Regulating Food Consumption

Studies of change and variation in Europe

Unni Kjærnes

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The role of people as buyers and eaters of food has changed significantly. From being protected by a paternalistic welfare state, people appear to be accorded more freedom and responsibility as individuals, where attention is redirected from the state towards market relations. Many have asserted that these changes are accompanied by fragmentation, individualisation, and privatisation, leading to individual uncertainty and lack of confidence. But empirical observations do not always confirm this, distrust is not necessarily growing and while responsibilities may change, the state still plays an active role. This dissertation explores changing relationships between states and markets, on the one hand, and ordinary people in their capacities as consumers and citizens, on the other. Do we see the emergence of new forms of regulation of food consumption? If so, what is the scope and what are the characteristics? Theories of regulation addressing questions about individualisation and self-governance are combined with a conceptualisation of consumption as processes of institutionalisation, involving daily routines, the division of labour between production and consumption, and the institutional field in which consumption is embedded. The analyses focus on the involvement of the state, food producers and scientific, first of all nutritional, expertise in regulating consumption, and on popular responses. Two periods come out as important, first when the ideas of “designing the good life” emerged, giving the state a very particular role in regulating food consumption, and, second, when this “designing” is replaced by ideas of choice and individual responsibility. One might say that “consumer choice” has become a mode of regulation. I use mainly historical studies from Norway to analyse the shifting role of the state in regulating food consumption, complemented with population surveys from six European countries to study how modernisation processes are associated with trust. The studies find that changing regulation is not only a question of societal or state vs individual responsibilities. Degrees of organisation and formalisation are important as well. While increasing organisation may represent discipline and abuses of power (including exploitation of consumer loyalty), organisation can also, to the consumer, provide higher predictability, systems to deal with malfeasance, and efficiency which may provide conditions for acting. The welfare state and the neo-liberal state have very different types of solutions. The welfare state solution is based on (national) egalitarianism, paternalism and discipline (of the market as well as households). Such solutions are still prominent in Norway. Individualisation and self-regulation may represent a regulatory response not only to a declining legitimacy of this kind of interventionism, but also increasing organisational complexity. This is reflected in large-scale re-regulation of markets as well as in relationships with households and consumers. Individualisation of responsibility is to the consumer not a matter of the number of choices that are presented on the shelves, but how choice as a form of consumer based involvement is institutionalised. It is recognition of people as “end-consumers”, as social actors, with systems of empowerment politically as well as via the provisioning system. ‘Consumer choice’ as a regulatory strategy includes not only communicative efforts to make people into “choosing consumers”, but also the provision of institutions which recognise consumer interests and agency. When this is lacking we find distrust as
representing powerlessness. Individual responsibility-taking represents agency and is not always a matter of loyal support to shared goals, but involves protest and creativity. More informal (‘communitarian’) innovations may be an indication of that, where self-realisation is intimately combined with responsibility for social problems. But as solutions to counteract existing imbalances of power in the food market the impacts of such initiatives are probably more as part of consumer mobilisation and politicisation than as alternative provisioning.
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The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>etc.</th>
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1 Introduction

1.1 Controversies and paradoxes

Over the last decade, Europe has experienced major crises and wide-reaching regulatory change within the area of food. Parallel to shifts in the role of the state, food provisioning systems have undergone significant transformations. Technological innovation, market integration, and globalisation have produced large and complex systems that challenge established social relations and normative expectations. The growing size and complexity have made mistakes and mishaps a much bigger issue since potential economic and societal consequences may be so extensive. The role of people as buyers and eaters of food has changed significantly. From being protected by a paternalistic welfare state, people appear to be accorded more freedom and responsibility as individuals. The notion of ‘consumer choice’ redirects attention from the state towards market relations. Expectations as well as discontent are referred to market based channels, while state regulation of citizens is attributed a less central function. At the same time, there is a cultural shift, where consumerism works with neo-liberalism, instructing citizens that they can reinvent themselves continually through the process of consumption. The shifts are perceived as problematic. Somewhat paradoxically, technocrats and marketing people seem to share with system critics an understanding of ongoing changes in consumption as characterised by fragmentation, individualisation, and privatisation, leading to individual uncertainty and lack of confidence.

How does this fit with empirical observations within the area of food? In spite of considerable change, the food market seems neither successfully self-regulatory nor producing evermore distrust. The focus on risks has contributed to rapidly growing market concerns for predictability and accountability, as represented by standardisation, quality assurance, traceability schemes, and external audits. Even though we may now see shifting responsibilities, the state still plays an active role. Several have suggested the emergence of a new function of the state, a ‘regulatory state’. Considering the wider selection of goods, the speed of innovation, media ‘scare’s’ – and a new role of the state, people’s responses are often rather stoic (Trentmann 2007, 150).

My interest is in how changing interrelations between states and markets, on the one hand, and ordinary people in their capacities as consumers and citizens, on the other, impact on the regulation of food consumption. My question is not primarily directed towards connections between consumption and citizenship. Instead, I want to explore the ways in which food consumption is regulated. Do we see the emergence of new forms of regulation of food consumption? If so, what is the scope and what are the characteristics? And what are people’s responses? I use ‘regulation’ as an encompassing concept, a mechanism of intended social control, including a wide range of codified and expressed goals or sets of values, brought forth by various agencies, social actors or sets of actors, to influence what we eat and how we do it, to monitor these efforts, and attempts to align the
controlled variables (Scott 2004, 147). Regulation is associated with power, power to make others progress a course of action that they would otherwise not have taken, involving broad issues such as the societal distribution of tasks and responsibilities and their moral foundations, resources to take action, as well as the concrete decisions that people make in their everyday lives. Regulation is characterised by its goals and purposes as well as its means, the specific ways of exercising power to reach these goals. But, as emphasised by Foucault, Lukes, and others, it is not a unilateral issue. Regulation may or may not imply consent by these subjects and their resistance and creativity is a central issue (Lazzarato 2002; Lukes 2005).

It has been suggested that paternalistic state regulation referring to conflicts over the distribution of material goods and class inequality are giving way to deregulation, individualisation, marketization, and conflicts over the distribution of risks (Beck 1992, 1999; Beck et al. 2003; Ungar 2001; Leach et al. 2005). Along similar lines, guiding citizens to good manners by using control (or disciplining) strategies is assumed to be replaced by a focus on multiple lifestyle choices as a private matter and with market freedom and consumer choice as dominant values (Sulkunen et al. 2004; Neumann 2003). As part of this process, many believe that consumption has changed from being a collective to becoming a predominantly private relation (Døving 2003; Cohen 2003). Underlying (or following from) the focus on ‘consumer choice’ is an assumption that consumers cannot be managed in any other way than through (cognitive) encouragement of self governance (which may be judged optimistically or pessimistically) (Halkier 2001, 2004).

In my opinion, regulation via a freedom of choice needs to be critically investigated. I agree that recent decades have represented a shift in the regulation of food and food consumption from paternalistic and disciplinary state action towards more emphasis on self governance and new forms of market based regulation. But commonsense attitudes towards a shift in the handling of risk and welfare seem to miss out on major aspects of ongoing changes, especially regarding how regulation is embedded in institutionalised interrelations. The dilemmas of freedom and structural constraints have received too little attention, especially problematic considering that the current focus on consumers is often made synonymous with a shift from collectivism towards individualism.

Instead of emphasising only individualisation, fragmentation, openness, and diversity, I propose that there are at the same time processes of institutionalisation and formalisation which strengthen interrelationships and dependencies between markets, states, and people as consumers. Not only may this growing institutionalisation impact on power relations by constituting practical frames of everyday life. The specific ways in which consumption is institutionalised will also open up to certain forms of regulation while making others more difficult. And these ways will frame and influence expressions of resistance and creativity by those who are consuming. This suggests a double movement, of more centralised powers (state and market), on the one hand, and of dispersion and dissidence on the other. This is particularly significant in the handling of risks, but also as represented by the major transfer of labour with food from the family to market and state based
solutions. Globalisation may increase diversity, openness and uncertainty, but it may also influence food consumption by strengthening interdependencies. It is this combination that first of all seems to characterise the contemporary regulation of food consumption. The combination of individual responsibility and freedom of choice, on the one hand, and growing importance of institutionalised interrelations, on the other, may imply strong tensions, politically and for people in their everyday lives. But the combination may also be mutually reinforcing, thus providing conditions for particularly strong forms of regulation.

In contrast to what is often believed, I claim that the state has not become less relevant in contemporary regulation of food consumption and, in relation to this; individual agency is in practice neither necessarily bestowed nor appreciated. There are many indications of a repoliticisation of food. While food security and prices disappeared as issues of state involvement, recent debates on climatic change and soaring food prices have put them high on the agenda again. Food safety has received renewed attention as a public responsibility, nutritional issues are (re)politicised, and issues like for example quality, ethics and organics have raised quests for regulation, including state action. But that does not necessarily imply uniform responses or the re-emergence of old solutions. We may find cases where strong elements of paternalism and/or repression are retained, but we may also find new foundations for providing welfare, risk regulation, and social order. Yet other cases may be dominated by controversy and unsettledness regarding such issues. Studies of regulation suggest strong path dependencies. It is with this as a backdrop that we should search for qualitatively new kinds of institutionalised relationships between ordinary people and the state in terms of power, involvement, and responsibilities. Throughout history the relationships between food markets, states and individuals have been subject to a number of deep, often dramatic, shifts in societal organisation and divisions of labour and responsibilities. Food raises major issues of the distribution of welfare and risks and of social concerns, of economic power, justice, cultural values, animal welfare, and environmental issues. All of these aspects may give rise to controversy as well as regulatory efforts with regard to the procurement and intake of food.

The argument can be summarised into three points. First, ongoing modernisation processes do not necessarily imply less regulation of food consumption. I propose instead tendencies to the contrary. But the forms of regulation seem to shift towards more emphasis on self-governance. More specifically, while there may be a move from state disciplinary actions towards more responsibility (and freedom) allocated to the private individual, state authority does not lose its importance. Second, I suggest that these new forms of regulation are deeply embedded in increasingly organised forms of interaction, not only with the state, but as much with market actors. Third, I argue that modernisation implying changing relationships and responsibilities are not antithetical to trust. Nor does it make trust redundant. Moreover, rather than reflecting just individual uncertainty and powerlessness, expressions of distrust and lack of ‘compliance’ may also represent active resistance or creativity regarding food procurement and consumption. The nation-state and
a paternalistic regulatory system is not the only way to guarantee safety and build confidence.

The analyses will focus on the involvement of the state, food producers and scientific, first of all nutritional, expertise in regulating consumption, and on popular responses. Two periods come out as important, first when the ideas of “designing the good life” emerged, giving the state a very particular role in regulating food consumption, and, second, when this “designing” is replaced by ideas of choice and individual responsibility. Buying and eating food are the objects of regulation, but it is not until more recently, in this second shift, that people, in their capacity as ‘consumers’, become (supposedly) active agents in this politics of food consumption. In that way, one might say that “consumer choice” has become a mode of regulation. The two shifts are characterised not only by specific types of state engagement, but of characteristic relationships between states, markets and households. I use a comparative approach to study these particular societal conditions in terms of institutionalised interrelationships. Trust represents an aspect of such interrelations, an aspect that has received attention in the more recent period when consumer agency and choice are at the focus of attention. I use mainly historical studies from Norway to analyse the first point in the argument, for the second and third points complemented with population surveys from six European countries.

1.2 Regulating people: Changing forms of regulation

Current discussions on the regulation of consumption are dominated by ideas of de-institutionalisation and a replacement with self-governance, accompanied by reflexivity, excessive risk awareness and distrust. This is reinforced by theoretically founded beliefs about the decline of the welfare state, about new ways of exercising power, and about privatization and market based regulation. These ideas about shifting relationships between states, markets and individuals come together in a strong focus on consumers’ freedom to choose. While theories about ongoing change may capture important aspects, there also seem to be inconsistencies and aspects that are overlooked. The debate seems to be caught in an abstract, de-contextualised, ideological conceptualisation of consumption. A number of recent theoretical and empirical contributions on consumption suggest that current processes are better conceptualised as a re-institutionalisation, not a de-institutionalisation. Why are there so strong opinions and beliefs that fail to catch these trends? My proposed answer is that this debate is not so much about understanding trends in consumption, but rather reflects an ideological and political discourse on the regulation of consumption. And analytically we need to keep regulatory strategies distinct from consumption practices.

The relevant question is therefore whether contemporary regulation of food consumption is best characterised by a tremendous shift from actively imposing external codes of behaviour to projects that seek to stimulate self-governance? Compared to the large and
rapidly growing body of literature on governance involving state and market, there is less empirical research about the state’s and other agents’ role in regulating private life, addressing questions such as who is expected to be responsible for what, what are the responses and influences from those subject to regulation, and what are the consequences of shifting responsibilities and modes of regulation (Hunt 1999)?

The focus on lifestyle choices as a private matter and market freedom and consumer choice as dominant values represents an ideology of moral management of the self – or, in other words, an ethic of not taking a stand on moral issues (Sulkunen, Rantala & Määttä, 2004). This increasing autonomy of citizens represents a break with what Foucault characterised as the pastoral authority of the traditional welfare state (Dean, 1999). Pastoral power is a “caring” form of power. The aim is worldly “salvation” in terms of health, standard of living, etc. It addresses all individuals during their entire lives and it is linked to the production of truth, truth about the population and the individual (Foucault 1982). The Nordic welfare states would be a prominent and far-reaching example of such pastoral authority, developed into a stable and consensual political culture of negotiated interests, moral guidance, and strong norms of universality.

In some sense this is not counter to individualism, as the welfare state was characteristically an arena for developing social rights, together with the development of civil and political rights, which also gave rise to the idea of “consumer rights” (Ilmonen and Sto 1997). But over the last decades, interest has been redirected from state protected individual citizenship and rights to calls for self-responsibility and social and parenting skills. Attention has been turned away from direct regulation in a state-citizen relationship towards indirect regulation and (implicit or explicit) emphasis on the consumer-market relationship, to be promoted also with the support of state initiatives. Consumption (understood as ‘consumer choice’) has thus come to form a typical representation of new forms of regulation (Hunt 1999). The shifting vocabulary, from ‘people’, ‘housewives’, and ‘citizens’ towards ‘consumers’, is pervasive, from environmental issues to animal welfare and alcohol (Uusitalo 2005; Blokhuis et al. 2003; Sulkunen et al. 2004). A recent edited volume on ‘Understanding consumers of food products’ illustrates the point well (Frewer and Van Trijp 2007). The book presents the problem of changing individual food choices as a matter of poor understanding of consumer decisions: “There is a need to develop more predictive, yet actionable models of consumer choice behaviour that provide guidance for enhancing success in behavioural modification efforts; research which is relevant to the development of effective health interventions as well as new product development.” (Frewer and van Trijp, 2007, 644) Policy-making is a matter of balancing consumer needs of protection against risks with the benefits of freedom to choose. Techniques are called for which can manage this balancing in ways that recognise differences of opinion and to integrate these views into governance practices. This is not only a problem for public policy: “Today, the food industry is increasingly being confronted with a responsibility for the external effects that purchase and consumption of their food products may bring about. [ ] It also means that they take a co-responsibility, together with governments and consumer organisations, to ensure that consumers balance the overall portfolio of food products they consume.” (op.cit. 647)
Yet, the ‘pastoral’ authority of the welfare state is contradicted not only by regulation assuming self-interested individualism, but also by communitarian tendencies, focussing on the commitment and responsibility of individuals and community institutions, rather than individual rights towards the (welfare) state - “a romantic rationalism of individual self-regulation” (Dean 1999; Rantala and Sulkunen 2006; Sulkunen et al. 2004; see also Trentmann 2006, 18). Community is also emphasised by Rose (1999), but he concentrates on what he calls ‘familiarization’ as crucial to the means whereby personal capacities and conducts can be socialised, shaped and maximised in a manner which accords with the moral and political principles of liberal societies. Hunt (1999, 194) has pointed to some paradoxes in this mixture of new and old values, expressed in ‘an ideological re-traditionalisation’, where new configurations of social values linked to individualisation are combined with attempts of reinstating traditional forms of social relations, especially expressed in a reinforced focus on ‘family values’. The family is counterpoised to bureaucratic paternalism of the welfare state. It is an ideal, romanticised family concept that does not recognise former tensions (e.g. related to gender) or the significant ongoing changes that are taking place in the family institution. Two aspects of community are therefore highlighted, the family and close friends, on the one hand, and wider social networks, on the other. But, importantly, the described social relations are based on individual responsibilities and voluntary commitment rather than strong social control of a more traditional kind. And they are clearly “private” as distinct from state as well as corporate arenas.

