

Interview with Chris Kjeldsen, May 2019

My name is Chris Kjeldsen. You can almost say that agriculture and food is in my blood, as I grew up on a dairy farm in Northern Denmark. I hold a MSc in Agricultural Science, and a PhD in social science. I have been working in research since the dawn of the new century. I have been employed at Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, University of Southern Denmark's Centre for Rural Research, and at my current institution Department of Agroecology at Aarhus University. The research themes which have interested me over the years include agricultural geography, food geography, food systems, systems thinking, agroecology and rural development.

What does “food culture” mean to you?

Food culture is the social, cultural and material practices emerging from the network of relations between production and consumption.

Why are food culture studies relevant in your perspective?

Food culture is a very tangible expression of how we think and act in the world. Apart from the benefits of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of food culture, we might also be able to learn how to change the ways by which we engage with food, both with regards to consumption and production.

What is your favorite food/dish, and why?

None in particular – I love simple, honest food, honest meaning that care and attention has been put into every aspect of the given food or dish. My favorite food is food which reaches out, builds community or even communion.

How does your work relate to food culture/in what way do you work with food culture?

Coming from a background in agriculture and agricultural science, part of my work has focused on development issues relating to various forms of ‘alternative’ food networks. Food culture, including notions of ‘good food’ is deployed by actors across consumption, processing and production – and trying to understand these notions have been a centerpiece of my research since my PhD days. Currently, my colleagues and I are working on a major project on Danish provenance foods, where we seek to explore how ‘provenance’ is or can be constituted across different product types.

Please tell us about the most exciting experience you have had with food(culture)

Many – it is hard to mention one particular example. However, a formative experience was when my Latin teacher in high school taught me (as a 17-year old) how to cook Spaghetti Carbonara, while drinking DOCG wine from glasses bought in Brugsen. That opened a door for me into a world of making food and making community through food.

Where would you like to see the study of food culture go in the near future / what perspectives on food culture needs more attention in your opinion?

I see many promising signs that food culture is being studied as a field, rather than sticking to established disciplinary borders. My ideal is that food culture studies should be based on collaborations between researchers from natural, social and human sciences – I consider epistemological pluralism a strength within scientific work. With regards to transdisciplinary work, I would very much like food culture studies to pursue a path where we continue to seek to establish collaborations with actors beyond the university, such as municipalities, private enterprises, NGOs, farmers, food sector organisations and others. Food studies should not let itself limit to pursue epistemic, theoretical ideals, but should also embrace a practical *ethos*.

