From Label to Practice: The Process of Creating New Nordic Cuisine

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This article examines the process of creation of new Nordic cuisine (NNC) as a culinary innovation, focusing on the main stages, actors, and mechanisms that shaped the new label and its practices and facilitated its diffusion in the region and internationally. Fast-paced diffusion was possible because NNC was conceived as an identity movement, triggered by active involvement of entrepreneurial leaders from the culinary profession, high-profile political supporters, legitimating scientists, disseminating media, and interpreting audiences. It was facilitated by three mechanisms: First, the use of an “empty” label, without a previous meaning in food, yet with positive connotations in other domains, allowed establishing a positive abstract notion open to interpretations and different practices. Second, the invitation for participation and financial support for innovative initiatives allowed for more actors and institutions to develop practices associated with the NNC label. Third, organized dissemination allowed the excitement and engagement with the new label to spread quickly.

KEYWORDS New Nordic Cuisine, culinary innovation, diffusion, identity movement

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New Nordic Cuisine has become a movement, driven by the desire for a common culinary identity and inspired by the excellence of our raw materials. As this movement’s profile grew, the Nordic ministers of food, agriculture and fisheries wanted to play their part, by helping to stimulate creativity and co-ordinate disparate activities towards a common goal.

—Einar Risvik, Chairman of the New Nordic Food program (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2008, p. 5).

New Nordic Cuisine has had a slow trickledown effect... started in Denmark, others who signed it have a more opportunistic approach to it... [and] still pay lip service to it. [It] is more about what you are hoping it will turn into; not many instances of it I’ve seen in practice.

—Andreas Viestad, TV chef (original New Scandinavian Cooking series), (Personal Communication, February 20, 2011, Oslo, Norway).

There has been a growing interest in research on collective identity emergence, adoption, and legitimation. Scholars have examined the construction of meaning and value in emerging categorical identities, such as modern Indian art (Khaire & Wadhwani, 2010) or the grass-fed meat and dairy product movement (Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008). They have also investigated new identity adoption, showing how French chefs migrated from classical to nouvelle cuisine identity (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). In addition, they have provided theoretical insights into nascent identity legitimation by delving into the mediating role of cultural entrepreneurship, which allows for control and coordinate membership expansion through identity and growth stories (Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011).

Gastronationalism has been a source of national branding and identity expression through food (DeSoucey, 2010). In the last decade, the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden)—traditionally reputed for their design, films, and welfare states—have become branded as the world’s new culinary Mecca, recognized for their new Nordic cuisine (NNC), with the best restaurant in the world, according to the S. Pellegrino awards (World’s 50 Best Restaurants, 2012), being the Danish Noma (an abbreviation for Nordisk Mad, which means Nordic Food in Danish) for the last 3 years. Launched with a Manifesto endorsed by reputable local chefs at a culinary symposium in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2004, the NNC has, in a very short time, overcome the reputation for heavy, old-fashioned national kitchens. The chefs from the region have embarked on rediscovering local produce beyond the characteristic smoked salmon, marinated herring, or rye bread. They are shaping a new “taste of the North” with new ingredients such as birch sap, bulrushes, puffin eggs, foraged chickweed, Arctic brambles, and livestock breeds from the times of the Vikings and new approaches to traditional techniques, such as salting, marinating, or smoking (Hallock, 2010; Itoi, 2007).

Major culinary innovations usually entail long periods of fermentation before they become defined and acknowledged, involving, in some cases,
substantial resistance and contestation, as exemplified by the French classical and nouvelle cuisine (Ferguson, 1998, 2004; Rao et al., 2003) or the more recent new Spanish cuisine (Svejenova, Mazza, & Planellas, 2007). How and why did the NNC emerge, get noticed, and gain recognition in such a short time? This article examines the process of creation of the NNC as a culinary innovation, focusing on the main stages, actors, and mechanisms that helped shape the new label and its practices as well as diffuse it in the region and around the world. In doing so we address Davis and Marquis’ (2005) call for mechanism-based research and Wry et al.’s (2011) call for empirical work on nascent collective identity legitimation.