Do we find such tendencies of ‘romantic rationalism’ in the field of food? While the general idea of governmentality assumes connectedness and inter-dependence rather than opposition between self-responsibility and family life, the current discourse on food does not seem so clear. Ordinary people deal with food in a number of roles and capacities as part of everyday life, but discursively these are often strictly compartmentalised. While expectations of utilitarian, self-responsible, and rational ‘choice’ dominates the market arena, communitarian ideals and commensality of a rather “traditional” or “romantic” kind is framing the (strictly domestic) family meal, especially with regard to how this meal is referred to in public discourse (Bugge and Døving 2000; Holm 2001; Shapiro 2004).

The ambivalence of rational self-regulation and community (and family) orientation is reflected in public nutritional campaigns, expressed as a tension around the ideology of health promotion. While many, first of all in the medical profession, state that “Unhealthy behaviours result from individual choice, [] so the way to change such behaviours is to show people the error of their ways and urge them to act differently”, others express a belief in action a the level of community, i.e. a social contract with the entire community (Coveney 2000, 21). Importantly, however, Coveney notes a striking similarity between the two; in each, the subject, or the collective subject (the community), is required to be self-reflexive and self-regulating in order to make ‘proper’ and informed decisions. Such connotations are also relevant for the increasing attention towards “food ethics” (Korthals 2004; Zwart 2000). Moreover, with explicit communitarian references, “alternative” food networks have received significant attention in social scientific research on food and food
regulation in recent years. Examples include farmers’ markets’, the Slow Food movement, community supported agriculture (CSA), and various organic food initiatives (see eg. Pollan 2008; Morgan et al. 2006).

Together, these tendencies seem to represent changes in the regulation of food consumption, especially with regard to the agency and social responsibilities accorded to people as buyers and eaters of food, assuming a ‘reflective social agent of all social conducts and capacities’ (Coveney 2000, 26). Privatisation and individualisation of responsibilities may thus develop along with a growing focus on community. With expectations of self-responsibility as expressed in the notion of ‘choice’, we see an amalgamation of communitarian ideals with individual competence and rational decisions (see also Rantala and Sulkunen 2006; Rose 1999).

The discussion of changing forms of regulation has mainly addressed discursive changes. This seems too reductionist. There are several problems. It is an approach that seems by its very focus to overemphasise the regulation of action via cognitive processes. In contrast to Foucault, all meaning should not be reduced to knowledge (or even “tacit knowledge”) and the actor is not transparent to herself. Moreover, people’s agency and freedom should not be reduced to a freedom of thought. We need to consider what people do and how that is affected by various forms of regulation. What happens at the discursive level is important, but an analysis of regulation and power should go beyond that, instead seeing them as part of a process of habitualisation and institutionalisation.

1.3 An institutional approach

The general theoretical debate as well as contributions on food consumption suggests shifts in the relationship between buyers and eaters of food, on the one hand, and other social institutions, on the other. Everyday practices are generally habitual, taken for granted, and not easily (or even misleadingly) verbalised. Changing relationships need to recognise discursive and cognitive as well as habitual elements. A considerable sociological literature has emerged on consumption in general and food in particular characterising such activities in terms of habits, conventions and social practices (see below). The institutionalisation perspective helps to bring this discussion to a more general, but still concrete, level, in search for patterns of change and difference. It is at this level that shifting forms of regulation can be discussed. While the habits and interdependencies of everyday food consumption may differ compared to earlier times, perhaps involving more individualised eating, that does not reduce the importance of studying how consumption is institutionalised and how it is regulated.

Food consumption is not a social institution like the family or the market; it is better framed as a set of coordinated practices, in which the practices as well as the overall configuration are subject to institutionalisation (Kjærnes et al 2007). It is a set of practices
with a certain sequence and division of labour. The focus on habits makes it reasonable to start out with eating as a key activity. “If eating is the sum effect of many situated events, the sociologically appropriate question is whether there is a social logic to the situations in which people find themselves.” (Warde 1997) As a consequence, neither items nor situations should be observed separately. Rather, the focus should be on the sequence of situations and bundles of items. The items, the materiality of eating, are social products, linking to the long chain of processes involved in the production, procurement and preparation of food. And all of this takes place within specific contexts or trajectories, culturally, politically, and economically (Appadurai 1986; Fine 2002).

These habits and interconnections are not static. Institutions have a history, a genealogy, and they evolve and change. At the same time, however, these processes should not be “over-socialised” in the sense that they are not deterministic and we need to recognise agency as well as individual flexibility. Everyday food habits are neither explicit, individual acts of decision-making, as assumed in cognitive approaches, nor are they mere unconscious, pre-determined acts (Gronow and Warde 2001). Habits normalize practice. They are the ‘way things are done’ (by ‘Us’ if not by ‘Them’). Such “normal” practices describe how things are usually done, but also how things should be done. But there may be internal differentiation based on competence and commitment. And, evidently, there is individual variation. Acting in direct contrast to the “normal” may raise practical difficulties as well as social sanctions. But that does not rule out individual freedom. “Freedom” develops within the frames of and with reference to institutions. It is not either institutionalisation or individual freedom: they are involved in a dynamic where habits are constantly reconfirmed, but also modified through individual actions. Different forms of institutionalisation will open for different degrees and forms of individual agency and flexibility.

So the approach is based on a distinction between social processes involved in everyday practices of food consumption and regulatory interventions meant to modify these practices. Current debates often seem to conflate these aspects, making a circular argument where the freedom and responsibility represented in consumer choice is both a condition and a goal of regulatory initiatives. As a particular form of regulation “choice” should be contrasted to other forms of regulation, where we can expect the balance between different forms to differ depending on time and place. As much as there may be accordance between regulation and the ways in which food consumption is institutionalised, there may also be tensions and conflicts. Attention is therefore directed towards associations between characteristics of regulation and the ways in which food consumption is institutionalised, opening for mismatches as well as protest and creativity.

In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical controversy that is suggested in this introduction, including a clarification of the ideas of the institutionalisation of consumption and regulation as part of institutionalised interrelationships. The next two chapters present the empirical studies. The third chapter addresses the regulation of food consumption in the Norwegian welfare state and questions the emergence of new forms of regulation. This is followed by a closer look at uncertainty and distrust related to food
risks across Europe. Finally, from a summarising discussion of the research questions, I will draw some more general conclusions.
2 The theoretical approach: regulation and institutionalisation

2.1 Power, interrelations and the regulation of food consumption

What about these notions of consumer freedom and responsibility? Is that just a disguise for the dissemination of a neo-liberalist ideology of market power? Based on ideas developed by Foucault, Rose has investigated what shifting relationships imply in terms of (forms of) power. He suggests that new and very broad forms of regulation and authority have developed, characterised as ‘government’, including “all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, and the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one’s own passions, to control one’s own instincts, to govern oneself” (Rose 1999, 3). The notion of ‘governmentality’ implies a certain relationship of government to other forms of power, in particular to ‘sovereignty’ and ‘discipline’ (Dean 1999, 19). Sovereignty is exercised through the juridical and executive arms of the state over subjects, while discipline represents power over and through the individual, obtained through institutions like schools, hospitals, manufacturing enterprises, etc. Power as ‘government’, on the other hand, sees living individuals as resources to be fostered, to be used and to be optimized (ibid, 29). This is not a question of replacing one form for another, but “in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty/discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security” (Foucault, 1991, 102).

Rose has suggested that government gives the state a less hegemonic role. The challenge of liberal political rationalities are committed to the twin projects of respecting the autonomy of certain “private” zones, and shaping their conduct in ways conducive to particular conceptions of collective and individual well-being. This takes place through procedures for shaping and nurturing those domains that were to provide its counterweight and limit – ‘governance at a distance’. The construction of freedom and free persons has therefore “come to define the problem space within which contemporary rationalities of government compete” (Rose, 1999).

I associate self-governance with the large emphasis on ‘food choice’ or ‘consumer choice’ in current food discourses, addressing for example nutrition. The notion of ‘consumer choice’ seems to encapsulate a number of different regulatory issues coming together to represent a strong re-direction of regulation from protection (in a pastoral sense) towards emphasising individual responsibility and freedom (Frewer and Van Trijp 2007). Examples are certified labelling programmes, “consumer” education, and communication in public and commercial media about concrete lifestyle issues. This may, in turn, be linked to neo-liberal winds of de-regulation, privatization and individualisation (Jubas 2007, 243).
Self-governance is defined as a distinctively cognitive process. But governing the mind is not the same as governing what people do. We must not overlook that food consumption practices may be influenced and regulated in many other ways, including legal and bureaucratic means and organisational procedures. The state as well as professional and economic actors may still exercise regulatory power over consumption without relying on self-governance. ‘Discipline’ may play a significant role, especially since a growing proportion of our meals are served in kindergartens, schools, workplaces, hospitals, etc., i.e. in places where individual choice is highly confined. It has also been suggested that discipline is a useful way of conceptualising how shops and retailing intentionally shape our purchases (Dulsrud and Jacobsen 2007; Barrey et al. 2000; Zukin 2004). Shops are carefully designed, so as to steer – “edit” (potential) their customers in certain directions. This may go beyond limited, commercial aims, such as removing sweets from their usual place near the checkout counter to avoid children being overly tempted and removing tobacco out of sight altogether. Of major importance for understanding the range of regulations of food consumption and issues of power is to redirect attention to include what happens with the food, where, by whom, how, and the power relations involved. Changes at this level may or may not be in accordance with their representation in public discourse.

Foucault characterises underlying power structures as ‘states of domination’, representing the capacity to structure the field of action of the other, to intervene in the domain of the other’s possible actions (Lazzarato 2002). These states represent an institutional stabilisation of strategic relations, based on the fact that the mobility, the potential reversibility and instability of power relations is limited. This non-differentiated understanding of power, from which there is no escape, has been criticised for “conveying a one-sided, monolithic image of unidirectional control” (Lukes 2005). But, even so, it is important to be aware of forms of power that are not overt and explicit; in fact, the most efficient ones are those that are not recognised. Power in non-coercive contexts includes a ‘third dimension’ (in addition to explicit decisions – and non-decisions), namely “securing the consent to domination of willing subjects” (Lukes 2005, 109). Social and cultural processes will help to produce consent. Food provisioning and consumption involve large and highly organised and structured sections of society and “organisation is the mobilisation of bias”, as Schattschneider (1975) put it. But they will also produce freedom. “[Individuals’] freedom may ... be the fruit of regulation – the outcomes of disciplines and controls” (Lukes 2005, 97). This is pointing to important dynamics between power and freedom, influenced by explicit regulation and the institutional framework that regulation operates within.

Searle (1995, 28) makes a useful distinction between constitutive and regulative rules. Regulative rules regulate already existing action via different explicit rules, laws and sanctions whereas constitutive rules “create the very possibility of certain activities”. Institutional facts exist only within systems of constitutive rules; they are the “rules of the game”. People are typically not conscious of these rules and they may also have false beliefs about them. Thus, people are developing a set of dispositions that are sensitive and responsive to the specific content of those rules which, in turn, develop through collective
agreement and acceptance (ibid, 142). This distinction between constitutive and regulative rules is a good opening for analysing how food consumption is regulated; a way to capture how institutionalisation is by itself regulatory for action and, at the same time, that regulative rules are imposed on institutions and institutionalised interrelations. Constitutive rules will by nature be internal to institutionalisation processes and generally implicit, while regulative rules are more explicit and (generally) imposed externally. In order to understand the character of regulation (i.e. regulative rules) it is important to consider the relationship between constitutive and regulative rules, asking how regulatory rules emerge, whether there is agreement or tension with the constitutive ones, and the powers involved in introducing regulations. Searle indicates that constitutive rules come first, with regulative rules being established within the framework formed by these rules. I will however put up the question whether regulatory rules may be transformed into constitutive ones? If so, would a transition be represented in the form of a crisis or rather a gradual habitualisation and normalisation? (see also Hunt 1999, 201).

The distinction between regulative and constitutive rules becomes tricky, but also important, when it comes to governmentality forms of regulation. We need to question who is regulating whom by which means, in order for people as food consumers to make the right ‘choices’? For this to be a matter of freedom, that is to represent some autonomy, we must also discuss how that freedom is exercised. The possibility of contesting power is hard to recognise in many contributions on governmentality, first of all because “power is in our freedom” (Rose 1999). While regulatory initiatives are being recognised, power is first of all expressed through self-governance and the free choice. When the empowerment of the individual is at the same time reflecting the success of the regulatory agent, how can we then catch contestation and resistance? Is for example obesity a regulatory failure, an act of resistance – or is it demonstrating that structural constraints make it difficult for people to take on personal responsibility, even if they may wish to? Norbert Elias has suggested that individualisation and informalisation develop along with growing interdependencies and therefore require a higher degree of habitual self-control, not less (Salumets 2001, 6). In this view, individual freedom means personal discipline and responsibility and those who do not exercise their freedom in a proper way may be sanctioned, typically in the form of shame, indignation, etc. However, while self governance may in this way represent power over the self; that does not necessarily imply power over others (Lukes 2005, 73). We might say that with self governance social problems are privatized and individualised. But self governance via active choices may also introduce elements of protest, resistance, influence in innovation processes, and democratic voice. The power relations involved and the relative impacts of these two aspects of individualised responsibilities - as privatisation and as politicisation - need to be explored critically and empirically.

Traditionally, two extreme positions have dominated the debate on consumption and power (Jensen 1984; Harvey et al. 2001; Fine and Leopold 1993; Fine 2004). The conception of the sovereign consumer of neo-classical economics (and some postmodernist ideas (McCracken 1988)) is contrasted to the critical position of for example Marxist inspired writers, who instead associate consumption with reproduction,
mirroring conditions of production and with power relations characterised by alienation, fetishisation and false needs. Numerous analyses of food issues have been made within the Marxist political economy tradition (like the ‘agri-food’ approach) (Buttel et al. 1990; Friedmann and McMichael 1989; see also Murcott and Campbell 2004). Within such a perspective, “consumer sovereignty” becomes meaningless because corporate actors will socialise consumers to adopt a – for the producers – appropriate behaviour. A sense of agency will mean self deception. If we discard the basic assumption reflected in the idea of the sovereign, decision-making consumer, we can therefore end up with the understanding that people in their capacity as buyers and eaters of food have very little to say, apart from the control they may retain within their own domestic sphere (and even that is challenged by increasing commodification) (see e.g. Guthman and DuPuis 2006). Governmentality would in this view mean manipulation of consumers and disclaiming responsibility rather than empowerment.

When addressing market relations, we cannot of course overlook that people as consumers encounter well organised and highly resourceful actors who must be expected to strategically forward their own interests and aims. However, structural imbalances of power should not lead us to look at regulation and power in a unilateral manner; we need instead to address this as a separate question. Rather than dismissing or assuming consumer agency, we need to problematise it. We need to question the role of consumers not only in relation to producers or states (or deflating the two), but in the triangular relationships between markets, states and consumers (first of all as households). Consumer expectations and responses have been found to be significant in the formation of public policies as well as in the development of markets (Cohen 2003; Haastrup et al. 2007; Harvey et al. 2001; Dréze and Sen 1989; Tilly 1975; Trentmann 2004). As part of questions of power, issues of legitimacy are recurrent and we need at least to ask questions about the potentials for people as consumers to be creative and “fight back”.

If we look at contemporary conditions, a number of questions and paradoxes appear. One is about ideals of pluralism and individualistic choices confronted with mass producing markets that are standardised and carefully assigned to various consumer “segments”. This raises the question of what a commodified “freedom to choose” is and how that is related to individual responsibility and the power of self governance (Fine 2002)(Warde, 1997). Selecting among varieties of breakfast cereals or readymade dinners can hardly be identified as moral choices and empowerment, whether referring to the self or to broader social issues. How can regulation by consumer choice regarding health, the treatment of farm animals, and environmental sustainability be visualised? How is it realised?

