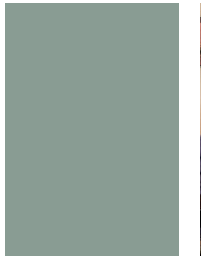
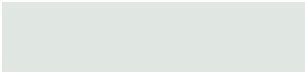




The Status of the Commensal Meal in Denmark – a study of commensality and dinner clubs



Master Thesis
Integrated Food Studies
Aalborg University,
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Project summary

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how commensality can be understood and practised in the Danish society and what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture. It is concluded that commensality is understood as the gathering of human beings where the served food is seen as the mean to gather people and socialisation is seen as the main purpose. Commensality is a highly practiced everyday activity in the Danish population. Dinner clubs contribute with the possibility to socialise with friends, neighbours, acquaintances and family members in an informal eating setting, and as a possibility to be relieved from everyday cooking chores. In a modern and changing eating culture, dinner clubs contribute with structure, stability and gastro-politics that establish a frame for human interactions around food.

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ABSTRACT

The Danish media often presents the Danish eating culture as being in decline. Danes eat alone, they eat in a hurry and they buy convenience meals that require a minimal time of preparation. In general time spent eating has decreased, the composition of meals has been simplified and both eating out and the use of takeout solutions have increased. To gather a modern family around the dinner table for a commensal meal appears to be an increasingly difficult task, because of longer working hours, the wish for pursuing a career, self-realisation projects, children's leisure activities and the practise of customised, individual diets.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how commensality can be understood and practised in the Danish society and what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture. This aim has a foundation in the wonderments; how is the term commensality understood, what is the status of the commensal meal in Denmark, what motivates people to participate in dinner clubs and what does dinner clubs and the new tendency with common food initiatives contribute with in a modern eating culture?

To investigate this, a varied use of methods has been applied. Six semi-structured interviews have been conducted with resource persons, with knowledge and practical experience in the field of food and sociology, in order to gain a diverse understanding of the term commensality and the status of the commensal meal. Furthermore, observations and semi-structured interviews have been conducted within five dinner clubs in the Greater Copenhagen, Denmark. Lastly, 116 motivation slips have been collected from dinner club participants in order to perform visual descriptive summaries on their motivation for participating. The triangulation of methods has been used to reveal the norms and perceptions among the dinner club participants.

Based on the analysis of our data, it is concluded that commensality is understood as the gathering of human beings where the served food is seen as the mean to gather people, and socialisation is seen as the main purpose. Our results show that commensality is an everyday activity among the Danish population. Furthermore, it is discovered that dinner clubs contribute with the possibility to socialise with family, friends, neighbours

and acquaintances in an informal eating setting, and to be relieved from everyday cooking chores. In a modern, changing eating culture dinner clubs contribute with organisation and structure, stability and gastro-politics that establish a frame for human interactions around food.

Keywords: The Danish Eating Culture, Commensality, The Commensal Meal, Practice Theory, Phases of Life, Socialisation, Individualisation, Individual Meals, Common Food Initiatives and Dinner Clubs.

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CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

The initial chapter of this master thesis begins by explaining the interest and motivation that has formed the foundation for this thesis. Secondly, an introduction to the background and problem area of the thesis will be presented, and then a description of the thesis' focal points, which is presented in the research question and the associated working questions of the thesis, will follow. Afterwards a clarification and delimitation of essential themes and selected terms will be explained, and finally, the structure of the thesis will be illustrated and described by giving a brief introduction to the following chapters with the aim of creating an overview of the thesis' different chapters.

During this thesis we will take use of italic type and inverted commas when quoting the respondents or when referring to a field note. Bold type will be used particularly in the summative paragraphs or when we as researchers estimate a point to be particularly important.

1.0 PREFACE

Since the beginning of this Master's degree programme Integrated Food Studies we have been determined on what subject area, this thesis should derive from.

Our interest in the sociological understanding of food has existed since studying a bachelor in Nutrition and Health at Metropolitan University College and has followed us ever since. Throughout the Master's degree programme we have dealt with a wide range of interesting aspects of sociology concerning humans' relation to food, including:

- The importance of increasing food literacy among school children and the need for prioritising home economics as a means to this.
- Increasing transparency of consumer information in the retail store with a focus on storytelling and labelling.
- Education of supermarket employees with the aim of improving health among the customers.

With a great research interest in the many sub areas of food sociology and consumer behaviour, there is in particular one area, which has awakened our curiosity and made us wonder. This

being, the term commensality and how humans practise eating together in the modern everyday life. In the light of societal development with busy work schedules and individual practises and needs, combined with an increasing number of takeout meals and convenience food, we find it interesting to look at some of the specific situations in which Danes practise eating together and investigate which elements that motivate them to prioritise the commensal meal. These initial thoughts were the beginning of this thesis.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Our point of departure for this thesis is formed on the significant focus on food and meals taking place in the media, both nationally and internationally. In addition, cookbooks are published and restaurants reviewed as never before. Cooking shows are daily aired on television, and in the newspapers experts are eagerly discussing the future of food consumption, the poor prioritisation of the meal and whether or not we still practise the act of eating together (Meiselman 2009, 16; Holm 2013, 23; Murcott, Belasco, and Jackson 2013; Kjærnes 2001).

Everyday life has changed considerably during the past decades, influenced by new organisation of work and new family structures (Kjærnes 2001; Kjærnes et al. 2009, 69). Particularly, the industrialisation by the 1930's changed the allocation of time and organisation of work and housing (Kjærnes 2001). Furthermore, this development influenced the Danish eating patterns and transformed the traditional five-meal pattern into the modern three-meal pattern (Kjærnes 2001; Holm 2013, 23). Based on the industrialisation and its focus on increased efficiency, lunch at home was abandoned and instead the packed lunch was introduced. As a result a stronger focus on the evening meal was created and the dinner became the place for gathering the family in a busy everyday life (Holm 2013, 23).

Today our eating patterns are changing yet again. Danes no longer eat breakfast in the kitchen at 7 a.m., lunch in the canteen at 12 p.m. and dinner with the family at 6 p.m. In a family with children, leisure activities are often scheduled the same time as the joint family dinner as well as the parents' total working time outside the home has become longer (Groth and Fagt 2003:9). This makes little time for cooking a proper meal and sharing it with your family.

Over time the range of places to buy takeout food and convenience products have increased tremendously (Prättälä 2000, 191; Crowther 2013a, 177; Ferguson 2012, 111). Dining is no longer reserved for special times of the day or special social occasions - now you can eat while biking and walking or while sitting in the train, which handy wrapping and to go options offer.

This kind of deconstruction of the meal is most commonly characterised as *grazing* and is used to describe irregular eating patterns that are regarded as the individuals' seek for own, instant satisfaction. Today, grazing is part of a daily lifestyle in the United States of America and the common meals are in decline (Meiselman 2009, 16). From time to time debates in the Danish media point out, that this trend has entered Denmark as well based on the fact that we eat in a hurry, individually and often while we are on our way to something else (Holm 2013, 23; Groth and Fagt 2003:9). In general time spent eating has decreased, the composition of meals has been simplified and both eating out and the use of takeout solutions have increased (Prättälä 2000, 191; Fischler 2011; Mäkelä 2009, 37). We therefore raise the question; **will snacks and grazing in the future replace the commensal meal?**

As mentioned the media tend to highlight that Danes eat alone, in a hurry and that they eat ready meals that require a minimal time of cooking. Despite of this, we as researches see a tendency, particularly articulated on the social media, where people prioritise to join private meal communities to a higher degree than earlier and particularly dinner clubs and common food initiatives, like *Madrouletten*, *Madklub.dk* and *Københavns Madklub* are at the moment influencing the commensal eating (Appendix 1).

According to the survey "*Fællesspisning*" carried out by Coop in 2013¹, 10,9% Danes are members of some kind of food community beside the usual meal with their family. Furthermore, 8,3% of the Danes would like to increase their participation in food communities within the next year (Aarup, Nielsen, and Steenberg 2013).

In this thesis, dinner clubs will be used as a case to examine what motivates people to participate in common food initiatives, including the participants own view on eating with others and the values attached to the shared meal.

The current increased participation in meal communities like dinner clubs, has made us raise the question: **are new commensal meal initiatives representing a backlash on the culinary development of takeout options, convenience products and the low prioritisation of the commensal meal?**

Based on the several critical statements on the Danish eating culture, mentioned throughout this introduction, the scope of this thesis is based on a curiosity and reflection of why people

¹ The survey includes 1000 respondents weighted on age, gender and geography and is described by Coop Analysis as representative relative to Denmark's population within the age group 15-74.

participate in dinner clubs and what this setting can contribute with in a modern eating culture. Commensality is often regarded as a characteristic foundation of meals, but **is the commensal meal actually disappearing or is it just changing in frequency and composition of who is included?**

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

How can commensality be understood and practised in the Danish society and what does dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture?

1.2.1 AIM

As mentioned in the paragraph *Introduction*, commensality is often debated in the media as a phenomenon that has difficult circumstances in a modern eating culture, where alternatives to the home-cooked and well-prepared meal can be found on every street corner in larger cities. **This thesis aims to discuss and answer how the concept of commensality can be understood and additionally, how commensality is practised in a Danish context.** This will be done by performing a literature search, in order to define and discuss the concept of commensality. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of carefully selected Danish actors, referred to as resource persons in the field of food and sociology, we will broaden out the concept of commensality in order to obtain a diverse understanding.

When reading some of the initial literature for this thesis it was repeatedly pointed out that the field of food and sociology (and within this the concept of commensality) was an unexplored topic, and not much research is done in the field. Despite the obvious connection between sociology and food, until recently, sociologists have not addressed food as a legitimate subject matter for their discipline (McIntosh 2013, 14; Holm 2013, 23).

We believe this is unfortunate, since the sociological aspect of food and the act of eating together can help us understand the structures of everyday lives and thereby the structure of society. **Therefore, with this thesis we also aim to contribute with new knowledge in the field of food sociology, social eating behaviour and the practise of commensality in a modern eating culture.**

The second part of the research question, is concerned with what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture. Dinner clubs will function as a chosen case in this thesis. The growing interest in dinner clubs and similar initiatives, with the shared meal in focus, has created a wonder of why the eating setting is changing and what participation in dinner clubs contributes with.

With the second part of the research question we will investigate the practices within dinner clubs by entering the field in an attempt to uncover how and why the Danish consumers practise commensality in their everyday lives. This, by interviewing the participants in order to explore the values they attach to the shared meal. We will investigate the different understandings, practices and the motivations formed by private consumers who practise eating as part of a social group. The methods applied in the thesis will be described more thoroughly in Chapter 4, *Research Design*.

1.2.2 WORKING QUESTIONS

The working questions stated below have been formed to uncover the topics influencing the context of our research. The answers to these questions will not be presented in a separate paragraph, but will appear along the way and support and enable us to answer the main objective of the thesis.

- How can commensality be defined?
- What are the selected resource persons' understandings of commensality?
- What is the status of commensality in Denmark?
- What motivates people to participate in a dinner club?
- Which everyday practices are related to the constitution of a dinner club?

1.3 CLARIFICATION

The following paragraph will be used for clarifying and elaborating on some of the terms used in the research question and throughout the thesis. This is to create a common ground and understanding between the readers and the researchers before moving on to the following chapters.

Commensality is a concept used to describe eating with others (Sobal 2000, 119). Commensal eating reflects the structures and shapes of 'social morphology' in the form of food relationships. Eating together operates to develop functional relationships between individuals as well as

nurturing and fuelling their bodies (Sobal and Nelson 2003). These are just some of the various estimates in defining what commensality is.

The concept of commensality, how it can be understood and practised, is the focal point of this thesis, and therefore further definitions on the term will be discussed in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*. Through the initial part of the thesis (up to and including Chapter 4) commensality will be referred to by its theoretical definition; “the act of eating together”.

The choice of including the word *modern* in the research question is based on a wish for describing dinner clubs in a current context. However, since dinner clubs is not a 2014 phenomena, we need to broaden out the focus and include certain events and initiatives founded years back into the definition of modern.

We prioritise to rely on solid, scientific research for this thesis, and since public reports of Danes' eating culture is not published every year, our definition of modern may extend somewhat further back. For making a clear definition of the time period we have chosen to put emphasis on Actor Network Theory and **let the network of actors be decisive when clarifying what we in this thesis define as modern**. The organisations and companies we find having the greatest influence on commensality are relatively new, since the oldest actor range back to 2010. This is today known as Københavns Madhus, who reintroduced the meal on the political agenda in Denmark, with the organisation MadX. We will take use of this event and this specific actor as the oldest to delimit our definition of modern, ranging back to 2010 and until present.

When choosing to take use of the term *eating culture*, we speak of a broad concept that encompasses the different ways eating is practised in Denmark, in other words; how, where, what, why and when Danes eat. We want to research what dinner clubs contribute with to this broad perspective of eating. This is where *meal culture* is used, as a chosen case, to narrow down this very broad concept, and to focus on the meal situation within dinner clubs. We define meal culture as *what is taking place around the meal*. In other words; the social interactions between the participants, the culinary norms (which is what the French sociologist Claude Fischler refers to as gastro-politics (Crowther 2013b, 109)) and the values attached to the meal within the chosen context, namely dinner clubs. It is our assessment that without this narrowed focus on meal culture, the findings and conclusions would be general and vague.

When studying literature for this thesis it was found that a lot of it is focused on the sociability of the family meal and the values that are attached to this specific eating constellation, such as gathering the family, strengthen solidarity, child upbringing, and teaching manners and norms (Burgoyne and Clarke 1983, 152; Meiselman 2009, 16; Mäkelä 2009, 37; Fischler 2011). The

family is the most fundamental commensal unit while colleagues eating together in lunch breaks, friends having a meal at a restaurant or neighbours sharing a beverage can be defined as other types of eating constellations (Kjærnes et al. 2009, 69)

Inclusion and exclusion in various commensal units establishes networks of relationships that delineate the range of people whom individuals eat with (Sobal 2000, 119). We believe that many of the values attached to the family meal, are comparable to other commensal eating settings. When researching commensality in this thesis the family meal will not be the central point, however it will from time to time be included. The family meal is not chosen as the focal point since the focus in literature more often is on how food constitutes a family and the roles among family members. In this thesis our focus of interest concerns the mixed constellation of members, and what the meal as a social setting for meeting others can contribute with.

The minor focus on commensality in a family does not leave out the family as being part of the dinner clubs we have visited and the family is therefore a part of the empirical data as well. In addition, it is worth mentioning that since the family is the most fundamental commensal unit we imagine that this frame is often also what our respondents will reflect upon in their answers during the interview. However, we attempt to keep families, as a closed unit, outside the focus of this thesis.

Finally, this thesis will have a Danish focus and particularly a focus on major urban areas and nearby areas surrounding the capital. This, due to that dinner clubs and the additional new common food initiatives, are tendencies we observe as being related to the larger cities in Denmark.

1.4 DELIMITATION

This paragraph will shortly present how some of the central concepts of the thesis has been delimited in order to sharpen and narrow down the field of research.

Throughout this thesis dinner clubs in private settings is what will be emphasised. Our definition on private dinner clubs is dinner clubs that are arranged by private persons and take place in private settings without involvement from any professional organisation. We thereby delimit the research from taking restaurants, professionally arranged soup kitchens, workplaces, public institutions like schools, retirement homes and kindergartens or other public dinner

settings into account, even though many elements might be identical to the practices taking place in dinner clubs.

This is due to the fact that public dinner settings like professionally arranged soup kitchens are assumed to possess less routinized practices, since dining out rarely is an everyday activity. This appears to be contradicting to this thesis' aim of researching the practices related to a dinner club and what motivates people to join a dinner club. Therefore, the focus on this thesis is limited to researching only private dinner clubs.

Lastly, when dealing with meal culture, the nutritious content of what is consumed is often a popular theme. Much literature has been written on how new eating tendencies are changing the eating patterns and leads to unhealthy eating habits that has negative consequences for the public health. The health and nutrition perspective is not a focal part of this thesis. What we are researching is **how** and **why** we consume food in social or individual constellations.

1.5 THE CONTENT AND ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Before turning to the next chapter we would like to give an overview of the thesis' content and organisation with a short presentation of the following chapters.

Chapter 1]	Part 1 – Introduction
Chapter 2]	Part 2 – Theoretical Foundation
Chapter 3]	
Chapter 4]	Part 3 – Applied Methods and Data Processing
Chapter 5]	
Chapter 6]	Part 4 – Data Analysis and Results
Chapter 7]	Part 5 – Discussion, Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Part 2 presents the thesis' theoretical foundation.

- Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework* attempts to unfold some of the central themes of the research question including Commensality, The Danish Eating Habits, the Phases of Life that the target group of the thesis belongs to and the theoretical approach of Practice Theory.
- Chapter 3, *Philosophy of Science* will explain some of the philosophical considerations on the production of scientific knowledge we had when starting this thesis and the pre-understanding that underlies our research.

Part 3 presents the applied methods and the following data processing.

- Chapter 4, *Research Design* will describe the methods that have been used to collect the empirical data of the project, including literature search, mapping of possible respondents with the use of Actor Network Theory, conducting semi-structured interviews performing ethnographically inspired observations and visual descriptive summaries on the collected motivation slips.
- Chapter 5, *Data Processing* will describe the processing of our empirical data including how the interviews are transcribed into smaller summaries and afterwards clustered into frames and subtitles and linked with field notes from the performed observations. Finally, the chapter will contain a description on how the motivation slips have been processed.

Part 4 presents an analysis of the collected data in relation to the theoretical framework of the thesis. This is followed by a presentation of the results.

- Chapter 6, *Data Analysis and Results* will present the initial findings of our data collection, including the characteristics of the selected resource persons and dinner clubs. Furthermore, it will contain an analysis of the themes derived from our data processing consisting of *Motivation, Challenges Related to Commensality, Practices* and *Status on Commensality*. This is followed by a summary of the main results.

Part 5 is completed by a reflection, where the analysis of the thesis is gathered and the results are discussed in a future- and societal perspective. The chapter culminates with a conclusion and our reflections and future perspectives.

- Chapter 7, *Discussion, Conclusion and Future Perspectives* will discuss the reliability and validity of the collected data and the theoretical framework of the thesis, followed by a

discussion on the status of the commensal meal in Denmark. Furthermore, the main conclusions of our project will be summarised, and lastly the future perspectives on the theme of commensality will be considered in relation to the integrated perspective of the Masters' degree programme Integrated Food Studies.

CHAPTER 2, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will provide a review of the theoretical framework of the thesis. It contains particularly an elaboration of some of the central concepts such as Commensality (paragraph 2.0) and The Danish Eating Habits (paragraph 2.1). Additionally, the two sections Phases of Life (paragraph 2.2) and Practice Theory (paragraph 2.3) have been included in order to provide an academic foundation for the further content and analysis. Lastly, we will provide arguments as to why these theories have been selected and as to how they are expected to contribute to the outcome of this thesis.

2.0 COMMENSALITY

The sociability of eating is essential to people as human beings. Therefore, commensality - the act of eating together - is often regarded as an inherent core of meals (Sobal 2000, 119; Mäkelä 2000, 7). The American author and professor of journalism at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Michael Pollan tries to capture the essence of the shared meal in the following quotation:

“The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture.” (Pollan 2008).

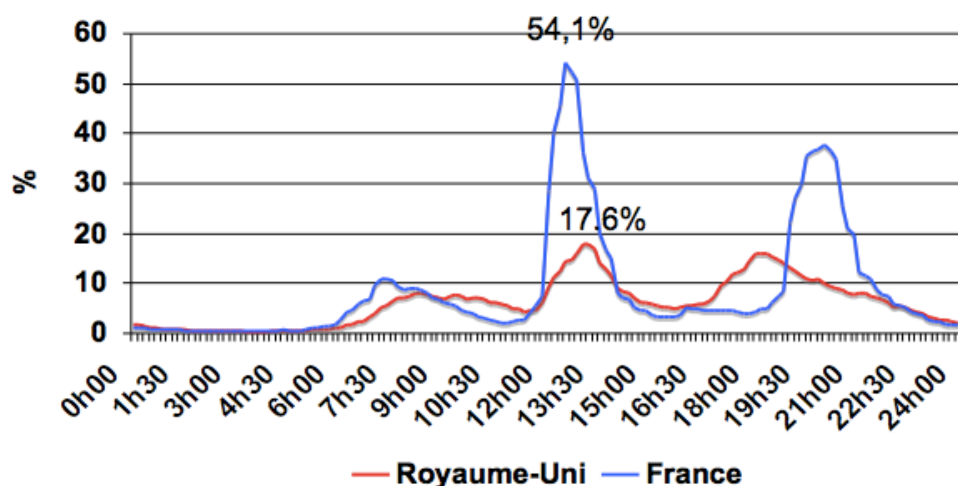
A solitary meal can be regarded as undesirable in certain cultures (Sobal 2000, 119) or even as an oxymoron - two concepts that seem to contradict each other (Fischler 2011). There is a general consensus among professionals engaged with the theme of commensality, that meals constitute a social relation and that they have a vital role in the everyday life of human beings (Mäkelä 2009, 37; McIntosh 2013, 14; Holm 2013, 23).

The literature reviewed for this thesis displays various researchers' diverse understanding of food and eating as a varying concept, which varies from culture to culture. The French sociologist Claude Fischler, Director of Research at the French National Research Agency's National Center for Scientific Research, highlights that the way meals are eaten in the United States of America and Great Britain is in great contrast to how meals are eaten in France or Italy. For the French, eating is a social affair whereas the meal in the United States of America is regarded as a symbol of personal freedom. It is up to the individual to make the right decisions

in order to be healthy, live longer or stay in shape. This way of relating to meals is what Fischler refers to as an individualisation and a medicalization of meals (Fischler 2011).

The figure below (Figure 1) shows the results from a time use survey within Great Britain and France. The survey shows that around 12:30 p.m. 54,1% of the people in France eat lunch, while only 17,6% of the people in Great Britain eat at the same time (De Saint Pol 2006). In general, the figure demonstrates a much steadier eating pattern in France compared to in Great Britain, where the time of eating is more unevenly spread. Furthermore, the French are not only just eating at the same time, they also eat dinner and lunch together in about 80% of the cases (Fischler 2011).

FIGURE 1: Eating Patterns: France vs. UK



At 12.30, 54.1% of the French are eating; at 13.10, 17.6% of the British (de Saint Pol, 2007. Source: Time use survey, ONS, 2000 and Enquête emploi du temps, INSEE, 1998-99).

Figure 1: *Le dîner des Français: Un synchronisme alimentaire qui se maintient.* A time use survey conducted in 2000. A comparison of the French and British eating patterns during the day (De Saint Pol 2006, 46).

Variations regarding the time and the content of the meal can also be observed within the Scandinavian countries (Kjærnes 2001), which are illustrated in figure 2.

FIGURE 2: Percentage of Scandinavian People Eating either Hot or Cold Food

	Hour	Hot	Cold	N
Denmark	6-8 p.m.	58	13	736
Finland	4-6 p.m.	34	18	976
Norway	4-6 p.m.	44	12	960
Sweden	5-7 p.m.	37	20	904

Figure 2: The percentage of people who have eaten hot and cold food in Finland and Norway at 4-6 p.m., Denmark at 6-8 p.m. and Sweden at 5-7 p.m. on weekdays. The total number of respondents: n= 3576. *Eating Patterns, A Day in the Lives of Nordic Peoples* (Kjærnes 2001, 115).

Figure 2 shows that compared to the Scandinavian countries a larger amount of the Danish population practise eating a regular hour between 6-8 p.m. and that their meals typically consist of hot food.

These varying eating practises were something we had in mind when designing the research question as very broad (*how can commensality be understood and practised*). This, because it is our understanding that the area of food sociology cannot provide one single or correct answer. Therefore, the following paragraphs will contain interpretations and definitions of the term commensality from professionals working within the field of food and sociology.