Our findings suggest that fast-paced diffusion was possible because NNC was conceived as an identity movement. It was triggered by the active involvement of entrepreneurial leaders from the culinary profession (both gastro-entrepreneurs and chefs), high-profile political supporters (the Nordic Council of Ministers and the national governments), legitimators (scientists), disseminators (the local and global media, both specialized and general), and audiences (foodies and others). It was facilitated by three mechanisms: First, choosing an empty label, without previous meaning in food, yet with positive connotations in other domains, such as design and welfare, allowed establishing a positive abstract notion open to interpretations and different practices. Second, the invitation for participation and the offer of financial support for the most innovative initiatives allowed for a distributed practice creation. Third, the organized dissemination of the label through the creation of stories (e.g., the Nordic territory, the Nordic diet), legitimized by scientists; the appointment of food ambassadors; and the involvement of the global media through organized visits and food diplomacy allowed for the fast spread of excitement about the new label and the possibilities it offered.

The article proceeds as follows: First, we outline the data and method employed in the study. Second, we provide an overview of the preconditions and discuss the nature of the main stages followed in the process of NNC creation. We focus on how different actors shaped the nature and trajectory of the label and the practice associated with it. In particular, we discuss the role of leaders, supporters, legitimators, and disseminators and the mechanisms they employed for a fast-paced diffusion to occur. Finally, we offer some insights on culinary innovation and collective identity creation.

**DATA AND METHOD**

This article reports findings from an inductive, in-depth, longitudinal study of how new Nordic cuisine emerged and developed. Our data cover the period 2000–2010, beginning 4 years before the label of new Nordic cuisine was formally launched with a manifesto (see Appendix A for the text and the list of endorsing chefs) and concluding in 2010, when the second stage of the Nordic Council of Ministers’ program was initiated.
Data Collection

We collected data in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, and English. We conducted interviews with leading chefs, entrepreneurs, politicians, scholars, and journalists who were known for their role in shaping the content and spirit of the new Nordic cuisine movement (see Appendix B for a list of interviews and other data sources). To identify them, we relied on a snowballing technique, soliciting suggestions on who else to interview from respondents. The interviews were conducted from December 2010 to December 2011. All interviews lasted about an hour and were conducted following a semistructured interview guide. The interviews were supplemented by a 2-hour meeting held with a group of representatives from the Copenhagen-based office of the Nordic Council of Ministers, who provided background information on their programs and initiatives and insights into their perspectives on the new Nordic cuisine. We also collected various archival data, following Ventresca and Mohr (2002), such as reports by consultants and documents published by the Nordic Council of Ministers as well as the national ministries. Furthermore, we collected press articles, documentaries, leaflets, cookbooks, and websites on initiatives related to new Nordic cuisine. Some of this material was retrieved from the respective homepages of the central institutions, such as the Nordic Council of Ministries and the national ministries, and other Internet websites, including seminal documents (e.g., the manifesto) and publications (e.g., the Nordic Council of Minister’s program for new Nordic food), whereas hard copies of other materials (e.g., cookbooks or other texts by chefs involved in the NNC movement) were used. Finally, a database media search on newspaper articles was carried out on new Nordic cuisine in Infomedia, the largest Danish database for search in full-text media with 1,454 sources, including nationwide dailies, regional dailies, local weeklies, professional and trade journals, magazines, news bureaus, and web sources. The search was conducted for the period 2000–2010 and a truncated search was carried out (e.g., New* Nordic* Cuisine*). The Infomedia search was supplemented by a Faktiva search for international sources and by a series of country- and language-specific Google searches. For the purposes of this study, the database information was used only for clarification of context. Last but not least, we experienced food in Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish restaurants that defined themselves as belonging to the NNC movement.