Another paradox is that modern food provisioning seems to represent both growing complexity and stronger predictability. While current risks are often being associated with processes of de-institutionalisation and individualization, the handling of many food risks is becoming increasingly organised. Market complexity and problems of controversial and dispersed responsibilities have given way to specific, market-led forms of monitoring and control as well as a re-emergence of food issues on the political agenda. This has, among other things, opened for a large “audit industry”, itself commercial and with built-in
tensions (Power 1997; Shapiro 1987). What we see is a shift towards stronger management of food provisioning (Hatanaka et al. 2005). What does this imply for regulation by choice, a powerless, distrustful consumer or a confident consumer with opportunities?

A third paradox is about the state as an unwanted “nanny” and the state as a significant party in ongoing regulatory initiatives. Reference to consumer and food choice is pervasive in current food policy making. It is not at all clear whether this is a matter of “bringing the state back in” (Skocpol 1985) or “taking the state back out” (Rose and Miller 1992). How do new forms of state involvement influence the balance between liberalisation and freedom, on the one hand, and securing loyalty and compliance, on the other?

Questions of power are complex. We cannot dismiss that people in their capacity as consumers may exercise power over others. Yet, it is an open, even dubious, question whether individual choice, freedom and agency can curb the tremendous increase in state and market organisation and management of the food that is distributed. It is within this space for action that governmentality becomes relevant. Many of the issues raised here, and especially with regard to the role of consumers and food consumption, appear in moral and political discourses about responsibility and the limited ability and legitimacy of conventional regulation to counter contemporary problems. It has been suggested that where globalised provisioning chains make conditions in production out of reach for the nation state in which these products end, consumer action can (Nestle 2002).

We also need to critically consider freedom in terms of power over the self. Communitarianism and familism may influence what regulatory efforts can do in terms of influencing contemporary eating. New forms of communitarianism seem less associated with the private, household context, increasingly with reference to networks, local communities etc. These spheres outside direct influence from corporations and states may delimit as well as reinforce the potential for or impacts on self-governance.

### 2.2 Consumption and institutionalisation processes

I have pointed to the need to recognise underlying structures, social and technological processes within and with reference to which regulatory efforts emerge. How can we conceive of consumption in a way that, on the one hand, transcends and problematises the rational, decision-making model, and, on the other hand, allows for conflict, agency and change? The concept of ‘institution’ fell into disrepute under the Parsonian influence because it seemed tautological. Institutions, as defined by shared norms and values, were seen as functional, self-serving and consensual. This produces a circular argument where it is impossible to discuss for example how they are established, by whom, or how they evolve. Behaviour and social system becomes one and the same thing. Durkheim also saw institutions as normative in character, as functional regulation of economic relations so
that a normal and anomie-free social order could develop in modern capitalism (Beckert 2002; Scott 2001). Yet, when placed in its original context of the more critical Pragmatist theory of habitual action – in opposition to economic ideals of rational action, an institutional approach can provide a basis for an analysis of how regulatory change is linked to food consumption practices as well as the agency of people as consumers.

Thorstein Veblen (1919/1990) had four basic critiques of economics. These were a hedonistic conception of the individual, a calculative conception of rationality, an atomistic conception of society, and a false position for causality and teleology in explaining individual action and social processes. The problem for Veblen was not the postulation of wrong motives for action but the presumption that action needs any motives at all. The motives for action do not precede action because they come into the picture in the middle of an ongoing action process (Veblen 1990; Samuels 1990). Second, calculative rationality is not the paradigm of rationality, but a very special case of rationality, corresponding to deductive reasoning where all the information is in the premises. Third, people do not act in a vacuum as atomistic individuals but under institutional effects. This is where norms come in, not as imperatives, but as inhibiting action. As the fourth element of Veblen’s argument, social processes do not form a background for discrete choice situations (as in Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’), they are ongoing and cumulative processes of causality that do not have any teleology.

Along similar lines, Polanyi argued that individual choices and preferences cannot be understood outside the cultural and historical framework in which they are embedded: “The instituting of the economic process vests that process with unity and stability; it produces a structure with a definite function in society; it shifts the place of the process in society, thus adding significance to its history; it centres interest on values, motives and policy. [ ] The human economy, then, is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and non-economic.” (Polanyi 1957, 34)

Several contributions that have emerged under the heading of New Institutionalism are anchored in this critique of Homo economicus and its presumptions of calculative rationality. With reference to Veblen and Pragmatist philosophy, there has been a renewed interest in habits as the foundation of institutions (Gronow 2005). By emphasising habitual action rather than socialisation and internalised norms such approaches are less prone to the critique of circularity. Instead of identifying habits with actual conduct, they are understood as dispositions or as proclivities to act in a certain way in certain situations (Kilpinen 2005). Institutions do not merely constrain individuals’ choices but they also “establish the very criteria by which people discover their preferences” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Social institutions are produced by the habitual action of individuals but the process is twofold: institutions also produce individuals. Institutions restrict action, but they also enable it. According to DiMaggio and Powell, this argument challenges functional explanations to institutions, as institutions may produce efficient as well as inefficient or counteracting solutions to problems of governance.
In Pragmatism the question of action comes before questions of knowledge, moral valuation etc. – not after them as is the traditional interpretation. And it is not possible to speak about anticipation of action without implicating an actual world in which such action might occur (Määttänen 2005). Actors need not be conscious of the habits that affect their behaviour. But habit is a reasoned routine where the habitual and intellectual aspects overlap and interact during the course of action (Kilpinen 2000, 2005). In that way, action is not reduced to routine (or the outcome of rational decisions) nor is meaning reduced to knowledge or discourse. This distinguishes a habitual understanding of institutions from the cultural-cognitive. While for example Berger and Luckmann (1976) derive habit from action that is originally conscious, according to this perspective conscious action derives from and with reference to habitual action. Action takes place within a certain context which is never stable. When the objective situation changes the actors have to respond by changing their habitual behaviour. It is first of all in situations of crisis that actors become conscious of their habits and they are the places for creativity (Swidler 1986; Joas 2006). This gives an interactive view of action and structure, not, as suggested by Berger and Luckmann, as expressions of one and the same ontological level.

A process of institutionalisation will arrange actors and individuals in certain ways, fixing who is affected and involved, their relationship to each other, their distribution of responsibilities, etc. While Parsons identified power with legitimate authority, others see power by definition acting against the interest of ordinary people (Lukes 2005). It seems more helpful to problematise power as part of the institutionalisation involving varying balances between different types of interests. Institutionalisation implies or includes taken for granted power structures, integrating certain actors and types of conflicts and making others more marginal (Schattschneider 1975). Being based on (some degree of) stability and predictability, the institutionalisation will imply particular procedures for handling these conflicts. This handling will entail more or less freedom to the people involved, depending on their position in relation to these conflicts (gender, age, class distinctions, consumption vs production, capital vs labour, etc.). The handling of conflicts is associated with mechanisms of legitimisation (and may thus raise issues of trust). Yet, we should be wary of an institutional theory that implicitly assumes consensus. Not only may individuals depart from common, normalised habits as acts of resistance. The sources of change and resistance are just as likely to be found in tensions within institutions as in contradictions between them (Friedland and Alford 1991, 255). Institutional change is often discussed in terms of destabilisation, but, according to Scott (2001, 200), we also need to consider the emergence of a new institutional logics. This implies that we should investigate forms as well as degrees or phases of institutionalisation. Reinstitutionalisation means that new habits develop, with a realignment of interests and power.

Often, but not always, will institutionalisation mean the emergence of organisations (such as businesses, public bodies and households) and formalised interaction with other institutions (such as regulatory or contractual arrangements, codified communication, etc.) (Scott 2001). Organisation represents not merely the introduction of rules and bureaucracy, but also a more general process of rationalisation, i.e. the creation of cultural
schemes defining means-ends relationships and standardizing systems of control over activities and actors (Scott 2001, 74). This also points to the role of material structures, such as location, houses, appliances, technologies, etc. (Latour 1998; Law and Hassard 1999). Artefacts and technologies represent important carriers of institutional elements, introducing inventions but also, once developed and deployed, becoming reified and appearing to be part of the objective, structural properties of the situation (Scott 2001, 84). At the same time, artefacts and their use are shaped by the institutions in which they emerge. New food processing technologies may influence eating habits, but their use and success will also depend on how they fit into established habits (Green et al. 2003).

This understanding has consequences for how I analyse the objects of regulation, food consumption practices - purchasing and eating, but also, importantly, for how I analyse regulation. A focus on everyday habits gives a broader conceptual framework for grasping food consumption, not as one monumental, normatively or cognitively defined institution, but as configurations of interlinked habits. Habits are socially constructed and situated, pre-existing to individual action, with more or less flexibility for individual acts not being in accordance with those habits. Agency develops within institutions and institutionalised interrelations. Institutions are composed also of relations between actors and they are not necessarily dependent on the knowledge of these actors. This approach allows us to study regulation without any ‘mind-first’ presumptions, a motivation-action causality, but instead seeing regulation as a component of interrelations between institutions and as part of processes of institutionalisation. Inspired by Bourdieu’s concept ‘field’, Scott (2001, 208) introduces the concept of ‘organisational field’. By this, he points to an analytical framework that goes beyond specific institutions as identified by organisations or specific habits to include questions like relevant actors, institutional logics and governance structures that empower and constrain the actions of participants in a delimited social sphere. It includes all parties who are meaningfully involved in some collective enterprise. This is vital in a field such as food consumption, which is so complex and organised, but still often treated as individual or, in recognition of social processes, as private. Since my focus is on non-organisational habits, I introduce the concept ‘institutional field’ with similar connotations, but where actors are not necessarily represented by organisations.

2.3 Dimensions of institutionality – a model of food consumption and regulation

The research problem raised in the introduction is about changing regulation of food consumption and assumptions about the character of emerging new forms. Following from the discussion in chapter 1 and in this chapter, such changes should be analysed in view of
shifts in the character of food consumption habits and in interrelationships between such habits and regulation.

Three dimensions of the institutionalisation of food consumption can be distinguished. Basic, constitutive rules are to be found in the habits of everyday eating as well as in institutionalised interrelationships between production and consumption. Following Polanyi’s concern with the relation between economic and non-economic processes, this second, relational, dimension may be captured as a matter of social division of labour. The third dimension addresses the institutional field. The regulation of food consumption practices take place within a certain context of players, interests and institutional logics. Some of the players and processes are local, others global, but we need to discuss how they come together in a particular configuration in order to understand how things happen (McAdam et al. 2001). The third dimension is therefore operationalised mainly in terms of the situated character of food consumption.

A whole range of activities may go under the heading of ‘food consumption’. Procurement (via purchase or otherwise), storage, preparation (by processing and cooking), serving, eating, - and clearing, washing and disposal are closely interlinked, but still specific activities, each internally also diverse. From the point of view of a person “consuming” food, purchase may be instrumental to bringing about cooking and eating, but may not be the key event. Food, cuisine and eating are proclaimed to lie at the very core of sociality: it signifies “togetherness” (Murcott et al. 1992, 115). This is not only about the ritualistic character of many meals. At an everyday level, the commensality of eating means that we try to coordinate our actions. To Simmel, the sociability of eating is related to the refinement of social forms of interaction (Simmel 1994/1957; Gronow 1997). A question repeatedly posed is whether traditional meal patterns and meal formats are being disrupted (Murcott 1995). Many use the expression grazing (there are also similar versions in other languages) to describe a situation where food is eaten in less patterned ways with regard to time, place and contents. Dissolution of tradition and individualisation are often presented as implying more flexibility and freedom for the individual to choose according to his or her tastes and preferences. However, many have also emphasised negative aspects of individualisation. By the concept gastro-anomie Fischler refers to a tendency whereby cultural norms for what should be eaten when and together with whom disappear; where regular meals become increasingly rare and replaced by irregular eating patterns (Fischler 1988; see also Mintz 1996; Burnett 1989). Following a collapse of traditional and authoritative external rules, the individual faces a splintered, uncertain and confused situation, where, in the midst of conflicting advice, the individual is left alone, ill-prepared to make decisions about food consumption.

However, increasing individualisation and conventionality need not necessarily be social opposites (Gronow & Warde 2001). Observed changes do not necessarily represent de-institutionalisation. With the growing complexity of modern societies we need both flexibility and daily routines. Campbell (1996, 149) contends that life in modern societies can at the same time become de-traditionalised and more habitual. This is, at least in part, an outcome of the organisation of everyday life, as influenced by demography and family
structure as well as work. And it is about resources like competence and income. While many who depict dissolution and anomie refer to the shifting character of the food supply and to public discourses on food, studies of eating habits do not reflect the same degrees of change and disruption. A growing body of empirical research indicates that while the symbolic and material characteristics of food may be changing, that does not imply that socially coordinated patterns of eating have disappeared (Blake et al. 2007; Mestdag 2005; Poulain 2002; Warde and Martens 2000; Bugge and Døving 2000).

This debate about the character of contemporary eating habits is clearly important for the analysis of regulation. It puts up to questioning how the social problems being addressed by regulatory efforts are being defined. Individualised eating appears to be the problem, but at the same time an implicit precondition in many regulatory initiatives focussing on choice and on situations in which individual choice is most predominant (Niva 2008, 72). The debate also opens for a range of interpretations of how people respond to regulative rules of eating, from powerlessness or irrelevance, via loyalty and active support, to resistance and creativity.

Change in the institutionalisation of food consumption is also about new divisions of labour and new types of interdependencies. Assumptions about the shifting character of food consumption often refer to a context of market exchange. But not only is “the target” moving, as this exchange takes place at different stages in the transformation of food items from singular raw materials to a complex dish served on a plate. Food items have a whole ‘biography’, with numerous steps, involving different people, technologies, economic relations, meanings and expectations, etc. (Kopykoff 1986; Murcott and Campbell 2004). Zukin sees production and consumption not as two poles of a commodity chain, but as continually interacting processes in a “cultural circuit”, where products both reflect and transform consumers’ behaviour (Zukin 2004, 178). A third, more economically and institutionally oriented conceptualisation of these processes and interdependencies is as ‘systems of provision’ (Fine and Leopold 1993; Fine 2002).

The dominant change here is, undoubtedly, the increasing significance of commodification. As already described, labour with food is taken over by formal food institutions, most of them commercial, a shift promoted by market developments as well as higher purchasing power and changes in the character of everyday life. This affects not only the economics of the relations. It is a massive transformation towards organisation, integration and rationalisation. It creates identifiable social entities endowed with interests, a capacity to act and formalised responsibilities (re Scott 2001). This introduces a whole set of questions about regulation, regarding power and responsibilities as well as how regulation can influence what people do. New relationships may not merely delimit the scope of direct state regulation, but also enhance regulatory efforts initiated by others than public authorities and also more indirect forms of state regulation of food consumption.

When food is part of organised procedures, it will also become subject to codification and standardisation. Dishes are given titles on restaurant menus and ingredients of manufactured food are chemically analysed, categorised and documented, nutritional
evaluations helping to sort those categories according to biological needs. The outcomes are both convergence and variation. Again, the question of ‘choice’ is central. Mennell (1985, 39) suggests a process of “diminishing [social] contrasts and increasing varieties”. In response to Mennell, Warde maintains that the contemporary phase of consumer culture has become obsessed with variety and choice, tending to obscure underlying continuities in food practice (Warde 1987, 179). With the growing importance of large supermarket chains, a huge variety of items is offered in the shops. But this variety does not necessarily have consequences for substantive patterns of consumption (ibid, 191). While people used to buy a few simple raw ingredients to produce a range of dishes at home, this variation has, at least in some respects, been transformed into product varieties in the shops. Indeed, “increasing varieties” may be as much a phenomenon that is discursively staged by certain producers of knowledge, most notably the marketing profession (Lien 1997), rather than giving a good description of consumption practices. In any case, self regulation in the form of ‘consumer choice’ seems to be based on this commodified and rationalised exchange of a variety of goods that are highly processed, categorised and labelled.

Rather than emphasising the impact of variety, Zukin (2004) focuses on the openness that choice introduces: “In as much as choice amongst commodities has been found to be important, it is not the range of commodities that matters, but the exploitation of choice for extending our ability to negotiate the ambivalences and anxieties of relationships” (ibid, 154). The openness may however go both ways, from the point of view of buyers as well as sellers. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, it is this openness, combined with increasing dependencies, that seems to raise issues of trust.