Claude Fischler, who is a much quoted sociologist within the field of food and sociology, defines commensality as the sharing of meals, which is central for creating groups, for bonding and for building intimate relationships (Fischler 2011). He argues that:

“One of the most striking manifestations of human sociality is commensality: humans tend to eat together or, to put it more exactly, to eat in groups.” (Fischler 2011, 529).

Fischler particularly emphasises the social aspects as being part of the meal:

“Commensality often conveys a more restrictive notion than eating with other people. It can involve a sense of sharing food habitually, with an assumption of some degree of dependence of one or several of the commensal parties upon another, or some degree of reciprocal commitment/involvement.” (Fischler 2011, 533).

Anne Murcott, sociologist and professor at Nottingham University, is studying the sociality of meals. She emphasises the meaning of the meal in the following sentence:

“Food and what we do to and with it is proclaimed to lie at the very core of sociality: it signifies togetherness. The commensality of eating means that we try to coordinate our actions.” (Kjærnes et al. 2009, 69).

Fischler and Murcott appear to agree that within the very core of commensality lays the social aspect of the meal. This is furthermore supported by professor in Anthropology at Capilano University in North Vancouver, Gillian Mary Crowther, who states that:

“Commensality is the act of sharing food with other people and it is an expression of on-going social relationships performed in accordance with cultural rules of eating etiquette.” (Crowther 2013, 158).

In contrast, Fischler and Murcott do not agree on the historical development of the commensal meal and what the consequences of this development might be. Fischler expresses his concerns about the mindless and unstructured eating that takes place outside the home. He states that:

“[...] without rules for meal-taking we are left normless and without guidance.” (Murcott 1997, 32).

This is what Fischler refers to as *gastro-anomie*, which is described as a tendency where cultural norms for what should be eaten when and together with whom disappear. The term originated in France as a response to the invasion of fast foods, particularly burgers, with their potential to undermine the nation's cuisine and people's relationship to food (Crowther 2013b, 109). Fischler explains:

“Following a collapse of traditional and authoritative external rules about what should be eaten, the individual faces a splintered, uncertain and confused situation, where the individual is left alone, ill-prepared to make decisions about food consumption.” (Kjærnes 2001, 26).

This perception of a *detraditionalisation* and a *destructuring* of our eating behaviour are not observed by Fischler alone. The American anthropologist and research professor at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Sidney Wilfred Mintz, argues that meal patterns are dissolving, and Pasi Falk, professor of Sociology at the University of Helsinki, describes a decline of ritual meals and a growth of the food industry (Murcott 1997, 32).

Murcott questions the notion of the commensal meal being in decline and being threatened by individuality. She challenges the speculation of popular literature as well as sociologists who argue that the family meal is in decline (Murcott 1997, 32). She argues that, looking back in history shows that the commensal family meal has existed in various forms and with major

differences due to socio-economic statuses and social classes, which are not comparable to modern family lives. Murcott traces the empirical foundation for this concept of decline and concludes that there is only scattered historical evidence of the status of the family meal, implying that the claims that status of family meal is changing is somewhat debatable. She believes that worrying about the decline of the shared meal is an expression of an ideal-typical model of the family, and that the research underlying these conclusions is not scientifically sufficient, highly biased, without transparency and not useful for generalisations (Murcott 1997, 32).

2.0.1 COMMENSAL OR INDIVIDUALISED MEALS IN A DANISH CONTEXT

The above-mentioned views on commensality are all contributions from foreign researchers whose findings may not be transferable to Danish eating culture. In a Danish context, the scientific literature does not reveal the same amount of scholars, who regard the status of the commensal meal as being problematic. For several years Lotte Holm, professor at the Institute of Food and Resource Economics, Faculty of Life Sciences in Copenhagen, has been working within the field of food and sociology. Holm does not seem to have the same concerns as Fischler, Mintz and Falk about the decline of the meal. In her argumentation Lotte Holm supports the aforementioned view by Anne Murcott regarding that the commensal meal through time has been seen in various constellations.

Within a Nordic context Marianne Pipping Ekström, associate professor at the Department of Home Economics at Göteborg University, has discussed the issue of whether or not the tradition of sharing family meals on a daily basis has ever really existed, and if so, how widespread it ever has been. Ekström shares the opinions stated by Murcott and Holm regarding that the shared meal was not, historically speaking, shared by everyone. Earlier, there were several social categories that did not belong to the sharing group; men, women, servants and children each had a different social status and there are reasons to believe that everybody did not eat from the same pot (Ekström 1990).

The following paragraph 2.1 *The Danish Eating Habits* will elaborate on the much debated change within the Danish eating culture.

As previously mentioned, the Danish media as well as researchers have touched upon this development as having a negative influence on the social aspects of the commensal meal. The debate on the decline of the meal in a Danish context has among others been raised by Johannes Andersen, associate professor at the Faculty of Sociology at Aalborg University. In the book

"Hverdagens centrifuge" he thematises the concept of *grazing* and discusses the individualisation that characterises modern family life. Andersen considers grazing as being undermining for the commensal meal as well as a dissolution of a meal tradition and thereby damaging for the community of the family (Andersen 2000). In the manuscript of his coming book² Andersen states that:

"The meal is unfortunately challenged and undermined as a joined activity and as the setting for proper food. It is challenged by the media, the food industry and modern ways of living, where busy people grab food of doubtful quality on the go. Even though we all prioritise the commensal meal it is challenged by everyday chores and by individual prioritisations." (Andersen 2014b).

2.0.2 COMMENSALITY AS AN EXCLUSIVE ACTIVITY

Commensality is most often referred to as an unifying activity, but some researchers underline that commensality as well can be regarded as exclusive for those who for various reasons (economy, religion, individual diets or allergies) do not take part in the commensal circle as Jeffery Sobal, sociologist and professor at Cornell University in the United States of America refers to. When sharing food around the table the community and equality is manifested (Fischler 2011). Fischler states that:

"Commensality can be understood as a bonding strategy. If eating food makes one become more like that food, then those sharing the same food become more like each other" (Fischler 2011, 533).

This bonding and the togetherness was in 1910, expressed by the now deceased German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel:

"What I think, I can communicate to others; what I see, I can let them see, what I say can be heard by hundreds of others – but what a single individual eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another." (Simmel 1997, 130).

This quotation by Simmel shows where the common meal performs its magic. It turns the exclusive selfishness of eating into a habit of being gathered together. In other words, the eating

² The book is expected to be published in August or September 2014. NB a copy can be forwarded by email if wanted.

of a meal is a highly important setting for displaying the belonging to a certain group and simultaneously making it clear who do not belong.

2.0.3 COMMENSALITY AND HEALTH ISSUES

Throughout the paragraph above, the importance of the meal has been related to the social aspects of eating. However, the nutritional aspects and health-related consequences of the deconstruction of meals can also be emphasised. Commensal eating may either promote health or constitute a risk against healthy eating. Evidence shows that socialisation in several cases increases the food intake, which can lead to a higher energy consumption and overweight (Mäkelä 2009, 37). On the other hand, some of the nations that have a more consistent practise of commensality appear to have a lower risk of obesity as well as related health problems. This tendency is particularly visible in France and Italy, where there, compared to other European countries with a similar standard of living, is a lower risk of obesity (Fischler 2011).

2.1 THE DANISH EATING HABITS

Every society has norms forming the eating patterns. There are norms regarding what is considered edible food, which foods should be combined, and how meals should be cooked in regards to season, daily activities, place and social company. Each opportunity to eat is structured by cultural patterns and organised by the expectations of the participants, such as what will be eaten and with whom. These patterns can be organised around the questions *when, what, how often, where* and *with whom* (Crowther 2013b, 109; Kjærnes 2001). These questions will serve as the point of departure for unfolding how eating as an everyday activity is structured and practised in the modern Danish society.

2.1.1 WHEN

Eating takes place as an integrated part of everyday life and thereby contributes to the structuring of our days into; morning, midday, afternoon and evening (Kjærnes 2001). Eating patterns are culturally constructed and fit the working lives of human beings. They are not natural patterns, but have come to serve our natural biological needs. The everyday meal can be regarded as a habituated ritual, and the ritualised patterns of meals create structure of life and emotional bonds to the meaning of food and the act of sharing it with other people (Crowther 2013b, 109).

The structured patterns can be found within the span of time where Danes eat. Dinnertime is not always fixed and may vary daily according to the schedules of the family members (Prättälä 2000, 191), but in general, eating times constitute a very uniform structure of daily routines. More than 50% of Danes eat their lunch between 12-1 p.m., and almost as many eat their dinner between 6-7 p.m. (Kjærnes et al. 2009, 69).

However, the same value is not attached to all meals of the day. This is among other things due to the amount of work and time spent on preparation, the formality of the meal and table setting as well as how many people are attending the meal. In Denmark, breakfast is therefore assigned the minimum degree of value, while dinner has the largest degree of value attached to it (O'Doherty 2013, 145).

2.1.2 WHAT

The question “*What is a meal?*” can be answered from a range of different perspectives. Among others the deceased, British anthropologist Mary Douglas has worked on defining the concept of a meal. According to studies conducted by Douglas and her colleague Michael Nicod “a proper meal” consists of a staple (potato), a centre (meat, fish or egg), trimmings (vegetables) and dressing (gravy) (O'Doherty 2013, 145; Kjærnes 2001).

The anthropologist Gillian Mary Crowther expresses another interpretation of “a proper meal”:

“It represents specific courses and associated dishes, or combinations of dishes, that carry cultural messages of appropriate sustenance for the particular time of day and gathering people.” (Crowther 2013, 156).

The conventional Danish eating pattern consists of three main meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. In addition, Danes eat two to three snacks a day (Prättälä 2000, 191). The traditional food components meat, fish, potatoes, bread and milk are still used in Danish eating culture, which can be regarded as being somewhat consistent with Douglas’ characterisation of a proper meal (O'Doherty 2013, 145). In addition, takeout options and convenience meals have become popular options, and boiled potatoes are most often replaced with pasta or rice. Furthermore, green salads have also become a central part of the modern meal in Denmark (Prättälä 2000, 191).

These changes can be explained by general socio-economic developments as well as changes in living conditions. Danes no longer earn their salary by doing heavy manual labour and the traditional housewives do not exist to the same extent anymore. Both men and women work outside the home, which makes less time for cooking a proper meal (Prättälä 2000, 191).

This makes particularly convenience food more appealing, and, despite the fact that a homemade meal made with fresh products is given a high priority, foods that are partly prepared have become more popular and are used by more than half of the Danish households at least once a week (Groth et al. 2009).

2.1.3 HOW OFTEN

In 1985, 90% of adult Danes had breakfast daily, 81% had lunch daily and 94% had dinner daily. In 1995, the numbers had decreased to 84% having breakfast on a daily basis, 51% having lunch daily and 86% having dinner daily (Prättälä 2000, 191). Recent studies show that in the period from 1995-2008, 85% of Danish families had commensal meals at least five days a week. Only at breakfast fewer commensal meals were observed, as only one third ate breakfast together at least five times a week in the years between 2005-2008 (Groth et al. 2009).

In addition, research shows that family meals tend to be more frequent among couples with children than among singles with children. Furthermore, figure 3 below shows that eating practices vary between age groups, as the frequency of family meals tends to increase with age (Groth et al. 2009; Kjærnes 2001). This variation of age groups characterised as Phases of Life, is a topic we will return to in the following paragraph 2.2.

FIGURE 3: Percentage of People having Family Meals divided into Age Groups

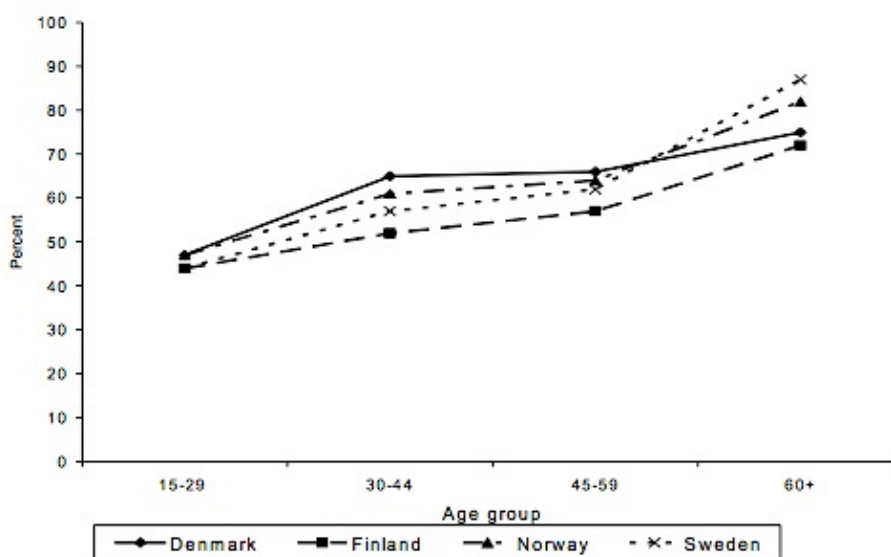


Figure 3: Family Meals and Age Groups. *Eating Patterns, A Day in the Lives of Nordic People*. Denmark: n= 890, Finland: n= 993, Norway: n= 888, Sweden: n= 820. (Kjærnes 2001, 206).

2.1.4 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT: WHERE AND WITH WHOM

The location of meals, whether being in the private or in the public sphere away from home, plays as well a role in shaping the meaning of a meal (Crowther 2013b, 109). The place of eating influences not only the social company and the social norms, but also how food may be provided and prepared.

Eating events primarily take place in three social contexts (1) individual eating events, (2) eating in the company of family members and (3) eating in the company of colleagues, schoolmates or business associates. The majority of eating events in Scandinavia takes place at home. The second greatest amount takes place at the workplace, while eating events in other people's homes and at restaurants, cafés and fast-food outlets constitute a minor proportion (Kjærnes et al. 2009, 69). In addition, it should be mentioned that people living in larger cities tend to eat at home somewhat less frequently than those living in smaller urban areas (Kjærnes 2001).

In general, most eating events take place at home on weekdays, particularly in the morning and in the evening. Studies researching Danish eating habits in the period between 2005-2008 show that Danes tend to consume their evening meal at home. This applies to more than eight out of ten Danes (Groth and Fagt 2003:9).

In general, individual eating events are of a brief duration and tend to be evenly distributed throughout the day. Family meals, on the other hand, are to a larger extent held during weekends and are characterised as eating events of a longer duration and as taking place in the evening (Kjærnes 2001).

Family meals have a great significance for family cohesion, and particularly meals eaten at home are consumed in the company of other household members. However, a great amount of difficulties arise when attempting to put the ideal of the family meal into practice. Family members in modern households typically spend the largest part of their day in separate social spheres, and some may be absent from the family meal due to leisure activities or work (Kjærnes 2001). The gathering of the entire household does therefore not occur on an everyday daily basis, but rather on an every-other-day-basis (Groth et al. 2009). To gather the entire family for a daily meal is a central issue in many households. The family meal is used as a place for teaching table manners, including hygiene, as well as manners concerned with unspoken social norms, including the sharing of food and considering others first (Groth et al. 2009; Crowther 2013b, 109). These norms are what Fischler describes as gastro-politics (Crowther 2013b, 109). Particularly, the adult members of the family prioritise to plan, organise, create and

conduct such meals, as it is regarded as an important element of creating a family (Kjærnes 2001; Groth et al. 2009).

However, Johannes Andersen emphasises that the good intentions of practising a family meal while passing on norms and manners also can be seen as a struggle. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“There is constantly a battle taking place around the table. A fight about what to eat, how to eat, and when it is dinnertime. A battle that to a great extent is based on different perceptions of what it means to eat right and to behave properly around a dining table.”
(Andersen 2014, 60-61).

2.2 PHASES OF LIFE

Since the objective of the second part of this thesis' research question is to answer what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture, we find it important to investigate, which kind of people who participate in dinner clubs and to investigate the various phases of life of the participants. This is based on our assumption that what motivates people to participate in a dinner club may vary greatly depending on their phase of life.

The fundamental aim of segmenting people into groups is to identify what makes human beings behave in a certain way. One of the historically most popular methods is the demographic segmentation. The typical variables of demographic segmentation are: gender, age, marital status, income, education, occupation, religion, race, place of residence and housing (Kongsholm 2007b, 53).

Through time, several life phase models have been developed, but according to trend researcher Louise Byg Kongsholm, MSc in Strategy and Management and director and owner of Pej Gruppen Scandinavian Trend Institute, some areas such as society, economy, culture and family patterns have changed, which she believes has provided the basis for several new life phases. Kongsholm states that the following six phases are lacking in existing segmentation models (Kongsholm 2007b, 53):

- *The Beginning of Life:* Within a consumer perspective, the phase taking place before birth plays a larger role today than earlier based on the increased amount of money spent on unborn children.

- *Children and the Youth:* Within this phase, children and the youth have developed an increasing purchasing power both directly and indirectly.
- *Eternal Youth:* As young adults today spend more time on education, living alone and enjoying life, the transition from youth to adulthood is not something that happens from one day to the other. Instead, young adults take their time discovering and developing their identity.
- *Traditional Family Life:* Families with children go through a series of nearly identical phases, with the only considerable variation being that the age of the children creates different needs and accordingly different practices.
- *Self-realisation:* A new phase of life appears to have originated in the period where children are leaving home and the retirement age has not yet been reached. Within this phase of life, there is time to focus on yourself, your career and your hobbies.
- *Senior Life:* The general increase in life expectancy implies that the retirement period is prolonged. Additionally, there are much more people aged 60 and above than earlier, which makes it impossible for all of them to be characterised as being identical.

Furthermore, Kongsholm argues that the indicated phases of life can be divided into 17 sub-phases (Kongsholm 2007b, 53). We will not review these 17 phases, but in the following, the phases comparable to the dinner club respondents of our collected data will be introduced and compared with the previously mentioned phases.

The phase *Eternal Youth* is comparable to the new phases *Identity* and *Establishment*.

- During the *Identity Phase*, efforts are made to master the new phase of life including new occupations, new boyfriends and getting held on own identity.
- In the *Establishment Phase*, a partner has typically been found, and focus is placed on relationships and closeness, including shared experiences and purchase of a house (Kongsholm 2007a, 91).

Traditional Family Life can be divided into additionally three phases; *Families with Smaller Children*, *Families with School Children/Tweens* and *Families with Teens*.

- The *Families with Smaller Children* are busy families. The parents have possibly just begun a promising career, but have chosen to put it on hold while their children are small. In general, time is limited and the costs are many. Money is typically used on the

home, the car, and the children and not on the parents. Leisure activities are put on hold and holidays are mostly spent at home.

- *Families with School Children/Tweens* are still busy, but the children have become more independent, and the parents are able to focus on their carrier and themselves again. Everyone comes and goes within the home according to his or her own agenda, and meals are consumed whenever it is found suitable. Particularly weekends are used by the family for joint activities.
- *Families with Teens* are under a great pressure. Conflicts and arguments are normal and activities and holidays have become more divided and individual (Kongsholm 2007a, 91).

The phase of *Self-realisation* is consistent with the earlier mentioned *Self-realisation Phase*.

- The economy is good, the health is fine and there is time to work, time for leisure activities and self-indulgence (Kongsholm 2007a, 91).

Senior Life has been divided into a number of new phases: *The New Senior*, *The Routine Senior*, *The Stay-at-Home Senior* and *The Independent*. However, the last phase is excluded based on our collection of respondents.

- *The New Senior* is characterised by having lots of freedom and spare time, and money is spent on experiences and travelling. After a few years of self-realisation the attention is again focused on the family, particularly if grandchildren have been added to the family. In general, children and grandchildren receive a great amount of attention.
- *The Routine Senior* seeks security in “the familiar” after a range of good years of globetrotting. The activity level is adjusted, and the focus is placed on one or two quiet leisure activities as well as the family.
- Stagnation begins when becoming a *Stay-at-Home Senior*. The health is not how it used to be and life is mostly lived at home (Kongsholm 2007a, 91).

Finally, it should be mentioned that no matter what phase of life you are in, the spirit of the time has as well an impact on people. The spirit is a generic term for what is characteristic for a specific time period. It is a combination of the right attitudes and actions, and describes the public debate and the discourses that a flourishing at the given time (Kongsholm 2007b, 53).

An example of how the spirit of the time has had an influence on the Danish meal patterns is the industrialisation in Denmark, where the meal by the 1930's had changed from the traditional five-meal pattern into the modern three-meal pattern (Kjærnes 2001). Based on the industrialisation and its focus on increased efficiency, lunch at home was abandoned, and instead the lunchbox was introduced (Holm 2013, 23).

A more recent example is the trend of joining a dinner club, which is a phenomena observed particularly in the larger Danish cities, and which sometimes even involves dining with people outside one's commensal circle. These modern food initiatives can be seen in Appendix 1: Examples of Current Common Food Initiatives in Denmark.

2.3 PRACTICE THEORY

Practice theory can be regarded as a kind of cultural theory or a special analytical lens, which can be applied on data. The theory focuses on social actions within sociological research in areas such as organisations, families, educations and leisure activities (Halkier and Jensen 2008). Practice theory is an attempt to integrate the elements of existing sociological theories into a new analytical perspective on the constitution and conditioning of practices or so-called micro-processes of social life, which is understood as the social actions and interactions taking place e.g. within family life or at leisure activities. According to Bente Halkier, professor at Roskilde University, practices can be defined in the following way:

"[...] practices come into being in the processes of activities in everyday life that are carried out in front of others, together with others and in relation to others. Everyday life practices are characterised by recurring performances and accomplishments." (Halkier 2013, 209).

The theory, or perspective as some researchers prefer to call it, allows for a distinct analytical view on everyday social life by focusing on practices as performativity. This means that the analysis focuses on social actions and how these are acted out and categorised as *performative processes*. The theory thereby moves the sociological attention from focusing on conscious ideas and values to focusing on the physical and the habitual (Swidler 2001, 83). As researchers, this gives us the possibility to focus our investigation and collection of data on the actual behaviour of human beings and the performed actions.

According to Elizabeth Shove, professor at Lancaster University in Great Britain, the theory of practice has roots stretching back to at least the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1950) and the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The early Anthony

Giddens, the late Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Bruno Latour are as well some of the contributors to the development of the concept of practice theory (Halkier and Jensen 2008). The deceased French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu was in his early work involved with the concept of practices, but is more widely known within areas of social sciences. Despite his significant work with practices, Bourdieu did not develop a consistent theory of practice. Within his writings, practices are more generally regarded as a means of approaching his central concern of theorising *habitus*. Bourdieu describes the concept of habitus as human beings' *social worlds*, which they are born into, influenced by and are an active part of during their lives (Olesen 2000, 136).

Academic discussions on the use of practice theory are taking place internationally, but have not truly become a part of the published Danish sociological discussions yet (Halkier and Jensen 2008).

The international discussions on practice theory occupy different positions. Theodore Schatzki, professor in Philosophy and Geography and Senior Associate Dean at University of Kentucky, and Andreas Reckwitz, German sociologist and professor at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt are some of those who have contributed to the discussion and definition of practice theory in an attempt to systematise and position practice theory on a more general theoretical level compared to other theoretical approaches of sociology.

Additionally, Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde, professor in Sociology at Manchester University in Great Britain, have worked with practice theory in an attempt to make the theory operational on an application-oriented level in various empirical fields, particularly with a focus on consumption sociology. Warde's research is primarily focused on practises on a micro-level, which is focused on at small-scale interaction between individuals, such as conversation and group dynamics (Halkier and Jensen 2008). We regard this view as transferable to our own area of research, since our focus deals with both the relations constructed within dinner clubs as well as the practises that unfold in a dinner club setting.

On the contrary, Shove's research is focused on environmental and sustainable sociology with a distinct focus on the material conditions and discourses on a macro-level (Halkier and Jensen 2008). This view on materiality alone could have been interesting to study if the thesis had focused on consumed food as a tangible material. As Shove's field of research differs from the one applied in this thesis, Shove has been considered of less relevance in the following analysis.

In this thesis, practice theory is applied as the theoretical framework for our empirical data in an attempt to uncover what the theory may offer as realm of understanding, and simultaneously as an experiment of implementing the theory into an integrated field of food and sociology.

