Hållbarhet till middag
En etnologisk studie om hur miljövänligt ätande praktiseras i vardagslivet

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i Hörsal F, Humanisthuset, fredagen den 13 januari 2017, kl. 10:00. Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

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Sustainability for Dinner: An Ethnological Study of how Sustainable Eating is Practised in Everyday Life

Abstract
Sustainability has become a conspicuous term in the public and political debate, as well as in the landscapes of consumption. This study focuses on how people understand and practice sustainability through food in their everyday life. The aim is to describe and analyse sustainability as a collection of meaning-making practices by studying households that in some sense actively aim for an environmentally friendly and sustainable food consumption. The ethnographic fieldwork, mainly interviews and participant observations, included fifteen households in a municipality in northern Sweden during 2012-15. The dissertation centres around reoccurring themes: organic food, local food, food as culture and materiality, morality and distinction. Through these themes it became evident that the participants related sustainable food practices to more than environmental issues. Socioeconomic relations within the locality and the global world, as well as cultural norms, traditions and values related to food, were important aspects of a perceived sustainable society. Although occasionally seeming inconsistent and contradictory in their meaning-making of and commitment to practices revolving around ideals of (ecological) sustainability, the participants balanced multiple sustainabilities simultaneously. Besides the ecological aspect, they also wished for sustainable localities, household economy, social relations and personal wellbeing.

Influenced by social practice theory the study pays attention to the competences, meanings and materials a practice is dependent on. The participants developed individual repertoires, or practice bundles, of sustainable food related practices that were meaningful in their everyday life. The development and expansion of such a bundle could be understood as a form of acquiring and maintaining green capital; a symbolic capital based upon shared green values which unite the possessors and distinguish them from those lacking such values. Green capital is expressed through green distinction, that is, using taste to differentiate between holders and non-holders of the symbolic capital. The participants separated themselves from both the large majority who did not yet understand or practise sustainability, and from “fanatics” who they perceived took sustainability in an extreme and unsound manner. A balanced approach to sustainability was favoured as the participants to a great extent valued a lifestyle adjustable to the preconditions of the contemporary Swedish society, such as social norms. The study shows how sustainability is constantly renegotiated and filled with new cultural meaning.

Keywords
Sustainability, food, consumption, sustainable consumption, practices, social practice theory, practice bundles, organic food, local food, culture, everyday life, ethnography, ethnology, green distinction, green capital

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