him, she realized that he was not only a farmer, but also an electrician and engineer and this was just something he was doing for fun. She has to know the human inside the farmer "shell."

Producers described the importance of consumers finding a "favorite producer." Producers described the connection that they see between consumers and producers. Most consumers visit the same producer week after week because they have "hit it off." They gradually start to see each other as friends and "act like they are part of the family." Many producers said it is "nice to visit with friends and it gives me the energy to go forward with my business." This has been one of the biggest influences of all the producers. The relationship with consumers is one of the biggest motives and involves the goals of the producers as well, making trust-building, interdependence, and relationship the essential elements of the farmers market.

Conclusion

As participants described the Bondens egen Marknad, they created a symbolic common language that set the preconditions for their interaction with each other. People identified what local food and direct contact meant and this created a sense of understanding of what was to be expected at the farmers market. As the founding of the organization was explained, the participants described how this mixture of farmers market “values” allowed the producers to feel part of the organization and communicate a shared message with consumers.

As producers take the role of the other creating motives for participants they identify with producers who like socializing and experimenting. They find the best channels among elderly women looking for traditional foods, and young families who are concerned about where their food comes from. These participants, classified by the producers allow us to understand why the participants act the way they do and how they see the larger societal context is affected by the growth of agricultural corporations and the food monopoly.

The goals of the consumers and producers at the farmers market are explained through the conversations they have with one another. Producers describe the dilemma: Why are consumers asking more about food tips and recipes than about farm production? In the course of describing the exceptions and divergent goals, the producers describe a situation where they are acting upon not just the goals they have placed upon themselves, but the supposed goals they have determined for consumers as well.

The perceptions of trust-building and interdependence are significant for the continuation of the Bondens egen Marknad. Consumers need to trust that the added-values of the farmer brand indeed exist and that the Bondens egen Marknad represents these values. The need for producers to feel affirmation for their work and the producer’s reliance on each other to keep consumers coming to the farmers market allows the producers to paint a picture of interdependence that is integral for the existence of the market’s society itself.

Producers demonstrate the potential for the Bondens egen Marknad to build relationships between producers and consumers that ultimately creating a bond that keeps consumers and producers coming back to the farmers market week after week, year after year. They describe the importance of participants coming closer to one another, and while coming closer, changing their own actions to match the identity others have created for them, going beyond their own assumptions about the others, and gradually building a closer relationship.

Further research is needed on the perspectives of consumers and perceptions about trust-building and interdependence at farmers markets before further conclusions and suggestions can be drawn. This thesis shines some light on the why people may come to the farmers market and continue to go after many years, allowing us to step into the shoes of those who may have the capacity to strengthen the flexibility and adaptability of these markets in the future.

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Appendix 1: Bondens egen Marknad Rules

Box 1: The Rules for selling produce at a farmer market in Sweden

- 1) The named producer on the application form must be the one producing the food. The producer cannot sell articles bought from other growers or suppliers
- 2) Producers are allowed to work with each other, as long as they display signs that indicate the cooperation.
- 3) Only farm products can be sold, this includes fruit, vegetables, herbs, eggs, meat, cheese, honey and products from bee keeping, cordial and juice, jams, preserves and similar goods, baked products plus plants. Cut flowers and flower arrangements can be sold if they are produced and arranged by the producers. Other products than those named above are not allowed to be sold unless there is a special arrangement with the organisers. Processed products main ingredients should be grown by the producer, ingredients for spices can be bought outside of the farm. The producer can also send their goods away for processing as long as they come back to the producers for selling.
- 4) Selling in the market area before or after the official market time is forbidden
- 5) Producers are responsible for following the rules for production, presentation, labelling, branding and sales of goods
- 6) The producer is responsible for taking away all rubbish from the market, public litterbins are not to be used, the market should be left in the condition it was found
- 7) Producers must place prices and their name clearly for the consumer as well as give accurate information as to the goods source and production
- 8) The market organiser can visit the stalls at any time to ensure that the rules are being followed. If there is a suspicion that rules are not being followed it should be reported in a signed letter
- 9) Every producer must have the correct insurance. The producer is responsible to defend and protect the market organiser from possible claims for damages due to loss, injury, and costs of responsibility during the participation in the market.
- 10) All products must have been grown or raised within a 250 km from the market
- 11) The organiser's decisions concerning the markets are final.