Since we as researchers regard practice theory as a cultural theory, and because the focus and empirical data is within a Danish context, the practice theory described by Bente Halkier and Iben Jensen, professor at Aalborg University, Copenhagen, will be the description we lean towards in the thesis. Schatzki and Reckwitz are interesting contributors to the (still on-going) development of practice theory, but they will not be applied further in this thesis, since the aim is to apply and discuss the application-oriented theory, rather than the abstract and philosophical understanding of the theory. Furthermore, even though the opinions of the contributing professors are interesting to discuss, our use of practice theory does not include a comprehensive discussion of their contributions.

Alan Warde seems to be the advocate when using practice theory as an application-oriented theory. Warde's work with everyday-oriented consumer sociology appears interesting as well as applicable to our own empirical data, given that the participation in dinner clubs to some degree can be regarded as an everyday behaviour and as a consuming act.

Warde suggests that an analysis must be concerned with both practical activity and its verbal representation (Warde 2005). This underlines our choice of not only observing, but also interviewing participants within the dinner clubs in order to gain insight into the way the participants articulate the so-called gastro-politics - the norms around the table. By focusing on the following three components (which Warde refers to as a nexus) and trying to apply them to the data, Warde describe this as a helpful depiction of how practices can be understood (Warde 2005).

Warde's *tripartition of practices* includes the elements 1) understandings, 2) procedures and 3) engagements. The three elements can accommodate both silent and articulated dimensions as well as physical and mental dimensions (Warde 2005; Halkier and Jensen 2008). This means that we as researchers will look for indicators of understandings, procedures and engagements in interviews and observation data. When processing the data, we will look for both silent and articulated dimensions, e.g. which points are between the lines and which are clearly articulated. With regards to the observations, we will look at the physical activities being acted out and will try to decipher which practises that would have occurred in the dinner clubs without the researchers being present as well as which activities that only occurred due to the presence of the researchers.

Furthermore, Warde highlights that practices can be both *coordinated* and *performed* phenomena. Coordinated practices are recognised by being performed based on known understandings, procedures and engagements. At the same time, we would not be able to recognise a practice e.g. such as the participation in a dinner club if it was not regularly performed. What constitutes a social practice is thus, according to Warde, the routine that appears from the coordinated practices (Warde 2005). Warde also deals with practitioners, or agents as they are called, in a cross field of multiple practices. The individual is regarded as a user of multiple crossing fields of practices, which are examples of everyday practises such as working, parenting and cooking (Halkier and Jensen 2008).

When using Warde's *tripartition* in the analysis, we will show **how practice theory can be used for improving the theoretical conceptualisation of the commensal meal and as an analytic tool in answering what dinner clubs can contribute with**. This, in an attempt to **understand and draw closer to the practises of everyday life and how and why the act of eating together is performed and maintained through dinner clubs**.

2.4 SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The above-mentioned theoretical framework, which consists of a presentation of relevant terms and theories, is an extensive and comprehensive chapter. Therefore, in the following short summary, we will shortly explain each of the terms and theories and how we imagine these to be applied in the thesis.

The term commensality has been included to illustrate the possible variations within the understanding, including interpretations and definitions of commensality. Throughout the paragraph it was discovered that Claude Fischler and Anne Murcott on the one hand agree on the fact that the social aspect is an important part of the meal, but they do not agree on the historical development of the commensal meal and what the consequences of this development might be. Fischler believes that the commensal meal is threatened based on the mindless and unstructured eating that takes place outside of home, and Murcott argues that historically, the commensal family meal has existed in various forms, which cannot be compatible with modern family lives. Therefore, she does not believe that the eating culture is as threatened as Fischler indicates. According, to our literature search, Murcott's interpretation is supported by several Danish and Nordic sociologists.

These opinions will be discussed in Chapter 6, *Paragraph 6.1 Analysis*, and will be compared to the opinions on how commensality is understood by the resource persons chosen for our data collection.

An introduction to Danes' eating habits has been included to give an insight into *when, what, how often, where* and *with whom* Danes practise eating. This was done to describe how eating as an everyday activity is structured and practised in the modern Danish society. These findings will be compared to the theory of the segmentation of life phases, in order to investigate, which types of people participate in dinner clubs and to identify what motivates them to participate. The respondents chosen for our data collection fall within the phases: *Identity Phase, Establishment Phase, Families with Smaller Children, Families with School Children/Tweens, Families with Teens Self-realisation Phase, The New Senior, The Routine Senior* and *The Stay-at-Home Senior*. The dinner club participants will be analysed in relation to this segmentation in Chapter 6, *Paragraph 6.1 Analysis*.

Furthermore, the analysis aims to provide an insight into the practises that take place in a dinner club, which is why practice theory will be applied. The purpose of the introduction to the theory is to both understand the social order that the practices create and to create a concrete understanding of what a practice is. In Chapter 6, *Paragraph 6.1 Analysis*, practice theory will be applied to our findings by using Warde's *tripartition of practices*, which includes the elements of 1) understandings, 2) procedures and 3) engagements.

In Chapter 7, *Paragraph 7.0.1 Discussion of Theoretical Approach*, we will argue why these theories were chosen, and in which ways they have contributed to the outcome of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3, PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

This paragraph will provide a short description of the underlying philosophical assumptions that characterise the investigation and therefore the results of this thesis. The purpose of presenting the philosophical foundation is to make clear how we have approached the production of scientific knowledge and to show how this thesis meets the scientific ideal of being transparent.

3.0 SOCIAL SCIENCE

This thesis is concerned with how commensality is understood and practised in the Danish meal culture as well as what dinner clubs as a phenomenon contributes with in a modern eating culture. The choice of research question indicates the researchers' interest within the specific field and additionally, the researchers wish for *changing* the current practises of eating or at least *discussing* the topic. This points to the underlying opinion or prejudice that the Danish population could benefit from increasing the level of commensality in regards to social well being and health issues. Or being that commensality is overvalued and the individual should be free to choose one's own eating setting without the involvement of any authorities. In other words, the research question implies that the researchers are interested in making a change and can therefore not be completely objective (Angrosino 2007, 53). Even though, the final result of the thesis is not revealed in the research question, the researchers enter the research process with a pre-understanding, which will be decisive for the result of the thesis.

Integrated Food Studies as an integrated Master's degree programme is a cross-disciplinary field, which calls for the use of various scientific methods. However, the social science discipline has dominated the research within this thesis. The discipline is concerned with society and human behaviour and differs from human and natural science by focusing on the interplay between (groups of) individuals and society or other objects (Sørensen 2010), which in this case are dinner clubs. One of the purposes of the thesis is to investigate dinner clubs as a growing tendency in the society and additionally, the practices and interactions between human beings in order to answer what dinner clubs contribute with.

Since we are investigating a field, which is an everyday and well-known phenomenon, we as researchers, have the possibility, through the chosen methods, to engage physically in the

participants' social worlds³. When participating, we as researchers should be aware that we might influence the data that is collected. However, according to the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), and his philosophical hermeneutics, prejudices are not something that researchers should attempt to overcome. Instead Gadamer maintains that our pre-understanding is always present and a necessary condition for being able to understand the field (Dahlager and Fredslund 2008, 159). Within social science research the researcher, including his or her pre-understandings, can be characterised as a part of the research process. This is what distinguishes social sciences from the natural sciences (Matthews and Ross 2010b, 5).

However, the researchers must seek to gain insight into own pre-understandings. This can be done in an attempt to remain critical towards the choices and deselections of methods and data throughout the thesis. In our case it has been an advantage to be two researchers, since we have questioned each other's interpretations and the knowledge that was taken for granted.

With the choice of applying practice theory in this thesis we are leaning against the constructivist perspective. Constructivism asserts that social phenomena, like dinner clubs, are only real in the sense that they are constructed ideas, which are continually being reviewed and reworked by those involved through interactions and reflections (Matthews and Ross 2010b, 5). The perspective of practice theory is based on the common assumptions of constructivism meaning that relations are what constitute practices and thereby phenomena like the dinner club. Practice theory is based on the fundamental idea of constructivism as socially constructed. Hence, it is not possible to make objective observations of practices, but rather theoretical reflected analytical snapshots (Halkier and Jensen 2008).

³ The setting or cultural surroundings in which social research takes place (Matthews and Ross 2010b, 5).

CHAPTER 4, RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter will describe the applied methodological approach when planning the research design for the thesis. Different approaches have been chosen in order to produce sufficient knowledge to solve the central issue of the thesis. The following paragraph will sum up how we approached the three different ways of collecting literature, which has been respectively through the method of snowballing on course literature, searching the database Bibliotek.dk and lastly the database Infomedia. The chapter furthermore provides an introduction to the methodological considerations and choices of the thesis' qualitative study regarding semi-structured interviews and ethnographically inspired observations.

Even though interviews and observations are considered the main empirical data in this thesis, visual descriptive summaries will be processed on the collection of motivation slips from the dinner club participants. This is in order to support the findings with a quantitative perspective, and demonstrate how the quantitative and qualitative methods together constitute solid arguments and findings.

Summing up, the research process will be based on a diverse use of methods, since we regard such a triangulation as contributing to a better understanding of the term commensality and the tendency of participating in a dinner club.

4.0 LITERATURE SEARCH

The content of this paragraph will be a description on the literature search performed for this thesis, respectively through the method of snowballing on course literature, searching the database Bibliotek.dk and lastly the database Infomedia.

4.0.1 COURSE LITERATURE AND SNOWBALLING

The starting point for the literature search has been that commensality is a theme we are acquainted with from several courses at the Master's degree programme and during internships. This familiarity made us approach known, scientific literature and the literature search therefore continued by searching the references within these articles and books. The fact that we made use of literature recommended by the university means that it was regarded as being academic and qualified. The search within the references of this literature led to new, interesting

studies, new researchers and simultaneously to other articles by known researchers. During this process it became clear to us that a number of researchers were referred to continuously within the field of food and sociology. These recurring names of national and international researchers characterised by the qualitative non-probability sampling technique of snowball sampling (Patton 1990) confirmed which researchers that have worked within the field and which literature that was relevant to choose for later review. Furthermore, chosen literature was discussed with supervisors and confirmed as some of the most important researchers in the field.

4.0.2 SEARCHING DATABASES

In order to broaden out the literature search we took use of the Danish database biblitotek.dk, which has been used as our primary database for literature search. The search was inspired by the scientific literature from the courses, which meant that the search continued on some of the researchers who appeared to be essential in covering the theme of commensality. Bibliotek.dk was approached in order to find literature within a Danish context, which we after the initial reading had the understanding could be difficult, since the topic of food sociology and commensality has not been a popular research topic compared to other sociological fields (McIntosh 2013, 14).

The aim of the literature search has not been to examine all literature covering the theme of commensality in a systematic manner, but instead to collect literature in order to discuss and gain a varied picture of how commensality can be understood and practised.

Additionally, we have made use of search engine Infomedia. Infomedia is a Danish media monitoring company that collects and monitors the content from national and regional newspapers and local papers, journals, magazines and news agencies. Infomedia consist of 1970 different search units of which we have chosen to use 18, which are illustrated in Table 1: An overview of the printed media. Nationwide newspapers have been chosen, while smaller local newspapers have been left out, since we are interested in the debate and tendency that reaches out to a broader audience.

The relevant literature found on Infomedia will not be used in the thesis as primary literature, since we do not regard it scientifically valid. An overview of our findings can be found in Appendix 31. The selected articles will be used to indicate a certain change or tendency in the society and to state that commensality and social meal communities is a current and growing tendency, which are highly debated in the media. Moreover, the articles will be used to

understand the different and often conflicting views on commensality as well as its development and future perspectives.

The aim of the Infomedia search has been to create an overview of how the Danish media presents the commensal meals and the development herein. Our hypothesis is, that the media tend to focus on the negative development of the eating culture, since stories on that fast food and convenience products pose a threat towards the values attached to the commensal meal, is something we have noticed several times.

TABLE 1: An Overview of the Printed Media

Nationwide Newspapers	Regional Daily Newspapers	Special journals and magazines
Berlingske	24timer København	Fagbladet FOA Kost og Service
BT	MetroXpress København	Fagbladet FOA Social og Sundhed
Børsen	Urban	FoodCulture
Ekstra Bladet		Helse
Information		Mad & Venner
Jyllands-Posten		Samvirke
Kristelig Dagblad		
Politiken		
Weekendavisen		

The relevant articles were chosen on the basis of the title and if this was considered relevant a review of the sub header decided whether the article was selected or not.

4.1 SELECTION CRITERIA OF RESPONDENTS

The following paragraph is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on desk research, such as the selection of six resource persons with the use of Actor Network Theory and the selection of five dinner clubs within Greater Copenhagen as well as the planning and considerations that were made with regards to the method of doing field studies. The second part of the paragraph includes a description on how the semi-structured interviews were conducted with both

resource persons and dinner club respondents, and how ethnographically inspired observations were conducted when visiting the selected dinner clubs.

The qualitative research of the thesis concentrates on the Danish eating culture and has a two-folded research question, which (1) has the aim to provide a greater insight into how commensality can be understood and practised in a modern Danish society, and (2) to investigate which motivational factors the participants of a dinner club are influenced by when participating in a dinner club.

The following paragraphs gives an introduction to the chosen respondents divided into resource persons and dinner club respondents. These two groups of people are different based on the fact that the resource persons possess an extensive knowledge within the field of food and sociology and the Danish eating culture, and the dinner club participants serve as examples on how they practise being a part of a meal community in the modern society.

4.1.1 MAPPING RELEVANT ACTORS WITHIN THE FIELD OF FOOD AND SOCIOLOGY

The following contains a presentation of how relevant actors, who somehow are professionally engaged with commensality, has been selected as resource persons for our data collection, with the aim of researching their varied knowledge and opinions on how commensality can be understood and practised in the modern Danish society. Initially, we have been open-minded towards a variety of actors working within the field of commensality, both from a social perspective, a food perspective and a health and nutrition perspective. In addition, our objective has been to make use of the chosen actors as a way to unfold the field of commensality and become familiar with other relevant actors working with commensality.

To identify the actors relevant for our thesis (being human or non-human/objects and their relations within this field) we have made use of Situational Analysis inspired by the Actor Network Theory approach. According to Adele E. Clarke, professor of Sociology and adjunct professor of History of Health Sciences at University of California, San Francisco, a Situational Analysis is accomplished through the making of three kinds of maps: a *Messy Working Map*, an *Ordered Working Map* and a *Relational Map* (Clarke 2003). The purpose is in this case to make the actors, objects, discourses and relations related to commensality as visible as possible.

The methodologies described by Clarke can be regarded as a practical tool when starting to map a given empirical field. She introduces maps in order to open the research topic and force analysis both in terms of relevant and/or silent actors, objects and discourses and in relation to

power/positions. The creation of maps presupposes some knowledge about the issue examined, about who acts and with which positions. This is comparable with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy on that knowledge within the field is a necessity in order to investigate it (Dahlager and Fredslund 2008, 159) Additionally, the method of mapping can be used to explore where and whether there is a lack of knowledge in the researched field (Clarke 2003).

To analyse the empirical field related to our thesis, we have created a Messy-, an Ordered- and a Situational Map.

When using the Messy Working Map tool, the process uncovered numerous actors, objects and discourses related to commensality and the Danish meal culture. An extract of the created Messy Working Map can be found in Appendix 2. Public, private, and individual actors were chosen as focus points and discussed in relation to if their aim was to support the practising of commensality. Examples of discussed actors were *The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, The Danish Health and Medicines Authority, the retail industry, workplaces and families* (Appendix 2).

To narrow down the content of the analysis an Ordered Working Map came into use, this to investigate where the actors, objects and discourses belonged, how they could be ordered and which elements that were of less relevance to the project.

Finally, by the use of additional online research it was possible to create a Relational Map. When reaching this part of the process an increased amount of objects, discourses and actors were collected. To eliminate some of the elements we reflected upon why we thought certain elements were important in order to answer the objective of the thesis. We discussed the silent and visible actors, which objects that influenced our research field and which discourses that are flourishing around the issue. In order to consider our research question from different angles we focused on having a variation within actors - some being public and some being private (Table 2).

Objects and discourses were included in the initial process of performing an Actor Network Analysis, but as our focus became further narrowed, private persons and public and private institutions/organisations that have an impact on the commensal meal in Denmark were selected as the primary outcome of the mapping. Human actors were chosen as point of departure for the further investigation on the practising and understanding of commensality. This, to create an overview of their varied knowledge and opinions on how commensality can be understood and practised in the modern Danish society. Through mapping we found that some

of the major human actors influencing how commensality can be understood and is practised today are those listed in the table below.

TABLE 2: Actors Working within the Field of Food and Sociology

	Workplace	Initially Selected Actors
Public-Private Partnership	Måltidspartnerskabet	Bente Stærk, Chairwomen
Private Foundation	Københavns Madhus	Anne Birgitte Agger, Director
Private Business	Meyers Madhus	Dorthe Petersen, Director
Ministry	Madkulturen	Judith Kyst, Director
Retail Industry	Coop Danmark A/S	Thomas Roland, Head of Department, Responsibility
Research Institutions	University of Copenhagen	Lotte Holm, professor at Institute of Food and Resource Economics, Faculty of Life Sciences.
	University of Aalborg, Copenhagen	Mikkel Jakobsen, Post doc. at Aalborg University Copenhagen and Københavns Madhus.
	Metropolitan University College	Jon Fuglsang, assistant professor at Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology, Department of Rehabilitation and Nutrition.
Private persons	Måltider med mening	Joan Preisler, Self-employed and partner of the Danish partnership The Meal Partnership.
		Katrine Klinken, Self-employed cook, cookbook author and debater.

Table 2 serves as an example on some of the actors we selected as being important when attempting to answer our research question. Some actors were eliminated after having researched their professional background, knowledge and current work and others excluded based on the fact that some of the organisations we found relevant did not see themselves as good representatives for answering our questions. In Appendix 2: Extract from Messy Working Map, The Danish Health and Medicines Authority and The Danish Veterinary and Food Administration are mentioned as possible actors. These were subsequently excluded after having researched their field of work, since they are not directly engaged with commensality, but to a greater extent health promotion and prevention, and rules and regulations within the veterinary area and the food area.

Based on the mentioned delimiting elements and further reflections a varied amount of actors were discovered and the resource persons who in the end were selected and contacted were

chosen based on a wish for covering a broad part of the field of commensality and the Danish meal culture.

The selected panel of resource persons therefore consists of a combination of Danish sociologists and people working practically with meals, along side with representatives from the Danish retail industry, private and public organisations supporting the Danish eating culture and public-private-partnerships. The resource persons thereby possess the role as being professionally involved with the Danish eating culture on different levels. Additionally, their educational background, gender, age and variation in their professional employment have been taken into consideration when compounding the panel.

TABLE 3: Actors Chosen as Resource Persons

Name	Employment
Lotte Holm	Professor at Institute of Food and Resource Economics, Faculty of Life Sciences, Copenhagen University.
Jon Fuglsang	Assistant professor at Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology, Department of Rehabilitation and Nutrition, Metropolitan University College.
Joan Preisler	Former Senior Consultant, Nutrition and Health at Coop Danmark A/S and partner in the Danish partnership Måltidspartnerskabet
Katrine Klinken	Self-employed cook, cookbook author and debater.
Thomas Roland	Head of Department, Responsibility at Coop Danmark A/S.
Mikkel Jakobsen	Post doc., Foodscapes, Innovation and Network, Aalborg University Copenhagen and representative of Københavns Madhus.

In addition, each selected resource person were asked, at the end of the interviews, if they could recommend any relevant actors or actants in the field of commensality and the Danish meal culture, which could be relevant for us to include in our collection of actors. Based on this question the resource persons recommended colleagues, organisations, and institutions or important elements influencing the field, which they imagined as contributing to the thesis. The method led us to persons with knowledge and experiences within the field and undiscovered areas that led to useful reflections. The actors and actants (human, non-human and objects) suggested by the resource persons can be found in Appendix 34.

The suggestions did not add any new actors to the panel of resource persons. However, the most suitable actors and actants mentioned by the resource persons will be used to apply

further reflections to *Paragraph 7.0.3 Discussion of the Thesis' Subject*. Additionally, the method of approaching the resource persons and allow them to contribute with their opinions on the most significant actors/actants contributed with a broader perspective. This confirmed that our choice of resource persons was perceived as relevant by the remaining resource persons. However, the process did also open up for actors/actants who were outside our area of research and were therefore left out of further analysis.

4.1.2 SELECTION OF DINNER CLUBS

The objective of researching a number of dinner clubs was formed in order to uncover and investigate the performative processes within dinner clubs and the new tendency of common food initiatives.

By participating and collecting data in private dinner clubs our aim has been to create an entrance into the private sphere where social life around food is practised in an everyday setting. This, to explore the participants' different perceptions, the performative processes and the private persons motivation for practising eating as a part of a social group. This has been uncovered by the use of observations and semi-structured interviews.

4.1.3 CRITERIA FOR SELECTING THE DINNER CLUBS

As an attempt to standardise the selection of dinner clubs, a number of selection criteria were made before recruiting possible meal communities.

- The research will concentrate on dinner clubs, situated in Greater Copenhagen (the capital of Denmark and remote areas/cities surrounding the city). This, because the tendency with new common food initiatives with the shared meal as a focal point is mainly seen in urban areas/larger Danish cities (examples of such initiatives can be seen in Appendix 1).
- The dinner club should consist of no less than six persons. This, because we want a mixed group of people, consisting of e.g. friends, family members, neighbours, colleagues or classmates. We thereby delimit ourselves from characterising a regular family meal (e.g. consisting of two parents and two children) as being a dinner club.
- The dinner club should have existed for at least five years and have regular joint dinners (one dinner at least every month). This, to make sure that the dinner club has become a part of a daily/weekly/monthly practice. In other words a performative process, which

has become a routine. The dinner club might have changed in number of participants through time or theme, but should have a stable foundation.

After having created a set of criteria for the dinner clubs a short text paragraph was composed and shared through the social platform Facebook to recruit suitable dinner clubs. The text paragraph can be found in Appendix 3. The post was shared through the researchers private network, in the group “Netværk for professionsbachelorere i ernæring og sundhed” created by the Danish union “Kost og Ernæringsforbundet” and finally in the group “Madkulturen”, which is created by the independent institution “Madkulturen”, which is connected to the Danish Ministry of Food.

We decided to take use of Facebook as a way to share our search for dinner clubs, because the social platform makes it easy to share posts and reach a broad span of people.

Within a week the posts received great attention (shared in forums with respectively 1384 followers and 1511 members⁴) and in total the post was shared 22 times by other Facebook users and several comments were added to each post on the different forums. 17 dinner clubs were approved according to the selection criteria. Of the approved dinner clubs a number was excluded based on social relations between the researchers and some of the participants of the dinner clubs and due to the fact that some of the volunteering dinner club participants had professional knowledge within the field of food and sociology. These participants were deselected, because we wanted to observe an everyday practice without too many distracting preconceptions, even though biases can never be fully avoided. In the end, five dinner clubs were selected as possible settings for the field study:

TABLE 4: The Selected Dinner Clubs

Name (given by the researchers)	Place
The Neighbour Dinner Club	Valby
The Dining Club Tinggården	Herfølge
The Dining Club Ulrik	Østerbro (Copenhagen)
The Neighbour/family Dinner Club	Frederiksberg (Copenhagen)
The Dining Club Galgebakken	Albertslund

⁴ The number was registered the 18th of March 2014.

4.1.4 SELECTION OF DINNER CLUB RESPONDENTS

To get an impression of what type of people who choose to participate in a dinner club our aim has been to get as varied a selection of respondents as possible, to get a greater understanding of the different reasons for participating in a meal community. The characteristics of the selected dinner club respondents, including their employment and marital status can be seen in table 5 below.

