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# Tourism, Place Branding and the Local-Turn in Food: The New Nordic Cuisine/ Tourismus, Place Branding und die Hinwendung zu lokalen Produkten: Die New Nordic Cuisine

Can-Seng Ooi und Jesper Strandgaard

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## Abstract

This paper looks at the branding of Copenhagen as food destination through the advent of the New Nordic Cuisine. The New Nordic Cuisine (NNC) offers two destination branding ‘puzzles’. The first puzzle is that a destination brand should accentuate the authenticity and uniqueness of the locality. This allows relevant stakeholders—e.g. attraction managers, tourism promotion authorities, restaurants and tour operators—to frame their tourism services and products, and make their offerings stand-out against those in competing destinations. Branding a destination as part of a ‘bloc’, in this case ‘New Nordic Cuisine’, is counter intuitive especially when members of the region compete with each other for tourists. Furthermore the NNC is a recent invention. The second puzzle is the ‘local-turn’; using local and seasonal produce is the main focus in the NNC. This concept is neither new nor original and can be easily adapted for other places. How does this idea work for destination branding? This paper addresses these two puzzles. Firstly, the case of NNC shows how a vague and ambiguous term like ‘Nordic’ can be a focal-point for local and international audiences. The term remains vague and ambiguous, and means different things to different people. New meanings are inserted into the unclear term, for instance the

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C.-S. Ooi (✉)

Department of International Economics and Management, Copenhagen Business School,  
Frederiksberg, Dänemark  
E-Mail: cso.int@cbs.dk

J. Strandgaard

Department of Organization, Copenhagen Business School, Frederiksberg, Dänemark  
E-Mail: js.ioa@cbs.dk

NNC go-local values are packaged, marketed and celebrated as part of a Nordic-identity. The tourism authorities did not attempt to refine the term but instead perpetuate the broad understanding of the NNC. It is not about communicating an authentic message but a message that resonates with different audiences. Secondly, the brand message issue is not what is authentically or uniquely Danish but what others imagine an authentic and unique Denmark to be. Even though the NNC is a newly invented tradition, visitors can 'reaffirm' the imagined authenticity and uniqueness of the destination. They may feel that they have experienced the 'real' Copenhagen as a result.

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit der Markenbildung Kopenhagens als kulinarische Destination in Zusammenhang mit dem Aufkommen der New Nordic Cuisine. Die New Nordic Cuisine (NNC) bietet zwei Herausforderungen für die Markenbildung einer Destination. Die erste Herausforderung besteht darin, dass eine Destinationsmarke die Authentizität und Einzigartigkeit des Orts betonen soll. Dies erlaubt relevanten Stakeholdern – z. B. Manager von Ausflugszielen/Sehenswürdigkeiten, Tourismusmarketingorganisationen, Restaurants und Reiseveranstaltern – ihre touristischen Dienstleistungen und Produkte so zu gestalten, dass ihre Angebote im Wettbewerb der Destinationen herausstechen. Die Bildung einer Destinationsmarke als Teil eines großen regionalen Zusammenschlusses, in diesem Fall New Nordic Cuisine ist unvernünftig, vor allem wenn die Teilnehmer dieses regionalen Zusammenschlusses miteinander im Wettbewerb um Touristen stehen. Zudem ist New Nordic Cuisine eine junge Erfindung. Die zweite Herausforderung ist die Hinwendung zum Lokalen (local turn). Die Verwendung lokaler und saisonaler Produkte steht im Mittelpunkt der NNC. Dieses Konzept ist weder neu, noch originell und kann relativ leicht an andere Orte angepasst werden. Wie kann dies für die Marketingbildung einer Destination eingesetzt werden? Dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich mit diesen beiden Herausforderungen. Zuerst zeigt sich im Fall der NNC, dass ein vager und schwammiger Begriff wie „Nordic“ im Fokus der lokalen und internationalen Zielgruppen steht. Der Begriff bleibt vage und schwammig und hat für viele auch eine unterschiedliche Bedeutung. Dieser unklare Terminus wird mit neuen Bedeutungsinhalten besetzt. So werden beispielsweise die lokalorientierten Werte der NNC gebündelt, vermarktet und als Teil der nordischen Identität gefeiert. Die Tourismusbehörden haben keinerlei Versuch unternommen diesen Begriff weiterzuentwickeln bzw. zu konkretisieren. Im Gegenteil, sie führen das weit gefasste Verständnis der NNC fort. Es geht nicht darum authentische Botschaften zu kommunizieren, sondern Botschaften, die bei unterschiedlichen Zielgruppen Nachhall finden. Zweitens transportieren die Markenbotschaften nicht das, was das authentische und besondere Dänische darstellt, sondern das, was sich andere unter einem authentischen und einzigartigen Dänemark vorstellen. Auch wenn die NNC eine neu eingeführte Tradition

darstellt, können die Besucher ihre Vorstellungen zur Authentizität und Einzigartigkeit der Destination nochmals bestätigen. Sie werden sich fühlen, als ob Sie das echte Kopenhagen erleben.