Data Reduction and Analyses

To organize the collected data, we developed a timeline of critical episodes in the trajectory of the movement and created visual displays (Miles & Huberman, 1984; see Table 1). Given our interest in the process of new collective identity creation, we sought to identify meaningful stages along
TABLE 1 Timeline of the Creation of New Nordic Cuisine (Selected Milestones)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Restaurant Noma opens in Copenhagen by Claus Meyer and Rene Redzepi</td>
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<td>First season of <em>Scandinavian Cooking</em> 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, with over 100 million viewers</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Manifesto for new Nordic cuisine launched at New Nordic Cuisine Symposium in Copenhagen</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Aarhus Declaration signed in Denmark; Nordic Council of Ministers in support of new Nordic cuisine; new Nordic food launched</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Nordic council announces funding and New Nordic Food I (NNF I) program for the period 2007–2009, DKK 25 million budget; Noma #33 on San Pellegrino 50 best restaurants list (SP-list)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NICE called for expressions of interest under the title “New Nordic Food—Enhancing Innovation in the Food, Tourism, and Experience Industry”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Nordic food laboratory established in Copenhagen; Noma, with second Michelin star, advances to #15 on SP-list</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>NNF I evaluated; study concludes that NNF can create wealth for Nordic countries (MAPP Aarhus); Danish OPUS research project launched, proving the health benefits of Nordic diet; NNF II adopted (2010–2014), DKK 18.5 million budget; NNF included in KreaNord, a Nordic program for advancement of the region’s cultural and creative industries, which seeks to pursue opportunities in the Nordic counties, as a response to the challenges of globalization; Noma #3 on SP-list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Noma #1 on the SP-list; Redzepi publishes cookbook: <em>Noma: Time and Place in Nordic Cuisine</em></td>
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which to break our data. We identified three main periods—emergence, legitimation, and expansion—and then looked at identifying what was distinctive about that with regard to how the process unfolded and who the main actors were. We took a keen interest in the changing ideals, materials, techniques, and artifacts (Jones & Livne-Tarandach, 2008), as well as important interactions and interpretations. Traveling back and forth between data and theory, we identified and labeled concepts and connected them to help explain the process of new collective identity creation. In the following sections we report the findings on the stages of the process, its distinctive characteristics as identified through the case analysis, and the mechanisms that drive it, following Davis and Marquis (2005).

THE PROCESS OF CREATING NEW NORDIC CUISINE

The creation of the NNC was preceded by a set of conditions and followed three stages, in which a variety of actors were involved (see Table 2 for an overview of the stages and Table 1 for a timeline).

Stage 1, emergence (pre-2005), was driven by entrepreneurial leaders from the culinary profession and involved launching of the label and definition of the core values for which it stood (Table 2). In stage 2, legitimation
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<td><strong>How?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main focus</td>
<td>New Nordic cuisine as a professional project</td>
<td>New Nordic food as a political and scientific project</td>
<td>New Nordic diet as a social project</td>
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<td>Label</td>
<td>Draws on a stable category—&quot;Nordic&quot;—with a positive connotation for high economic development, design, and innovation, not on local traditions</td>
<td>Broadens invitation for participation beyond gastronomy to food industry and farming</td>
<td>Contestation over label use—limiting use vs. certification; elitist vs. mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplars</td>
<td>Noma (restaurant) and Redzepi (chef)</td>
<td>Food ambassadors Research centers</td>
<td>Projects selected for funding OPUS program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Manifesto</td>
<td>Aarhus declaration</td>
<td>Defined in program I, 2007–2009:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>Defined by guiding values in the manifesto</td>
<td>Define in Program I, 2007–2009:</td>
<td>Communicate what new Nordic food is about; kitchen and gastronomy, health, welfare, and taste; develop the periphery (coastal and rural areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>No practices</td>
<td>Invitation for practice creation (NICe, Nordic Innovation Center call for initiatives and selection of projects)</td>
<td>Guidelines for practice creation; e.g., on food diplomacy, on communicating Nordic cuisine (deliberate use of language), on Nordic diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main actors</td>
<td>Entrepreneurs and chefs</td>
<td>Politicians, civil servants, scientists</td>
<td>Diverse, increasingly at the national level</td>
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(2005–2006), politicians and public servants across the Nordic countries saw, in what was conceived as a professional project, a unique opportunity to pursue a political agenda for local and regional branding and boosting competitiveness. They engaged in translating and further refining the original values of the new Nordic cuisine into policies and incentives and launched a broader label: new Nordic food. In stage 3, contested expansion (2007–2010), the incentives put in place attracted entrepreneurs who came up with a pool of initiatives, some of which materialized into concrete projects, assisting in the crystallization and scripting of practices related to new Nordic cuisine and new Nordic food. These initiatives expanded the movement’s domain of operation and, with that, sharpened the tensions about its boundaries. Overall, the process of collective identity building that was initially launched as a professional project through new Nordic cuisine expanded to a political and scholarly project through new Nordic food and, later, to a social project through new Nordic diet.