TABLE 5: The Chosen Group of Dinner Club Respondents

Name	Employment	Marital Status	Dinner Club
Christian Eriksen, 42 years old	Educational consultant at the trade union 3F (United Federation of Danish Workers)	Married and has three children between 6-16 years of age	The Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby
Anne Henriksen, 54 years old	Consultant at the Danish wholesale company Solhjulet	Single and has four children of whom a 20-year-old girl lives at home	The Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge
Jesper Poulsen, 39 years old	Lecturer at University of Copenhagen	Married and has three children between 4-8 years of age	The Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro (Copenhagen)
Helle Hansen, 37 years old	Geographer and lecturer at Rysensteen Gymnasium	Married and has two children on respectively 8 and 10 years of age	
Katja Hansen, 26 years old	Diet responsible in a child care institution	Lives together with her boyfriend	The Neighbour/ Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg (Copenhagen)
Gitte Bertelsen, 37 years old	Psychologist	Married and has two children on respectively 2 and 7	The Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund

The names of the respondents are known by the researchers, but have been changed in this thesis in order to make the statements and the identity of the respondents anonymous.

4.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The following considerations of doing semi-structured interviews cover the six interviews executed with resource persons and the five interviews executed with dinner club respondents.

Interviews are one of the main data collection methods used by social researchers, providing the opportunity for direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179). Doing interviews are predominantly concerned with investigating different actors' perspectives and perceptions on a given topic (Launsø, Rieper, and Olsen 2011, 108), which is why we have chosen the above-mentioned respondents.

The interviews conducted for this thesis are investigating the knowledge in the field of commensality and how it is understood and practised. Furthermore, they are concerned with the motivation for choosing to participate in food communities like dinner clubs. The interviews were conducted with the aim of identifying the status of the current Danish eating culture.

The approach of a semi-structured interview was chosen since the method makes it possible for the respondent to answer more openly and thoroughly and express personal opinions and values (Christensen, Schmidt, and Dyhr 2008, 63). Furthermore, it allows the respondent to answer the questions or discuss the given topic in their own way using their own words (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179).

The semi-structured interviews follows a common set of themes or questions for each interview and it may introduce the themes or questions in different ways or orders depending on each interview and respondent. For this, a thematic interview guide (Appendices 4-10) was developed for each interview before they were conducted (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179; Launsø, Rieper, and Olsen 2011, 108).

The themes for the interview guide, concerning the resource persons, were selected with point of departure in the areas; *Professional Background, Commensality at Home, About Dinner Clubs/Commensality away from Home, New Tendencies within Meal Communities, Eating Alone, Commensality in the Future and Rounding Off* (Appendices 5-10).

The themes for the interview guide, concerning the dinner club respondents, were selected with point of departure in the areas; *Facts about the Dinner Club, The Food Served in the Dinner Club, The Development of the Dinner Club, The Norms and Regulations of the Dinner Club, Your Private Engagement in the Dinner Club, The Participants' Motivation for Participating and Rounding Off* (Appendix 4).

Each theme selected for the individual interview guide was chosen with the aim of answering the research question of this thesis. Additionally, the theme *Professional Background*, including questions about the respondents' field of work, was used to open each interview. The theme was included, to create a safe and relaxed atmosphere during the interview, by asking

questions that the respondents already knew the answer to (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179). Furthermore, as the end of the interview was drawing nearer, the themes *Commensality in the Future* and *Rounding Off* were introduced in order to encourage the respondent to reflect upon the future and elaborate on their perspectives on commensality in the future (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179). Furthermore, it was a possibility for the respondent to ask the researchers questions before the interview was finished.

All respondents were contacted by email in order to set up a meeting for the interview and a visit in the selected Dinner Clubs. This, to ensure, that the respondents were comfortable and fully informed about the nature, length and format of the interview.

Each interview was done as face-to-face interviews and recorded by dictaphone. The interviews were later transcribed into smaller summary charts, which can be found in Appendices 11-21. The process of transcribing the interviews into summary charts will be explained in the following Chapter 5, *Data Processing*. The interviews performed with the resource persons had a duration between 33 minutes and 1 hour and 3 minutes (Appendices 16-21), while the interviews performed with dinner club respondents had a duration between 27 minutes and 47 minutes (Appendices 11-15).

The interviews performed with the resource persons were conducted at the respondents' work place, while the interviews performed with the dinner club respondents were conducted in the respondents' private homes or at the location of the dinner club. These locations were chosen in order for the respondents to feel as comfortable as possible (Christensen, Schmidt, and Dyhr 2008, 63). The interviews were in general characterised as informal with a positive atmosphere and the power relation between the respondents and us as researchers seemed to be relaxed and balanced. This is particularly important to pay attention to as a researcher and try to equalise in order to make the respondent feel comfortable and elaborate on his or her answers (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179).

As researchers we took turns interviewing the respondents, but were both present when conducting the 11 interviews. The researcher, who was not in charge of asking questions focussed on the respondent's answers and whether it was important to ask a follow-up question. Furthermore, this researcher functioned as a moderator and kept track of the sequence of questions in order to achieve a natural flow in the conversation.

4.3 ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INSPIRED OBSERVATION

The following paragraph will present the method of observation applied in this thesis and a short argumentation of why observation was found suitable in this research context.

The aim of the paragraph is to clarify how the method of observation took place in order to create transparency and validity of the applied method. In total, observations were executed within five private dinner clubs in five different evenings in late March and the beginning of April 2014. These five dinner clubs were each observed one time during a time period of approximately two hours in the time span from 6 p.m.–8 p.m.

As humans we do observations all the time, but when conducting scientific research these observations have to be of a structured kind, since information comes from all of our senses (Angrosino 2007, 53). Conducting participant observations were chosen as a method, since it offers the possibility to achieve intimate knowledge on the group of people who are the subject of this research and for the knowledge to be gained in the group's natural setting (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179). In our case observation is an obvious case since a traditional and everyday situation like the act of eating together cannot be moved to a new location (e.g. a laboratory) without having consequences of changing the behaviour of those who participate.

In a thorough ethnographic research numerous observations should be done to provide an understanding of the field, the people and the situations observed. The research executed for this thesis must be regarded as having a more narrow and focused purpose, namely to observe:

- The practices and procedures surrounding the meal
- The understandings, including the gastro-politics, within a dinner club
- The atmosphere among the participants
- The themes of conversation, and lastly
- The served food

These focus points were selected to narrow down the purpose of the observation. The aim of observing the dinner clubs is to get insight into how the dinner club constellations works, which performative processes that belongs to the act of sharing a meal and how this is a part of everyday life practices in our attempt to reveal what motivates people to join such an eating community. The selected themes of focus in the observation guide (which will be presented within the next pages) (Appendix 22) are in other words the elements that we as researchers

find to be possible indicators of why the participants repeatedly decide to participate in these dinner clubs, still with room for adding notes, which did not fit into these categories.

The interviews conducted with the dinner club respondents might give an answer to the aim mentioned above, but the purpose of having multiple research methods (and by including observations) is to validate the answers from the interviews and as researchers get a sense of how the rest of the participants seem to experience the dinner club. The collected data (both interviews and observations) will be used in the analysis to help us answer the second part of the research question, which raises the question of *what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture*.

Participant observation is a method for producing data, typically used in the qualitative research paradigm. The aim of the participant-as-observer is to be an integrated part of a given group of individuals and their practices, usually during an extended period of time to gain reliable and valid data (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Whyte 2008, 91; Angrosino 2007, 53). For this thesis, having the short time span in mind, the aim of being a truly integrated part of a given group is difficult, if not to say impossible. Doing observational research is not a single act, but rather a developmental process, which questions the reliability of including a participant observer in our research. The choice of method is something we will return to in the discussion paragraph of the thesis.

When we entered the dinner club as participants-as-observers, and simultaneously a new contemporary member of the eating situation in question, we tried to engage in the routines of the dinner clubs on equal terms as the remaining participants. The intention was to act according to the other participants, accept a drink and sit down and eat by the table when the food was served. However, the role as a researcher was still acknowledged. In order to make the situation as natural as possible the participants were informed about our purpose on beforehand and as well through a short presentation on the actual evening of observing. For us as researchers, this way of declaring our presence seemed most ethically credible, and it gave the participants the opportunity to withdraw, if they did not wish to be a part of the investigation.

When being in the role as participant-as-observer the intention is not to enter the field unnoticed. Instead the intention is to involve partly in the routines and actions taking place in the field and accepting that the involvement as researcher might create a different data than without our presence. The observer will have some sort of impact on what is being observed just by being present. This is referred to as the Hawthorne effect (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179).

Therefore, the researchers' role as observers cannot be completely objective (Angrosino 2007, 53).

4.3.1 THE OBSERVATION GUIDE

Before entering the field an observation guide (Appendix 22) was made with keywords to guide the observers' focus. The observation guide was considered in a way that we as researchers were aware that we could not predict how the evening in the dinner club would turn out, and therefore open for any observations.

The observation guide was categorised into three subjects:

- Descriptive notes: notes on the specific observations. What is observed, where is it observed, when it is observed and how it is observed.
- Methodological notes: data collection techniques and registration of methodological adjustments (how we act as observers).
- Analytical notes: analytical reflections, adjustments and description of ideas that appear along the way (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Whyte 2008, 91) (Appendix 22).

The field notes serve not only to record or archive descriptions of specific situations, routines and themes of conversations. They also functions as a necessary reflection tool during and after the fieldwork (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen and Whyte 2008, 91).

When it seemed appropriate notes were taken on some of the immediate thoughts on what was observed. In some cases we estimated that note taking would cause too much attention and the observations and reflections were instead written down right after the observation sessions.

4.3.2 THE MOTIVATION SLIPS

Within the five visited dinner clubs, apart from observation and interviews another method of collecting data was applied. Each dinner club participant were handed a small note (in the thesis described as a motivation slip, see appendix 23) to be filled in by them personally and anonymously. This to make sure that the participants did not have to think about giving an answer that was socially accepted by the remaining participants or by us as researchers.

The idea of giving each of the participants a possibility to explain their personal reason for participating appeared from a discussion on whether interviewing only one participant could

give a valid and sufficient picture of the individual dinner club. Could this single respondent represent the whole group? Or what if others had completely different reasons for participating? These differing reasons would be interesting to gain insight into as well. With the motivation slip each participant were encouraged to fill in their gender, their age and finish the sentence: "*I participate in the dinner club because...*" (See appendix 23 for the entire motivation slip). The collection of slips thereby contributed with data from a larger number of people (n= 116) but without the inconvenience of being involved in a long-termed interview.

The reason for asking about the participants' gender and age was to collect markers for later analysis and characterisations of groups. The purpose was not to look for statistical significant results, but to create some clusters, which could show tendencies for the researchers to reflect upon.

The collection of the motivation slips should be regarded as secondary data in the sense that this quantitative method has not been applied to its full potential. However, the researchers still find these motivation slips useful as they will contribute to support and triangulate with what should be viewed upon as primary data; the literature search, the interviews and the observations.

CHAPTER 5, DATA PROCESSING

This chapter will describe the processing of the empirical data, respectively the 11 conducted interviews, and the field notes collected from observations in five dinner clubs and lastly the processing of 116 collected motivation slips.

Due to the large amount of data, the 11 qualitative interviews (six with resource persons and five with dinner club respondents) were decided to be processed into smaller summaries (Appendices 11-21) as a method, to transcribe the collected data.

The initial part of the chapter, *Paragraph 5.0* will describe how the collected data from interviews were transcribed into smaller summaries and the criteria and precautions that were taken within this process. *Paragraph 5.1* will describe the following process of clustering the summaries, the quotations and the selected keywords into frames and subtitles and how these were linked with field notes from observations, in order to obtain compound, transparent and manageable findings for later analysis and conclusions. Finally, *Paragraph 5.2* will include a description on how the data from the motivation slips were processed.

5.0 SUMMARY CHARTS

When approaching the initial data processing, it was chosen not to perform a verbatim transcription of the conducted interviews, but to create a summary chart for each of the conducted interviews. The costs associated with verbatim transcriptions, in terms of time and human resources, can be regarded as significant and complex. Whether researchers transcribe the recordings themselves or engage professionals, transcribers are still human and the process of transcription is open to a range of human errors, including misinterpretation of the content or language errors (Halcomb and Davidson 2006). When discussing that the process of transcription in this case should be about interpretation and generation of meanings from the data, the method of transcribing the collected data into smaller summary charts were chosen as an adequate way of transcription.

The method of creating smaller summaries of the collected data was performed during a four-day period. Initially, 11 charts were created (one chart for each conducted interview), to gain a systematic and structured overview on the content of the individual interviews (Appendices 11-21).

FIGURE 4: The Three Steps of Processing Interviews

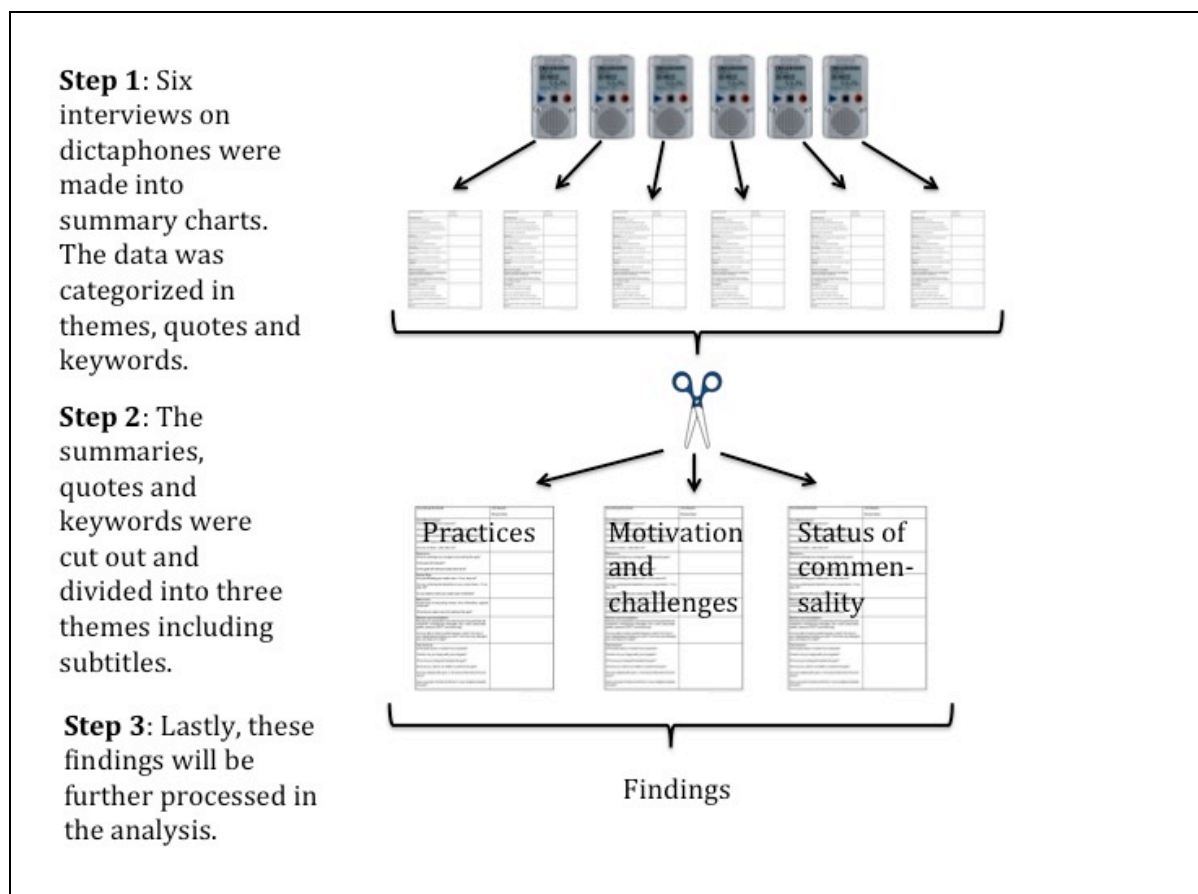


Figure 4: The Three Steps of Processing Interviews. The figure illustrates the three steps performed when processing the six interviews conducted with the resource persons. A similar process was performed with the five interviews with dinner club respondents (Andersson and Petersen 2014).

The themes inserted in the charts were based on the themes of the interview guides, which were created prior to each performed interview. As an example the questions that were created for the dinner club respondents and organised in an interview guide (Appendix 4) were categorised in the summary charts with point of departure in the following themes: *Facts about the Dinner Club, The Food Served in the Dinner Club, The Development of the Dinner Club, The Norms and Regulations of the Dinner Club, Your Private Engagement in the Dinner Club, The Participants Motivation for Participating and Round Off* (Appendix 4).

Thereby, the design of the six summary charts created for each of the resource persons are identical, except for a few deviations, and the five charts created for each of the dinner club respondents are identical. The 11 summary charts are to be found in appendices 11-21.

Each of the mentioned themes was inserted in a column in the chart and while both researchers listened to the recorded interviews notes were taken for each theme and smaller summaries were made. Additionally, each chart includes a column for **keywords** related to each theme and a column for **quotations** expressed by the respondent. Furthermore, the **duration** of the respondents' statements related to each individual theme was written down in a matching column to indicate the length of each thematic summary and the duration and appearance of each quotation was noted as well (Appendices 11-21).

To create transparency and to systematise our choice of keywords a set of criteria was created before filling in the summary charts.

The keywords written in the summary charts (Appendices 11-21) were chosen based on the criteria that they were **mentioned several times** by the respondent or if the respondent **emphasised one word in particular**, either by the use of body language or through a linguistic emphasis. The aim of the keywords is to serve as a compressed version of the individual thematic summaries.

A set of criteria for the chosen quotations written in the summary chart (Appendices 11-21) were made as well. This was also done with an aim of creating transparency as well as in order to systematise our choices.

The quotations are chosen based on the objectives of this thesis. Thereby, quotations are chosen with the aim of identifying how commensality can be understood and practised in modern society and in order to identify the dinner club respondents' motivation for joining the dinner clubs and the values they ascribe to it.

In order for the researchers to maintain objectivity during the process of systematising the collected data and transcribing it into smaller summaries, the following precautions were made during the data processing:

- Since we have collected the data ourselves, with the use of semi-structured interviews, we have a feeling of already knowing our data very well. Therefore, we have emphasised to be aware of, as we conducted more interviews, that during the data collection process we were less able to distinguish between each one of them, and that significant points made in the first interview could be forgotten as more data was added (Matthews and Ross 2010a, 179).
- To make sure that nothing was left out based on a pre-understanding of the outcome of the interview, when listening to it afterwards, it was a great advantage being two

researchers. This, because we were able to listen to each interview in collaboration and continually discuss how a theme should be summarised, whether a keyword did fit the criteria and why quotations were considered relevant to include in the summary chart.

These discussions helped us remain critical towards our own data and chosen method throughout the process of transcribing our data into summary charts.

To show that the mentioned interviews are actually conducted and that the data gathered in the summary charts are a true and accurate representation of the data obtained through the interviews, audio recordings of the interviews are available until the defence of the thesis.

5.1 THEMATIZING OF SUMMARIES

The processing of data can be regarded as a three-part process. The first step is the transcription (in our case translating raw data into summaries, described in the paragraph above) and the next step is a thematizing of the summaries, which will be described in this paragraph. The aim of thematizing the summaries, the quotations and the keywords along with the field notes is to look for patterns, crossing points, similarities and contradictions and with that in mind draw closer towards the specific findings. The third step is the process of using the findings in the following analysis (See figure 4 on page 48).

In the beginning of the process of thematizing the summaries were cut into minor parts, which were performed quite low-tech with scissors. These small parts were placed on large posters divided into major themes (in the following described as frames), which we have chosen based on a comparison with the themes from the interview guide. The process is illustrated in the last part of Figure 4: The Three Steps of Processing Interviews (Pictures of the posters can be seen in Appendix 29).

When thematizing the data collected in the dinner clubs the following frames were created:

- **Practices** (how is the dinner clubs practised)
- **Motivation** (what motivates people to participate in a dinner club) and lastly
- **Challenge** (what are the challenges when participating in a dinner club).

All summaries, quotations, and keywords that matched the above-mentioned frames were collected within the frames. As several statements were collected, minor clusters appeared

when one theme, statement or estimation was consistent and recurrently mentioned (Appendix 29). The themes were then again divided under coherent subtitles, which are listed below:

- The subtitles within the frame of **Practices** were: *Individual Needs, Prioritisation, Hosting, Social Preferences, Manners Around the Table* and *Divisions of Generations*.
- The subtitles within the frame of **Motivation** were: *Socialisation, Commensal Dinner as a Relief, Children as the Main Focus, Creation of Micro-societies* and *Interest in Food*.
- And lastly the subtitles within the frame of **Challenges** were: *Socialisation, Hosting Can Be Stressful, Busy Schedule* and *Noise* (Appendix 29).

In order to thematise the summary charts created from the interviews with resource persons, three frames were again chosen, based on the themes from the interview guide (Appendices 5-9). The chosen frames were as well based on a wish for doing comparisons between the dinner club respondents and the resource persons in order to discuss their contradicting or identical statements in the following analysis. Therefore, some of the frames have a comparable character across the two groups of respondents. The selected frames were:

- **Practices** (how can commensality be understood and practised)
- **Motivation and Challenges** (why do people participate in a dinner club and what are the challenges for participating) and lastly,
- **Status of Commensality** (containing statements on the decline/ steadiness of the commensal meal).

The same method of dividing the summaries into minor parts were applied and subtitles were made within each frame. These are listed below:

- The subtitles within the frame **Practices** were: *Development and Current Tendencies, What Commensality Contributes with, How Commensality can be Understood, Practices within Dinner Clubs, Phases of Life, and Negative Aspects of Commensality*.
- The subtitles within the frame **Motivation and Challenges** were divided into: *Motivation* and *Challenges*.
- The subtitles within the frame **Status of Commensality** were: *Not in Decline, (Might be) in Decline* and *Socialisation and Individualisation can Go Hand in Hand* (Appendix 29).

5.2 PROCESSING MOTIVATION SLIPS

The final processing of the collected data concerns the motivation slips (Appendix 23), which were filled out by 116 of the participants within the five visited dinner clubs. Almost all participants did fill in the motivation slip (total number of possible respondents: n= 179). The purpose of the slips was to give all of the participants a possibility to explain their personal reason for participating in a dinner club, instead of asking solely the interviewed respondents.

In order to create an overview of, which elements that in general seem to motivate the participants for joining a dinner club, a table was created to cluster the motivational elements into categories. The motivations for participating were very diverse expressed by the respondents. How we as researchers did cluster the statements under the chosen categories can be seen in Appendix 30. As an example, if the wording "live nearby" or "neighbours" were mentioned, the statement fell into the category *Local*.

The main categories were *Socialisation, Food, Economy, Food Literacy, Local, Focus on Children, Friendship, Family, Tradition, and Relief* (Appendix 30).

When striving to make the process of clustering the motivational statements as reliable as possible it was chosen that both researchers should read each of the 116 slips (number of relevance n= 98) and discuss within which categories the statements were suitable. An example of the process is illustrated in the following:

As an answer to the question "*I participate in the dinner club because...*" a 50-year-old man from the "Dinner Club Galgebakken, Albertslund" answered: "*The food is good, it is cheap, I don't have to cook and it's cosy*". The motivation slip in question can be found in Appendix 33. According to the process of clustering the answers into categories (Appendix 30) "*the food is good*" is placed within the category *Food*, "*it is cheap*" belongs to the category *Economy*, "*I do not have to cook*" is placed in the category *Relief* and finally "*cosy*" is defined as belonging to *Socialisation*.

In addition to the mentioned clustering of answers into categories each slip was evaluated, in order to determine if it could be estimated as being valid. The validity of the motivation slips were particularly questioned when children between 0-10 years of age had filled out a slip. This was based on the fact that several adults were observed filling out motivation slips on behalf of their children. Motivation slips filled out by children between 0-10 years of age are therefore excluded from our research, since it is estimated that the answers are based on the parents' considerations on what motivates the children to join the dinner club and not on the children's

actual motivation for joining. Finally, participants who only participated on the specific day of our observation and not on a regular basis were as well excluded from the investigation. Therefore, 98 out of 116 motivation slips were estimated as valid.