### Keywords

New Nordic Cuisine · Food Destination · Destination Branding · Authenticity · Local-Turn

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## 8.1 Introduction

“In the last five years, a new culinary movement has washed through the world’s top kitchens, flowing... from Copenhagen, Stockholm and points as far north as Lapland ... The style of cooking is most closely associated with ...chef, René Redzepi of Noma in Copenhagen ... It is earthy and refined, ancient and modern, both playful and deeply serious. Instead of the new (techniques, stabilizers, ingredients), it emphasizes the old (drying, smoking, pickling, curing, smoking) with a larger goal of returning balance to the earth itself” (Moskin 2011).

The New Nordic Cuisine (NNC) is a newly invented food tradition that has been entrenched into the image and identity of Copenhagen. Despite its short tradition, the NNC success has made the Danish capital into a food destination, and has generated culinary pride in Denmark and to a certain extent, the Nordic region.

Gastronationalism has been a source of national branding and identity expression through food (DeSoucey 2010). This study investigates the branding of Copenhagen as a food destination. While the NNC has drawn attention to Copenhagen as a food Mecca, the city is promoting itself its food culture beyond the NNC. Among other things, Copenhagen Cooking—a 10-day event that celebrates eating-out in the city—celebrates the Danish capital as a food destination together with other food events like CPH Street Food, CPH Harvest Festival and Dining Week.

Besides documenting the NNC contribution to the making of Copenhagen as a food destination (Healy 2014), this paper also addresses two destination branding ‘puzzles’. The first puzzle is that a destination brand should accentuate the authenticity and

uniqueness of the locality (see Morgan et al. 2004). This allows relevant stakeholders—e.g. attraction managers, tourism promotion authorities, restaurants and tour operators—to frame their tourism services and products, and make their offerings stand-out against those in competing destinations. Branding a destination as part of a ‘bloc’, in this case ‘New Nordic Cuisine’, is counter intuitive especially when members of the region compete with each other for tourists. Furthermore, the NNC is a recent invention (Byrkjeflot et al. 2013). The second puzzle is the ‘local-turn’; using local and seasonal produce is the main focus in the NNC. This concept is neither new nor original and can be easily adapted for other places. How does this idea work for destination branding?

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## 8.2 Data Collection

This study is built on interviews with leading chefs, entrepreneurs, politicians, scholars, tourism promotion officers and journalists who were known in shaping the content and spirit of the NNC movement in Denmark. The interviews included a two-hour meeting with a group of representatives from the Nordic Council of Ministers. An interview was also conducted with Martin Bender, the then-Vice President and initiator of the Copenhagen Cooking festival in Wonderful Copenhagen (WoCo), the tourism promotion agency of the city. Various archival data (e.g. reports by consultants, documents by national Ministries) were collected and analyzed. Press articles, documentaries, leaflets, cooking books and websites were also used. Because of the word restriction imposed on this paper, elaboration with data is limited here.

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## 8.3 New Nordic Cuisine, Copenhagen Cuisine, Copenhagen Cooking and Branding Copenhagen

Copenhagen has become a global food destination. This fame stems partly from the publicity of gourmet restaurant Noma when it was voted and ranked “The San Pellegrino Best Restaurant in the World” in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2014 (and ranked 2nd in 2013 and 3rd in 2015). Noma is part of the NNC movement (Byrkjeflot et al. 2013). Noma opened in 2003 in Copenhagen by Chef Rene Redzepi and gastro-entrepreneur Claus Meyer. The NNC principle celebrates local produce and seasonal ingredients, among other things. The NNC venture is institutionalized through a series of initiatives, including a ‘Manifesto’ signing by many famous Nordic chefs in 2004 at a symposium, and in 2005, the establishment of the ‘Aarhus Declaration’ which is the official endorsement by Nordic governments, giving support to programs related to the “New Nordic Food—Enhancing Innovation in the Food, Tourism, and Experience Industry”. A number of NNC restaurants have since opened in the region, and many are bestowed with Michelin stars, and listed as ‘World’s Best Restaurants’. Such recognition is an advantage for the tourism industry—restaurants have become ‘destination restaurants’. Copenhagen, as already

mentioned, is now featured prominently in gastronomy tourism reviews around the world. The following offers a timeline of selected milestones in the emergence of the NNC.