Preconditions

Several factors coincided in shaping the opportunity structure that paved the way to the emergence of new Nordic cuisine: First, dining out had increased in importance in the Nordic region, with different international food restaurants being established and gaining popularity, as “people travelled a lot in the 1960s–1990s, took interest in new eating habits and brought them back” (H. Osa, personal communication, February 21, 2011). Second, economic prosperity in the Nordic region made it economically feasible for people to dine out, seeking quality and gourmet food. Third, culinary movements were already under way, such as the new Spanish cuisine and the slow food movement, challenging the centuries-long French hegemony in gastronomy and serving as a source of inspiration for Nordic chefs to create their own culinary identity. Fourth, a general interest in food, gourmet food in particular, had also been growing, with chefs rising to fame and celebrity status hosting TV programs, branding cookware, and so forth, also paving the way for other chefs and culinary inventions. Fifth, with the increasing culinary globalization, the openness and curiosity about foreign food and culinary traditions also brought the realization that “We have been open, but neglecting our own heritage. . . . All over the world people are going back to their roots, they travel so much, they (need to) take care of their own identity” (H. Osa, personal communication, February 21, 2011). The NNC was aligned with that quest for identity. As explained by Claus Meyer, gastro-entrepreneur and cofounder of Noma, on his website (Meyer, n.d.):

The Nordic Cuisine movement—informal, open and democratic—is widely considered the strongest and most important culinary revolution ever in the Nordic region. . . . This new kitchen ideology is not a
declaration of war against Thai food, Mexican mole or sushi. It is not a crusade against pizza. We don’t feel any affinity with nationalistic ideas. We just think that food from our region deserves to have a voice in the choir of the world’s other great cuisines.

The need for rediscovery and taking pride in one’s roots was further strengthened by Nordic chefs gaining international recognition, regularly winning medals at prestigious competitions such as the Bocuse d’Or. Since the competition’s inception in the late 1990s, over 50% of all medals were in the possession of Scandinavian chefs. Sixth, there were also concerns that Nordic as a region was losing identity extremely quickly with the entry of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland into the European Union (E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2011). Though the Nordic Chefs Association had existed since 1939, and Nordic chefs have traveled to international professional events together, there had been no explicit suggestions for a Nordic food label until the 1990s when sporadic media articles mentioned the idea and the need to create “nouvelle Nordique.” However, no ideas were provided as to how that could be achieved or by whom.

At the same time, the Nordic Council of Ministers and national ministries had been looking for collaboration and branding opportunities, for both the Nordic region and its constituent countries. For example, Claus Meyer had been working in a consulting capacity for the Danish government, supporting its attempt to change food culture and seeking to create a quality brand. He has also been consulting on revitalizing some food industries and inventing and improving products such as beer (with Carlsberg), cheese (with Arla), and aquavit (with Danish distillers); the two former were more successful than the latter. With these different forces converging in the early 2000s, the time was ripe for launching the new Nordic cuisine initiative. Its emergence, legitimation, and contested expansion are detailed below.

Stage 1: Emergence (Pre-2005)

Three critical events marked the creation of the NNC. The first was the opening of the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen in 2003 by gastronomic entrepreneur Claus Meyer and chef René Redzepi. As explained by Claus Meyer (2010, personal communication, December 22, 2010), “With Noma, our aim was to change food in Denmark. . . . [It was] a rhetorical instrument, just another one in my toolkit . . . to redefine Nordic food.” In December 2002, Meyer had approached Redzepi, who had worked at some of the world’s finest restaurants, with an opportunity to start a restaurant in the North Atlantic House, a former 18th-century warehouse located in the Copenhagen harbor area, which was being turned into a cultural center for the North Atlantic region. The building was situated by the Greenlandic
Trading Square (Grønlandske Handels Plads) at the North Atlantic Wharf (Nordatlantens Brygge), which since 1767 had been a center for trade to and from the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland in the Danish capital. Meyer made an offer to Redzepi to become the head chef and his partner in the venture, along with entrepreneur Kristian Byrge. The restaurant opportunity came with the condition that it had to reflect Nordicity and, in particular, North Atlantic cuisine, “given its location and the history of the building” (Skyum-Nielsen, 2010, p. 11). Inspired by the constraint, they embraced terroir thinking. In August 2003, Claus Meyer and chefs Redzepi and Mads Refslund set out on a study tour of the North Atlantic—a 17-day mission to the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland—to “absorb gastronomic inspiration and meet possible suppliers of raw materials and décor for what was, as far as we know, the first restaurant with a modern, North Atlantic menu” (Skyum-Nielsen, 2010, p. 11).