Source (BeM 2005)

(Nilsson, 2006)

Appendix 2: Purpose of Bondens egen Marknad

The Association has the objective to promote the market involved the interests of its members by:

1. Contribute to the creation of market places for small-scale local production where activities related to rural areas.
2. Develop entrepreneurship, business and market thinking of the members so that they reinforce its position in a long-term competitive way.
3. Help to create long-term marketing channels for producers with small-scale production in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and horticulture.
4. Disseminate knowledge on the interactions between food and environment in the production of food and build bridges between urban and rural areas and thereby help to create a positive orientation to the local-produced raw materials, food and garden products.
5. Help to establish contacts between producers and consumers.
6. Own and develop the contents of the club-owned brands and related concepts and
7. Engage with the foregoing activities.

(uppdaterade enligt årsmötet 2009-03-09)

(BeM, personal email, 2009)

**translated using google translate

Appendix 3: Concept of Bondens egen Marknad

About Farmers' Market in Sweden

Imagine a traditional local market...

The air is full of exciting smells of new-baked bread and fresh vegetables. A crowd of customers between the market stalls are doing their shopping and discussing crop growing and animal rearing with the farmers who produced the goods on sale. The customers walk around in a sea of colours and can taste local specialties no longer to be found in the shops. The produce on the market is guaranteed to be the freshest available, often harvested the same day and transported only a short distance.

There is now a growing demand among consumers for healthy, environmentally sound products that help to promote sustainable development. People are looking for an alternative to food that is transported all over the globe, sprayed in order to withstand transport, and stored for months. Farmers' markets offer an answer!

A farmers' market is characterized by locally grown and reared produce, all of it from farms near the place where it is held. In the United Kingdom, farmers' markets began with support from local Agenda 21 offices. By the time the pilot project had come to an end, they had become self-supporting. Today more than 200 farmers' markets exist in the UK – developed from the first one set up in September 1997. In the United States, 100 markets were established during the first year, and the latest known figure is 3,500. In that country, farmers' markets have nearly one and a half million customers every year – which bodes well for their future in Sweden!

Two rules which make farmers' markets unique:

Producers only

Farmers must grow or rear all the products they offer for sale on the market. The main ingredients in processed foods, such as marmalade, fruit juice or sausage, also have to come from the stallholder's own farm. Some farmers may share a stall, but they must always display a sign clearly declaring that they are doing so.

Locally grown produce

All the farms involved are located within a 250 km radius of the market place and are therefore seen as "local producers".

For the benefit of consumers, producers and the environment

Farmers' markets significantly reduce "food miles", i.e. the number of miles food has to travel to end up on the consumer's plate. The classic example is a portion of spaghetti Bolognese: when you add together the travelling all the products in this dish have done, it amounts to a trip from Stockholm to Göteborg (500 km) and back!

Ecologically sustainable production is encouraged and rewarded by customers. Because of their many environmental advantages, farmers' markets are also supported by local authorities, and local communities can use them as a platform for ongoing efforts in the context of Agenda 21.

The local community

One of the greatest advantages of a farmers' market is the way it can spread information and encourage a change of attitude. In both the UK and the US, the meeting between consumer and farmer is serving as a door opener and a catalyst for the message of a sustainable society. Local authorities in these countries have themselves initiated farmers' markets, on account of the real benefits which they have been shown to bring for local communities.

The consumer

One of the main reasons for the success of farmers' markets is that they give consumers the chance to speak to food producers direct about crop growing and animal rearing. The wide variety of organic produce available, the friendly atmosphere and the fact that products follow the seasons are also highly valued. The products on sale are guaranteed to be the freshest ones available, often harvested the same day.

Grocery stores

Although farmers' markets were initially seen as a threat in both the UK and the US, grocery stores and supermarkets have begun to see the benefits they can bring, both as a complement and as a stimulus to their own trade. Farmers' markets offer a wide variety of locally produced specialities which are not available to regular stores, and the two sides have therefore begun to cooperate. In the UK, 50 farmers' markets are now held outside stores between March and November.

The farmer

Farmers' markets allow products to be sold directly, without middlemen, which means that the price paid for them goes straight to the farmers. These markets are a good thing for small business, for organic agriculture, and in terms of providing space for a wider variety of products. In other countries, farmers' markets have in particular been successful in protecting and marketing regional specialities.

Cultural heritage

In the middle of the last century a large number of local specialities could still be obtained in Sweden. Today's efficient, large-scale distribution channels do not allow them to reach consumers, and they are therefore rapidly disappearing. This is happening despite the considerable demand for produce of this kind. Crop rotation has been shown to be better for the environment, and many farmers want to produce in this way.

Translated information from Swedish Farmers' Market.

Artur Granstedt

The Biodynamic Research Institute, Skilleby, 153 91 Järna, Sweden.

Phone: +46-8 551 577 02

Fax: +46-8 551 577 81

arturgranstedt@jdb.se sbfi@jdb.se.

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