It has been argued that modern food institutions are characterised by their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact. There has been an ongoing debate about how globalised trade, travel and cultural exchange produce more homogeneous patterns of food consumption, as represented by for example Georg Ritzer’s (1993) thesis about ‘MacDonaldization’. But the transformation of the retail sector has been very diverse across Europe, with highly varying degrees of supermarket dominance as well as significant differences in the structure of the supermarkets (logistics and integration, size, selection of products and marketing strategies, proportion of fresh foods, place/distance, etc.) (Kjærnes et al. 2007). While shifts in food production and consumption may represent new divisions of labour and changing norms and organisation, they still take place within specific locations (Jubas 2007, 246). There are path-dependencies and considerable unevenness. It is important to see how the various aspects come together in specific institutional fields in order to understand regulatory aspects as well as their impacts on food consumption practices. Yet, the institutional field is not merely characterised by the specific places in which production and consumption take place and the links between them (‘where’). The institutional field is also matter of ‘who’, of which types of actors and institutions that are involved and how they relate to each other. This allows us to move beyond an essentialisation of place, which is not very productive analytically, to analyse how such differences are produced within specific institutional fields, involving local and national as
well as international actors and relations. These fields may moreover differ significantly depending on the food issue in question.

Figure 1 summarises the elements of my analysis of modes of regulation and links to consumption, captured as an institutionalisation of food consumption. It outlines a model which emphasises interrelationships and interdependencies. The circle represents the institutionalisation of food consumption, as characterised by three dimensions; everyday habits, the division of labour and the institutional field. Everyday habits are characterised by the organisation of food consumption practices, their embedded meanings and social and normative significance. The focus is on what people usually do. In the end, it is these habits that are to be influenced by regulation. But the formation of habits is difficult to understand without considering how they are part of a dynamic and a division of labour between provisioning and consumption, affecting not only what people do, but also the scope of regulation. Moreover, the regulation of food issues takes place within a specific institutional field which influences how habits and the division of labour relate to and interact with regulation. The double arrow between food provisioning and the mode of regulation is an indication of the dynamic between the two. Change taking place in the relationship between provisioning and regulation will impact on the institutionalisation of food consumption as well as how it is regulated. But the main point of this model and its triangular form is to emphasise that such impacts are not a matter of structural determinism and that food consumption habits are part of the dynamic. These relationships work together to produce varying degrees of freedom (freedom from and freedom to), responsibility, and protection of the eater of food.
Figure 1. Regulating food consumption – a model

Notably, this model refers to (aggregate) activities rather than groups of people or organisations, such as households, markets and states. I address how these activities are institutionalised and interrelated without any presumptions about how, where and by whom they are carried out. Mostly, food consumption is associated with households, provisioning with markets, and regulation with the state. But, as the historical as well as current references indicate, this is not necessarily so and the interrelationships are highly dynamic in terms of the division of labour and responsibilities. The institutionalisation of food consumption represents, together with provisioning systems, configurations specific in time and space.

This model opens for refining the questions I posed about current types of regulation of food consumption. First, the issue of regulatory change can move beyond public discourse to address is association with actual transformations in the institutionalisation of food consumption. Second, as changes in the various dimensions of the institutionalisation of food consumption may coincide, reinforce, or instead counteract each other, there may be matches or tensions which may help to explain responses of trust and distrust. Third, it opens for a possible diversity of emergent, new types of regulation. Self governance in the form of consumer choice may not be the sole or even predominant solution and it may take different forms, depending on power, agency, and organisation. Increasing interdependencies with regard to food provisioning may open for disciplinary techniques becoming more important. But discipline within a neo-liberal context may be quite different from strategies developed within the frames of a pastoral welfare state. And the extensive expansion and complexity of the organisation of food provisioning represents a formalisation which may imply (much) more use of bureaucratic forms of regulation. But it is again a question how that appears within the general context of a regulatory state and aims of governance at a distance from political arenas – as opposed to legal regulations based on specific political decisions. Again, this raises issues of legitimacy and trust.
Yet, the model represents a strong simplification of how eating patterns are formed and how they change. The model is meant to operationalise how we can theoretically and empirically capture changing interrelations between food consumption/consumers and various types of regulatory interventions. These interrelations are of course not the sole source of change and variation in food consumption. Broader social and cultural processes as well as individual adaptations are involved. The model as well as the empirical investigations must therefore be regarded as one input to these larger questions about change.

2.3 Design, methodology and the selection of empirical cases

The empirical studies forming the basis for this dissertation are selected and presented as elements in the theoretical argument about changes taking place in the regulation of food consumption. The overall design therefore refers more to this general theoretical and conceptual framing than to one investigation or one method of data collection. Discussing change and variation in regulatory and market institutions is relatively straightforward. But in order to capture new forms of regulation, emphasising consumer self regulation, we need to get much closer to consumption habits and people’s opinions in their capacity as consumers. The challenge has been to find a way of analysing the character of interrelations between regulation and consumption. Instead of going into micro-level types of interaction, I have looked for broad patterns within areas that are shaped by more or less the same types of interrelations with state and market institutions. The concept of institutionalisation helps to bring consumption to a more aggregate level that matches descriptions of provisioning and regulatory arrangements.

The chosen approach has been to focus on the country level. The nation state should not be essentialised, but serves as an analytical unit. While European food consumption of today is clearly shaped by processes taking place at sub-national as well as at supra-national levels, when it comes to regulatory intervention in terms of direct interaction and communication, the national level is still dominant. This is also demonstrated by distinct national patterns (sometimes homogeneous, sometimes very heterogeneous) regarding politics and markets as well as eating habits and public opinions.

I have made use of Norway as a case to study the historical emergence and change of welfare state regulation of food consumption. The characteristic Norwegian regulation of food consumption, “marrying” agricultural interests with public health concerns, has turned out to provide a particularly stable and consensual form of regulation.

A typical feature of institutions is that their constitutive rules are taken for granted. Such rules are therefore more easily identified by making systematic comparisons across contexts and countries. Cross-country analyses help to analyse how regulations emerge within and are conditioned by the (variable) institutionalisation of food consumption. This
may be particularly urgent when trying to understand the present situation and the emergence of new forms of regulation of food consumption. I have focussed on Western Europe. This is a region with many similarities, including food supply as well as regulatory frameworks. As such, they therefore share some common references which make a comparative discussion of institutional variations meaningful (thus representing a “most similar” comparative approach). One should be careful about making too generalised statements. We know that Europe as a region is particular in many respects. Not only is it a wealthy and powerful corner of the world, defending a Western political culture. There are also distinct regulatory traditions and ongoing intensive harmonisation processes which unify (Ansell and Vogel 2006). In that way, many discussions will be specific to that region, distinctly different from for example Russia (Berg et al. 2005; Ganskau 2006). Neither North America nor Australia has experienced the same popular and political reactions as in Europe. In order to understand varying and changing forms of regulation of food consumption, it would therefore be very useful to extend the perspective to include other regions.

A number of different methods of empirical data collection and analysis have been employed, including historical sources and documentary analyses, statistics, interviews with key players, and interviews with ordinary people, mostly in the form of public opinion surveys. The particular methodologies involved in data collection and analyses are described in more detail in the publications on the various case studies.

The historical studies in Norway are to a large degree based on an investigation of Norwegian nutrition policy. The study was a collaborative project between SIFO and the University of Bergen, coordinated by U. Kjærnes, and (initially) funded by the Norwegian Research Council. The study addressed the emergence and institutionalisation of nutrition policy, its development and implementation, including case studies of particular political controversies (milk, margarine). The empirical material included historical archive material, interviews with key players, policy papers, and secondary material. While article I refers directly to this study, it is in article II complemented with published findings from a number of other studies (see references in the article).

The empirical material presented on trust in food has been collected in a project on variations in trust in Europe (articles III and V). ‘Consumer Trust in Food. A European Study of Social and Institutional Conditions for the Production of Trust’ (TRUSTINFOOD) (2002-2004) was funded by the European Commission, 5th Framework Programme, Quality of Life, Key Action 1, contract no. QLK1-CT-2001-00291. The project was coordinated by The National Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO) and involved teams at the University of Bologna, The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and Roskilde University in Denmark, CRIC University of Manchester, University of Porto, and the Federal Research Institute for Nutrition and Food in Karlsruhe, Germany. As part of the TRUSTINFOOD study, representative population surveys were conducted in six European countries, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, and Portugal, along with institutional studies in the same countries and at
the European level (Halkier and Holm 2006; Kjærnes et al. 2007; Poppe and Kjærnes 2003). For further details on the collection of survey data, see article III and V.

The focus on national variations in trust in food has meant that survey data are presented mainly in the form of simple univariate distributions (in article III) and one country by country multi-variate regression model (in article V). The “social” nature of trust has here been investigated by contextualising opinions at an aggregate, national, level. Basically, therefore, public opinions have been analysed as one out of several sources of information on trust within a country. More detailed statistical analyses of individual variations in trust, linked to attitudes and social background factors as well as food consumption practices, have been conducted (Kjærnes et al. 2005; Poppe and Kjærnes 2003). These analyses do provide additional knowledge about the dynamics of trust and distrust, including how the dynamics of high trust than that of high distrust. But the general, overriding experience from these analyses is that explanations at the political and institutional level are more important than those which can be identified within the survey material. On the other hand, the survey has provided crucial information on what people do as food consumers (shopping, cooking, eating, protesting), serving as input to analyses of the impact of different forms of institutionalisation of food consumption (Kjærnes et al 2005, Kjærnes et al 2007).
3 The regulation of food consumption: from discipline to self governance?

3.1 Modernising eating habits

Liberalisation and the creation of “free markets” from the 16th century onwards represented a major breach with the ‘moral economy’ of the past. Entitlements had been based on status and direct relationships between the sovereign and his subjects. While these entitlements were dismantled, new ones gradually emerged: “if the rise of a market society brought indisputable horrors, it also brought an emphasis on individual freedom of choice, the right to self-embetterment, eventually the opportunity to political participation.” (Thompson 1971, 272) In the long run, Thompson states, improved communications and the formation of national/international markets were advantageous to all parties. But dearth and famine are always in the short run and Adam Smith had only long-run remedies. Political conflicts were mainly over short-run measures, where he advocated more strongly than others the inviolability of laissez-faire (admitting only distributing pittance money). Riot marked a transitional phase towards the establishment of more efficient national markets regulated by price and police alone (Thompson 1971; Tilly 1975). But by the latter part of the 19th century, free market economies and rapid industrialisation of agriculture dominated, reducing most states’ food regulation to restrictive forms of poverty relief.

The poverty relief distinguished strongly between the deserving and the non-deserving and often had explicit disciplinary aims, including what to be eaten (Jones 1986; Dahl 1977). At the same time, moral guidance was relegated from the Church to more secular institutions, often voluntary, philanthropic ones. Regulatory efforts addressed not only individuals, but eventually also the rapidly developing mass markets in the form of measures to avoid malpractice, speculation, and health hazards. Disciplining markets was a matter of efficiency and “fair” competition. But it was also a matter of social order. A wave of riots across Western countries around the last turn of the century addressed the unpredictable and hazardous conditions in many food markets (Burnett and Oddy 1994; French and Phillips 2000; Hirdman 1983). Regulatory responses did however not contest the principle of free market exchange. State regulation of markets and food relief were explicitly not to replace market mechanisms but to make them work better.

So while this period of liberalism represents more market and (for the majority) individual freedom, we also see the emergence of strong regulatory institutions disciplining markets and people. This is most explicitly expressed by the hygiene movement which took hold from the last turn of the century (Hennock 2000; Jones 1986; Schmidt and Kristensen 1986). It was a question of modernising eating and production along lines drawn up by sciences like nutrition, microbiology, and epidemiology. Hygienic modernisation was widely popular as a way to improve general standards of living (and reduce social conflict). Discipline, by itself, points to the expansion of organisations and institutional
procedures, embraced by modern capitalists (like entrepreneurial chocolate manufacturers in the UK and in Norway) as well as by voluntary organisations. At the same time, the family developed from a patriarchal sanctuary towards a space and an instrument for building welfare in society. New dependencies formed by the commodification of food provisioning both required and opened for more regulation of food consumption. With the new discipline of ‘home economics’ the housewife was to be taught how to make efficient use of resources, how to become a rational consumer in the modern food market, and to serve nutritious food to the family. It is within this scientific, paternalist - clearly disciplinary - frame that we see the emergence and institutionalisation of what may be called “modern” regulation of food consumption.

But, as in earlier times, liberal politics provide little preparedness for acute shortages of food. And food, when there is a loss of entitlements, is closely associated with social order (Sen 1982). The shortages in the last years of World War I were met by widespread riots of the classical form; with protest marches, but also attacks on profiteering shops and looting (Argenbright 1993; Coles 1978; Frieburger 1984; Kjærnes 1997; Koblik 1976; Smart 1986). Quite extensive regulatory measures, including price regulation, public purchases, and distribution of food in kind, were rapidly put in place, institutions which were to have considerable implications for food provisioning and consumption policies of the 20th century. Even though there is little uniformity, this represented in many ways the end of laissez-faire food policies and a more active role of the state.

It is with this background of conflicts over the distribution of food that we see the emergence of welfare state food regulations. Esping-Andersen’s Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism is paradigmatic of a vision of the welfare state, in which the relative balance of public or private provisioning of goods and services, commodification and de-commodification, privatisation and nationalisation, have set state and market as essentially antagonistic forces, often sustained by contrary ideological perspectives and political strategies (Esping-Andersen 1990). Notably, however, de-commodification is complementary rather than replacing market based distribution. The legal status of public responsibilities related to food and welfare within the frames of a welfare state may take different forms (Esping-Andersen 1990, 48). As opposed to means-tested poor relief of the liberal state, where eligibility is conditional and where the assistance is characterised by restrictiveness, and insurance based systems where rights and benefits may be ample, but where access is conditional upon a blend of labour-market attachment and individual financial contribution, the third, Scandinavian, type of system aims to actively counteract the unequal outcome of market based distribution. It springs from the Beveridge principle of universal rights of citizenship, regardless of degree of need or extent of participation in the labour market.

Levenstein (1988) has shown how the modernisation of American food habits was influenced by a multiplicity of social forces which are not merely characteristic of a liberalistic regime, but are strongly affected by particular American interrelations and alliances, especially between nutritional science, large food corporations, and regulatory authorities. James et al (1997) describe more briefly how European countries differ in
rather basic ways in how they handle more or less similar nutritional issues. In a similar manner, we can ask how reforms of food regulation appeared in the Scandinavian welfare state. On the one hand, it brought new distribution principles, a focus on collective, universal goals and an active state. On the other hand, while labour mobilisation was a central force, coalition building played a key role as well (Esping-Andersen 1990, 12). A broad labour-agrarian alliance formed the basis for a full-employment welfare state in return for farm price subsidies (ibid, 30). In the next section I will discuss how these different forces and political aims influenced the regulation of food consumption in the Norwegian welfare state.

3.2 Designing the good life: the emergence of Norwegian nutrition policy (article I)

From the last decades of the 19th century there was in Northern Europe a growing recognition of the shortcomings of a system of Poor Laws advising subsistence measures (Burnett 1989, 109). New critique emerged which addressed not only the injustice of the system but even its inadequacies in producing a population of high quality, reducing the performance of soldiers and workers. The science of nutrition was instrumental in replacing a quantitative understanding of hunger as sufficient food (or energy) by “basic needs” as a qualitative issue, with requirements of specific food items to produce “a balanced diet” that could provide enough energy as well as essential nutrients. The emerging science offered scientifically based, “a-political”, decision-making criteria for food distribution in a time of growing social tension (Jones 1986). In large countries military demands and concern for national safety also helped to bring nutrition onto the national political agendas (Mills 1992; Weggemann and Schätz 1995). Thus, hygienically framed efforts were attractive to diverse political regimes, like Germany, Great Britain, and the Scandinavian countries. They all wanted to discipline the population to improve its “quality”. But the specific formulation and implementation differed.