The opening of Noma was met by professional skepticism, because it challenged existing gourmet food conventions—“The Danish restaurant world laughed at Noma’s gastronomic concept” (Skyum-Nielsen, 2010, p. 11)—and ridiculed the venture with a number of nicknames such as Lard Thrasher, The Whale Belly, The Seal Humper, The Dry Fish, and The Golden Harpoon, as Claus Meyer recalled. Despite the initial skepticism, Noma started gaining recognition by the Michelin Guide, as well as the newer St. Pellegrino’s World’s 50 Best Restaurants ranking, topping the latter in the last 3 years. It also became an embodiment of the values of NNC and hence an exemplar of NNC.

The second event was the New Nordic Cuisine Symposium, which Claus Meyer and René Redzepi organized. They brought together a number of leading gastronomic entrepreneurs and chefs from the Scandinavian countries in an attempt to extend to a Nordic venture what had begun as a Danish initiative. During the 2-day symposium, the 12 participating chefs created, agreed upon, and signed, a manifesto for new Nordic kitchen (Appendix A). Inspired by the Dogma95 film manifesto, according to Claus Meyer, the manifesto was an attempt to define the new Nordic kitchen in 10 rules. The 10 rules of the manifesto have been distilled from 20 points in a working draft, which Meyer had developed, in the span of 6 months, with the help of his friend Jan Krag Jacobsen, president of the Danish Academy of Gastronomy and a communication professional. The purpose behind the creation of the manifesto was the willingness “to capture local, original food culture” (C. Meyer, personal communication, December 22, 2010). Core values in the manifesto associate the new Nordic cuisine with purity, freshness, and simplicity; with local, seasonal ingredients from the Nordic terroir; and with a healthy, green, and environmentally friendly profile. It “represents the dream of recreating a sort of link with nature once again” (Wolff, 2011, p. 10), which differentiates it from the hedonistic quality of French cuisine and the impressive technical level of Spanish cuisine.
The third event had to do with the broadcasting of the first season of *Scandinavian Cooking* on the American PBS channel, a TV program initially hosted by Norwegian TV chef Andreas Viestad, later followed by Swedish cook Tina Nordstrøm and Danish gastro-entrepreneur Claus Meyer, shown in 130 countries, including the UK, Germany, Italy, France, and China (Saether & Lindergard, 2003–2009). Each episode had been seen by more than 100 million viewers, according to the producers of the TV program series. In 2008, the TV series was followed by the sequel *Perfect Day*, which included Viestad as well as Nordstrom and Meyer and the Finnish gastro-entrepreneur Sara la Fountain, who introduced traditional foods, customs, and cultures of their respective home countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland). Though a separate set of factors had triggered the creation of the TV programs, it coincided with the other two events in enhancing international awareness of food in the Scandinavian region.

Claus Meyer (personal communication, December 22, 2010) acknowledged that he chose a regional (Nordic) and not a national (Danish) label because “[t]he Danish food brand was polluted. . . . When you say Nordic food. . . . [it was a] brand that was free, open space [allowing to] define what it is.” As other informants explained, Nordic and Nordicity had a positive connotation, drawing on other Scandinavian fields (e.g., design, film, literature), and were perceived as representing strong economic development, innovation, fairness, or purity. An additional rationale for using a regional rather than a national label was Meyer’s conviction that the origins of a great cuisine were in the diversity of climates and there was too little diversity in Denmark: “nothing upon which to seduce a foodie from Japan” (C. Meyer, personal communication, December 22, 2010).

When conceiving the NNC concept, Meyer acknowledged the influence of several sources: First, he drew on the example of the Dogma95 movement in filmmaking (however, in his view, they were guided by compliance with constraining rules, whereas he envisioned a much more open movement; hence the emphasis on values and not on rules). Second, he found inspiration in the slow food movement, as well as the Spanish culinary revolution, for the capacity to undertake a major culinary transformation (however, Meyer envisioned a more nature-based and less science-related movement, akin to the French notion of terroir). Third, he was also impacted by the simplicity and freshness of Japanese cuisine and wanted to factor in those values. According to another movement activist, the manifesto was particularly inspired by the renowned chef Ferran Adria, who had suggested that “the next big cuisine will come from the North . . .” and be associated with purity, freshness, and simplicity.