The distribution of the various categories will be presented with the use of graphs in the following Chapter 6, *Data Analysis and Results* and will be referred to as visual descriptive summaries. None of the graphs have been created based on the dinner club participants' gender, since this was not regarded relevant for the further analysis.

CHAPTER 6, DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the data from Chapter 5, *Data Processing*, and to understand the data based on the applied theoretical framework in Chapter 2, in order to finally present the results. Not all of the data has been chosen for further analysis. Some findings appeared earlier in the process of this thesis, and were merely included for the purpose of supporting the progress of the work or as a necessary detour in order to reach the main results. Therefore, the findings will be presented separately as initial findings (Paragraph 6.0) followed by the analysis (Paragraph 6.1) and lastly a summary of the results (Paragraph 6.2). The latter will have the purpose of answering the research question.

6.0 INITIAL FINDINGS

The next paragraphs will present our initial findings concerning the five selected dinner clubs as well as the six resource persons. These will be illustrated through a characterisation of the resource persons, including a description of their professional background and of how they experience commensality, followed by a characterisation of each dinner club as well as the demographic characteristics of the participants.

6.0.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELECTED RESOURCE PERSONS

As mentioned earlier, the objective of our data collection has been to assemble a versatile group of respondents with the aim of researching their varied knowledge and opinions on how commensality can be understood and practised in the modern Danish society.

The following will introduce the respondents in order to uncover their professional background and how they understand the commensal meal. In addition to this, each respondent was asked to characterise what constitutes a meal for them, in order for us to familiarise ourselves and create a platform for common understandings and differences of the respondents' opinions in relation to commensality.

- Jon Fuglsang and Lotte Holm represent Danish sociologists. They work, among other things, with the term commensality in a research and teaching perspective.

Lotte Holm is one of the first sociologists in Denmark to work with meals and human behaviour. She is the author of several scientific articles and books and has,

among other subjects, researched the eating habits of Nordic people (Prättälä 2000, 191; Holm 2013, 23). She characterises a meal as being more than a snack and regards it as a structured event.

Jon Fuglsang has a modern approach to food sociology, through among other subjects he works with the creation of identity through food as well as new tendencies evolving around food and eating. He describes the meal as a joint event that is characterised by a meal being eaten. He also mentions that in a Danish context, the meal can be characterised as something that has to be finished quickly. It should not last too long, since both men and women have entered the labour market and are under time pressure (Appendix 16 and 17).

- Mikkel Jakobsen also researches commensality in his work at Aalborg University, Copenhagen. He has been chosen as a respondent mainly because of his collaboration with Københavns Madhus as well as his work with EAT school meals, which among other subjects works for creating increased commensality in a school setting.

Mikkel Jakobsen believes that the meal is the best social media we have. According to him the meal can be seen as being the media and the food or the plate as being the text. He compares this scenario to the cinema, where the cinema is the media and the movie is the text. In his opinion, meals are a way of gathering people, not in a formal way, but in an everyday context (Appendix 20).

- Joan Preisler works as a self-employed consultant and she has been chosen due to her role in the public-private-partnership, Måltidspartnerskabet, in which she represents the retail Coop. Her work revolves around food literacy, the Danish dietary guidelines as well as the creation of equality in the availability of healthy meals. Therefore, her professional focus is particularly on the element of nutrition within the Danish eating culture.

To Joan Preisler, a meal does not have to be eaten in the company of other people in order to be characterised as a meal, and she believes that it does not have to be structured by an overall framework (Appendix 18).

- Katrine Klinken is an educated chef and was chosen for this investigation based on that she act as a debater in magazines and newspapers and as an opinion leader within the Danish eating culture. She focuses in particular on taste, food quality as well as sensuality in everyday settings like canteens, private homes and childcare institutions.

Katrine Klinken states that a meal for her always is a joint event consisting of a number of social aspects that are important in order to enjoy the meal (Appendix 19).

- Thomas Roland has been chosen, as he is the Head of the Department of Responsibility at Coop Danmark A/S. In addition to the large amount of projects that the department has already launched, Coop is at the moment developing a new food manifesto focusing on better food for everyone, increasing the food literacy among children and young adults as well as prioritising the commensal meal.

Thomas Roland does not hide the fact that new tendencies like dinner clubs are interesting for Coop due to the fact that there is a commercial interest in a movement like this (Appendix 21). Therefore, it is questionable whether or not the intentions of Coop are trustworthy, but, on the other hand, Coop attempts to be involved in Danes' eating habits because they are a democratic organisation that wants to meet the expectations and the needs of their 1,4 million members⁵, which is another reason for us to choose Coop as a relevant actor for our thesis.

6.0.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELECTED DINNER CLUBS

The characteristics of the five dinner clubs will be described through the subcategories *setting*, *time*, (including for how long the dinner club has existed, how often it takes place as well as the duration of each individual dinner club) the *demographics of the participants*, (including their educational background and their average age) the *food served* and finally, a presentation of the *keywords* characterising each individual dinner club. The keywords have been chosen based on the following question, which all of the interviewed dinner club respondents were asked: *if you were to describe the dinner club in one word, what would it be?* (Appendix 4). Furthermore, if other motivational factors were mentioned several times or if the respondent emphasised one word in particular, these were included as keywords as well. Finally, the characteristics chosen to describe each dinner club are based on empirical data from interviews as well as observations (Appendices 11-15 and 24-28). Therefore, the following paragraph can be regarded as an initial presentation of our findings.

⁵ The number was registered the 6th of May 2014 on the webpage of Coop Danmark A/S: <https://om.coop.dk/medlemskab/Bliv+medlem.aspx>

In addition, the subcategories also serve the purpose of showing that the criteria set for choosing the dinner clubs explained in Chapter 4, *Paragraph 4.1.3 Criteria for Selecting the Dinner Clubs*, are consistent with the dinner clubs that were actually chosen as suitable settings for our data collection.

THE NEIGHBOUR DINNER CLUB, VALBY

This dinner club is a private event that takes place within the private homes of one of the participating couples on an alternating basis. The dinner club has existed for six years and takes place once a month. Each dinner club takes place approximately between 5:30-9:00 p.m. The dinner club has 26 participants consisting of six families, in total 12 adults between 36-50 years of age as well as 14 children between 6-14 years of age. The adults have a medium-length education or an academic education.

The food served is described by the dinner club respondent as being unambitious and often consisting of a dish that is easy to cook in large amounts, and is prepared the day before. A typical dish served could be Chili con Carne or a curry dish with rice. The food is served in dishes at the table, and wine and water is always served with the food. The setting of the table is simple, consisting of a white tablecloth, a vase with branches, white plates, cutlery, and water and wine glasses.

The keywords of the dinner club are **friendship and community**. We, as researchers, experienced it as a place for particularly the adults to meet up and to strengthen their friendships and be **relieved from their everyday chores** of grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning. Conversations and actions observed while visiting the dinner club showed that the adults are young at heart and attempt to prioritise their individual interests and needs together with other adults instead of being caught up in the daily family routines. This has led to a very segregated dinner club, where the children eat between 6:00-6:30 p.m. and the adults eat together between 7:00-9:00 p.m. (Appendix 12 and 24).



PICTURE 1: The setting of the "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby", the 27th of March 2014.



Picture 2: The served food in the "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby", the 27th of March 2014.

THE DINING CLUB TINGGÅRDEN, HERFØLGE

The dinner club takes place in the common house of the housing association Tinggården, and it is managed by its residents. The participants are divided into kitchen teams taking turns hosting the dinner club. It has existed for 25 years and takes place once a week. Each dinner club lasts from approximately 6:00-7:30 p.m. The dinner club has 16 participants consisting of 11 adults between 25-66 years of age and 5 children between 5-17 years of age. The majority of the adults are professionally involved with liberal arts like for example pedagogics, nursing and teaching, and the majority of them have a medium-length education. Furthermore, most of the participants are women, and several of the participants are single.

The interviewed dinner club respondent characterises the served food as being healthy and varied, and mentions that it typically consists of a large proportion of vegetables. The food is served on a buffet in big dishes, and water is served with the meal. Coffee, tea and a small dessert consisting of fruit or biscuits are served afterwards. The table setting is informal and is characterised by the fact that it should be easy to clean afterwards. White plates, glasses for water and cutleries are placed on the table.

The keyword of the dinner club is **social interaction** and it is characterised as being an **easy and timesaving** way to have your dinner once a week. Additionally, it can be regarded as constituting a platform for getting to know other residents and to share recipes and information about activities taking place at Tinggården (Appendix 11 and 25).



PICTURE 3: The setting of the "Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge", the 1st of April 2014.



PICTURE 4: The served food in the "Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge", the 1st of April 2014.

THE DINING CLUB ULRİK, ØSTERBRO (COPENHAGEN)

This dinner club takes place at the common house of the residents' association Ulrik, and it is managed by its residents. Each family of the residential area takes turns hosting the dinner club, which has existed for nine years. It takes place once a week, and each event lasts from 6:00-7:00 p.m. The dinner club has approximately 30 participants consisting of families with smaller children. The adults are between 28-40 years of age, and the children are between 0-8 years of age. The adults have a medium-length education or an academic education.

The respondents mention that the served food mainly consists of casserole dishes. It is planned according to the needs of the children, and the philosophy of the club is that the food should be easy and simple to prepare. Food is served in a buffet in big pots, and water is served with the meal. Coffee, tea and homemade cake or the like is served afterwards. The table is set with white plates, cutlery and glasses for water, and it is characterised by the fact that it should be easy to clean afterwards.

The keywords of this dinner club are first and foremost **room for children**. Children are given a very high priority in the hierarchy of this dinner club, and it demands a great deal of tolerance of noise to part of this meal. According to the dinner club respondents, being involved in the dinner club creates a **village-like atmosphere in a chaotic city**, where **socialisation among neighbours** and practical possibilities for babysitting or sharing information about activities taking place at Ulrik constitutes another articulated reason for joining the dinner club (Appendix 14 and 25).



PICTURE 5: The setting of the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro", the 2nd of April 2014.



Picture 6: The served food in the “Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro”, the 2nd of April 2014.

THE NEIGHBOUR/FAMILY DINNER CLUB, FREDERIKSBERG (COPENHAGEN)

This dinner club is a private event, which takes place within the private homes of two of the couples participating in the dinner club on an alternating basis. The dinner club has existed for 30 years and takes place once a week. Each dinner club lasts from 6:00-7:00 p.m. The dinner club includes 17 participants, consisting of two couples in their late sixties and early seventies living in a shared house in a residential neighbourhood at Frederiksberg, their children and grandchildren as well as one of the couple’s niece. The adults are in the age group between 26-71 years of age and the children are between 3-6 years of age. The adults have a medium-length education.

The food served is characterised by the age of the hosts. It is traditional and consists of well-known dishes such as chicken with curry and rice or a minced beefsteak. The food is served on the table in big pots or dishes, and milk and water is served along with the food. Coffee and tea is served afterwards. The table setting includes a colourful tablecloth, candles, white dishes, cutlery and mugs for water and milk as well as for coffee or tea afterwards.

The keyword of the dinner club is **tradition** based on the fact that it has taken place for 30 years and been highly prioritised throughout the years. Furthermore, **joining generations and prioritising family** and close neighbours/friends are mentioned as important elements by the dinner club respondent. Another characteristic of the dinner club is **ease and relief from everyday routines**, which is particularly mentioned by the younger participants. The power relation within the dinner club is centred at the two couples hosting the dinner club; the rest of the participants join on their terms and the fixed traditions (Appendix 15 and 27).



PICTURE 7: The setting of the "Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg", the 7th of April 2014.



PICTURE 8: The served food in the "Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg", the 7th of April 2014.

THE DINING CLUB GALGEBAKKEN, ALBERTSLUND

This dinner club takes place at the common house of the cooperative housing association complex Galgebakken, and it is managed by the coordinator of the resident area. The dinner club is therefore highly dependent upon one passionate organiser. It has existed for approximately 40 years and takes place once a week. Each event lasts from approximately 5:45-7:00 p.m. The dinner club has around 90 participants consisting of families with children, young adults, couples, elderly people, single people, widows and widowers. The participants are between 0-84 years of age, and the adults have a medium-length or an academic education, but it also consists of people supported by the welfare system or other kinds of social support.

The food served is very varied and consists both of old traditional dishes as well as vegetarian or biodynamic dishes. It is served in a buffet in big pots, where cutlery and plates are available as well. Glasses are taken in a cupboard, and a vase with wild flowers is the only object already on the table. Wine, beer and soft drinks can be bought separately.

The keywords mentioned by the dinner club respondent are **social relations**. There is to a certain degree a large spaciousness in the dinner club, but the social relations are mainly observed between people of similar generations. The dinner club creates a sense of belonging, despite of the large number of participants, and it is regarded by the participants as a great relief with regards to not having to cook (Appendix 13 and 28).



PICTURE 9: The setting of the "Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund", the 9th of April 2014.



PICTURE 10: The served food in the "Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund", the 9th of April 2014.

6.1 ANALYSIS

Until now the initial findings of this thesis have been presented. In this paragraph we will analyse the content of the following four frames, which has been extracted from our data process and explained in Chapter 5, *Data Processing*:

- Motivation
- Challenges
- Practices
- Status of Commensality

Within these frames are several themes, which together make this chapter extensive. The objective of the analysis is to compare our different findings from resource persons, dinner club respondents, observations, motivation slips, and lastly comparing this with the applied theory from Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*. This, in order to draw closer to answering the research question.

6.1.1 MOTIVATION

By analysing what motivates people to be a part of a dinner club, it is our hypothesis that we will draw closer to answering what dinner clubs can contribute with in a modern eating culture, which constitutes the last part of this thesis' research question. Motivation will in

the following be divided into the frames Socialisation, Cooking as a Relief, Children, Creation of Micro-societies and The Food.

6.1.1.1 SOCIALISATION

According to the resource persons, the reasons for joining a dinner club are varied. A dinner club may for example be regarded as a possibility for networking or dating, as an easy meal or as a possibility for unfolding gastronomic interests (Appendix 16 and 20). However, most often the element of socialisation connected to the meal experience is highlighted as a powerful explanation as to why people participate in dinner clubs.

That the resource persons emphasise the social aspect as being important is in accordance with what was observed within the five dinner clubs; namely lively and loud conversations as well as interactions between the participants. This is illustrated in figure 5 on the next page. The dinner clubs are used for discussing simple, practical issues such as delivering children, the school day, the work day as well as future events within the dinner clubs (the next possibility to socialise) (Appendices 24-28). In other words, **practicalities and daily activities are planned and discussed within the informal dinner club setting**, participants receive advices from other participants, often people within the same phase of life. In this setting, **one can communicate one's thoughts on ordinary doings in the everyday life - subjects that may not be discussed at a restaurant or in a more formal setting.**



PICTURE 11: Adults and children are socialising in the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro".

That socialisation is an essential part of the dinner clubs is stressed by all five dinner club respondents (Appendices 11-15). The following quotations have been chosen to demonstrate that socialisation is an essential aspect of dinner clubs, as it is mentioned by different dinner club participants across age and gender. The participants were asked what they gain from being a part of the dinner club.

“We have a social meeting, a social community and we become attached to good friends [...] in a very local way. I believe that we are all fond of that. That we are neighbours, right [...]. I believe we all find that valuable.” (Christian Eriksen, 42 years old, “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby”, Appendix 12).

“I experience a social aspect, and I find that very cosy [...]. I believe it is a lot about safety for me as well. I feel safe there.” (Katja Hansen, 25 years old, “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg”, Appendix 15).

Furthermore, the visual descriptive summaries performed on the collected motivation slips shows that the *Socialisation* aspect is mentioned by 83% of the respondents, who filled out the motivation slip as the reason for participating. In comparison *Relief* is the second largest reason for participating and it was only mentioned by 44% of the participants (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: Reasons for Participating in a Dinner Club

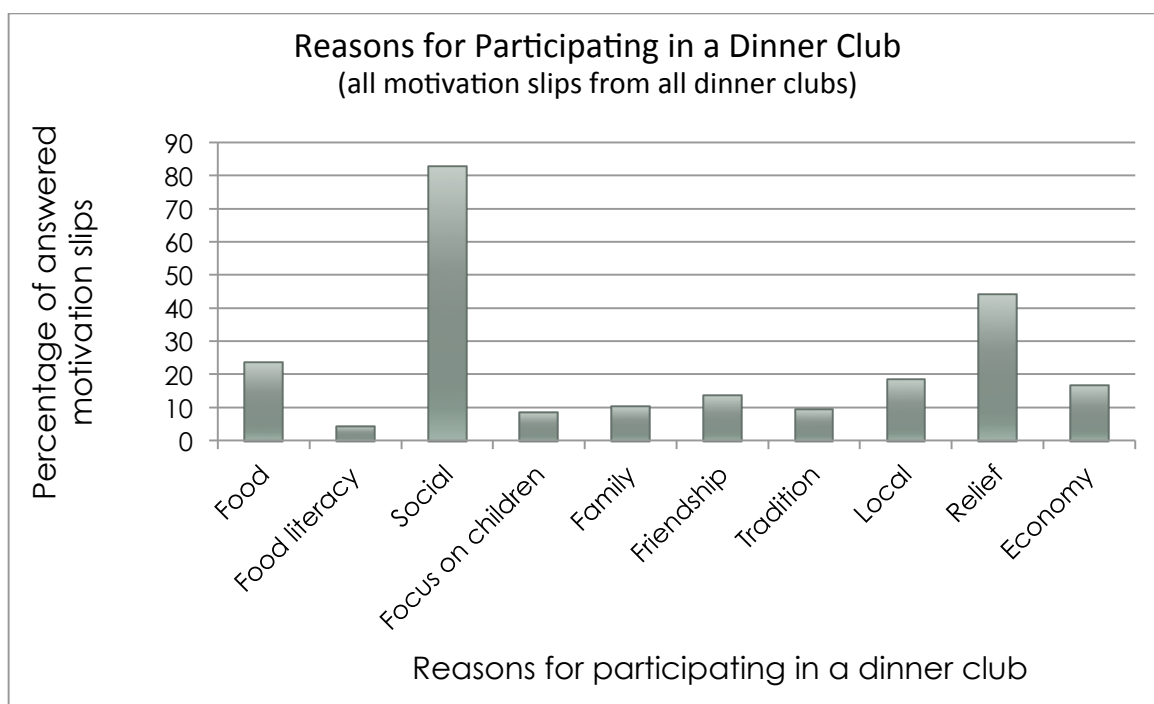


Figure 5: Reasons for Participating in a Dinner Club. Total number of motivation slips: n= 98 (Andersson and Petersen 2014).

The results in the figure and the quotations above correspond to what is stated in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*, regarding food's ability to gather people and strengthen personal relations within groups (Kjærnes et al. 2009). Additionally, that the meal is always considered a social activity is in accordance with Fischler's view on commensality, which he states can involve a sharing act with some degree of dependence and reciprocal commitment (Fischler 2011).

However, the dinner club participants are interested in socialisation, but only to a certain extent, since they often gather in groups with people they already know. This was mentioned by one of a dinner club respondents (Appendix 12) as well as observed in the field (Appendix 24, 26 and 28). The following note taken by one of the researchers during fieldwork serves as an example of how the participants appeared to divide themselves into groups:

"The guests are standing in small groups. Divided into males and females". (Researchers' observation notes, 27th of March, "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby", Appendix 24)

Even though the dinner clubs can be regarded as one gathered community, it seems like minor groupings appear as well, depending on the size of the dinner club. This tells us, that **the very basic understanding of eating as an intimate activity and a wish for socialising with someone you can relate to, does exist in the dinner clubs** as well as we assume it exists in private households.

6.1.1.2 COOKING AS A RELIEF

Dinner club participants are, however, also motivated by other factors than social interaction. **The commensal dinner as a relief was a recurring theme within all five interviews.** Independently, the participants all mentioned that more time with family and friends was highly prioritised in a busy everyday life, and that **the dinner clubs contributed with the possibility of letting others take care of everyday chores such as cooking, which was considered as a relief** and as a reason for joining. This prioritisation of relief was stated by 73% of the participants in the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro", which might be due to the large amount of families with smaller children (Figure 6, page 71). This prioritisation was as well as mentioned by the dinner club respondents in the quotations below:

"Well basically, Tuesday I don't have to think about food, other than the day where I have to cook [...]. It's simply about having more time. It's clearly a relief that today I don't have to cook." (Anne Henriksen, 54 years old, "Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge", Appendix 11).

“That is what I think is really nice. I just have to show up, eat and leave again when I don’t want to be there anymore.” (Katja Hansen, 25 years old, “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg”, Appendix 15).

“It is easy and convenient not having to do the dishes and not to be responsible for the food that day, and knowing that rye bread might be the solution Tuesday and Thursday, because we get a hot meal Wednesday [in the dinner club].” (Gitte Bertelsen, 37 years old, “Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund”, Appendix 13).

Preparing a meal is a necessity, and as the quotations above indicate, help with the daily chore of cooking is a great relief in everyday life. **Thus, attending a dinner club also contributes with practical help and variety to the routinised process that cooking might be** in some homes. Furthermore, as stated in the last quotation by Gitte Bertelsen, the home cooked, warm meal seems to be the “golden standard”, while rye bread seems to be a second choice, but anyhow, a reasonable meal solution on busy weekdays where one has to consider both family and work. This interpretation is supported by a statement by the sociologist Jon Fuglsang who believes that the following can be regarded as a reason for participating in a dinner club:

“Of course it also has to do with food quality. It might be a good way to have a proper meal, that is prepared in the middle of the week, instead of something that just can be prepared in 20 minutes.” (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

6.1.1.3 CHILDREN

Children have been a part of each of the observed dinner clubs, but their role and influence has varied greatly. In some interviews, the children’s social relations were mentioned as the primary reason for establishing the dinner club, which afterwards have led to friendships among the adults. This is stated in the following quotation:

“You get to know each other. Previously we didn’t know each other [...]. The children think it’s interesting that they meet other children. This has kind of been the main attraction.” (Helle Hansen, 37 years old, “Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro”, Appendix 14).

That families with children participate in dinner clubs can also be regarded as **a way for the parents to socialise in a setting where children are welcome**. Many of the participants, particularly in the “Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro”, are in the phase of life called *Families with Smaller Children* and therefore share a common understanding of which challenges dining out with children may bring. **The dinner club contributes with a possibility to dine out, but without the gastro-politics of appropriate behaviour and economical expenses that dining**

at a restaurant comprises. In the dinner clubs, there is plenty of space to play and more leniencies towards children's behaviour. This is illustrated in the case below.

CASE 1: The Children's Dinner Club at Østerbro

An ordinary evening in the dinner club at Østerbro, Copenhagen. The door opens almost exactly at 6 p.m. and soon the room is teeming with life from children between 0-8 years of age and their parents who arrive shortly after. The children are impatient, hungry and are quickly helped with their jackets. They gather around the buffet and when the food is served, the parents help them cut their dish into smaller bites. After a few mouthfuls the eating becomes boring and the children leave the table to play with their friends or pick up an iPad to play games. The door opens and closes. There are loud cries and ball games between the tables where parents try to have a conversation. By now, the youngest children are becoming tired. Less than an hour after arriving, the parents leave the dinner club to put the kids to bed.

The case is chosen to describe how an ordinary evening in the dinner club is taking place. That the children have a powerful influence is obvious when reading the case, which is inspired by field notes taken while observing the dinner club in question (Appendix 25).



PICTURE 12: Children eating in the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro".

6.1.1.4 CREATION OF MICRO-SOCIETIES

When investigating the motivation of the dinner club respondents, another theme that turned up several times and therefore constitutes a topic for further analysis, was the creation of micro-societies. By micro-society we understand a smaller area within the city, where the residents strive to achieve some of the values related to minor communities such as knowing your neighbour and feeling safe. The following quotations express the dinner club participants' wish for a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood:

"Since we are in a big city, one could think of people being rootless or lacking a sense of belonging. This [the sense of belonging] is established in such a core like this [referring to the dinner club]." (Helle Hansen, 37 years old, "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro", Appendix 14).