Even in Norway nutrition emerged as a social problem under a liberal regime for economic policy, but much wider aims developed during the inter-war period. Compared to other European countries the Norwegian labour movement had been strongly focussed on class struggle and nutrition became part of radical mobilisation for better welfare; nutrition was reformulated from elitist discipline into a liberating project. So what did that imply? A study of the emergence of nutrition policy in Norway shows how this goes to the core of the political foundations of the Norwegian welfare state, with its very distinctive approach to issues of welfare (Jensen and Kjørnes 1997). Three aspects are of particular importance: belief in scientifically based state intervention, corporative forms of governance, and the emphasis on disciplinary forms of regulation to increase welfare for all.
Nutrition became integrated into the "standard of living" concept developed within economic welfare theory, which aimed at systematic use of science in defining and solving social problems (Wold 1949). Solutions were associated with state responsibility – for the large numbers of unemployed, for other groups outside the labour market, as well as the many with too low salaries to meet the needs of a household (Nordby 1989, 57). Central to Norwegian welfare state food regulation was the extended and unquestioned beliefs in state authority and an ‘active’ (in Keynesian terms), benevolent state. The State was to have responsibilities concerning economy and production as well as the welfare of the population. The political wings met in a belief in rational and scientifically based planning as an administrative measure and a way of solving social problems.

The political red-green alliance had a very particular significance for the corporative solutions that developed in the food sector. The Labour Party taking over government in 1935 was based on a political agreement with the Agrarian Party. The new, reformed, politics emphasised common interests of urban workers and the rural population (smallholders, rural workers). "Town and land - hand in hand" was the slogan. Nutrition policy came to materialise directly the new political situation by linking welfare concerns of workers to those of rural producers (Rudeng 1989). This was indeed based upon concrete experiences of insufficient national supplies during World War I. But the agenda rapidly exceeded this reference to war and crisis, aiming at maximum self-sufficiency on a more permanent basis. A “national diet” agenda can be found at one time or another in many countries, but the long lasting significance of this "patriotic" policy for nutrition policy seems rather unique to Norway, as part of a liberating, nation-building project. The very strong and propagandistic slogan of a "marriage between health and agriculture", saluted even in international forums like The League of Nations, laid the foundations for broad consensus: "The question of nutrition has two aspects, the economic and the hygienic, or in other words: it concerns on the one hand the production and distribution of food, on the other hand the maintenance and promotion of the health of the people (Det Norske 1937, 3). Paradoxically, as part of this process, attention was redirected from redistribution and social policy towards economic growth and production.

Together, scientific planning and patriotic corporatism signalled a long period of strong interventionist - and protectionist - policies in the food sector. The focal point was that large sections of the population "needed" a higher intake of “protective” foods. Several of these were the very same that were produced in larger quantities than the farmers could sell: milk and butter. Yet, when the population's "needs" for these protective foods were calculated, the conclusion was undersupply. Like housing problems, nutrition represented material needs that could increase production and thus benefit the national economy. The administrative solution to these challenges was in the coordinated efforts of experts and political interest groups, through planning committees and negotiating bodies. A national nutrition council was soon established with representatives from all "concerned parties", i.e. nutrition and economic experts, administrators and producers – and no citizens/consumers. Their task was mainly directed towards policy advice and planning.
This centralised multi-sectorial state regulation implied special forms of interrelations and moral considerations, where nutritional concerns became interwoven with other concerns of strong national importance, such as economic support to agricultural production and rural communities and reduced social inequality. Scientific, and especially nutritional, experts played a central role in forming policies that addressed welfare issues without challenging political coalitions (between the labour movement and the farmers). Modernisation within and with reference to these particular forms of institutionalisation provided powerful solutions and legitimacy, but also significant tensions and limitations. While nutrition was co-opted by strong interests, the alliance and its political foundation also implied strong legitimacy of health and nutrition issues. Nutrition was a social problem to be solved by political means, not a private, individual problem. Moreover, unlike liberal policies nutrition policy addressed the whole population in a collective and universal enterprise, not particular groups, like the most vulnerable or groups of particular importance.

This case emphasises the importance of historical legacy and institutional path-dependency for understanding how regulations of food consumption evolve and become institutionalised, in Norway closely linked to nation building during the first half of the 20th century. Second, this was facilitated and maintained by strong legitimacy from powerful groups and political alliances, in particular the alliance between the labour movement and the farmers. Consumers became politically completely marginalised. Rights to protection dominate over private freedoms or responsibilities, with little hesitation over state regulation of markets and the family sphere for “the common good”. But, third, the welfare state also represented strong moral regulation, where discipline was associated with goals of universal welfare. The question is then how these aspects have impacted on current regulation of food consumption.

3.3 Discipline, choice and the institutionalisation of food consumption (article II)

There is a widespread assumption that the welfare state as a moral project has lost its legitimacy and has more or less disappeared. In scientific papers as well as in political rhetoric this moral project is framed as old fashioned and paternalistic. I argue, however, that the moral role of the state in creating “a good life” – in its social democratic version – has had widespread support and that its legacy is not necessarily total condemnation. Importantly, this paternalistic regulation has had strong and lasting impacts beyond direct policy-making. It reformed the institutionalisation of food consumption in Norway in crucial ways, affecting also how Norwegians now encounter new problems and new regulatory initiatives.

The Norwegian packed lunch with open sandwiches has an interesting and special history which shows complex interactions between regulatory initiatives and processes of institutionalisation of food consumption in the welfare state (Kjæernes and Døving 41
forthcoming). “The Oslo breakfast” was established in the inter-war period as a reformed school meal. Introduced by hygiene oriented medical reformers, the meal was explicitly designed according to scientific conceptions of needs, considering even national provisioning and educational effects. Many Norwegian municipalities were almost broke at the time, leaving little space for costly reforms. Thus, the ‘matpakke’ was invented; a packed ‘Oslo breakfast’ to be brought from home. Not only would that save money, it would also educate the homes. The idea of a ‘matpakke’ was not totally unknown, but the fixed contents was; open sandwiches with wholegrain bread, margarine, and a thin topping of cheese, salami or liver paste, accompanied by raw vegetables or fruit, with whole milk to drink. The effort was highly disciplinary, including monitoring of the children’s lunch boxes. Switching from a meal served in school to a packed lunch effectively extended the ‘inspecting gaze’ (Lukes 2005, 100) to their mothers and families at home.

The ‘matpakke’ was a school reform initiated by the medical elite and supported by agrarian interests, but it was received as a popular modernisation project to the benefit of the people. It came to represent an improvement, rather than a break with ongoing changes in food consumption associated with processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. Its organisation reflected a dominant contemporary division of labour, where families (i.e. the housewife and the mother) were to provide nutritious meals, making careful use of incomes and food resources. The guidance did not open for flexibility or questions of individual freedom. And the puritan character of the meal fitted well into the Norwegian work ethic of moderation and personal discipline. But the political framing of this project seems to be an important reason why it was so well received and also why the success was so large. It came to represent one element of designing the good life - for all.

Yet, the long-term effects on eating habits cannot be explained only by its political popularity at the time. The fervour with which it was implemented had deep effects on Norwegian eating habits via its function as a socialisation project as well as through its implications for the organisation of eating during the day, in schools and eventually in work places – and at home. It intervened directly with the institutionalisation of food consumption. The 2-3 slices of bread wrapped in paper, prepared at home and eaten at lunch time in a canteen or at school, is thus an example of a regulative rule which via processes of institutionalisation has developed into a constitutive rule. Normatively, it has turned into the “proper” lunch, wrapped in an egalitarian and national spirit and sanctioned by condemnation and exclusion. Even if you do want to oppose by having a different lunch, practical opportunities to do so are few. The strong normative and political support, combined with organisational implications, may contribute to explain why this lunch institution is so strong today, in spite of contemporary Norwegian’s affluence, new nutritional recommendations, cultural exchange, and changes in food retailing. The links between regulation and institutional frames are relatively easy to describe, with accordance between normative expectations related to food and eating, the modernisation of family life via welfare state policies, and the structure of food provisioning.

However, the very same interrelations became a problem when the nutritional agenda in the 1960s and 70s was completely redefined from insufficiency to “over-nutrition”,
especially of saturated fat. Sugar eventually also entered the over-nutrition agenda in relation to diabetes and obesity. The focus was redirected from healthy food items (like milk) towards nutrients and nutrient composition. Referring to an American discourse it has been suggested that this redirection of attention is associated with more emphasis on individual flexibility and choice (Pollan 2008). These problems also emerged in a period when disciplinary initiatives were gradually becoming out of date, not the least because their main targets, the housewives, were disappearing into the labour force. So does this imply a general shift towards more self-governance even in Norway? The answer is not simple. In spite of apparent similarities between sugar and fat, their regulation turned out to become quite different.

The problems of fat were being linked to dairy fat, meat and margarine, at that time the major sources of fat. The most significant and politically supported sectors of food production were affected. The new dietary recommendations turned the nutritional value of formerly highly appreciated and subsidised food items, like whole milk and butter, upside down. The welfare state had produced a large problem for the wellbeing of the population. The new approaches thus opened for considerable opposition and conflict. But, and this is the surprising observation, the welfare state had produced institutions which formed a basis, a point of departure, for reformulating and reorganising regulatory efforts to address the new problems. This includes policymaking bodies like the National Nutrition Council as well eating habits like the packed lunch. One might critically say that the eventual reformulated policy is an example of cooptation and the new regulatory efforts were in fact rather defensive. But new dietary goals were legitimised and the promotion of animal fat was – little by little – removed. After years of public and expert criticism, the dairy industry eventually decided to offer a low-fat variety of milk – which people welcomed with great enthusiasm (Kjærnes 1995). New educational campaigns were launched of a (slightly) more open and individualised kind: advice suggesting fat-reducing modifications of established meal conventions (Haavet 1996). The “national menu” was revised, not dismantled. Fat did re-politicise food, but the critique was soon to be recaptured by a producer dominated agenda along established alignments of the welfare state: welfare for people and for the farmers.

Sugar represented almost none of this. Sugar has never been associated with major agricultural interests in Norway and has no position in the welfare state. Chocolate and soft drink manufacturers have been concerned with freedom from state intervention (esp. taxation) rather than protection. They have concentrated on competition and marketing of products for “new consumers” - individualistic and pleasure seeking (Rudeng 1989). The disciplined everyday meals of modern Norwegians contain little sugar, which is mostly relegated to the leisure sphere, with freedom, pleasure and few rules as key characteristics. This private sphere of freedom is not easily addressed by traditional moral regulation or corporative intermingling with the agricultural industry. And the political “story” is weaker. Even though there are Norwegian bad guys, “sugar pushers”, in this story, these are hardly visible in public discourse. Mobilisation has mainly focussed on multinational corporations – with little capability of politicising sugar within the Norwegian context. Within such frames of freedom we might expect to see the emergence of consumer self-
governance, considering the generally high concern about and knowledge of nutrition in the Norwegian population. There are certainly also educational efforts pointing in that direction. Hardly any Norwegian is unaware of the advice to cut down on sugar. But the success is meagre. People eat less fat, but more sugar. For sugar we can see that eating habits and institutional fields play together in producing an area of consumption that is not easily and effectively targeted by regulatory intervention.

The strong position of the packed lunch and the sharp contrast between fat and sugar are surprising not merely in relation to regulation, but even in consideration of the social effects of changes in time use, the increasing provision of leisure services (e.g. restaurants) as well as global changes in consumer culture. The reasons are surely complex. I have pointed to some explanations linked to distinctive aspects of the Norwegian institutionalisation of food consumption and how that is interlinked with regulatory initiatives.

The assumption that self regulation is associated with de-institutionalisation in terms of deregulation of public policies as well as eating is supported here if self regulation is regarded as a default outcome of neo-liberalism and non-intervention. But that does not seem satisfactory if regulation is about influence and power. Norwegians’ responses to sugar may as well be regarded as acts of resistance to the disciplinary regulation of the welfare state, so successfully implemented in the case of the packed lunch and, later on and in a modified and modernised version, with fat. I therefore suggest a dynamic, where the regulation of food consumption has powerful effects on what people eat when there is accordance between regulations, market institutions, and cultural and normative references for everyday habits, and much less - or in unexpected directions - when this is not the case. Harmonisation of different societal institutions has been particularly strong in Norway because of specific interrelations between households, the food market, and regulatory institutions within the welfare state. This configuration has been capable of incorporating even new and redefined goals when they fit into the established institutional field of nutrition. But outside such institutional fields Norwegians can and do exercise their individual freedoms. The discourse on regulation has changed but it is a question about whether we observe a real shift in Norway towards self regulation and self responsibility with regard to nutrition.
4 Consumer choice: risk and trust

The regulation of food hazards goes way back in history. Food safety has typically been part of public health policies, but has also represented an integrated element of regulatory policies for civilizing markets (Ansell and Vogel 2006; French and Phillips 2000; Quirk 1980). The safety of marketed food is, along with fraud, difficult to control at the point of purchase and has repeatedly provoked reactions among ordinary people. Regulation seems to have been almost a precondition for the marketisation of perishable foods. Industrialisation and urbanisation brought new challenges to food safety – and to food regulations, to a large degree paralleling those that have been described above. But unlike the regulation of the diet, food safety regulations did not attain a fundamentally different character with the emergence of the welfare state. The main difference was a somewhat higher level of ambition with regard to the protection of public health (Elvbakken 1997; Kjærnes 1994).

With the extension and globalisation of markets national and local food safety regulations were increasingly criticised as, on the one hand, insufficient and, on the other, as obstacles to market integration. The regulation of food hazards and risks has been subject to extensive re-regulation in Europe (Ansell and Vogel 2006; Halkier and Holm 2006; Smith et al. 2004). Many of these changes are in line with broader shifts in regulation over the last couple of decades, involving new mechanisms of social ordering. The regulatory state represents complex changes in public management, with a separation of functions of control from bureaucratic mechanisms towards other instruments. A typical example is the “agencification” of regulatory bodies, combined with an emphasis on market responsibility and self regulation (Braithwaite 2000; Scott 2004; Jordana and Levi-Faur 2004; Majone 1996). The re-regulation is closely associated with structural change. Vertical as well as horizontal integration in the food provisioning chain, technological and logistic innovation, more concentration and power located at the retail level, as well as regulatory change towards market responsibility, all add up to wide-ranging shifts in the state-market relationship and in market interrelations with households and consumers (Dulsrud 1996; Harvey et al. 2003; Marsden et al. 2000). Extensive quality assurance schemes address issues of predictability and liability. But, increasingly, they have also become important instruments for market differentiation, communicated to consumers via product labels, market segmentation strategies, and retailer branding. “Third parties”, serving crucial functions as auditors and certification bodies, include a range of “independent” actors, but the state has retained a central role when it comes to food safety and the protection of public health (integrating national and supra-national systems).

The major changes in the societal handling of food hazards are often assumed to produce uncertainty and risk, supported by food safety questions ranking high on the public and political agendas in recent years. This is taken to indicate the emergence of a new, rather uncomfortable and distrustful consumer. As such, responses of trust and distrust can therefore be analysed as part or expressions of changing interrelationships. I will in the following address this issue, asking whether we uniform tendencies of increasing distrust.
I will discuss the issue in view of various theoretical debates on trust, asking how helpful they are for understanding these observed tendencies. I argue that a relational and institutional perspective is not only useful in analyses of the dynamics of trust, but that this can be of help in analysing emerging new types of interrelationships and new forms of regulation of food consumption. In particular, trust and distrust seem important for understanding questions of consumer agency, responsibility and power.

4.1 Trust and distrust: cognitive decisions or social relations? (article III)

Consumer trust has been a keyword in European debates and policy initiatives on food over the last 10-15 years. Numerous academic contributions have attempted to capture current public discomfort and unrest with regard to food (Kjærnes 2006). In asking why people react as they do, cognitive approaches have come to dominate, linking individual perceptions of risks to media scares and communication with experts. With reference to the vast efforts to improve food safety, experts and policymakers have tended to judge consumer unease to be excessive, unwarranted and irrational. The experience that many people are not reacting in accordance with experts’ evaluations of risks has been attributed to “lay” ignorance. Numerous studies have analysed people’s reactions to technological hazards and media crises, often focussing on new issues such as genetically modified food and mad cow disease. Perceptions and probability assessments involved in risk perception and risk-taking behaviour are characterised as ‘judgements under uncertainty’ (Hansen et al. 2003; Scholderer and Frewer 2003; Slovic 1999; Löfstedt and Frewer 1998). This uncertainty is about knowledge and information and the role of trust is as part of individual decision-making about risks, where assessments and decisions are seen as cognitive processes. The focus on (one-way) information programmes as the remedy has been characterised as the ‘knowledge deficit model’ (Scholderer & Frewer, 2003). People represent a lay public and individual customers, they are not social actors.