In conclusion, the new NNC label was empty of shared culinary tradition and, as such, open to interpretation, meaning creation, and sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Noma, the symposium, and the manifesto, along with the TV programs, were building blocks and identity-configuring
events for the movement. Noma became an exemplar; that is, a concrete representation of what the new label and movement were about and what potential members should aspire to. This project, originated and led by culinary entrepreneurs and professionals, was noticed and expanded to the political and scholarly domain, as detailed in the following stage.


During this stage, new Nordic cuisine transformed from a largely professional project to a political project, embraced and endorsed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, as an opportunity to open up a new arena for Nordic cooperation and a new source for shared Nordic identity. The main identity-configuring event was the summer 2005 meeting known for the Aarhus Declaration. It gave explicit support to the manifesto and launched a 3-year program for New Nordic Food I, 2007–2009, dedicating resources necessary for realizing the program. In addition to Noma and chef Redzepi, national food ambassadors were appointed to represent and communicate the new collective identity and serve as exemplars of it (E. Hålien, personal communication, September 26, 2011) in the absence of extensive practices.

The Nordic Innovation Center (NICe), which is the Nordic Council of Ministers’ operating instrument for promoting innovative initiatives in the Nordic business sector, was assigned a budget of 10 million Danish Krones (DKK; 1.5 million euro) and the responsibility to select proposals that responded to spirit of the Aarhus Declaration and aimed at translating it into concrete practices. NICe called for expressions of interest under the title “New Nordic Food—Enhancing Innovation in the Food, Tourism, and Experience Industry.” Such a call represented an invitation for new participants to join the collective identity and create concrete expressions of it. NICe received 69 applications, of which it funded 6.

Leading actors during this stage were politicians and civil servants who were involved in the promotion of the new collective identity. In addition, scholars were increasingly involved, legitimating the new movement through the means of research. From the few academics involved in this stage, particular mention of the scientist Einar Risvik is deserved, who recognized that he had been an “instrument” for Claus Meyer: “Claus Meyer is the spirit, it wouldn’t have happened without him, I am his instrument” (E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2010). Risvik explained that he had provided Claus Meyer with a very complementary set of competencies and sources of legitimacy through science, as well as a set of activities as a broker, bringing parties together and promoting the creation of new projects and practices among them.

In conclusion, this stage was marked by the engagement of two new categories of actors: the promoters (politicians and public servants) and the legitimators (scientists). Identity-defining events and initiatives, such as the
Aarhus Declaration, the New Nordic Food Program, the food ambassadors, and the innovation initiative (NICe) were launched and worked as important vehicles for the legitimation, spread, and development of new Nordic cuisine. The involvement of politicians and public servants brought the logic of bureaucracy to the professional project of NNC, introducing ideas about the need for standardization and certification as means to define who/what new Nordic cuisine is (and is not). That was at odds with the vision of the movement’s initiators and leaders and created possibilities for contention.


In this stage, another label was launched—Nordic diet—expanding the new Nordic agenda beyond cuisine and food to social ends. It was channeled through the Danish OPUS research project concerned with documenting and improving health through the benefits offered by Nordic food. During this stage, the role of scientists, such as Risvik, was to create connections between diverse players so that together they can create new practices. At the same time, concrete and detailed guidelines were offered on how to create practices in several priority domains, such as language for Nordic food (Risvik, Larsson, Vatvedt Fjeld, Osa, & Hersleth, 2009) and public food diplomacy. The contribution of Risvik et al. (2009) was to explain and provide a language for how to describe Nordic food in a way that is coherent with the collective identity. Public food diplomacy centered on using food for representation purposes at events in the national embassies, the Cannes Film Festival, a computer games fair in Japan, as well as music, fashion, and other events that could offer synergies and help showcase the Nordic food culture (E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2011). New practices were also accounted for in a number of cookbooks (Meyer, 2010; Meyer, Astrup, & Houmann, 2011; Redzepi, 2010; Skogseth, 2009).

