‘Wellfare delicacies’ as a New Nordic agricultural sustainability concept.
A physiosophical perspective.

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In the article “Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability in Scandinavia: An Overview”, 1 the authors call for the creation of a research paradigm of CSR and sustainability in a Scandinavian context, while also encouraging a critical discussion of the challenges to Scandinavian CSR-performances. The aim of this contribution is to highlight one of the challenges, namely how to ensure a socially and ecologically sustainable agricultural production in Denmark. With the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto 2 as a springboard, this contribution investigates the specific case of “Welfare-delicacies” (Velfærdsdelikatesser), a concept of sustainable animal production developed by the animal welfare organization Dyrenes Beskyttelse 3.

At the basis, the Danish agricultural sector is one of the most intensive and most industrialized in the world. This situation has led to pollution of soil and water, problems of animal welfare and the spread of antibiotics-resistant bacteria from animals to humans. Moreover, recent research suggests that conventional agriculture may have detrimental effects on human fertility. A part from the ecological and social issues, the sector’s huge debt burden also raises questions as to whether it is even economically sustainable. Although the agricultural umbrella organization The Danish Agriculture & Food Council prides itself on sustainability, the question is whether the organization is just moving towards a more explicit CSR-strategy, where efforts are invested in “talking the talk”, but not always in “walking the walk”. Many are calling for a paradigm shift, but the question is how this shift should come into existence.

As a high profile movement in the quest for a paradigm shift, The New Nordic Food Movement has received international attention. But it is still debatable how much the movement has actually changed the Danish consumer habits and agricultural production. It may be argued that structural and mental challenges still hamper the New Nordic Food Movement, keeping it from becoming a full-fledged alternative to conventional agricultural production and consumption habits. In order to identify such challenges and propose ways forward, the present study focuses on the agricultural sustainability concept “Welfare Delicacies”. This concept is closely linked to the New Nordic Food Movement, as the product indications for Welfare Delicacies correspond to all 10 points in the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto. Moreover, several producers of Welfare Delicacies are also suppliers to New Nordic restaurants such as Noma.

In itself, the Welfare Delicacies concept represents an excellent case of emerging sustainability initiatives. By posing the ethical requirements as the sine qua non basis of the concept, it subverts classical CSR-models such as Carroll’s pyramid. Moreover, it encourages responsible stakeholder engagement and joint producer-community value creation. Despite this theoretical excellence, the impact of Welfare Delicacies on the food market is still quite modest. Based on a combination of desk research and field work such as participant observation and explorative interviews, this study investigates the barriers to the spread of
the concept, and discusses what would be needed in order to consolidate and support it as an alternative to conventional agricultural production.

While seeking to identify specific challenges that may prevent the Welfare Delicacies concept from reaching its full potential, this contribution widens the perspective to a more general debate about New Nordic Food and sustainability in the Danish agricultural sector. As a prism for the paradigm shift, it proposes a physiosophy. The term physiosophy is composed by the two concepts [physis], and [sophia], both extracted from Ancient Greek. The first term, [physis], condensates meanings such as “nature”, “nature of the body”, “nature of the mind”, “way of being”, “natural character”, “natural state”, “creative and productive power”. This polysemic complex is joint with the term [sophia], which reaches back to meanings such as “wisdom”, “science”, but also the original meaning: “manual skill”, “ability” (in the [physis]-world). Consequently, physiosophy is not an abstract philosophy, but an approach situated at the nexus of theoretical and practical preoccupations, thus mirroring the 10th “commandment” of the New Nordic Cuisine Manifesto. A physiosophic approach will see humans (and perhaps animals?) as holistic bodily-psychic-cognitive beings embedded in their environment and its web of life-death cycles. The concept does not, however, have the spiritual flavor of ecological movements such as theosophy, the Gaian movement or other similar earth religions. Instead, it draws upon already existing trends within different scientific communities (anthropology, history of ideas, psychology, agro-ecology and animal science). It will be argued that through the prism of the concept physiosophy, these different approaches can be merged into a new understanding of CSR and sustainability with regards to agricultural production, distribution and reception in the public.

NOTE FOR THE REVIEWER: The last paragraph may be deleted, and the previous ones expanded, if the organizers wish to keep a sharp distinction between theoretical and empirical papers.

2 http://newnordicfood.org/about-nnf-ii/new-nordic-kitchen-manifesto/
3 http://www.dyrenesbeskyttelse.dk/velf%C3%A6rdsdelikatesser#OgsZxX8dA5KWdBO3.97