The lack of success of one-way information has led several to suggest deliberative approaches, with two-way communication programmes and consumer involvement in debates and regulatory decision-making (Slovic 1999, Scholderer & Frewer 2003). Even though participatory in nature, these contributions still adhere to the cognitive focus on communication. Trust is an individual attitude which, in turn, is assumed to influence behaviours, understood as purchasing decisions. Successful information depends on trust in its sources (Breakwell 2000; Frewer et al. 1999). But such a cognitive account of trust easily becomes tautological: trust is based on trustworthy information and trustworthy information is information which is trusted.

This understanding seems to offer little help in understanding current phenomena (Kjærnes 2006). As a starting point, I will therefore discuss some observations which challenge the dominant current understanding of trust in food and instead direct attention towards the importance of social interrelations in the food chain. Looking across European
countries, there do not seem to be any direct correlation between the extent of media scandals and public opinions of distrust (Bredahl 2001; Böcker and Hanf 2000; Imig and Tarrow 2001; Renn and Rohrmann 2000). Not only are people more concerned in some places than in others, but their responses in the food market after a “media scare” are markedly different. As part of the TRUSTINFOOD study (see section 2.4), representative population surveys were conducted in six European countries, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, and Portugal, along with institutional studies in the same countries and at the European level (Halkier and Holm 2006; Kjærnes et al. 2007; Poppe and Kjærnes 2003). The survey findings indicate that, overall, experts tend to be highly trusted in terms of truth-telling in case of a food safety scandal. Food authorities and the media are neither strongly trusted nor met with disbelief. It is first of all market actors who are mistrusted. A survey question about changes in the food sector with regard to key food issues, like quality, price, safety, nutrition, and farming methods, also gave surprising results. The relative proportions of those who think that food has improved with regard to these issues are generally higher than those who think that the situation has deteriorated. One might interpret this as overall rather positive and optimistic views on the modernisation of the food sector. Price is subject to most worry, concentrated in the euro zone countries, followed by quality, especially in Italy and Portugal. Also surprisingly, safety is the issue for which people in these six countries were most optimistic (in 2002) with a majority of respondents thinking the situation at that time had improved in all countries. Searching for mechanisms behind widespread consumer distrust in food focusing only on safety might therefore be insufficient and even misleading. This relatively widespread optimism regarding the food sector was also found in a European survey on food and animal welfare, conducted in 2005 (Kjærnes and Lavik 2007).

But when looking at the overall levels of trust, we find systematic differences between countries for these as well as other trust measures. The high-trust countries are, in particular, Great Britain, but even Denmark and Norway. Italy and Portugal generally display low levels of trust. Germany also represented a low-trust region in several respects. It is notable that socio-demographic variables generally have modest and quite inconsistent significance, compared to the national variations (Kjærnes et al. 2005)(Poppe and Kjærnes 2003). These findings seem to redirect attention from media discourse on the extent and character of food risks and individual responses to those discourses towards wider issues connected with interrelations in the food market and public regulation.

In spite of the large volume of studies on risk perception and trust in food, few conceptual tools are provided for analysing these larger social processes of variation and change in trust – as a condition and as an outcome. What is it that makes the British see their food institutions as so much more trustworthy than the Germans do? Why do Europeans seem so jumpy now? And why has that become politically urgent? Cognitive models are not developed to explore these kinds of questions.
4.2 Risk, individualisation and consumer politics – a hypothesis (article IV)

Several authors have claimed that uncertainty and distrust are associated with new or (post-) modern conceptions of food dangers as ‘risks’, as captured in the much vaunted ‘risk society’ hypothesis of Ulrich Beck (1992). He points to two major features of ‘second modernity’: risk society and individualisation (Beck 1999; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck et al. 2003). People, it is argued, are increasingly forced to take individual and personal responsibility for their everyday lives and life-time careers. This responsibility gives freedom, but it also represents pressures, dilemmas, frustrations and uncertainties. Structural constraints influence how individuals take on these responsibilities; lack of knowledge and insight, asymmetrical power relations and distribution of resources all affect their freedom of manoeuvre. These dilemmas and uncertainties appear in all areas of everyday life. Everyday activities such as buying and eating are part of a process of individualisation, allowing individual creativity and self-fulfilment, but also, it is argued, producing insecurity and anxiety (Giddens 1991; Sulkunen 1997).

Modern risks are typically difficult or impossible to estimate, with consequences that cannot be delimited in time and space. They result from human actions and decisions, rather than the external influence of nature, fate or divine forces. Risk society marks the end of both Nature and Tradition. Food processing and preparation have represented a way of handling the potential hazards but, in risk society, the handling of food will also be seen as introducing new ones. It is not difficult to find examples of food risks that are perceived as unintended side-effects of social development: mad cow disease is the outcome of improper industrial handling of fodder due to economic priorities; the rising incidence of salmonella is explained by larger production units and global trade; hazardous high fat diets are promoted by cheap fat from a subsidised and industrialised agriculture and manufacturing industry, genetic modification (GM) generally enhances the manufactured uncertainty of modern food, the list goes on and on.

Beck’s theory is a general one aimed at understanding major processes of social change. Little attention has been paid to how such processes are embedded in more concrete institutional structures and interrelations within the area of food. But the ‘risk society’ thesis has formed an interpretative frame for understanding contemporary issues of distrust in food (Almås 1999; Breck 2000; Brown and Michael 2002; Michelsen 2001; Wandel and Bugge 1997). The increasingly complex and dynamic character of modern systems of food provisioning, knowledge production and regulation is frequently said to lead to unpredictability, fragmentation and contradictions, themselves core features of contemporary consumption (Busch 2000; Gabriel and Lang 1995).

Giddens (1991) has directed attention to the interconnections between modern institutions and personal everyday life. Modern institutions are characterised by their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact. There is a dislocation in time and space which leads to what he characterises as ‘abstract’
institutions. Because it is impossible for us to have direct knowledge and complete control of the process, we have to take chances. To be able to do that, we need to feel secure that the outcome will be acceptable. In complex systems trust is becoming more important and, at the same time, more difficult to obtain (Luhmann 1979). Trust is a medium of interaction with the abstract system which serves both to empty day-to-day life of its traditional content and to set up globalising influences (Giddens 1991, 3). But what does this mean in terms of trust and distrust in contemporary society? Giddens’ answer, which he shares with Beck, is reflexivity. Reflexivity is associated with the uncertainty which seems to characterise our lives today, where many aspects have suddenly become open, organised only in terms of ‘scenario thinking’ (Giddens 1994, 184). Routines, and the basic trust that forms a condition for them, become less valid. We must instead evaluate each problem and its alternative solutions, one by one. We have no choice but to make choices. In such circumstances, risk (as a social product) and trust need to be analysed together. Thus, society is not only a ‘risk society’; it is also one in which mechanisms of trust are shifting. Trust has to be actively evaluated and sustained. In larger organisational contexts, active trust depends upon more institutional ‘opening out’, that is institutions arguing actively for their own trustworthiness (Kjærnes 1999).

Although the theoretical approach may vary, many others have joined in this concern with people worrying over modern risks, often associated with food scares, on the one hand, and individual uncertainty and distrust, on the other. In particular, we find parallel ideas in the sociology of science and the ‘public understanding of science’. Wynne (1996; 2005) sees a repeated need among major institutional actors to reinvent new ‘public deficit’ modes. Risk assessment by experts is a crux to the conflicts and a major source of public concern and distrust (Hoffmann-Riem and Wynne 2002). From having been generally ignored, public concerns do get attention. But a simplification of scientific knowledge and downplaying of the ‘unknown unknowns’ is taking place which, rather than being comforting and pacifying, instead raises public scepticism. People are not necessarily risk obsessed and fear driven, incapable of handling ‘uncertainty’, individualist and atomized. Their scepticism is rather associated with performative issues, control of science, scientific contingencies and the handling of the unknowns. In order to overcome some of the distrust and suspicion, public or lay involvement is a key, thus making expertise more open, transparent and accountable to a wider audience (Gough et al. 2003). The recent media and political focus on risks seems to fit with contemporary notions of the individualised consumer in global (turbo) capitalism, ambivalently described as victimised and equipped with agency. Politically as well as theoretically, risk society has become almost synonymous with media attention, as exemplified in food scares.

I will not deny that these highly diverse, sometimes clearly contradictory, contributions may point to significant features of contemporary society and its dealing with food consumption. But for the purpose of studying the changing regulation of food I have some additions and objections. First, uncertainty and disagreement over food is about more than health and environmental hazards (Fine 2002, 218). People may be sceptical about, or deceived with regard to, for example, quality and flavour, price, nutritional composition, as well as various aspects of production and distribution (such as animal welfare or child
labour). These issues may be “new”, like GM food or animal welfare, or quite well-known, like fraud, salmonella or poor nutritional composition.

Second, disproportionate attention is given to the hierarchical relations between individuals as lay people, on the one hand, and experts and science, on the other. This perspective overlooks basic interrelationships between markets, states and individuals in terms of divisions of labour, responsibility and power. It also overlooks the impacts of concrete institutionalisation, thus assuming more or less uniform processes of modernisation, varying mainly in pace. It is moreover a question whether these controversies reflect individual uncertainty and basically uncontrollable risk, or whether they instead indicate disagreement and disappointment over the quality of the food, the performance of food institutions and social justice. The assumption of a long-term trend towards greater uncertainty, conflict and distrust is not clear. It may be that after a period of rapid change, new institutional arrangements may provide legitimate solutions to conflicts of interest and power imbalances and find ways to handle the asymmetric information. Indeed, as described in chapter 3, historical records show that large-scale shifts in the food sector have often been accompanied by consumer distrust and activism, which in turn have resulted in new forms of organisation and regulation.

Third, assumptions about contemporary consumption being individualised in a sense of becoming “de-socialised” and privatised and, at the same time, overloaded with responsibility, are problematic, especially as a fundament for understanding how current food consumption is regulated. The immediate question is whether this captures everyday practices in a time of growing complexity? In order to actively sustain trust, modern institutions may have to accept, even support, the turbulence following the ‘opening out’ and expressions of distrust. But for various reasons institutions may be just as likely to seek ways to avoid uncertainty, mishaps, and turbulence.

This is of course not to say that changes are not taking place or to disregard problems associated with the pervasion of scientific knowledge and new technologies across the world as well as new structures of power in global capitalism. This is certainly of no less importance compared to a decade ago when several of these contributions were produced, including my own commentary in article IV. But the focus in current discourses seems somewhat redirected from being concerned mainly with the problems of risk and individual uncertainty towards more emphasis on consumers and their agency. My point here is that we should problematise the issues of worry as well as how they apply to regulation and to people as consumers.

4.3 Sources of trust in food (article V)

Referring to a broad sociological tradition, Misztal (1995) claims that trust is inherently social, a collective orientation and structuring social life. Following from that, the formation of trust requires shared and relatively stable norms within society. In this vein,
trust in institutions may be regarded as an extension of interpersonal trust, projected onto political institutions and therefore conditioning the assessment of political performance (Inglehart 1997; Putnam 1993; Uslaner 1999). To say that trust is social is to emphasise shared norms and expectations, the predictability of cooperation and the constitution of everyday practices. A basic condition of trust is its emergence from, and embeddedness in, processes of institutionalisation. Referring to Bourdieu, Misztal has characterised an aspect of trust as habitus: ‘Trust as habitus is a protective mechanism relying on everyday routines, stable reputations and tacit memories, which together push out of modern life fear and uncertainty as well as moral problems.’ (Misztal, 1995, 102) Trust then becomes part of the taken-for-grantedness that characterises many of our daily practices. This is not necessarily ‘blind trust’ – trust that is without any foundation, because trust is typically being confirmed by experiences and the normative and institutional framing of the practices. It makes sense to say that the establishment of flexible, but predictable everyday routines of buying, preparing and eating food require trust, while trust is also generated within such routines (Seligman 1997). But then distrust may easily signify a break-up of routines, a lack of social cohesion and community (re Putnam and others), suggesting a situation of ‘gastro-anomie’ (re Fischler 1988) or chaos (Elster 1989). At a national level, the levels of trust and distrust will reflect degrees of social cohesion.

As opposed to theories of trust emphasizing norms, habits and social networks, which Mishler and Rose (2001) call ‘cultural’ theories, so-called ‘institutional’ theories propose that trust is derived from institutional and political performance. Trust hinges on citizen evaluations of institutional performance. Institutions that perform well generate trust, while those that perform badly generate scepticism and distrust. Trust in institutions is rationally based, and most contributions within this tradition seem to be founded within a rational choice perspective, thus emphasizing the role of rational calculation of self-interest (Coleman 1990; Mishler and Rose 2001; Rothstein 2000; Sztompka 1999). National variations in trust are being associated with judgements about the performance of particular institutions (typically measured as economic performance or degrees of transparency/levels of corruption), either as an aggregate output or as individual experiences.

Trust links citizens to regulatory bodies that are intended to govern on their behalf, and thereby enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance (Hardin 2001). But this does not imply that political distrust necessarily has the opposite effect. Scepticism is assumed to have a constructive role in democratic processes, in the sense of requiring sufficient evidence or reasons for trusting (Braithwaite 1998). The conditional character of citizens’ trust may be accepted as a part of a legitimate democratic framework, and does not necessarily contest governance. People should question the performance of politicians and governmental bodies, and a healthy scepticism is a prerequisite to democracy (Sztompka, 1999). But scepticism which gives way to distrust can also be subversive to governance. Where distrust affects the legitimacy of existing institutional arrangements, governance itself becomes contested. Trust can make extensive organisational control mechanisms redundant and distrust may become a problem for governance when it for
example leads to non-productive increase in government regulations as a means of building or regaining trust (Majone 1999).

Cultural and institutional theories are often presented as mutually exclusive explanations of trust, but their opposition should not be exaggerated, as indicated by the varying roles of distrust. Some empirical studies suggest that while cultural explanations may be important under stable conditions marked by general consensus about values and solutions, explanations related to the performance of specific institutions are needed for an understanding of trust under conditions of turbulence and social change (Guseva and Rona-Tas 2001; Völker and Flap 2001). But even under more stable conditions, evaluations of performance cannot be seen only as a rational consideration of self-interest. There are variations across sectors and countries that suggest considerable path dependency, where institutional performance is part of a comprehensive, dynamic process embedded in a cultural and historical setting (Rothstein, 2000). According to Rothstein, structural and cultural frames influence both how institutional actors operate and how people relate to and react upon them and these processes may be mutually reinforcing.

A multi-variate analysis of trust in food (the safety of meat) based on the TRUSTINFOOD data lends support to this (Kjærnes et al 2006). Interpersonal trust and general confidence in food as well as more immediate judgements about institutional actors and changes in the food sector are not mutually exclusive, but add up to explain variations in trust in food. But while basic confidence matters more in the peaceful Denmark, trust seems more conditioned by the performance of food institutions in the United Kingdom, a country having experienced much more turbulence around food in recent years. West Germans’ strong scepticism rests equally strongly upon their judgements about the food sector. The low trust in Italy, Portugal and East Germany appears to contain basic, cultural elements as well as concrete scepticism towards institutional actors. The Norwegian high trust seemed to hinge on cultural as well as performative influences.

It would seem, therefore, that it is necessary to consider both socially formed habits and organisational performance in order to understand the social sources of trust in food (Kjærnes et al. 2006). In both instances trust is mediated through other actors and within a political context. But how can people trust, considering the large and growing imbalances of knowledge and power? Ongoing changes in the European food sector have features that may both strengthen and challenge the foundations of trust. Integration, management systems, and technological innovations can improve predictability and efficiency, thus supplying foods at a lower price, of a predictable quality, in a wider selection, and with lower risks of unintended (but known) safety hazards. On the other hand, many of the changes imply shifts in power and distribution of responsibilities, such as integration of markets down the food chain, more concentrated ownership structures, global sourcing, etc. (Harvey and Randles 2002; Lyon 1998; Busch 2000) The complexities of technologies and provisioning systems pose problems of understanding, such that consumers may not be convinced that their interests are sufficiently protected.
Judging food providers trustworthy seems to require shared, or at least clear, norms and expectations, as well as confidence in the ability and competence of food providers to meet those expectations. This is not simply a matter of knowledge and information, but is as much based on a reliable and accountable delegation of practical control. The social division of responsibilities is a key feature of any set of impersonal trust relations, which also must match the actual division of labour, and their fulfilment in practice. Where this occurs one will expect non-reflective reproduction of trust which delivers, relatively efficiently, other benefits too. Failing performance and mismatches, by contrast, may lead to trust being questioned.