### 8.3.1 Selected Milestones in the New Nordic Cuisine Movement

- 2003** Restaurant Noma opens in Copenhagen. First season of Scandinavian Cooking on American PBS Channel, hosted by Norwegian TV-chef Andreas Viestad, later to be followed by Swedish cook Tina Nordstrøm and Danish gastronomic entrepreneur Claus Meyer, shown in 130 countries, attracting over 100 million viewers.
- 2004** Manifesto for New Nordic Cuisine launched in Copenhagen
- 2005** Aarhus Declaration signed in Denmark; Nordic Council of Ministers declares support for NNC and launched a New Nordic Food programme
- 2006** Nordic Council announces funding and the New Nordic Food I (NNF I) programme for 2007–2009 with DKK 25 Million budgeted; Noma #33 on San Pellegrino 50 best restaurants list (SP-list).
- 2007** Nordic food laboratory established in Copenhagen; Noma bestowed with 2nd Michelin star, advances to #15 on SP-list
- 2008** Elite international gastronomy competition Bocuse d’or Europe held in Stavanger, Norway; Scandinavia is Guest of Honor at the international gastronomy congress “Madrid Fusión”; Noma #10 on SP-list
- 2009** NNF I evaluated; study concludes NNF can create wealth for Nordic countries (MAPP Aarhus); Noma # 3 on SP-list; WoCo launches Copenhagen Cooking
- 2010** Noma #1 on the SP-list; Redzepi publishes cookbook: ‘Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine’
- 2011, 2012, and 2014** Noma #1 on the SP-list

(Source: Adapted from Byrkjeflot et al. 2013)

### 8.3.2 Branding Copenhagen with NNC

The relationship between tourism and other industries is a complicated one. Close cooperation can be difficult because of high coordination costs and large differences in interests and agendas (Ooi and Strandgaard Pedersen 2010). Copenhagen Cooking is a 10-day event organized by WoCo to entrench the city as a food destination. The then Vice-President of WoCo, Martin Bender, who was tasked to create events for the city stated that he was not sure if the industry would support the initiative:

We started the Copenhagen Design and Architecture Week and it didn’t succeed because the industry didn’t want to work together with us. But Copenhagen Cooking was a success. It could just as well failed. We were lucky. It’s also about timing—to be at the right place at the right time. [...] We also tried to start up a contemporary art festival but that was also very hard. You need to be anchored very well in the local environment and business.

Copenhagen Cooking aims to promote the food and restaurant culture in the city, with a strong focus on NNC. It is to create global awareness of the city:

It's mainly a PR [public relations] event. It is branded mainly through PR. You invite journalists and they come in buses. Then you show them the best the city has and they write some great articles about it.

Noma, the restaurant seems to serve a similar function for Copenhagen. Bender said:

Noma had a huge impact, but what happened was that when journalists come and want to eat at Noma, the world's best restaurant, but they can't get a reservation immediately [...]. But then they found out that there are extremely high quality restaurants in Copenhagen and they started writing about them. [...] You will see [the same] journalist write about contemporary art at Vesterbro and then about new chefs in Nørrebro, and the new building at the waterfront by Bjarke Ingels, or whatever [...] That's why food is such a gift.

Even though Copenhagen is in the Nordic region, the NNC refers to more than Copenhagen and Denmark—it refers to the entire Nordic region that spans across a large part of Europe—Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, the Aaland Islands, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The conventional view of destination branding is that the brand should accentuate the uniqueness of the locality (Morgan et al. 2004). This allows relevant stakeholders to frame and make their offerings stand-out against competing regional destinations. Branding a large region as a destination, or 'bloc' branding, is counter intuitive especially when members of the region are somewhat competitors for tourists. When this observation was presented, Bender reflected:

I remember I was sitting in Dubai the first year Noma [was named Best Restaurant in the world] and the same day we moved the Little Mermaid to Shanghai [World Expo 2010], which was quite a story. I was at an international conference. When I told people that I am from Denmark, Copenhagen, they said, 'Oh congratulations!'