"It also has a lot to do with having a sense of belonging out there. It's really cosy to be a part of and to know that we have a tradition where we are gathered this way." (Gitte Bertelsen, 37 years old, "Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund", Appendix 13).

These quotations indicate that **dinner clubs contribute with the creation of a smaller, a more local, and a more intimate and safer community**, which to a minor degree exists within the urban area, and which some groups therefore attempt to become a part of. The perspectives of belonging were mentioned by the dinner clubs in Valby and at Østerbro (Figure 6, page 71), but not to the same degree by the dinner clubs within the rural areas. This sense of belonging is used to create close relations and is described by the respondents as providing safety within a closed community (Appendices 12 and 14). The dinner clubs outside of Copenhagen, where these qualities are not articulated, might simply just possess these qualities as an unspoken norm of their everyday life.

Summing up, we believe that the data above and **the involvement in a dinner club indicate a wish for prioritising the local community rather than devoting oneself to the worship of the individual mind-set and care**. This indicates a counteract towards the individual and personal diets and needs, which earlier have characterised our relation to food. This is supported by the sociologist Jon Fuglsang who explains:

"There has been some kind of what you call anomie. It has been highly individualised [refers to eating practices]. Earlier in cooking shows on television you just saw the food being prepared, but now it also has to be eaten [...]. In general more focus is currently on that food is what gathers people." (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

6.1.1.5 THE FOOD

The food served in the dinner clubs constitutes a kind of paradox. The eating is the primary activity that takes place within the dinner clubs. The eating thereby shapes and names the activity. However, **the food is not ascribed any particular status** by the dinner club participants. Very little was mentioned with regards to food quality, taste or choice of ingredients during the interviews and the observations. A slight tendency of food as a reason for participating in a dinner club is seen in figure 6 below, whose data is based on the 98 collected motivation slips. Only within Albertslund and Herfølge the food was articulated and this was mainly emphasised by the two groups; 60-70 years of age and 70 and above (Figure 7, page 77).

FIGURE 6: Reasons for Participating in a Dinner Club divided on Individual Dinner Clubs

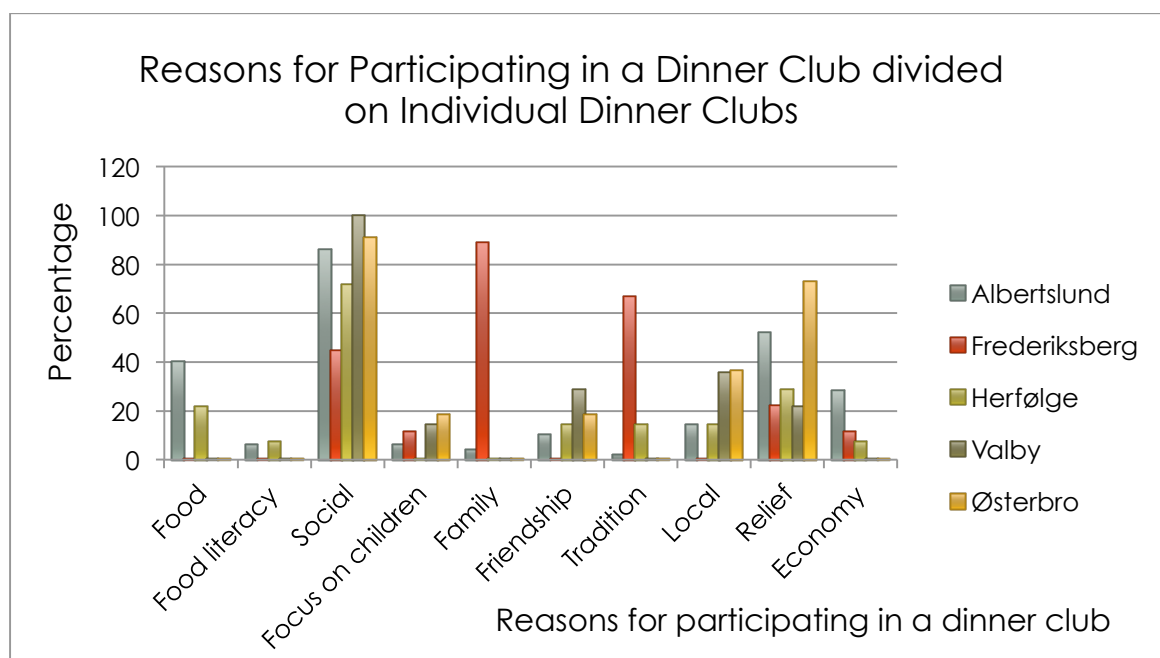


Figure 6: Reasons for Participating in a Dinner Club divided on Individual Dinner Clubs. In total n= 98 collected motivation slips. Albertslund: n= 50, Frederiksberg: n= 9, Herfølge: n= 14, Valby: n= 14, Østerbro: n= 11 (Andersson and Petersen 2014).

That food is not ascribed any particular status appears to be in contrast to a statement by Katrine Klinken, who highlights that good food, brings people together and that bad food has a negative effect on commensal eating (Appendix 19). This seems contradicting with the reality since only two out of five dinner clubs questioned the food, the taste, and the ingredients with curiosity, and recipes were shared among the participants.

Furthermore, Mikkel Jakobsen states that food in the future presumably neither will be the focal point of joint eating events:

"I believe that dinner clubs in the future will be about more than food, much more than food, but the food will probably still function as a gathering point." (Post doc. Mikkel Jakobsen, Appendix 20).

The low level of ambition regarding the food is as well expressed by one of the dinner club participants in the following quotation:

"In general it's not that ambitious [refers to the food]. I think we are more ambitious in our private lives, or if we meet up two families. It is more about the community and to meet and chat [refers to the dinner club]." (Christian Eriksen, 42 years old, "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby", Appendix 12).

Summing up, **it is our assessment that the actual food has quite little significance** and that **socialisation can be well functioning despite of the food being very simple** and appearing to be solely with the aim of satiating the participants. This was especially our interpretation when observing the "Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg" (Appendix 27).

When studying several of the newly established food initiatives (Appendix 1), both *Cook4Food* and *Københavns Madklub* emphasises the social aspect of the meal. However, no criteria for the quality of the food, the taste or the ingredients are articulated.

Why food is not the focal point of the dinner clubs that we have researched is difficult to answer. The respondent Jesper Poulsen from the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro" mentions that currently the dinner club does not revolve around food, however he believes that it probably will be the case later on, when the children are bigger and the surplus of energy among the parents is greater (Appendix 14).

However, it should be mentioned that we are aware that gastronomy can be the focal point in some dinner clubs beyond the scope of this investigation, which is also acknowledged by the sociologist Jon Fuglsang (Appendix 16).

When studying what the resource persons believe that the dinner clubs and commensality contribute with, they highlight; the passing on of traditions and norms, being social, organising and structuring everyday life and bringing families and friends together. This is summarised very well by Katrine Klinken in the following quotations:

“Food cements us together. Food is cultural cement. Eating something together is basically about love and peace, particularly peace and reconciliation.” (Chef, cookbook author and debater, Katrine Klinken, Appendix 19).

“The food also structures the human interaction as well as the day. The meal does many things. For most of us, it is some kind of rhythm that gives the very life and the year a rhythm.” (Chef, cookbook author and debater, Katrine Klinken, Appendix 19).

This is supported by Dr. Unni Kjærnes, Head of Research at The National Institute for Consumer Research in Norway, who states that eating takes place as an integrated part of everyday life and thereby contributes to structuring our days into morning, midday, afternoon and evening (Kjærnes 2001).

So far this analysis has consisted of the most recurring reasons that motivate people to participate in a dinner club, themes emphasised by practitioners as well as professionals engaged with the subject. When processing the data, we also found themes, which indicated that being a part of a dinner club also involves challenges. This was not a finding we as researchers expected to find.

As we in the second part of the research question prepare the ground for a broad answer to *what does dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture* we do not indicate whether the contribution is of a positive or negative character, we estimate that this data is relevant to analyse as well. The next paragraph will therefore contain an analysis of the challenges connected to being a part of a dinner club.

6.1.2 CHALLENGES

The socialisation enhanced by both resource persons and dinner club participants in the paragraph on motivation above, is not solely described as a positive gain. One of the challenges is that **being social can be overwhelming since there is an expectation that those who participate are mentally present and engage in the community** through conversations and the underlying gastro-politics - the norms and expectations on how to behave around the table. This was stated by the dinner club respondents Katja Klausen (Appendix 15) and Helle Hansen. Helle Hansen mentioned that it can be stressful that you have to socialise again when participating in the dinner club, after a long workday consisting of a lot of socialisation. (Extract from summary chart, 2nd of April, “Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro”, Appendix 14).

In other words socialisation is on one hand highly prioritised and rewarding, but on the other hand a dinner club is just another event in a busy schedule.

However, this challenge was not a general opinion among the dinner club participants. Often the few challenges were counterbalanced by other positive gains, which is expressed in this quotation by a dinner club respondent, who reflects on her and her family's participation in the dinner club:

"I can't comprehend that we didn't sign up earlier, while the others [the children] also lived at home. I just couldn't cope with getting started [...]. I thought arghh then you are committed once a week. I felt more like I was bound, now I feel just the opposite." (Anne Henriksen, 54 years old, Appendix 11).

The sociologist Lotte Holm supports this viewpoint and acknowledge that busy work schedules, leisure activities and family life can challenge the participation in dinner clubs (Appendix 17). This is supported by Kjærnes as well, who states that family members in modern households typically spend the largest part of their day in separate social spheres and that some may be absent from the family meal due to leisure activities or work (Kjærnes 2001). However, since the voluntary participation is still prioritised **it seems like the wish for being social, for having the relief and for being a part of the local community, anyhow, contributes to more gains than challenges**. This is based on the observed attendance of the participants, which were very high as well as the many other gains illustrated in figure 5 on page 66.

Another challenge mentioned by a few dinner club participants is the noise and the large number of people, which can be overwhelming (Appendix 13 and 14). The respondents mentioned that the **loud conversations, noises from cutlery, and children playing and crying made some of the neighbours deselect the dinner club as an eating opportunity**, while other dinner clubs are closed entities where those who show up are familiar with the form and therefore tolerant towards the circumstances.

Another challenge that was mentioned by the respondents participating in the dinner clubs in Valby, Østerbro and Herfølge were the challenge of hosting. All dinner clubs that were paid a visit for observation and interviews had shifting host/hostess who performed the planning, the grocery shopping, the cooking and the cleaning. **Hosting was described as a quite extensive task that the participants expressed as exhausting and sometimes stressful** (Appendix 11, 12 and 14). However, this challenge was not a general opinion among all of the dinner club participants. Often the challenge of hosting was counterbalanced by the possibility to have an easy meal without any chores during the many following weeks.

Not only the participation in dinner clubs can be challenging. Several of the resource persons, among others Lotte Holm and Katrine Klinken emphasised the challenges related to commensality in general as well. The following quotations contribute to answering the first part of the research question (*how can commensality be understood*) since it contributes with varied views on what the term commensality holds.

“The commensal meal can also be a nightmare, it can be absolutely dreadful. Within some families the meals can be horrible, if there are conflicts and underlying agendas.” (Sociologist Lotte Holm, Appendix 17).

“It can as well be really tiring to eat on a certain time. After all, it can be unpleasant, rigid and tiring. If there isn’t a good atmosphere then the meal can be horrible.” (Chef, cookbook author and debater Katrine Klinken, Appendix 19).

These quotations indicate the negative side of the commensal meal. Accordingly, Johannes Andersen states that constant battles are taking place while having a family meal, which consist of fights about what to eat, how to eat, and when it's dinnertime (Andersen 2014b).

None of the participants mentioned similar situations, anyhow, we find it interesting to reflect upon that commensality in all families or eating communities is not considered the social highlight of the day. One could claim that the family picture on the cornflakes packet is often what we associate with the commensal meal - a cosy, ideal and happy situation where love, care and sharing is what matters. However, the statements by Lotte Holm, Katrine Klinken and Johannes Andersen describe the opposite scenario.

The above-mentioned challenges are furthermore supported by Jon Fuglsang, who challenges the view on commensality by pointing out that commensality can be regarded as a one-unit-culture, which is not particularly broad-minded and additionally **indicates some guidelines, which can be oppressive** (Appendix 16). It is our assessment that this is rarely a reality within dinner clubs, since these are voluntary and chosen by the participants' own desire. Instead the perspective that Jon Fuglsang emphasises could be regarded as a critical view on other places in the Danish society where eating is performed as a structured part of everyday life, such as childcare institutions, schools or hospitals.

Lastly, commensality may carry other negative aspects when analysing the term with a public health perspective in mind. Joan Preisler believes that eating together can lead to increased intake of energy as well as a negative health condition (Appendix 18). In other words, **commensality may lead to unhealthy overeating**, since the Danish phenomena “hygge” is

often accompanied by sweets or fatty temptations and a wish for sharing and eating together make us eat, even if we are not hungry (Boye 2009). This is as well mentioned by Johanna Mäkelä, professor of Food Culture at the University of Helsinki, who states that the commensal eating can be a risk to healthy eating. This is based on evidence showing that social facilitation can increase the food intake in several cases (Mäkelä 2009, 37).

This paragraph has analysed the challenges related to commensality. These challenges were expressed to a lower degree by the resource persons and dinner club respondents than the expressed motivation for joining the dinner clubs.

6.1.3 PRACTICES

In this paragraph we attempt to investigate, which practices that are carried out in the observed dinner clubs. In relation to this we want to apply the theoretical perspective of *Practice Theory* to the practi

ces performed in the dinner clubs, as an attempt to see what the theory may offer as realm of understanding, and simultaneously as an experiment of implementing the theory into an integrated field of sociology and food. Finally, the theoretical segmentation theory *Phases of Life* will be applied in the paragraph, by focusing on how the practises and prioritisation of the dinner club is related to the phase of life the dinner club participants are in.

As mentioned earlier, practices can according to Warde be understood, by applying a *tripartition of practices*, which includes the elements 1) *understandings*, 2) *procedures* and 3) *engagements* (Warde 2005).

Furthermore, Warde explains that practices can be *coordinated* and thereby based on known understandings, procedures and engagements, which characterises the practices related to a dinner club. A dinner club that is not regularly organised and performed by practitioners in relation to other practitioners can thereby not be characterised as a practice.

Based on our findings a dinner club is most often described as having a focus on socialisation around a meal, where **the meal is described as the mean, and socialisation as the main objective**. This is a tendency seen in all age groups (10-84 years of age) across the visited dinner clubs, ranging from 64% to 91% of the respondents, which is illustrated in the bars related to socialisation in figure 7 below. This reason for participating is highly prioritised in contrast to for example the category Food Literacy, which contains expansion of own cooking skills, cooking inspiration and development of practical cooking skills (Appendix 30). The

category is only mentioned as a reason for participating in two out of five dinner club, both by less than 10% of the participants, which is illustrated in the figure below.

FIGURE 7: Reasons for Participating in Dinner Clubs divided into Age Groups

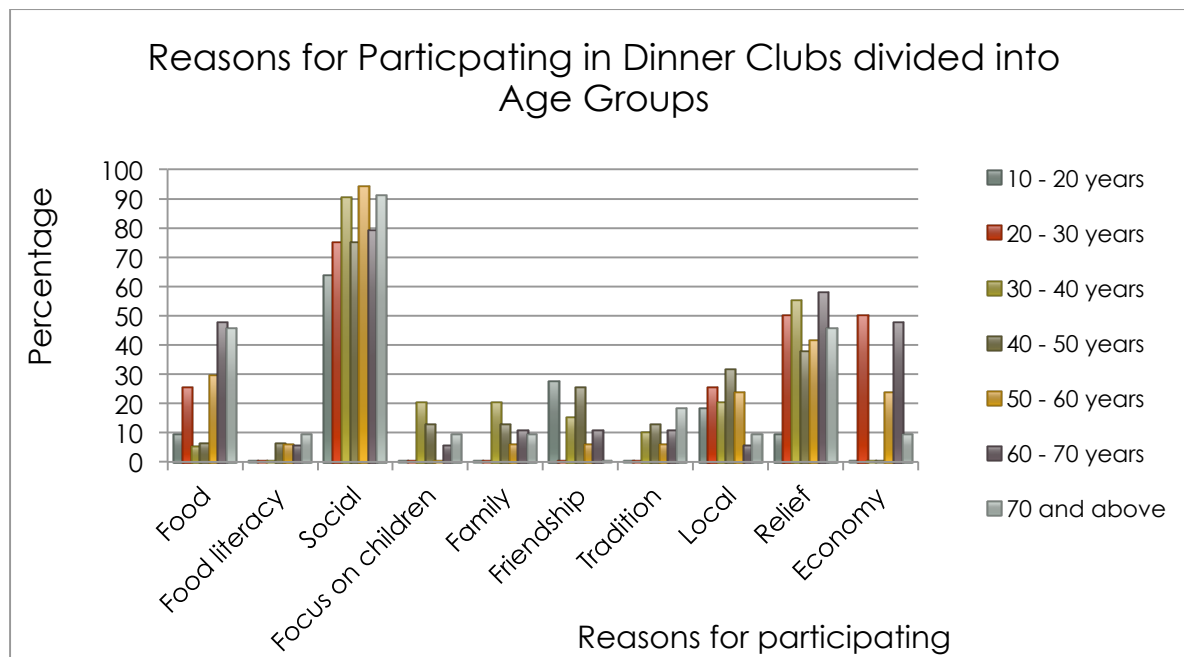


Figure 7: Reasons for Participating in Dinner Clubs divided into Age Groups. In total n= 98 motivation slips. 10-20 years of age: n= 11, 20-30 years of age: n= 4, 30-40 years of age: n= 20, 40-50 years of age: n= 16, 50-60 years of age: n= 17, 60-70 years of age: n= 19, 70 and above: n= 11 (Andersson and Petersen 2014).

According to this, dinner clubs can be characterised as a social practice based on the routinized processes in combination with the three coordinated elements *understandings, procedures* and *engagements* (Warde 2005).

6.1.3.1 UNDERSTANDINGS AND PROCEDURES

Understandings and *procedures* can when focusing on dinner clubs be estimated as the *understanding* of the practices performed in and around the dinner club and how they as *procedures* are carried out. An example of *understandings* and *procedures* related to the participants of the dinner clubs is the gastro-politics – the articulated and unwritten norms and rules, e.g. the duration of the dinner club. All participants understand and accept that the dinner club will end around 20 p.m. as the latest.

As earlier mentioned the family meal is used as a place for teaching table manners and social skills (Groth et al. 2009; Crowther 2013). These patterns were observed within the dinner clubs as well. In the “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby” it was expressed when the parents told their children to finish their meal before leaving the table and in the “Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge” it was expressed when it was made clear how much food that was available per person (Appendix 24 and 26). **Child upbringing and table manners including *understandings* and *procedures* are therefore not only regarded as private education taking place at home, but as basic elements of socialisation that can take place while sharing food with neighbours, friends, acquaintances or even strangers.**

Warde describes each individual as agents, who every day go through a multiple crossing field of practices within the various meal settings, which the individual participate in (eating breakfast alone, lunch with colleagues, family dinner at home or eating in a dinner clubs with neighbours) (Halkier and Jensen 2008). Every time the individual is within a new eating setting it is considered which performances that are appropriate. That child upbringing and teaching table manners are practices that take place both in the private home and in dinner clubs therefore shows that the individual are capable of performing these practices within multiple crossing fields or eating settings.



PICTURE 13: A mother from the “Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro” is cutting out her child’s food and encouraging her to eat it properly with cutlery.

In our observations **it was clear that the power among the participants was laid predominantly within the hands of the person/persons hosting the dinner club.** The remaining participants had to subject to certain rules formed by the host, which was mainly

observed in the smaller dinner clubs. Particularly hierarchy and the varied generations had a big importance within the “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg”. Observations showed that the participants had fixed seats and the male host was seated in the middle of the table with the food served in two huge pots right in front of him. He was in charge of the procedure of scooping up the food on each participant’s plate and hand it to him or her. The youngest participant was served first and the oldest was served lastly (Appendix 27). That all the participating members subject to these rules can be understood through what Warde describes as the *understandings* (Warde 2005).

Specific roles or power relations were not mentioned by the respondents participating in the larger dinner clubs and it was difficult to observe if certain people were possessed more power within this constellation. This was particularly based on the large number of people participating. In the “Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge” the role of collecting money for participating was mentioned, but an increased power based on the role was not indicated (Appendix 11). Furthermore, the coordinator of the resident area in the “Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund” was mentioned by the respondent as having a specific role, based on the fact that he is the manager of the dinner club and can in that way be seen as being assigned additional power (Appendix 13).

6.1.3.2 ENGAGEMENTS

Halkier and Jensen describe Warde’s term *engagements*, as what is created in the interplay between emotions and performances (Halkier and Jensen 2008). The observed participants were in general very involved in the dinner club and a regular participation was prioritised to a great extend. Within the “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg” it was expected that everyone participated each time, and the participants therefore did not sign up for the individual dinner club, but were supposed to cancel if they were not able to participate.

Another example of the participants’ engagement is that the participants seemed willing to meet the gastro-politics of the specific dinner clubs. The interviews conducted with dinner club respondents show that dinner clubs are not a place where special considerations are taken regarding allergies, taste preferences or individual diets. Thereby, **there is a norm stating that when being part of a dinner club you cannot expect special considerations**, you are bound to eat the same as everyone else and you are supposed to accept the host's choice of food. The individuals’ engagement therefore weighs higher than having own individual needs fulfilled. Sociologist Jon Fuglsang supports this norm that special considerations are not made in dinner clubs by stating:

"I also see commensality as very civilising in the sense that you have to adapt to a collective set of rules." (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

The many positive gains that the dinner club participants attach to the dinner club e.g. the social relations and the relief from everyday chores seem to counterbalance that one does not necessarily get served the meal that one could wish for. Since socialisation appears to be one of the decisive elements for joining a dinner club, the **individual needs and preferences in relation to the served food seems to lose its importance** and commensality is created to a greater extent since the participants are sharing a meal by eating the same food instead of bringing individual meal solutions.

Every human being is part of a range of multiple crossing fields of practices - such as work practices, parenting practices and relationships practices (Warde 2005). Within these different fields one can practise eating in various ways. One type of eating can be a quick breakfast eaten alone where own preferences are prioritised, on the contrary a meal eaten in the dinner club can be regarded as a compromise in relation to specific wishes such as organic ingredients, low fat meals or vegetarian dishes. In this setting one have to subject to whatever is served. This shift between eating practises challenge people's performativity as the practices are coordinated by different types of people and therefore also different *understandings* and *procedures*.

6.1.3.3 DIVISION OF GENERATIONS ACCORDING TO PHASES OF LIFE

Each family was typically divided while participating in the dinner club. Through observations it was noticed that the participants often divided themselves into smaller groups based on their age and current phase of life e.g. *Families with Smaller Children* (Kongsholm 2007a, 91) often clustered with other people having smaller children and seniors sat down with other seniors.

Based on these findings it appears that **families with children primarily do not participate in dinner clubs to strengthen the social bond within their own family, but to nurture relationships with other adults and children.**



PICTURE 14: The adults of the “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby” are socialising, while their children are playing upstairs.

This fragmentation of generations was particularly visual within the “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby”. At this dinner club the practise of eating takes place in shifts. Firstly, the children are quickly served their meal and secondly the adults are seated around the table and served their dinner. An example of this division is illustrated in the case below.

CASE 2: Neighbour Dinner Club in Valby.

A 10-year-old girl arrives in the dinner club just as the other children have finished their meal and left the table. Some adults are cleaning the table after the children and others are standing up surrounding the dinner table and having a glass of wine, while waiting for their dinner to be served. The girl, who is standing up, is served a plate with lasagne and raw vegetables like the other children. She looks a bit confused about the situation, since the other children whom she was supposed to eat with have went upstairs to play. She decides to sit down at the empty table. None of the adults sit down and socialise with her, but maintain standing and leaves the girl alone at the long empty table. Some adults start making funny hints emphasising that she should hurry up. One adult says in a joking manner: *“As soon as you have finished eating, there is room enough for the rest of us to sit down and eat our dinner.”* The girl quickly eats her food and leaves the adults, so they can enjoy the meal alone (Appendix 24).