Many ongoing controversies in the area of food are associated with the legitimacy of divisions of responsibility and control. In connection to that we have seen a proliferation of public and private systems of quality and safety assurance, independent audit systems, traceability and transparency schemes, and new forms of consumer representation (Busch 2000; Jacobsen and Kjærnes 2003; Lyon 1998). These are not merely there out of liability concerns, but represent institutional solutions to keep imbalances of power, interests, and information in check (re the opinions about the truth-telling of various types of actors). Their independent authority is therefore crucial, independence first of all from commercial considerations, but increasingly also from political strategic influences. In more general terms, they may be characterised as ‘institutionalisation of distrust’ (Braithwaite 1998; Luhmann 1979), a crucial part of many contemporary regulatory strategies within the area of food. It must be emphasised that this may not be an even, predictable or consensual process. To the contrary, changes and institutional responses depend on the institutional field, its built-in tensions and its capability of handling conflicts and new problems. We can expect negotiations and balancing of values, interests and responsibilities to be handled very differently across settings. Ultimately, this is not only a question of defining and framing food issues, but about control over food, and how people’s lack of control (qua consumer or citizen) is handled institutionally when conditions change.

### 4.4 Complex relationships, emergent trust and distrust

Countries differ, not only when it comes to popular trust, but also with regard to market and political responses (Bergeaud-Blackler and Ferretti 2006; Domingues 2006; Ferretti and Magaudda 2006; Halkier and Holm 2006; Lenz 2006; Nielsen 2006; Terragni 2006; Wales et al. 2006). Some underlying common principles of variation can be identified which refer to institutionalised interrelationships (for further documentation of the analysis, see Kjærnes et al. 2007). At the crudest level, high trust, even of different kinds, is seen to be a consequence of a ‘positive fit’ of relationships; and low trust is generated by a ‘negative fit’. Despite their differences, Norway and the United Kingdom share the characteristic of strong alignment between state regulation and market provisioning, producing a ‘positive fit’. The one is closed, protectionist, and with a producer-dominated provisioning system; the other has supply chain integrated control, an open system, and centralised regulation. Norway has largely retained a post-war, standardised and national
culture of food, protected by a paternalist welfare state. The United Kingdom has witnessed rapidly extending globalisation of provisioning, an opening up and transformation of mass-food quality, with a regulatory system that adapted quite fundamentally to an extreme crisis symptomatic of modernisation. There, a ratcheting up of consumer norms and expectations, both with respect to provisioning and regulation, has to an extent been met by state and market actors. Perhaps the most important conclusion, therefore, is that trust in food involves much more than attainment of some putative standard of good or bad food. Different types of relationship, between different types of consumers, provisioners, and state authorities generate different expectations and very different alignments of trust.

In a parallel manner, the high levels of distrust in Italy cannot be allocated to simple regrets of the passing of a nostalgically cosy familiar past. Instead we find failures to cope with conflicts of norms and standards between modernising tendencies and attachments to local and regional, small-scale consumption and provisioning. And the state is as much part of the problem as part of the solution. These diverse patterns were repeated in late 2005 when the threat of avian flu caused significant drops in poultry sales in Italy and Germany, much less in the United Kingdom and hardly any in Norway.

The intertwining of different tempos of change has led to more disruption of relationships and their embedded norms and expectations in some countries than others. Norway has been relatively insulated from scandals and has a slow pace of institutional change, whether of consumer habits, provisioning systems or state regulation. The United Kingdom has witnessed quite rapid institutional change, in terms of changing consumer habits and provisioning systems, and the BSE scandal finally triggered a radical and rapid change in regulatory systems. In Italy both the immediate threats from ‘crises’ of various kinds, and the longer term institutional shifts intertwine to maximise disruption of shared norms and expectations – if ever such a state of ‘positive fit’ existed in post-war Italy. And finally, Germany has witnessed some fairly rapid institutional responses to immediate crises, but not in a direction consistent with longer term shifts in consumption habits and provisioning systems. This produces a situation of positively conflictual, rather than merely disrupted, norms and expectations. Clearly, this interpretation can only be speculative. But viewed from a relational perspective, trust and distrust are about profound institutional change and immediate events, crises and scandals.

This account challenges any simplistic dualism of state versus market, of regulation and deregulation. There is very little empirical evidence that can support a view of the Anglo-Saxon model as one of ‘free markets’, as against a continental European social state model. Rather, there are different types of concordance or discordance between different types of regulatory frameworks and market provisioning systems. All food provisioning systems, as markets, are highly regulated, at national, European and world trade levels. The contrasts are firstly between the way that different regulatory systems meet and match the organisation of provisioning systems and the ways in which these institutions consider and involve people’s expectations and reactions. It is significant that new regulatory regimes of traceability from farm to fork and hazards critical point analysis is paralleled
by the types of control over production and distribution manifest in integrated supply chains. Secondly, there are variations both in levels of market coherence and conflict, and in efficiency, transparency and coherence within state regulatory authorities. Some governments have struggled to implement regulatory frameworks in a uniform way across the provisioning systems, themselves often fragmented and very diverse within a given country. This is another source of conflict and tension between regulatory systems and provisioning systems, or simply a lack of efficiency, transparency and coherence in regulation. There are wide variations in ‘good’ and ‘bad’ relationships.

Various configurations therefore differ in their ability to tackle problems and to restore trust. Clarity, consensus and transparency seem to be ways of stopping scandals turning to crises; and concealment and deception on the part of authorities seem to be worst case scenarios. It must be emphasised, however, that conditions for trust also have important slow-changing, path-dependent elements. Configurations are mostly at least temporarily stable. Nevertheless, they are still subject to change, and may sometimes be destabilised quickly, as in the British case. However, in the UK a new accommodation between producers and regulation re-established significant degrees of trust within a few years, at least with regard to food safety.

Trust does not necessarily seem to hinge on active consumer involvement. Whereas trust in Norway seems to rely comfortably on social cohesion, consensus and delegation of control, the British and German situations are more conditional. It is also in these countries that we find (somewhat) more consumer activism and, in the British case, more collective consumer representation. However, it is difficult to say whether this conditionality is a characteristic of the emerging new forms of regulation or whether it is instead typical of changing relationships and that institutionalisation, if efficient and legitimate, will result in less contingency and activism.
5 Conclusion

5.1 Shifts in the regulation of food consumption

The activities of providing, preparing and eating food have constituted arenas for regulation since ancient times. Many have argued that new forms of regulation are emerging, emphasising individuals’ freedom as well as responsibilities. I have tried to characterise some aspects of contemporary regulation of food consumption, asking whether they represent distinctively new forms. I have also questioned people’s responses - as eaters, buyers and citizens.

Patriarchal and status oriented forms of regulation, associated primarily with household centred food consumption, gave little freedom and responsibility to the individual. Industrial societies developed more efficient food distribution systems and as well as new notions of individual rights guaranteed by the nation state. Gradually, science (and good manners) took over from previous religious norms about good eating. New forms of regulation emerged, addressing people’s health and wellbeing captured in the notion of ‘hygiene’; disciplining markets as well as families. Quests for regulation as well as enhanced governability were associated with a major restructuring of food provisioning systems, along with the emergence of a new type of family with a responsible and dedicated housewife. But this liberal system was a system with strong tensions related to social justice. The social democratic welfare state continued and extended most of the liberal regulation of food consumption but with new emphasis on universalism and the right to social welfare. The ‘pastoral’ welfare state made family life a central target for political action – as part of a moral project of “designing the good life”. This took place within a political regime concentrated on conflicts between capital and labour, with little agency allocated to the consumer role beyond the family sphere. But rather than being perceived as subversive, limiting individual freedom, the highly paternalistic efforts of disciplining eating were met by enthusiasm, as part of a collective liberating enterprise to build a national welfare society.

Many have stated that societal change has made legalistic and disciplinary actions less relevant and less legitimate, suggesting that new forms of regulation have replace stated welfare with choice and individual responsibility. As part of this process people, in their capacity as ‘consumers’, appear as subjects and are accorded agency in the politics of food consumption. Instead of addressing ‘choice’ as an analytical concept, I have argued that its popularity in public and political discourse reflects a distinctly new model of regulating food consumption. With its close association with markets, an economic vocabulary, and a focus on individual decision-making, it fits well with neo-liberalism in advanced post-industrial societies. But ‘consumer choice’ is not just a direct implication of deregulation, marketisation and privatisation. Across Europe, we see that regulatory action is taken on the basis of such models. It becomes a mode of regulation emphasising individual self-responsibility and a governance of mentalities. It is a moral type of regulation, making
people do the right thing by their own free will (Halkier 2004; Sulkunen et al. 2004). Active measures are taken by various social actors to make people become “choosing consumers”, that is people taking responsibility for the consequences of their own actions as consumers, individually and collectively. This is different from disciplinary actions, which, instead of making them choose the right thing, steer people in the right direction by educational and organisational efforts.

Self governance, as a form of market regulation as well as regulation of consumption habits, emphasises voluntarism, autonomy and diversity – as opposed to state directives and disciplinary actions. It is, however, also about new divisions of responsibility and consumer obligations. The balance plays out quite differently depending on the type of issue and kinds of interrelations involved. New social problems are framed as “ethical choices”, such as issues related to sustainability and animal welfare (the ethics being contrasted to self interest). Many old issues have also become re-politicised. Nutrition, which has typically been characterised by relatively weak institutionalisation in Europe, seems to adapt to new forms of regulation by focussing on the manipulation of “food choice” as self responsibility and self (and market) governance. But when it comes to a strongly institutionalised and regulated issue like food safety, the significant regulatory changes have, relatively speaking, less emphasis on self-governance by individual consumers. Food safety risks are subject to re-regulation (with “government at a distance”), but the new consumer plays a different role, more as a stakeholder in policy formulation through deliberative processes. The consumer has here emerged more as a collective actor than being attributed individual responsibilities.

For market regulation, governance at a distance has meant that enforcement rests more on market actors, but the formulation of standards as such may and often do involve other actors. New ways of influencing consumption habits, on the other hand, concentrate first and foremost on morally framed persuasion of individual consumers via education and campaigns initiated by a multiplicity of actors, as well as more indirect efforts, like state promoted market communication, research funding (and science based “dissemination”), or support to NGO activities. Added to that, regulation may aim at directing or facilitating consumer choice via non-communicative means. This is particularly evident in the ways in which state actions and other initiatives try to shape market differentiation, assurance and certification schemes, transparency initiatives, etc. in order to promote responsible ‘consumer choice’. Product labelling is central. But, as we have seen in the studies of trust, shifts in market-state relationships may also be reflected in more focus on ‘consumers’ in decision making and, following from that, conflicts on who represents this ‘consumer’. A legitimate collective consumer voice seems to be needed in stakeholder policy making forums and there are a number of efforts to facilitate or produce such a voice through various forms of consultations, lay panels, and citizen juries. In that way, reasonable and rational opinions are expected as an obligation of (people as) consumers not only individually but also collectively. Established political channels do not seem sufficient for that (Micheletti 2003).
Governmentality is based on representative discipline, order and hierarchy being internalised in self-discipline. This empowerment can be seen as a new layer upon a people that already accepts the state, king and police, but are too liberal and self-conscious to accept a direct order. But a repeated observation is that while people may be interested, engaged and concerned about a wide range of food issues, this is often not reflected in what they do (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006; Harrison et al. 2005). There is a lack of ‘consistency’, ‘compliance’ or ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Mayfield et al. 2007). Standard answers are that this is either a matter of failing convictions or due to market related barriers, such as lack of information and availability or high prices. But people may be able and willing to take on new responsibilities or – put in another way – they wish to have a say. Actions characterised as ethical and political consumerism give support to that. Yet, consumer activism rarely emerges in isolation, but is commonly supported by public debates and collective mobilisation. Though appearing as individual choices, it is part of a social process: “Consumer individual action and collective activism, although arguably in conflict with market liberal theory, is here the ultimate ethical enforcer.” (Newholm 2000). Individual analytical perspectives fail to catch such connections.

I see the main problem of this form of regulation not in responsibility via choice as such (collectively and individually), but in the ways and degrees to which these strategic actions match institutional conditions, first of all in terms of autonomy and power. While choices may be voluntary in the sense that acting in opposition is not met by legal or disciplinary sanctions, they are not actions cut loose from their social context. We must consider the relationships between regulative and constitutive rules. Consumer actions take place within institutional field, with interrelations and dependencies that are not deterministic, but highly influential on what people wish and do when they buy, prepare and eat food. ‘Consumer choice’ is adapted to, or emerges from, institutional settings that are quite distinct in terms of households and family life as well as food provisioning and state action. If we look at how interrelations and habits are regulated, it has clearly not been a universal, perhaps not even a dominant mode of regulation of food consumption over the last decade. This is partly due to uneven and path-dependent regulatory change, institutional inertia, and resistance from powerful actors. The Norwegian studies demonstrate how a lack of change in mentalities does not emerge in isolation, but is strongly associated with stability in the institutional field in which regulation addresses everyday habits and their interlinkages with the provisioning system.

Not only may the degrees of change be questioned, but even its directions. There are indications that ongoing institutional change does not predominantly point in a direction of informalisation. Across Europe, food consumption is becoming more and more dependent on interaction with formal institutions, as reflected in standardisation, integration and formalised procedures. This is also opening up opportunities to use disciplinary techniques – in public institutions as well as in private food services and shops. Moreover, recent controversies over food are associated with and partly outcomes of this formalisation, like struggles over standards and labelling. We might say that a regulatory policy of ‘consumer choice’ rests on stronger institutionalisation and formalisation, including individual as well as collective consumer agency and voice.
Where we find a lack of formalisation, like in the Norwegian example of sugar, habits as well as interaction with the provisioning system are also largely decoupled from regulatory processes. The institutional field within and with reference to which regulation can be established is too weak.

5.2 Trust and its institutional foundations

Throughout history food has been associated with repeated periods of contestation and social mobilisation, which have either been met with some kind of realignment (often re-regulation) or through direct exercise of power to reinstate social order. However, until the 1980s or even 1990s, tranquillity was not called ‘trust’, protest was not called ‘distrust’, and the protesting people were not called ‘consumers’. Gradually, problems and discontent became ‘concerns’, worries that perhaps reflected the new individualised understanding of the consumer role. Some time in the 1990s these individual concerns became reframed as problems of trust (notably not as distrust). This change of words is clearly not accidental, but seems linked to food regulation becoming more politicised, perhaps also consumer responses becoming more important to institutional actors.

There are several ways to record distrust. Media attention, mobilisation and political turbulence are certainly important, especially since we have seen a reorientation in these debates towards consumers. This new focus has been helped by rapid shifts in demand, such as sudden drops in beef consumption following immediately after the news about BSE. But public opinion surveys have also come to represent important input, recording the extent of popular (or “consumer”) discontent. However, until the late 1980s, people were rarely asked about such issues, so we really do not know if such opinions of discontent have become more widespread. There are signs to the contrary, as trust in food safety policies appears to have improved over the last years, at least in some places. But we cannot say much about tendencies over time regarding risk and trust in food. What we can say is that such issues have become more urgent in politics as well as in the market. We also see that more people (in some places) take action as consumers – re political consumerism. It is within this dynamic, politicised context that I have analysed survey findings about variations in trust in food.

The Europeanisation of the food market and food regulations is in this respect important, bringing up new issues and reconstructing old ones (Ansell and Vogel 2006). The process has not yet been settled in terms of relations between institutional actors and ordinary people. The role as consumer seems to have become a key point, not only because people are affected as buyers and eaters, but also because this has become a relevant arena for response. The larger and more integrated the sellers become, the more will they be affected by mismanagement and bad reputation. Vulnerability to public criticism is increasingly sensitised and even small drops in demand (even only for a short period) may cause concern. The confidence of the public becomes more critical, its distrust more consequential. Notably, however, responses of distrust refer to politics and market
conditions, while science and new technologies do not appear central per se. Scientists are definitely important, but their role seems to a large degree to depend on the relationships they have with those controlling the food, i.e. public authorities and market actors, and the trust that people have in these institutions. As independent actors, trust in them is generally high (see also Niva 2008).