'About the Little Mermaid?'

'No no, about NOMA.'

I think that's where I understood that it [Noma] was maybe a little bigger. There's something with the letters, Noma... Nordic... And the journalists just call it the Nordic kitchen [...] I would have loved if it was called Copenhagen Style, but it wasn't.

Noma indeed is the main champion of NNC. The bloc message was not originally in the branding strategy. It was however opportunistically used when the global media ignorantly or otherwise imagined the Nordic region as a somewhat monolith, and Noma and Copenhagen represent the region.

The block of Nordic countries are not working together in the NNC and not making the region a mega food attraction. In fact, the attempt failed. Bender explained why. Copenhagen as a destination is relatively more global and the NNC parties are trying to make NNC accessible to all. On the other hand, the other destinations, translated the NNC concept according to their own local agendas. 'We were at two different places,' Bender succinctly summed up. Regardless, he added:

We still call it Nordic because that's what the journalists expect to hear, but the idea of having all the [Nordic] countries working together is not going to work.

So in spite of the 'empty label' open for interpretation (Byrkjeflot et al. 2013) and the lack of coordination between destinations in the Nordic region, that the term does not communicate a unique message about Copenhagen, the NNC has come associated with Noma and the city. This indicates that the term is vague and ambiguous to international audiences. This has turned out to be quite beneficial for WoCo, as Copenhagen is seen to be the seat of 'Nordicity'. As will be discussed later, such a destination branding strategy has implications in the development of destination branding theories.

Another puzzle in the NNC branding of Copenhagen is the principle behind the food movement. The NNC is a relatively new invention and seems inspired by several sources—the French notion of 'terroir', the localness of the Slow Food Movement and the filmmaking concept Dogma95 (in its use of declarations and guidelines). As mentioned, the NNC promotes locally produced and seasonal ingredients. This idea is attractive but not original. When it was first introduced in the early 2000s, it was ridiculed in public, their peers and by the media. For example, when Noma opened ... 'The rest of the Danish restaurant world laughed at Noma's gastronomic concept' (Skyum-Nielsen 2010, p. 11) and provided it with nicknames, like: 'Restaurant Lard Thrasher', 'The Whale Belly', 'The Dry Fish' and 'The Golden Harpoon'. But since then, the go-local message has caught on. There are a number of positive connotation and notions that come with the NNC and the go-local principle.

The first notion is the romantic view of local authenticity. It indicates a celebration of the local and the locality, in contrast to food from industrial agricultural production and imports. By going local, one imagines supporting local villages and farms, with an emphasis on quality rather than costs. It celebrates local knowledge and the traditional local kitchen. Images of NNC chefs foraging in the forests or in their backyards to collect ingredients are burned into the public imagination. This image may not be accurate as local ingredients can also be produced industrially.

The second notion is that local ingredients are fresher and of a higher quality because they take a shorter time to be transported from local farms or just from the restaurants' backyard. With fresh quality ingredients, the dishes will inevitably be healthier and tastier. This is also an assumption.

The third notion ties with the current concern with the environment. Besides lowering fuel needed for transportation, many of the ingredients are collected in nature. It requires the chefs to know the local environment well, for example, what is edible in nature and be intimate with the biodiversity of the region in order to re-discover substitutes of high quality (for example rapeseed oil instead of olive oil). The NNC provides demonstrates what nature offers to humankind.

**Example**

This ‘go-local’ principle can be adapted for other places. Claus Meyer’s venture of applying the principles of NNC in Bolivia is an example, and this also works for Noma’s internationalization strategy. It set up a pop-up restaurant in London during the 2012 summer Olympics, and for a month in 2015, it was in Tokyo.

Copenhagen and Denmark benefit from the positive images that come with the NNC and Noma. Noma and the NNC are now associated with quality food, and that means Denmark has the ingredients to host the best restaurant in the world.

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## 8.4 Conclusions: Theorizing Destination Branding

This paper contributes to the empirical documentation of the NNC movement. It also highlighted two destination branding puzzles in the context of the NNC and branding Copenhagen. The branding strategy seems to have worked but the NNC does not make Copenhagen unique, and the principle behind the NNC is applicable to all locations. There are lessons to be learned, and a new set of perspectives may be needed to throw light on destination branding.

Uniqueness and authenticity are often touted as essential elements for destination branding (see review at Ooi 2014). The accreditation theory has already shown that many destination branding programmes do not necessarily aim for these attributes but instead learn from ‘best practices’ and consequently creates destinations that are similar (Ooi 2014). This study again questions the uniqueness and authenticity principles behind conventional destination branding theories.