The case provides a clear picture of the division of generations and the power relations formed within the dinner club, and which *understandings* and *procedures* you have to accept when *engaging* in this particular dinner club.

As humans we go through different phases in our lives. Sometimes we belong to a meal community and have regular meals together, and sometimes, in other phases of life, we might be alone, be single and have the primary social activities focused around other aspects than the eating situation. When being young and not having settled down, people tend to eat alone. In relation to this Lotte Holm states that practising the commensal meal can be connected to a person's material status (Appendix 17). Research shows that particularly among families with children the commensal meal tend to be more frequent (Kjærnes 2001; Groth et al. 2009). Furthermore, the frequency of having a common family meal tends to increase with age (see the earlier introduced figure 3: Family Meals and Age Groups, page 19).

During the *Identity Phase* and *Establishment Phase* mentioned in *Paragraph 2.2* in the Theoretical Framework, efforts are made to get a hold on one's identity and the creation of social bonds with whom eating practises also are established (Kongsholm 2007b, 53). People in the *Identity Phase* and *Establishment Phase* are typically those inspired by communal initiatives like *Københavns Madklub* and *Madrouletten* (Appendix 1), where the aim is to gather a group of strangers around an informal meal. These initiatives can be seen as everyday life inspired practises aiming to create new relations and as mentioned by Jon Fuglsang, participants joining such initiatives are particularly people, who are curious and open towards meeting new people (Appendix 16).

When people enter the phases *Families with Smaller Children*, *Families with School Children/Tweens* and *Families with Teens* emphasis is put on the children including their needs and upbringing. The participants of the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro" consisted of *Families with Smaller Children* and the focus was placed particularly on the children, and on parents secondly. On the other hand, the participants of the "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby" consist of *Families with School Children/Tweens or Families with Teens*. Within these phases every family member comes and goes according to individual agendas, and meals are consumed whenever it is found suitable. Despite of this, it was observed that the social bonds of the families were not prioritised while participating in the dinner club. The children were old enough to take care of themselves, which made it possible for the parents to enjoy their needs for socialising with other adults (Appendix 24).

The majority of the participants of the “Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge” can be characterised as being part of the phase of life called *Self-realisation* (Kongsholm 2007a, 91). Their children were older and did not demand the same amount of attention from the parents. The older participants thereby had the possibility to increase the time and energy that was put into the taste, quality and variation of the served food. Therefore, one of the themes of conversations observed within this dinner club was that the served food was discussed and that recipes were shared (Appendix 26).



Picture 15: Two ladies from the “Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge” are enjoying a quiet meal.

Finally, people representing the phases *The New Senior*, *The Routine Senior* and *The Stay-at-Home Senior* were present in the dinner clubs the “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg” and the “Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund”.

The New Senior is characterised by having lots of spare time and by giving a great amount of attention towards their children and grandchildren (Kongsholm 2007a, 91). This was particularly observed at the “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg”, where the older generation provided additional nurturing for their children and grandchildren by cooking and serving them a meal once a week.

The Routine Senior and *The Stay-at-Home Senior* were particularly observed and registered through the motivation slips in the “Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund”. Within these phases of life the activity level is adjusted and the focus is put on quiet leisure activities and the family, and particularly the life of *The Stay-at-Home Senior* is more commonly lived at home (Kongsholm 2007a, 91). For these participants joining a dinner club is seen as a possibility

to socialise with other people, within their own comfort zone. This was observed as well as expressed through the motivation slips. Figure 7 on page 77 shows that 79% of the participants between 60-70 years of age and 91% of the participants being 70-years-old and above are motivated to participate in the dinner club based on socialisation.

Finally, it should be mentioned that particularly the larger dinner clubs consisted of varied groups of participants representing different generations and thereby phases of life. This can create a “paradox of recognition” (Warde 2005) regarding the practices forming the dinner club. In other words, the variations of participants and thereby the variation within phases of life creates varied practices and motivations for joining, which can make it difficult for the participants to maintain the initial format of the dinner club, because the dinner club might become more segregated into smaller groups formed according to the participants phases of life, priorities and interests.

6.1.4 STATUS ON THE COMMENSAL MEAL

In this paragraph we will present our results regarding the status of the commensal meal in Denmark. The findings are based on opinions formed by the selected resource persons, findings discovered through a search on Infomedia and based on definitions and theories presented in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Framework*. The mentioned parts will be included in order to discuss to which extent commensality is practised and whether these practices are about to change.

The paragraph will thereby consist of our results supporting that the commensal meal is in decline, followed by the results supporting that the commensal meal is not in decline.

The media tend to emphasise the fact that Danes eat individual meals, in a hurry and on the go. A skipped breakfast, a quick lunch in front of the computer, a snack in the train and a few pieces of rye bread for dinner, consumed while the TV is on, are according to the media and Johannes Andersen the reality of the present Danish eating culture (Andersen 2000). The following headlines published in Danish media serves as examples of this understanding: “Busyness Costs Socialising at the Dinner Table” (Andersen 2014a, 2), “STOP the Feeding” (Færch 2012), “Breakfast is Eaten in a Hurry” (Sørensen 2009, 14) and “Real Families Eats Together” (Schou 2009, 4).

Our literature search and the resource persons indicate an increasing individualisation of the meal. However recently there seem to be a shift in the way we view food. Jon Fuglsang describes the recent development in the following:

“I also believe that this health tendency that has characterised the last decade has been overruled by a more pleasure-oriented agenda during the last five years. And with this pleasure came as well the community.” (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

Family members in modern households typically spend the largest part of their day separately and both children and parents are sometimes absent from the family meal due to individual leisure activities or work (Kjærnes 2001). In addition, there is a tendency of practising individual diets, which also affects the possibilities for practising the commensal meal. Sociologist Jon Fuglsang underlines this tendency in the following:

“The diet culture, which many are practising makes it difficult to participate in a commensal meal and it may be an element that affects the possibilities for eating together [...]. It threatens the common meal.” (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

Therefore, it can be difficult to gather a family in a modern everyday life. **People tend to prioritise individual needs and projects instead of eating together with the family.** This is expressed by Sociologist Jon Fuglsang:

“I think [...] that being effective and having to meet a great amount of things during a weekday creates that particularly the everyday meal is constantly threatened, because there are so many other things you also need to achieve.” (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

In addition, Lotte Holm mentions that the individualisation of the meal is increasing to some extent:

“I believe that life has become faster. The pace has increased and maybe a little more meals [are eaten] and more people are eating alone.” (Sociologist Lotte Holm, Appendix 17).

Furthermore, Mikkel Jakobsen mentions that we are becoming more and more distant from our food, both culinary and sensually (Appendix 20). This tendency is by Fischler described as gastro-anomie and he argues that the cultural norms for what should be eaten, when and together with whom, are disappearing (Crowther 2013b, 109).

When asking the recourse persons to express their opinion on whether or not the Danish commensal meal can be regarded as in decline, several of them referred to the eating patterns practised in France and the United States of America. A few stated that if they were to compare Denmark to France (serving as an example of a society practising the commensal meal) and the United States of America (serving as an example of a society practising the individual meal), they

would not consider the commensal eating in Denmark as in decline. In relation to this Mikkel Jakobsen states:

"I'm not particularly worried. Although we in no ways are similar to France, we definitely do not look like the US." (Post doc. Mikkel Jakobsen, Appendix 20).

Correspondingly, Jon Fuglsang arguments:

"You cannot just annex the criticism from Fischler, because we [Denmark] have a completely different food culture. We do not have the same traditions regarding the common meal." (Sociologist Jon Fuglsang, Appendix 16).

In general there is a consensus among the recourse persons stating that **the commensal meal is still practised in Denmark** and that **it cannot be compared with the increasing grazing taking place in the United States of America** (Meiselman 2009, 16) **or the critical interpretations regarding gastro-anomie formed by Fischler** (Crowther 2013b, 109). In addition, Thomas Roland states:

"Danes are the people of Northern Europe, who are most often gathered, at least in the family, around a common evening meal. You do not see that anywhere else, at least not to the same extent." (Head of Department, Responsibility, Coop Danmark A/S, Thomas Roland, Appendix 21).

And Lotte Holm believes:

"I don't think it's a decay that people do not eat together every day. Why would you do that? Our data suggests that people eat together, the whole family, more than every other day and I don't think that is a decay." (Sociologist Lotte Holm, Appendix 17).

Finally, Mikkel Jakobsen questions whether or not Danes give higher or lower priority to the meal today than earlier. He believes that a higher prioritisation of work is given in some parts of society, but that the values of the commensal meal are obvious to every Dane (Appendix 20). In that sense, the societal structures can be regarded as a decisive factor for the possibilities to practise the commensal meal.

Despite the issue that it can be rather problematic to gather the entire family for a joint meal, due to individual activities and preferences, Lotte Holm states that parents are willing to bend over backwards in order to make the joint family meal happen. The parents adjust the meal according to who is doing what and when. This is a new phenomenon that correlates with the fact, that children currently have another status in the family than earlier (Appendix 17).

Another tendency that supports the practise of the commensal meal is the wide range of common food initiatives taking place at the moment. Jon Fuglsang, Katrine Klinken and Joan Preisler mention that people are moving towards an increasing socialisation based on a tendency of practising higher gastronomy both in private and public settings, and based on the larger focus on communal initiatives such as “community tables” within the restaurant environment (Appendix 16, 18 and 19).

Joan Preisler answered the following when asked why she thinks these tendencies are increasing at the moment:

“It is my experience that there has been a trend towards an individualisation of society, which I think some people wants to put an end to [...]. You get into this treadmill where things are just running and running [...]. I think people might have a need for loosening up a bit.” (Representative from Måltidspartnerskabet, Joan Preisler, Appendix 18).

This could indicate that the modern family with children are in need of more spare time in their everyday lives. They want to be relieved from some of their everyday chores and be able to socialise with other adults despite having children and daily routines to take care of.

Trend researcher Louise Byg Kongsholm supports the tendency of an increased need for socialisation as well. In 2007 she argued that individualism has grown in recent years, and everyone has tried to create a unique expression through for instance diets. Additionally, she mentions that, people no longer see anything bad in belonging to a group and the trend is going from individualism towards a community thought (Kongsholm 2007b, 53). This development is comparable to the increasing participation in common food initiatives, which we have seen within the last years (Appendix 1).

The earlier described Infomedia search showed several examples supporting that the social initiatives like dinner clubs are a phenomenon that is practised increasingly (Appendix 31). The mentioned common food initiatives in Appendix 1 are all formed within the last couple of years (between 2012-2014) and they show a tendency going on at this very moment. Accordingly, Lotte Holm supports this tendency when stating that creating forums for people, who do not know each other with the purpose of eating together, can be regarded as new phenomena. Under normal circumstances, people tend to eat together in other settings or for different reasons e.g. with your family in a shared household, at work, or with relations from leisure activities. But in this case food makes it possible to form a community with people you might otherwise not have met or have anything in common with besides the served food (Appendix 17).

The purpose of such initiatives can be described by article titles like: “Dinner Clubs are Sensual Pleasure that We can Practise Together” (Pagh 2012), “Dine with a Stranger” (Agger 2014) and “The Meal is Something You Share” (Oehlenschläger 2013, 4) (Appendix 31).

The trend may be an indicator of people appreciating a strong community and socialisation in relation with a non-binding and informal meal.

In addition, Mikkel Jakobsen highlights that professional, cultural and social networks can be joined, with food as the medium and networking as the aim. He has spotted this tendency in the United States of America, but believes that it will appear in Denmark as well in the future, based on the fact that there is a greater need for networks today than earlier. It is used to find and get a new job, finding a boyfriend or girlfriend or creating new relations (Appendix 20).

The above-mentioned findings, based on interviews and literature search, are included as an example of how **the common meal is still practised and that current trends can be regarded as a counteract to the increasing individualisation of the meal.**

6.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN RESULTS

Since Chapter 6, *Data Results and Analysis* is a long and comprehensive section, the purpose with this summary is to present a shortened and concise overview of the results that we have found through the analysis. The paragraph does therefore not contain any new information.

Regarding what motivates people to participate in dinner clubs, **the socialisation was found to be a cornerstone.** The dinner clubs contributes with the possibility to plan and discuss practicalities and daily activities with friends, neighbours or family in an informal dinner setting. **Cooking as a relief was another theme with a strong presence.** A busy everyday life and a wish for more time with the family made the participants emphasise how the **dinner clubs contribute positively and practically to their lives by being time-saving when others take care of everyday chores such as shopping, cooking and cleaning.**

That **children are welcome in the dinner clubs and able to spend time with their friends** was a recurring theme expressed by the participants. **The dinner clubs contributes with a possibility for the adults to socialise** and a possibility to dine out, but without the rules for appropriate behaviour and economical expenses that dining at a restaurant comprises. Furthermore, **the dinner clubs contributes to a local sense of belonging, and a safe and intimate community** in an urban area. **Thereby, the involvement in a dinner club indicates**

a wish for prioritising the local community rather than devoting oneself into the worship of the individual mind-set and care. Lastly, an interesting result is that **food is rarely what motivates the participants**. The dinner club participants who were interviewed **did not ascribe the food any particular status**. It is our assessment that **food in most cases are regarded a secondary gain** whereas socialisation is the main reason for participating. The social aspect is even well functioning despite of the food being very simple.

The analysis did also point out that there are some challenges connected to participating in a dinner club. This being, that **the socialisation can be overwhelming based on the expectation that those who participate must engage in the community** through conversations and conform to the underlying gastro-politics within the dinner club. The dinner club thereby **indicates some guidelines, which can be oppressive** and therefore challenging for the inclination to participate. Some participants emphasised that **loud noises, conversations, cutlery and children's playing and crying made some of the neighbours deselect the dinner club** as an eating opportunity. Lastly, **hosting was described as a quite extensive and stressful task**.

These challenges indicate the negative aspect of the commensal meal. However, it appears that the wish for being social, having relief in everyday life and being part of the local community, anyhow, contributes to considerably more gains than challenges.

Investigating the practices taking place in a dinner club has had a certain focus in order to answer the research question dealing with how commensality is practised. The most significant expressed practice was that **child upbringing and table manners are an important part of the dinner club**. It is regarded as basic elements of socialisation that can take place while sharing food with neighbours, friends or family and therefore also a practice within the dinner clubs. Other practices that constituted the dinner clubs were the power relations between the participants. It was clear that **the power among the participants lay predominantly with the person/persons hosting the dinner club and in other cases among the children**.

Just as well as the food was not ascribed any particular status, special considerations were not taken for allergies or individual preferences. There appear to be a norm stating that **when being a part of a dinner club one enters a common set of rules, which are difficult to stand out from**.

CHAPTER 7, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Chapter 7 is the last chapter of this thesis and therefore also the place for discussing how we have reached the final results, for making the final conclusions on the research question and lastly, reflecting upon the subject and the future perspectives of practising commensal meals and participating in dinner clubs.

7.0 DISCUSSION

The first part of the discussion (Paragraph 7.0.1 and 7.0.2) seeks to verify the academic approach of the thesis and will sum up, and discuss the weaknesses and strengths of the theories and methods that have been applied. The second part (Paragraph 7.0.3) will contain a discussion of the projects main results conducted from interviews and observations. A view on the results and the application of the theoretical framework will be evaluated and approached with a future- and societal oriented perspective.

7.0.1 DISCUSSION OF THEORETICAL APPROACH

The following paragraph will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the applied theory of *Practice Theory* and the scientific foundation of *Social Science*.

7.0.1.1 PRACTICE THEORY

Our approach to practice theory has been to investigate the practices of commensality taking place in an everyday life setting. We are not acquainted with other researchers who have applied practice theory to the social aspect of meals. Therefore, we have been obliged to let our analysis be inspired by other subjects, whereas the practice theory has been applied. Subjects that we find somewhat comparable to our own research field, such as Alan Warde's research on consumption sociology (Warde 2005).

By applying Warde's approach to practice theory, to the data of this thesis, the theory has managed to unfold the concept of practices in the sense that we have not only considered practices as one element, but as a term consisting of three related elements - *understandings*, *procedures* and *engagements*. This has provided the analysis of our data with a more nuanced look at practices, their execution and their significance.

As mentioned our aim has been to investigate the Danish eating culture as an everyday practice and it is thereby reasonable to discuss, if we could have chosen another eating event than a dinner club in order to investigate these practices.

An eating event that more often is taking place is the family meal executed in a private setting. A dinner club is rarely taking place every second day, which the private family meal typically is (Groth et al. 2009). A dinner club more often takes place once a week, every month or maybe four times a year. People participating in a dinner club may not think of the event as an everyday practice, but as a special event, a small party in the middle of the week or anyhow as something out of the ordinary. It can therefore be discussed whether dinner clubs can be regarded as daily practises.

However, we as researchers, define dinner clubs as being an everyday practise. This is partly based on an example mentioned by the dinner club participant Gitte Bertelsen, who participates in the "Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund" once a week with her husband and their two children. Through the interview it was discovered that Gitte Bertelsen plans and considers the week according to the family's participation in the dinner club.

The dinner club is a very social event, which from time to time can be a bit overwhelming to her children, and social activities the following days are thereby deselected in order to create a balanced week. Furthermore, the served food within the private family home is planned according to the dinner club as well. The dinner club takes place on Wednesdays and it always consists of a warm meal. Therefore, Gitte Bertelsen finds it acceptable that she serves her family a cold meal (consisting of rye bread with cold cuts) on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This indicates that the dinner club is an integrated part of the family's everyday routines despite that it only takes place once a week (Appendix 13).

Time, continuity and routines are therefore important elements when defining dinner clubs as an everyday practice. The ideal everyday practice is thereby rather a meal with the family than a common meal in dinner clubs, when applying practice theory. Our focus, however, has been on the practises and motivational elements that bring people together around a meal outside the private home and on new initiatives concerning the commensal meal, which is why dinner clubs have been chosen as our focus.

As mentioned we have made use of Warde's *tripartition*, when striving to apply practice theory. Taking use of only one specific way of approaching practice theory can be regarded as somewhat limited.

Looking at practice theory through the lens of Warde and his application-oriented approach we may have overlooked being critical towards his selection of the three elements when applying the theory to our data, and therefore neglected to reflect on whether these have covered the field adequately. Furthermore, Warde's use of the three elements can appear quite intangible, since not much description on his specific use of the element is available. This constitutes a kind of uncertainty on whether the theory in this thesis have been applied according to Warde's intentions and should therefore be regarded as an attempt as well as a first time application of practice theory to food sociology.

In a long-term project it could be interesting, initially, to discuss the different approaches and definitions of the theory, followed by an application of these in order to work with the theory on a more comprehensive level.

In this thesis we have made use of Warde's understanding of practices. Another way practices could have been understood is by analysing the "doings and sayings". These are terms Theodore Schatzki is much concerned with. He describes the "doings and sayings" as organised by a pool of understandings. Understandings are in this case thought as a practical understanding of what and how you should perform, in other words it is comparable to knowledge and know-how. Schatzki states that an analysis of practices must be concerned with both practical activity and its representations. The application of doings and sayings is comparable with Warde's description of the nexus; *understandings, procedures* and *engagements* (Warde 2005; Halkier and Jensen 2008). These various attempts to understand practices can be seen as overlapping and therefore an application of both would not contribute with an improvement of the results. However, we have chosen to apply Warde's approach towards practices, particularly, because we see his interpretation as an extended tool for gaining insight into practices. This, because it furthermore contains a focus on *engagements*, which is particularly useful for this thesis when trying to understand what motivates people to participate in a dinner club and what dinner clubs in the end contribute with.

A limitation of the chosen theoretical approach has been our focus on not only practises, but also on motivation and challenges, as being consistent themes throughout the analysis to which the application of practice theory has been rather complex. Practice theory is applicable on the performed processes carried out by human beings, but to a minor degree on the mental processes, because these elements not always are verbally expressed or possible to observe.

For others working with practice theory in the future we would like to emphasise that practice theory is an applicable tool when researching human beings' every day practises. For us as

researchers, it has particularly been beneficial to have a practical study to relate the theory to. However, when dealing with such an indefinite and not fully developed theory, it demands a great amount of literature studies to gain a deeper understanding of the many theoreticians' work. Furthermore, one should be aware of that even though Warde's interpretation of the theory is described as being application-oriented, one should be prepared that the theory involves extensive academic terms and on-going discussions on how to approach the theory.

7.0.1.2 SOCIAL SCIENCE

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate dinner clubs as a growing tendency in the society and additionally the practises and interactions between human beings, in order to answer what dinner clubs contribute with. The discipline of social science is thereby thought of as applicable within this thesis, since the discipline is concerned with society and human behaviour and the interplay between (groups of) individuals and society or other objects, which is not the case within human science and natural science (Sørensen 2010). However, if our focus had not been on the social aspects of eating, but on for instance the nutritional advantages or disadvantages of sharing a meal with your family, friends or colleagues, other disciplines could have been advantageous to apply as well.

Integrated Food Studies as an integrated master education is however a cross-disciplinary field, which calls for the use of various scientific methods. A triangulation of methods has therefore been applied within this thesis and has been found very useful when striving to reveal the preconceptions, norms and perceptions among the dinner club participants.

Since the social approach towards the Danish eating culture so far has not been studied to a great extend (McIntosh 2013, 14; Holm 2013, 23) an investigation like the one unfolded in this thesis is by us as researchers regarded as highly relevant to execute and follow up on.

As mentioned social initiatives related to the commensal meal is a very current phenomena and the future of initiatives like *Madrouletten* and *Københavns Madklub* (Appendix 1) can be difficult to foretell. Alongside, that new initiatives occurs and the common meal appears to be practised and prioritised, an increase in individual eating and individual meal solutions are appearing at the same time due to societal changes. Approaching the Danish eating culture from a social science approach is thereby very relevant and it could be interesting to repeat such an investigation in approximately 10 years to investigate whether or not the current initiatives turned out to be a scientific fad or a fixed trend that is here to stay, and if so, which influences this might have had on the commensal meal.

7.0.2 DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The following chapter will contain a discussion on the applied methods, including the performed literature search, the interviews conducted with resource persons, and the observations, interviews and motivation slips, which were carried out and completed within five dinner clubs.

7.0.2.1 LITERATURE SEARCH

In order to gain an overall insight into the field of food and sociology, including how the term commensality is understood and practised in the Danish society, a literature search was performed.

As earlier mentioned the familiarity with the chosen theme of this thesis made us approach known scientific literature, followed by a search in the references of these articles and books. A more extensive literature search could have been made with the use of other scientific databases, but since the aim of the search has not been to examine all literature covering the theme of commensality in a systematic manner, but to collect literature in order to discuss and gain a varied picture of how commensality is understood and practised, this method was chosen as suitable. Additionally, the fact that we made use of literature from courses at the university indicates that the literature is of academic character and thereby qualified. Furthermore, we believe that the fact that two researchers have performed the search has established some kind of dependability and has strengthened the outcome of the literature search.

During the initial reading, we got the impression that there is a lack of literature regarding commensality, since the topic of food sociology and commensality has not been a popular research area compared to other sociological fields. This was experienced both when searching for Danish and international literature and stated as well in literature by recognised sociologists and researchers (McIntosh 2013, 14). Since our focus has been on commensality in a Danish context, and because literature within this field has been difficult to find we have placed a greater emphasis on understanding commensality through interviews with Danish actors in the field.

Accordingly, it has been difficult to find literature highlighting the practise and prioritisation of commensality, which has been published within the last decade. Therefore, references dating back to 1990 have as well been used to support how commensality is understood and practised in modern Danish society. This is deemed suitable since the opinions formed in the mentioned references are perceived as being present in a modern context as well, based on how e.g. the media are dealing with the commensal meal and its possible decline.