The Nordic Council of Ministers launched the second stage of the program on new Nordic food yet decreased the funding. In the words of E. Risvik (personal communication, February 19, 2011), “With the shortage of funding, the program aims to be inspirational, a bonfire . . . light a fire, build awareness, no resources for more.” In the absence of funding, an active role was played by a steering group on new Nordic food, chaired by Risvik, with the participation of Claus Meyer as the engine and spirit of the movement, representatives from the Nordic Council of Ministers, and journalists. Meeting two to three times a year, their main role (as explained by E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2011) was to develop concepts and launch ideas, organize and build networks to bring together relevant actors, and help them in identifying relevant funding opportunities and regimes.

Branding and competitiveness became a priority and voices started being heard about the national differences that needed to be accounted for within the broader regional collective identity. Hence, national initiatives were launched
by actors sometimes only loosely affiliated with new Nordic food as a collective identity. For example, in February 2011, for the World Ski Championship in Oslo, 55 restaurants in the city signed a document expressing that they would use local ingredients. The national labels are still the main labels used both in national media and in the political discourse. As explained by H. Osa (personal communication, February 21, 2011), “Maybe in 10–20 years we can have countries to collaborate, but politicians are up for election, they need to show results within their own country. Norwegian politicians are not likely to be willing to put money into promoting something Nordic or Scandinavian.” Osa also clarified that Norway, in particular, has put a lot of money into developing local and national food traditions but that Sweden has also recently set a goal to become the number one food culture in Europe.

The expansion of identity membership in new Nordic cuisine also brought tensions about where and how to draw boundaries to avoid dilution. For example, referring to the role of the Nordic council, Claus Meyer (personal communication, December 22, 2010) explained that his concern was to ensure that they “adopt it, not rape it as a formal ideology.” Both Meyer and Risvik affirmed that they were against proposals for standardization and certification of who and what is new Nordic, because they saw that as making the movement dogmatic and narrowing down the range of practices that could emerge and be inspired by it. That they have somewhat succeeded with this ambition was supported by Wolff (2011), who affirmed:

The Nordic cuisine movement has no logo and no formalised leadership. It is rather like a benign virus spreading at lightning speed at all levels. Everyone is welcome: the market will be the judge. The manifesto serves as a guide for large and small businesses alike, as well as for associations and individuals (p. 10).

The overall willingness of the movement’s leaders to protect the label found an illustration in the five new TV programs on Nordic food produced by Tellus, in which the request has been to interpret the concepts and values of the manifesto without explicitly mentioning new Nordic cuisine (E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2011). That is another manifestation of the main challenge for the collective identity at this stage of its further expansion, according to E. Risvik (personal communication, February 19, 2011):

... to avoid too much control and become dogmatic; as soon as someone owns the concept, it is dead; many people call for stamps and certification systems, Claus and I do not want that. Nordic mentality is about equality, we want to have people define what New Nordic Cuisine is about; if you disagree, you engage in a debate, and the more debate, the better.

An evaluation report on the first 3 years of the new Nordic food program suggested such a certification instrument in order to overcome the
problem with asymmetric information, meaning that neither consumers nor public authorities could know whether something was produced according to Nordic values or not (Kvistgaard, 2009). These kinds of proposals have been resisted so far, because this will create opportunities for lobbying from commercial interests and threaten to destroy the open character of the label, which may be a precondition for its capacity to mobilize a diverse set of actors (C. Meyer, personal communication, December 22, 2010; E. Risvik, personal communication, February 19, 2011).

Another take on the issue of boundaries has been through criticisms of new Nordic cuisine for its elitist nature and nationalistic identity, excluding ethnic immigrant and lower class food cultures present in the Nordic region (Gravdal, 2008; Holm, 2011). All that has made the issue of boundaries very contested, with divergent views thriving as to how to further control the identity expansion.

In conclusion, this stage introduced a new focus as well as a new label, new Nordic diet, focusing on the health benefits from the Nordic diet. The project transformed from professional and political to social (through the OPUS project). The various guidelines and cookbooks helped to outline and define what new Nordic cuisine stands for. Along with the second version of the new Nordic food program, these were some of the main vehicles in the continued development of the label into workable practices. With the increased definition, however, also came some criticism and skepticism about new Nordic cuisine (elitist, anti-ethnic, nationalistic, etc.).