Firstly, the case of NNC shows how a vague and ambiguous term like ‘Nordic’ can be a focal-point for local and international audiences. The term remains vague and ambiguous, and means different things to different people. New meanings are inserted into the unclear term, for instance the NNC go-local values are packaged, marketed and celebrated as part of a Nordic-identity. The tourism authorities did not attempt to refine the term but instead perpetuate the broad understanding of the NNC. It is not about communicating an authentic message but a message that resonates with different audiences.

Secondly, following from the first point, the brand message issue is not what is authentically or uniquely Danish but what others imagine an authentic and unique Denmark to be. Even though the NNC is a newly invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), visitors can ‘reaffirm’ the imagined authenticity and uniqueness of the destination (McIntosh and Prentice 1999) They may feel that they have experienced the ‘real’ Copenhagen as a result. This experience is partly produced by the focus on history by NNC focusing on re-discovering forgotten techniques and ingredients—contrary to, for example, the Molecular Gastronomy movement that focuses on innovation through new gastronomic techniques.

Lastly, the tourism authorities ride on and play a ‘supporting’ role to the NNC movement. It propagates the messages, and encourages travel writers to present the NNC. There are spillover effects on the other aspects of the destination. Asking tourism authorities to play second fiddle is not an easy task. Understanding when and how tourism and other industries can work together effectively demands more attention. The NNC and branding Copenhagen case is a success story among many less glorious examples.

**Acknowledgement** We gratefully acknowledge the funding from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement CRE8TV.EU–320203 that has enabled us to undertake this research. Specifically, this paper has been derived from Task 2.1.2 and constitutes Deliverable 2.1.2.

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## Über die Autoren

**Can-Seng Ooi, PhD**, is the center director at the Center of Leisure and Culture Services and Professor in international business and culture industries at the Copenhagen Business School. He holds a Master’s degree in research from the University of Singapore. After that he worked as a research assistant at the East and Southeast Asia Regional Office of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and as a sociologist at Singapore’s public housing agency, the housing and development board. He finished his doctoral studies in culture services at the Copenhagen Business School. After that he worked as a lecturer in cultural services management in the division leisure, tourism,

and hospitality at Glasgow Caledonian University. Research interests: sustainability challenges in cities, art world and art industry, place branding, tourism strategy, cross-cultural management, tourism and social media.

**Can-Seng Ooi, PhD**, ist Vorstand des „Center for Leisure and Culture Services“ und Professor für „International Business and Culture Industries“ an der Copenhagen Business School. Er hat ein Masterstudium an der Universität Singapur abgeschlossen und anschließend als wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am East and Southeast Asia Regional Office der Friedrich Naumann Foundation und als Soziologe bei der Singapore Public Housing Agency gearbeitet. Er promovierte an der Copenhagen Business School im Bereich „Culture Services“. Anschließend arbeitete er als Lektor für „Cultural Services Management“ im Bereich „Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality“ der Glasgow Caledonian University. Forschungsschwerpunkte: Nachhaltigkeit im urbanen Raum, Kunst und Kunstindustrie, Markenbildung, Tourismusstrategie, Cross-cultural Management, Tourismus und Social Media.

**Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, PhD**, is a professor at the Department of Organization at the Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. He holds an PhD in Organizational Theory of Copenhagen Business School. Prior to this he studied political science at the University of Copenhagen. Research interests: organization theory, organizational culture and symbolism, institutional theory, organizational integration and transformation, organizing and managing creative and innovative filmmaking enterprises, the role of media and educational institutions in relation to production, diffusion, and consumption of managerial knowledge and management concepts, mergers and acquisitions.

**Jesper Strandgaard Pedersen, PhD**, ist Professor am Department für Organisation an der Copenhagen Business School. Er promovierte zum Thema „Organisationstheorie“ an der Copenhagen Business School und studierte davor Politikwissenschaften an der Universität Kopenhagen. Forschungsschwerpunkte: Organisationstheorie, Organisationskultur und Symbolik, Institutionstheorie, Organisations- und Veränderungsmanagement, Organisationsmanagement kreativer und innovativer Filmstudios, die Rolle der Medien- und Ausbildungsinstitutionen bei der Umsetzung, Verbreitung und Konsumation von Managementwissen und -konzepten, Mergers & Acquisitions.