There is therefore a sense in which in recent years a more critical public has emerged whose trust in food has become more conditional. In response to this situation, we have seen what may be called an intensification of ‘processes of reassurance’ (Kjærnes et al. 2007). Corporations and states feel impelled to institute new procedures which acknowledge that consumers might sometimes have grounds for disquiet, that their trust should not be expected to be unconditional. New institutional arrangements have been developed which accept that distrust may in certain circumstances be appropriate and rational. There need to be ways in which consumers can be reassured that they are not subject to malfeasance, misinformation or other forms of mischief on the part of powerful actors. This reassurance response is one of institutionalising distrust. In the ten years or so after 1990 legitimacy problems related to food were pressing. The framing as a British and a European problem of consumer trust was new, requiring urgent action. But it also gave the European Union more freedom to act and to formulate new solutions. They included key elements like the recognition of consumer concerns for safety, as well as organisational issues of accountability, transparency and independence. And, gradually, the problems have receded from the newspaper front pages.

In that way, the European and, especially, the British events cannot be explained merely as the restoration of confidence and re-establishment of the status quo through successful social engineering. The consumer has come to stand in a somewhat different relation to powerful economic and political actors. Institutional means to handle conditionality and instability have become necessary to the reproduction of trust. Distrust does not only represent absence of confidence. Rather there are signs of distrust coming to represent a relevant, dynamic and active option for expressing discontent, feedback and influence on institutional conditions. This distrust is not occasioned by individuals becoming more reflexive. The analysis points to ‘fits’ and ‘misfits’ between socially institutionalised actors. As a consequence, we should focus on how particular and new societal and institutional configurations of relationships between key actors emerge. Consumer protest is not a new phenomenon, but widespread awareness of a legitimate consumer role or agency is. It does indicate that people are thought to be more self-conscious and willing to become more responsible as consumers. But that cannot happen if they do not have the relevant options to act in the market or the necessary channels to express their voice, or if decision-makers disregard their opinions as ‘stupid’ or ‘irrational’. One cannot expect an active and responsible consumer role to emerge without disturbance, conflict and uncertainty among institutional actors. Above all, this is a matter of questioning the distribution of power, and its expression in institutional arrangements. This is not attributed to circumstances where consumer power has grown relative to other major actors – this is nowhere demonstrably the case – but to a realignment of the distribution of power. Thus, acknowledgement and anticipation of consumer demands (or fear of
consumer reactions) by the major actors, state and market, have had consequences for the recent re-organisation of the food system in Europe, both in regulatory arrangements and in the market.

5.3 Regulation and power

Building on the historical as well as the comparative studies, two major dimensions emerge regarding ongoing regulatory change. The first is the degree of freedom and autonomy that is accorded to and taken by the individual as a consumer, politically and in everyday habits. The second dimension addresses market and regulatory conditions, reflecting the degree and scale of organisation and formalisation of food provisioning (and thus also the division of labour with food as well as regulatory arrangements). It is not difficult to see that a ‘welfare state approach’ may be characterised as low individual freedom combined with highly developed and trusted institutional structures centred on nation state responsibility for solving social problems. Similarly, an approach involving ‘consumer choice’ is based on highly organised and formalised solutions within a context of complex, globalised markets, but it is combined with strong emphasis on individual freedom – a responsible ‘choice’. Compared to the de-commodification emphasis of the welfare state approach, commodification is here central. Contrasted to both of these highly organised and formalised forms, however, there are also situations in which the institutionalisation is less formalised, thus forming very different kinds of interrelations and contexts for regulatory efforts. The studies of trust indicate that parts of Europe, in the south and sometimes in the east, have less reliance on and attention towards large-scale institutional procedures, which are also less trusted. Instead, favoured cooperation and trust tend to refer to local networks and familiarity based interrelations with less imbalance of power. This is paralleled by differences also in the form of consumer involvement. Work with food is more household centred and relations are influenced by loyalty to particular providers or places. Such relations are easily characterised as traditional and to some degree they probably are. But in Europe they also point to local responses to situations of widespread institutional distrust.

However, the two dimensions opens to a fourth position, namely initiatives with low degrees of organisation and formalisation combined with high individual freedom. This may reflect what has been described as ‘communitarianism’ and thus important for understanding the emergence of new forms of self-regulation. As such, they must be based on characteristic supplier-consumer relations, with less imbalances of power and information, compared to conventional solutions, and more emphasis on the mutuality of norms and well as obligations. Importantly however, compared to “traditional” networks, the mutuality does not take away their individual and voluntary character. Participation is based on inner convictions and motivations regarding values and causes rather than multiple bonds and social sanctions – these are “weak ties”. While this is not evident as dominant strategies at a macro level (like in the cross-country comparisons presented here), this seems to be a type of (self-) regulation that characterise initiatives such as
farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), cooperative shops, etc. Such initiatives constitute very small proportions of food distribution, but they seem to represent an important form of activism in which consumers are involved and also a source of innovation in modern food provisioning (e.g. as ecological modernisation) (Morgan et al. 2006). Typically, however, these types of relations and their sharing of responsibilities will however only work within small-scale settings. Paradoxically, success may therefore challenge their foundations and basic ideas. A well-known example is the development in the organic food market, which in many places has shifted from communitarian innovation to commercialisation, standardisation, and market regulation (‘conventionalisation’) (Guthman 2004; Sonnino and Marsden 2006). Similar tendencies can be observed even for farmers’ markets. Scaling up and accompanying institutionalisation will inevitably affect the interrelations and power as well as their normative foundations.

Table 1. Types of regulation - different solutions and consumer roles

Table 1 indicates how the various types of regulation emerge from combining the two dimensions. The traditional approach is based on particularism, with low degrees of institutionalisation, but also low degrees of individual freedom, where familiarity and social control in small networks are central features. The welfare state approach is, on the contrary, based on universalism and equality, with far-reaching forms of institutionalisation. But there is even here little space for individual freedom and choice, emphasising instead collective decisions and political solutions. Moving then to the consumer choice approach, where commodification is an important way of solving social problems, we find emphasis on individual freedom as a choice between commercial alternatives. Institutionalisation is represented by large, often globalised, corporations. Liberal ideals of competition and choice will generally include state action, but involvement is in most cases meant to support market based distribution, rather than counteracting the effects of it. The fourth type of approach, characterised as ‘communitarianism’, indicates voluntary actions where people as consumers and citizens are involved in small-scale, alternative initiatives with reference to immediate wishes of better food as well as more altruistic ideals. It is a form of self-regulation, but with very different institutional foundations.
Increasing degrees of organisation and formalisation will, in relation to households and people as consumers, mean growing imbalances of power. This makes the questions of ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’ pertinent. I have described how individual freedom and responsibility will to a large degree depend on the ways in which organisational structures are set up and how they are configured (the institutional field). While organisational resources may represent discipline and abuses of power (including exploitation of consumer loyalty) and thus struggles for ‘freedom from’, organisation can also, to the consumer, provide higher predictability, systems to deal with malfeasance, and efficiency which may provide ‘freedom to’. The welfare state and the neo-liberal state have very different types of solutions. The welfare state solution is based on (national) egalitarianism, paternalism and discipline (of the market as well as households). Individualisation and self-regulation may represent a regulatory response not only to a declining legitimacy of this kind of interventionism, but also increasing organisational complexity. This is reflected in large-scale re-regulation of markets as well as in relationships with households and consumers. Individualisation of responsibility is to the consumer not a matter of the number of choices that are presented on the shelves, but how choice as a form of consumer based involvement is institutionalised. It is recognition of people as “end-consumers”, as social actors, with systems of empowerment politically as well as via the provisioning system. ‘Consumer choice’ as a regulatory strategy includes not only communicative efforts to make people into “choosing consumers”, but also the provision of institutions which recognise consumer interests and agency (institutionalisation of distrust). When this is lacking we find distrust as representing powerlessness. Individual responsibility-taking represents agency and is not always a matter of loyal support to shared goals, but involves protest and creativity. Communitarian initiatives may be an indication of that, where self-realisation is intimately combined with responsibility for social problems (‘power to’). But as solutions to counteract existing imbalances of power in the food market the impacts of such initiatives are probably more as part of consumer mobilisation and politicisation than as alternative provisioning.

It is easy to sympathise with the claims that consumer concerns must be taken seriously and that proper channels for feedback and influence should be ensured. Such channels are often poorly developed in Europe today. It is also understandable that requesting consumer responsibility without empowerment is problematic. Demands of consumer responsibility are often coming from other societal actors. Such demands may sometimes be in accordance with the expectations of modern consumers. Korthals (2001) has argued that shopping considering caring and ethical concerns challenges the distinctions between the consumer role and the citizen role. ‘Political consumerism’ as a form of political activism points in the same direction (Micheletti 2003). In my opinion, this is not only a matter of value orientations or public discourse. Values and debates develop within particular social settings; in everyday life, markets and politics. The ways in which consumption is institutionalised - the daily routines, the directions and priorities of food consumption, as well as the responsibility, power and resources of ‘the consumer’ – are not static preconditions. Assuming agency without considering concrete arrangements,
power structures, and trust relations may end up being moralising rather than mobilising. There are numerous examples.

‘Consumer choice’ is a highly politicised concept, emerging within a historical and spatial context of ample supplies and sufficient incomes. It denotes a particular type of action and particular forms of interaction. Consumer choice combines ideas of freedom and responsibility. Making use of animal welfare to differentiate and “milk” segments with high purchasing power does not necessarily promote consumer activism – nor the welfare of farm animals. Yet, well developed, integrated and predictable markets form the background for the emergence of this type of regulation, which typically involves elements of politicisation and mobilisation as well as state efforts to encourage and sustain the “right” choices. Still, due to the historical contingency of such contexts, freedom and responsibility do not take the same forms everywhere, nor is it universally successful. On the contrary, as a governing principle within the area of food consumption, ‘consumer choice’ is of relatively limited significance. But, where it has succeeded, empowerment and agency are important characteristics; it cannot be reduced to ‘self regulated markets’. Likewise, lacks of success should not be reduced to ‘gastro-anomie’ or lack of compliance.
References


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Hoffmann-Riem, H., and B. Wynne. 2002. "In risk assessment, one has to admit ignorance. Explaining there are things we can't know could improve public confidence in science." Nature 416 (14 March):123.


Article I.


Abstract

This paper presents a study of the emergence of nutrition policy within the Norwegian welfare state. Emphasis is put on how nutrition in the inter-war period came to be reformulated from elitist discipline into a collective, liberating project. Three aspects are of particular importance: belief in scientifically based state intervention, corporative forms of governance, and the emphasis on disciplinary forms of regulation to increase welfare for all. Together, scientific planning and patriotic corporatism signalled a long period of strong interventionist and protectionist policies in the food sector. This centralised multi-sectorial state regulation implied special forms of interrelations and moral considerations, where nutritional concerns became interwoven with other concerns of strong national importance, such as economic support to agricultural production and rural communities and reduced social inequality. The paper shows how modernisation within and with reference to these forms of institutionalisation provided powerful solutions and legitimacy, but also significant tensions and limitations. Consumers became politically completely marginalised. Rights to protection dominated over private freedoms or responsibilities, with little hesitation over state regulation of markets and the family for the “common good”. The case emphasises the importance of historical legacy and institutional path-dependency for understanding how regulations of food consumption evolve and become institutionalised, in Norway closely linked to nation building during the first half of the 20th century.
Article II.


Abstract

Many assume that current regulatory influences on consumption are dominated by individualised responsibilities and commercial solutions. This paper examines this assumption, discussing how the regulation of food consumption in Norway has changed in a complex interaction between regulatory strategies and institutional structures. The packed lunch introduced in the inter-war period is an example of explicit social engineering succeeding in becoming socialised and internalised into an institution that has survived until today. The contrasting handling of fat and sugar shows how structural influences do not disappear when eventually more freedom and responsibility were allocated to the individual. The regulation of food consumption may have very powerful effects on what people eat when in accordance with important cultural and normative references and organisational structures and much less – or in unexpected directions – when this is not the case. These effects are particularly strong within the Norwegian welfare state, providing considerable space for action in the case of fat, very little for sugar.
Article III.


Abstract

The issue of consumer trust has repeatedly been raise in relation to food policy events in Europe over the last couple of decades. Based on the project ‘Consumer Trust in Food’ (funded by the European Commission, contract no. QLK1-CT-2001-00291), the paper discusses explanations to variations and changes in trust. Representative population surveys were conducted in Denmark, Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Norway and Portugal. Opinions on trust in food show large and consistent differences across the countries. While trust is high in Great Britain and Scandinavia, levels are generally much lower in Italy, Portugal and Germany. It may seem as if the considerable regulatory and market-based reforms that came in the aftermath of the BSE crisis have had positive impacts on trust. But trust is based even on other issues than food safety, and people are generally more sceptical when it comes to ethical issues, quality or nutrition. It is argued that cognitive models, focussing on individual risk perception and communication, are insufficient to explain these variations. An alternative approach is outlined, where consumer trust is understood as organisational frames. By considering food consumption as the outcome of complex interrealations between consumers, the market, the state, and civil society, we can identify characteristically different types of conditions for trust. Trust seems to refer not only to shared norms and expectations, but also to the concrete organisation and performance of food institutions, regarding predictability, openness, etc. It is a matter of both organisations’ capability and willingness to meet expectations. Historical and cultural conditions as well as rapid shifts may lead to discrepancies between expectations and performance – which may be expressed as distrust – politically and in the market. It is therefore suggested that institutionalising consumer distrust may represent and important way of building trust in modern food institutions.
Article IV.


Abstract

There is an increased focus on trust in food. While today’s consumers may have become somewhat more attentive and demanding, the main point is that trust in the food system itself has become more significant – and, thereby, so have the mechanisms that direct trust and distrust. Using Norwegian examples, the article focuses on structural changes that have contributed to this situation: liberalisation of trade, increased competition, and shifts of power in the food system, together with rapidly growing organisational and technological complexity. Our daily encounters with food are important for individual identity and safety, at the same time as they are dependent on highly complex social institutions. Dynamic trust seems to be essential, allowing us to shift between straightforward routines, based on simple symbols and classifications, and a more active state of reflexivity on what we are doing and what is taking place in the market. A precondition is the establishment of robust and effective channels for expressing distrust, preferably in the forms of third-party control and public concern. One major issue is the transparency of decision-making in the market and within these control bodies. While established commercial actors benefit from strategies that can promote the status quo, which is dominated by closed decisions and routine consumer purchases, this is challenged by new supply-side actors, consumer groups, the media, etc. The various actors in the food system have a range of alternative strategies for responding to distrust. The combination of these strategies and their relation to other efforts that may reduce the pressure on consumer trust – or alternatively distrust – are worthy of attention, particularly in empirical studies of the role of trust.
Article V.


Abstract

Many claim that trust rests on taken for granted habits, norms and basic social networks, often developed as part of early socialisation. As opposed to these ‘cultural’ theories, so-called ‘institutional’ theories propose that trust is derived from institutional and political performance. While distrust from the first kind of perspective often signifies a break-up of routines and a lack of social cohesion and community, and institutional perspective opens for a more constructive role of distrust as part of democratic processes. Based on data collected in representative population surveys in Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, and Portugal in 2002, we explore the importance of these two types of explanations to variations in trust in the safety of food items. The levels of trust vary significantly between the countries, with Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries representing high-trust areas, while low levels of trust are found in Germany, Italy and Portugal. Two regression models were introduced to study influences on trust within each country, one including variables taken to indicate social and cultural influences (trust in other people, confidence in own food), a second one adding variables indicating judgements of performance (trust in the truth-telling of institutional actors, optimism/pessimism regarding change in the food sector). Generally, we find that both types of variables help to explain variations in trust, but the patterns are quite varied across the six countries. While the high trust in Denmark hinges on cultural explanations and on institutional explanations in Great Britain, we find both types of influences in Norway. Institutional explanations are significant in all three low-trust countries, but while this seems to be the main type of influence in Germany, social and cultural influences matter as well in Italy and Portugal. In view of ongoing modernisation of the European food sector, it is evident that changes are experienced and trusted very differently across various countries, seeming influenced not only by culturally and socially contingent expectations but also on how states and markets take on board and handle structural and regulatory change. This latter, ‘institutional’, factor is particularly important for understanding responses of distrust.