Actors and Mechanisms for New Collective Identity Creation

We identified four groups of actors and three major mechanisms that drove the process of NNC creation (Figure 1). The first group of actors was that of the movement leaders, who came from the culinary profession. They

![FIGURE 1: Actors in and mechanisms for the creation of new Nordic cuisine (color figure available online).](image-url)
identified a professional opportunity, launched and defined the label, and drew attention to it, providing useful exemplars. They also served as its custodians, protecting its openness of participation from attempts at certification and limited access. A second group of relevance was that of the promoters, which in this case included Nordic politicians and public servants. They also had an entrepreneurial capability to identify a regional (and national) branding opportunity and provided resources (seed capital of sorts) to entrepreneurs interested in defining the initiative further. They also supported the speeding up of the label’s diffusion and offered high-profile visibility for it. A third group of importance was that of the legitimators, which involved scientists who provided legitimacy for the new culinary movement through research. In that way, they provided both professional and social legitimation, showing the benefits of the Nordic diet for the population at large. Last but not least, the group of the disseminators was represented by local and international specialized and general media who found the new initiative newsworthy and engaged by broadcasting to the foodies and broader audiences, creating both awareness and a momentum for the movement.

Three mechanisms allowed for a fast-paced creation and diffusion of the new collective identity: First, the choice of a label without a previous history in the culinary domain, yet with a positive connotation in other areas, facilitated its acceptance. Second, the invitation for participation opened up the movement further, allowing for a distributed creation of practices. In addition, the involvement of promoters provided financial support for experimentation. Third, the managed dissemination of the new label sped up its diffusion. Particularly relevant to its diffusion were the positive connotations of the label, as well as the creation of stories and exemplars that provided inspiration for other participants to join and for the media to come up with catchy headlines. The actors and the mechanisms in interaction helped shape the NNC amidst tensions for inclusion and exclusivity. It remains to be seen whether the body of practice behind the successful label will be stabilized and expanded and whether the movement will continue attracting followers both in the Nordic region and abroad. Whatever the direction of its evolution, it has provided an important example of an orchestrated culinary innovation that has succeeded in mobilizing a wide range of actors with different agendas.

REFERENCES


**APPENDIX A—DATA SOURCES ON NEW NORDIC CUISINE**

**Interviews**


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**Articles and Books**


Selected Policy Documents

APPENDIX B—THE MANIFESTO OF THE NORDIC CUISINE MOVEMENT

As Nordic chefs we find that the time has now come for us to create a new Nordic kitchen, which in virtue of its good taste and special character compares favorable with the standard of the greatest kitchens of the world.

The aims of new Nordic cuisine are

1. To express the purity, freshness, simplicity and ethics we wish to associate with our region.
2. To reflect the changing of the seasons in the meals we make.
3. To base our cooking on ingredients and produce whose characteristics are particularly excellent in our climates, landscapes, and waters.
4. To combine the demand for good taste with modern knowledge of health and well-being.

5. To promote Nordic products and the variety of Nordic producers—and to spread the word about their underlying cultures.

6. To promote animal welfare and a sound production process in our seas, on our farmland, and in the wild.

7. To develop potentially new applications of traditional Nordic food products.

8. To combine the best in Nordic cookery and culinary traditions with impulses from abroad.

9. To combine local self-sufficiency with regional sharing of high-quality products.

10. To join forces with consumer representatives; other cooking craftsmen; agriculture; the fishing, food, retail, and wholesale industries; researchers; teachers; politicians; and authorities on this project for the benefit and advantage of everyone in the Nordic countries.

Source: http://www.clausmeyer.dk/en/the_new_nordic_cuisine_/manifesto_.html#. The manifesto was signed by the following reputable Nordic chefs at an event on November 18–19, 2004, Copenhagen, Denmark: Hans Välimäki, Finland; Leif Sørensen, The Faroe Islands; Mathias Dahlgren, Sweden; Roger Malmin, Norway; René Redzepi, Denmark; Rune Collin, Greenland; Erwin Lauterbach, Denmark; Eyvind Hellstrøm, Norway; Fredrik Sigurdsson, Iceland; Gunndur Fossdal, The Faroe Islands; Hákan Örvarsson, Iceland; Michael Björklund, Aaland.