7.0.2.2 INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS IN THE FIELD

The thesis' selection of only five dinner clubs is a non-representative sample size, in comparison to the number of dinner clubs existing in Denmark. However, we consider the data to be reliable, though neither to be thought of as objective, reproducible nor to be used for generalisation. The data produced in the investigation of the dinner clubs reveals momentary snapshots of how the researchers through observation and interviews, perceived the practices on the given days. The data can be used to illustrate certain situational realities and their contextual circumstances.

Based on interviews and observations it is estimated that the selected dinner clubs can be regarded as relatively comparable, since they by all of the respondents are categorised as being informal, focused on social relations and a relief from everyday chores. However, they are differentiated according to their size and setting and the power relations formed within the dinner club. Despite of the common values, the overall focus of the individual dinner club varies. As an example the children in the "Dining Club Ulrik, Østerbro" and the adults in the dinner clubs "Neighbour Dinner Club, Frederiksberg" and "Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg" have a great influence on the agenda of these dinner clubs.

In addition, it can be discussed if the selection criteria of the dinner clubs have created bias regarding the collected data. As mentioned the dinner clubs are regarded as relatively comparable – but what is the reason for this unambiguity of our data? Is it because the results are obtained based on the fact that we unconsciously have attracted a special type of dinner clubs because of our selection criteria? This might be the reason, since we know that several dinner clubs within Denmark has a great focus on gastronomy as well even though it has not been the case with our data.

The second part of the research question asks: *what does dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture*. But is it possible to study the modern eating culture by collecting data within dinner clubs, which have existed between 6 and 40 years? Are these cases the right choices in researching a modern phenomenon or should we have chosen to focus on younger dinner clubs instead? We agree that this could have been the approach, however, our wish has also been to investigate what (still) motivates people to join a dinner club independent on how long time it has existed. Based on the fact that all of the observed dinner clubs consists of more than one generation and the participants thereby represent a varied part of the different phases of life we do not think of this as decisive for the validity of our thesis.

Regarding the interviews four out of five were executed in the private homes of the respondent. The interview executed with the respondents Jesper Poulsen and Helle Hansen from the "Dining

Club Ulrik, Østerbro” was exceptionally executed in the same room where the dinner club took place. This setting was chosen because the respondents did not have the time to stay after the dinner club had ended, due to their children's bedtimes. The interview therefore took place while eating and in the company of the rest of the dinner club participants. This created much noise and interruptions from the respondents' children and other participants approaching the respondents while we were interviewing them and can have affected the respondents' answers to be less considered and precise.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that since the relationships between the researchers and all of the dinner club respondents were newly established, one cannot make sure that a trustworthiness were established, which characterises the full ethnographic interview. Therefore, there is a risk that the respondents have given the information they think comply with the researchers' agenda, instead of demonstrating their own attitudes and perceptions (Christensen, Schmidt, and Dyhr 2008, 63).

The following reflections are based on the collection of observations, categorised in methodological and analytical notes (Appendix 22). Our role as observers in an unfamiliar setting and intimate eating setting was difficult to approach. Particularly, the dinner clubs “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby” and “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg”, created a bigger amount of obstacles, when striving to fulfil the role as participant-as-observer and blend in among the participants. This was based on the fact that the mentioned dinner clubs took place in the participants' private homes, whereas the remaining dinner clubs took place in a communal house of the residents' association and thereby made the setting more neutral. Furthermore, the number of participants was bigger in the communal houses and it was therefore easier for us to blend in among the participants and perform our observations without creating additional attention. These considerations were particularly made during the first observations, because the more experienced we became, the more relaxed we felt.

In addition, the size of the dinner club affected our ability to observe the themes of the different conversations taking place in the dinner club. The observations performed in the smaller dinner clubs “Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby” and “Neighbour/Family Dinner Club, Frederiksberg” thereby provided a better overview of the topics of conversation than for instance the “Dining Club Galgebakken, Albertslund”, which consisted of almost 90 participants.

While observing we strove to appear as neutral as possible, but based on the general etiquette of social norms we appeared accommodating and interacting as well, and since it is impossible not to be noticed in a small setting (and this however neither was our intention) we did not avoid

accepting each host's hospitality and the remaining participants' curious questions regarding our presence.

Prior to our observation, all participants were informed about our presence and the purpose of it. Based on the high educational level among the participants of the "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby" our role as observers were particularly acknowledged and the participants were highly aware of their role as being objects for observation. This was noticed when talking to some of the participants, who after the conversation said: *"Well, I better step back into my role"* or: *"Oh hello, you are the ones watching us today. Then we better act decent"* (Appendix 24). Because we only had the resources and possibilities to perform one observation in each dinner club we were not able to create a common pattern or a recurring routine, which could have made our presence less interesting for the participants.

As researchers we both had the feeling, that some of the practices performed at the dinner clubs were influenced by our presence.

At the "Neighbour Dinner Club, Valby" the served meal seemed to be much more formal than it used to be. According to the respondent Christian Eriksen, the served food was typically very simple and informal and children and adults were served the same meal (Appendix 12). When visiting the dinner club it seemed like the hostess has changed the standard of the served food. Two dishes were served; a simple and informal meal for the children and a meal that was raised to a gastronomic level, including new interesting ingredients and tastes were served the adults (see picture 2 page 58). It is therefore relevant to consider if these changes of practices were caused by our presence or if it was a coincidence based on the fact that the hostess had additional time on her hands and felt like spoiling her guests. The change of the standard of the food was mentioned by several of the guests as well. It thereby seemed like the hostess had a pre-understanding of what we wanted to observe and tried her best to meet this in a positive manner. These reflections are described in the observational notes in Appendix 24.

Another example of the host changing the normal practices, while we were observing, was observed in the "Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge". After having finished eating the host started clearing the tables and place the dirty tableware in the dishwasher. This was not a routinized process according to the rest of the participants, since each participant normally are supposed to place his or her cutlery, plate and glass in the dishwasher. The reflections are described in Appendix 26. Based on deviations like these the observations have been examined critically.

Based on observations, interviews and the visual descriptive summaries *socialisation* and *relief* were the main motivational factors for participating in the dinner club. The motivation slips that were made into graphs however showed that *economy*, *food* and *local* were also regarded as motivational factors (Figure 5, page 66) and to a much greater extent than the conducted interviews and performed observations showed. The served food was emphasised in the “Dining Club Tinggården, Herfølge” through observations and the interview conducted with one of the participants, but the price for participating in the dinner club was not articulated through either observations or interviews in any of the dinner clubs. This may be based on the fact that economy can be regarded as a taboo to mention.

The minor focus on food gained through interviews and observations may be due to that food is a basic element of a dinner club. The food was initially expected by us as researchers as a key element of a dinner and a social gathering, but our results indicate that the food does not receive the main attention within the dinner clubs. Furthermore, the low prioritisation of the food can be caused by our approach when interviewing the dinner club participants. We could have asked more questions regarding the food, such as the initial planning and grocery shopping, the used cooking methods, reflections about the serving and table setting, which might have led to additional reflections on the choice of ingredients, taste, choice of organic foodstuff, sustainability or the like.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that our approach from the beginning has been to investigate the social practices taking place in a dinner club and not the served food or the health agenda of the event, but since they are considered as important elements of the Danish eating culture, food and health has to some extent been included in the thesis as well. Our one-sided focus on the social perspective of eating throughout the thesis could therefore have affected the answers given by the respondents.

A different perspective on the reliability of this thesis is related to the fact that Danes appear to be aware of the values attached to the commensal meal and thereby do not want to admit if they do not practise it. This is related to the current discourse in modern society, regarding that “real families” should eat together and it can therefore be regarded as a taboo if it is not possible to live up to these expectations of the modern family.

An example that underlines this discourse regarding the commensal meal was seen on one of the motivation slips filled out in the “Dinner Club Ulrik, Østerbro”. The mother of a five-year-old boy helped him fill out his motivation slip and stated: *“I can play with my mom and dad right until 7:55 p.m. because they do not have to cook”* as a reason for participating (Appendix

33). This shows that the parents are very reflective regarding the importance of the commensal meal and the “proper answer” to this question, which based on the current discourse, namely is to spend time with your family.

Based on the mentioned results gained from the various use of methods, it has been an advantage to make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to demonstrate how the methods in combination constitute solid argumentations and has strengthen the validity and reliability of our results.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the statements formed by the resource persons and dinner club participants have been translated from Danish into English when making them into quotations. Bias can appear in this process, since adjustments need to be made during a translation in order to match the English formulations of a sentence to the initial Danish formulation.

7.0.3 DISCUSSION OF THE THESIS' SUBJECT

In this paragraph we will discuss the understandings and practises related to the commensal meal and the dualistic tendency of meals being practised both in individual and social contexts. Furthermore, some different points of view on the cultural expectations on the practice of the commensal meal will be discussed.

Throughout the analysis of our data, the thesis' focus on the status on the commensal meal opens up a discussion on the possible dilemma of the dualistic relationship between the increased individual eating behaviour and the tendency of prioritising the commensal meal for example through a dinner club.

There is a current discourse in society stating that “real families” should eat together and preferably once a day. This wish was supported by each of the interviewed dinner club respondents, who stated that a shared meal was a very important element of their everyday family life. But an increased amount of challenges seem to appear when the common meal has become the ideal. It puts the modern family under pressure since the societal structures, on the one hand, demand that a large part of everyday life is spent at work. On the other hand, the aforementioned discourse is challenging the responsible parent to serve a healthy and home cooked meal, enjoy it together with the entire household while raising their children in a relaxed and cosy atmosphere. Therefore, there is a risk that the discourse of emphasising the ideal meal constellation will make the modern family doubt whether they perform well enough, and that they cannot be characterised as being “*a real family*”.

Simultaneously, Danes are currently focused on several trends regarding the meal and how it should be practised. On the one hand, we are individualised and take use of convenience products, or follows specific customised diets, and, on the other hand, we are searching towards originality and authenticity through cooking, with an increased focus on organics and environmentally sound choices. We constantly seem to increase the requirements to ourselves through demands and ideals like these. It is therefore questionable whether or not this tendency of striving to make everything as ideal as possible enhances or inhibits the commensal meal. Because, when having to cook an environmentally friendly, healthy, tasty and nourishing meal while also having to consider the individual needs and preferences of a family and individual schedules, it can be difficult to find the actual time to sit down and share a meal.

As mentioned by Lotte Holm in the analysis, particularly parents are willing to bend over backwards to accommodate the individual needs and leisure activities of their children in order to have a joint family meal (Appendix 17). Accordingly, one of the main results of this thesis is that socialisation is found to be a cornerstone when participating in a dinner club. But why is the social part of eating of such importance to human beings? Which values does the social meal provide that the individual meal cannot compete with?

Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* is interesting to include in this connection. The hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology proposed by deceased Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), who was an American psychologist. Maslow used the guiding categories; *Physiological, Safety, Belongingness and Love, Esteem, Self-actualization* and *Self-transcendence* to describe the different steps of development that human beings can attain (Maslow 1987). Food is placed at the lowest step of the pyramid along elements like breathing, water and sleep. Our results of the thesis show that food is not the focal point in the investigated dinner clubs. An explanation on this could be that food today is such an easily available and basic commodity in our society, that other elements placed higher in the *Hierarchy of Needs* is of increased interest to us and we thereby attempt to gain more from our meals than just satiety. This being elements like socialisation including local networks, creating friendships or finding a partner, which all were mentioned by the resource persons as reasons for participating in a dinner club today.

Another explanation to why the food appears to be downgraded within the dinner clubs can be based on the fact that a great amount of the participants are within the life phase *Families with Smaller Children* (Kongsholm 2007a, 91). The focus is thereby not particularly on the quality of the served food, but on practicalities like if their children gets something to eat.

Accordingly, people's phases of life are of importance for whom we share our meals with, and

commensality tend to happen to different degrees and within different settings depending on whether you are in for example the *Establishment Phase*, the phase *Family with Children*, or the phase of *Self-realisation* (Kongsholm 2007a, 91). However, the food eaten appears to be as basic that the individual groups of dinner club participants do not show any mentionable differentiation. This is comparable to the following quotation stated by Georg Simmel in the book "Mad, mennesker og måltider" by Lotte Holm:

"The fact that we eat together, is as primitive and inferior a fact in the development of our life values that it is something that every individual certainly have in common with other individuals." (Holm 2013, 23).

Throughout the thesis we have argued that dinner clubs are taking place in various settings and across different phases of lives. Across differences within life phases the participants manage to be integrated in a joint and social event. In relation to this we have come across a number of common food initiatives appearing lately and particularly throughout the last two years (Appendix 1). It is our estimation that these initiatives mainly attract the younger generation placed in *The Identity Phase*, who use such initiatives to meet new people or to find a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Furthermore, 38% of the Danish households are single households (Statistics 2014), which create an increase in individual meals and accordingly an increased search for possibilities to share a meal with other people, including friends and neighbours as well as strangers. The search for additional socialisation is as mentioned visible among young people, who have not found a partner yet, but also among divorced middle-aged people (typically being in *The Self-realisation Phase*) and among widowers (typically being in the phases *The New Senior*, *The Routine Senior* or *The Stay-at-Home Senior*) (Kongsholm 2007a, 91).

In the analysis we have discussed whether the individualism or the commensalism are what characterises the modern Danish eating culture.

Our results show that there is a consensus among the resource persons that the commensal meal is still practised in Denmark and that the development in Denmark is not comparable with the increasing grazing taking place in the United States of America (Meiselman 2009, 16) or the critical interpretations regarding gastro-anomie formed by Fischler (Crowther 2013b, 109) (Appendices 16-21). The two-sided development of prioritising the individual meal and the fact that the commensal meal in Denmark seem to remain stable, indicates that these practises are running simultaneously. The resource persons selected for this thesis all agree on the fact that the increased practise of individual eating can be joined with the commensal meal. In other words, it seems like there is a coexistence of commensalism and individualism in the

modern eating culture. Sometimes individuals need to nurture their bodies and sometimes they want to reproduce their social relations (Appendices 16-21).

In relation to this Lotte Holm proposes that the Danes' future eating patterns will consist of a joint family feast once a week and a routine of individual eating patterns during the weekdays (Appendix 17). Furthermore, Mikkel Jakobsen states that if it is not possible to practise the commensal meal in the family, people will find other arenas for practising it such as schools or workplaces (Appendix 20). To increase the practise of the commensal meal Katrine Klinken suggests an increased use of convenience solutions like the meal box⁶ developed by the company "Aarstiderne" and the online grocery shopping tool "nemlig.com"⁷. These elements can help families find the necessary time for cooking and sharing a proper meal (Appendix 19). Thomas Roland supports this solution in the following quotation:

"I think we are increasing the use of take-away and prepared meals, but we use it as partial ingredients to cook a meal at home [...]. It is still a common meal [...] even though you use some partial ingredients along the way. These things are growing, but that does not necessarily lead to the meal's ultimate decay." (Head of Department Responsibility, Coop Danmark A/S, Thomas Roland, Appendix 21).

Lastly, it can be discussed if our increased practise of individual meals actually is as problematic as expressed by the media. The individual meals are an inevitably and natural part of the societal development and the working structures within Denmark, and if some meals still are shared, it may not be that big a problem if breakfast is skipped from time to time or if lunch is eaten alone in the train. To minimise the discourse of the "ideal family meal" the media could instead focus on better commensal meals in for example childcare institutions, schools or workplaces instead of only focussing on the family meal as being the ideal.

In relation to the discussion on the decline of the commensal meal, a discussion on the definition of a meal is relevant to include as well. If the definition of a meal still is the warm, home cooked meal that is cooked from scratch then yes, the current meal can be regarded as in decline.

However, one could argue that based on the aforementioned societal structures and the dinner club participants' stated need for relief in a busy everyday life, a new definition on what

⁶ A meal box from the company Aarstiderne contains all ingredients for a meal including the recipe. The meal box is delivered directly to the buyer.

⁷ Nemlig.com is an online store where you can buy groceries.

constitutes a meal today is needed. Whether one defines meals by their social nature or by its actual content, it is clear that many meals still occur (Groth et al. 2009). However, it also appears that the meal composition has changed and appears to continue to change (Meiselman 2009, 16). It can therefore be discussed if we need a new definition on the Danish meal and the practices surrounding it that includes these changes. Perhaps Mary Douglas' definition of a meal, consisting of a staple (potato), a centre (meat, fish or egg), trimmings (vegetables) and dressing (gravy) (Kjærnes 2001; O'Doherty 2013, 145) might be out-dated for a meal definition in the year 2014, where an increased amount of convenience solutions and takeout meals are eaten (Prättälä 2000, 191; Mäkelä 2009, 37; Fischler 2011).

Additionally, Danish national dietary surveys typically focus on what Danes eat, when they eat and where they eat, but rarely with whom we practise eating and the reasons for wanting to share a meal with friends or family, or the reasons for eating alone. Knowledge on the current practises of commensal eating would anyhow be beneficial to get a greater insight into, in order to provide a solid background for discussing the future of the commensal meal.

In the conducted interview with the resource person Jon Fuglsang, The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries was mentioned as an important actor when focussing on commensality. This was based on a wish that they would start prioritising the commensal meal in their official dietary guidelines instead of solely focussing on the nutritional part of eating.

In March 2014, The Brazilian health authorities launched a new set of dietary guidelines⁸ that appear to be radically different than the Danish dietary guidelines (Altomkost 2013). While the dietary guidelines in Denmark is concerned with choosing lean meats, avoid soft drinks and eat whole grains every day, the Brazilian health authority has went in a completely different direction and their guidelines consists of recommendations like *"Be critical of commercial advertising"* and *"Plan your time to give meals and eating proper time and space"*. The 10 Brazilian dietary guidelines can be found in appendix 32. The guidelines are remarkable in the way that they consider the social, cultural, economic and environmental implications of food choices.

In our investigation on commensality, particularly, the fifth recommendation is of interest, since it emphasizes the social aspect of eating: *"Eat in company whenever possible"*. In the seventh recommendation food literacy is emphasised: *"Develop, practise, share and enjoy"*

⁸ The dietary guidelines launched by the Brazilian Health authorities are currently at a political hearing and have not been finally approved at the time of writing this thesis.

your skills in food preparation and cooking". This new focus raise the question whether other elements than food can contribute to a more healthy population, e.g. through the act of cooking and eating together with other people and whether the Danish population could benefit from having similar official guidelines.

On an average weekday, only 5% of Danish families with children make cooking a joint activity (Groth and Fagt 2003:9). In none of the five observed dinner clubs children were included when cooking the served meal. This was stated by all of the dinner club respondents. Despite the fact that the dinner clubs are regarded, as a setting for teaching gastro-politics to children, it is apparently not used as a setting for teaching food literacy. A few of the adult dinner club participants mentioned food literacy (they improve their cooking skills) on the motivation slips, as a motivation for participating in the dinner club, but the possibility for increasing children's food literacy were not mentioned by any of the respondents or written on any of the motivation slips. The theme of supporting food literacy among children was emphasised by several of the resource persons, who mentioned home economics, school food programmes and childcare institutions as relevant actants when wanting to support commensality (Appendix 34).

This draws our attention to the future of commensality. What will the Danish eating culture be like in the future if we do not teach children the practical skills of planning and cooking a meal as well as the social values attached to the meal? Andreas Reckwitz states that practices are not only understandable to the agent or the agents who carry it out, it is like-wise understandable to potential observers (Reckwitz 2002), which we believe often are the children since they are not involved in cooking. This may eventually be a challenge for the public health situation, since a lack of knowledge regarding ingredients and basic cooking skills can have serious consequences for children's health when they grow up.

7.1 CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this thesis has been to investigate *how commensality can be understood and practised in the Danish society and what dinner clubs contribute with in a modern eating culture*. The following paragraph will initially present the conclusions on the first part of the research question followed by the conclusions on the second part. Lastly, we will give our estimation on the status of the commensal meal in Denmark in regards to the current debate of the decline of the meal.

Throughout the analysis and the presentation of the results we have identified that commensality is a term that is broadly understood by the selected resource persons as well as the dinner club respondents.

Based on the collected data from the performed literature search and interviews with resource persons we can conclude that commensality is understood as a socialising act, as passing on traditions and norms, as organising and structuring everyday life and lastly as the act of bringing families and friends or even strangers together. However, commensality can also be understood as a challenging practice in the sense that the gastro-politics related to the act of eating together can be uncomfortable, oppressive and exclusive.

When investigating what dinner clubs contribute with we found that both motivational and challenging factors were mentioned by the dinner club participants.

Firstly, the socialisation aspect was found to be a cornerstone. Socialisation contributes with the possibility to discuss practicalities and daily activities with friends, neighbours or family members, across generations and phases of life, in an informal dinner setting. Being part of a dinner club does neither require a certain educational level, a good economy or a specific residence. Therefore, it is a phenomenon that brings people together across standards of living.

Secondly, cooking as a relief was another theme highly valued among the dinner club participants. It was found that the participants valued that their children were welcome in the dinner club and were able to spend time with their friends. At the same time the dinner club contributes with a possibility for the adults to dine out, but without the rules and economical expenses that dining at a restaurant comprises. Additionally, it was found that the investigated dinner clubs contribute to a local sense of belonging as well as a safe and intimate community in an urban area. Lastly, an interesting conclusion on the thesis is that food is rarely what motivates the participants to join a dinner club. The served food has a minor prioritisation and our results show that socialisation can be well functioning despite of the food being very simple.

The challenges connected to participating in a dinner club is that socialisation can be overwhelming based on expectations regarding that you are supposed to engage in the community and conform to underlying gastro-politics, which thereby can be oppressive and appear as a challenge for the inclination to participate. Additionally, the participants described hosting as a quite extensive and stressful task.

Despite the above-mentioned challenges we can conclude that the wish for socialising and other positive gains for example the relief, anyhow, contributes to considerably more gains than challenges.

The Danish meal patterns seem to be more resistant than perhaps anticipated by us as researchers and as expressed in the on-going debate in the Danish media. Even though people sometimes eat alone, they still prioritise and practise the commensal meal surprisingly often. This was discovered through our investigation as well as through the performed literature search.

Our findings suggest a two-sided development that is running simultaneously. This being, on the one hand, a modern eating culture where people prioritise individual needs and are grazing, and on the other hand, the practise of the stabile, commensal meal within private homes or dinner clubs. In other words, there is a coexistence of commensalism and individualism in the modern Danish eating culture.

Summarising the above-mentioned conclusions, the answer to the research question of this thesis is that commensality is understood as the gathering of human beings where the served food is seen as the mean to gather people and socialisation is seen as the main purpose and the outcome. Commensality is practised as an everyday activity that takes place between varied groups of people in an informal eating setting. Thus, dinner clubs contribute with the possibility to socialise and to be relieved from everyday cooking chores. In a modern and changing eating culture, dinner clubs contribute with structure, stability and gastro-politics that establish a frame for human interactions around food.

Lastly, the objective of this thesis has as well been to contribute with new knowledge in the field of food sociology, social eating behaviour and the practise of commensality in a modern eating culture. Little research is done on the practise of commensality in Denmark and we thereby believe that the conclusions stated above can be useful in the future when discussing the commensal meal in Denmark.

7.2 REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

In this thesis it has been the purpose to gain insight into the status of commensality in the year 2014, but a question relevant to rise is, how will the status of commensality be in the future? How will commensality be practised in Denmark ten years from now? Will the tendency of

dinner clubs and more commensal eating increase or will fast food, grazing and eating on the go in the future be a part of what characterises Danish food culture?

The new common food initiatives, such as *Dinnersurfer*, *Madrouletten* and *Cook4food* (Appendix 1) are primarily led by the young generation and the development within this area will therefore be interesting to follow in the coming years. The generation has been raised in a time where consumer influence and climate changes, in earnest, have been on the political agenda as well as in the media. How this generation will handle the relationship to food in the future, is an interesting subject, however difficult to predict. As stated by the resource person Lotte Holm, the way we cook our food today, where each household has its own stove, is neither particular time saving nor climate friendly (Appendix 17). If Danes in the future will stick to values as organic food production and sustainability, and simultaneously have time to socialise, which is expressed as highly important in this thesis, more common food initiatives might be a positively contributor.

In this thesis one of the three pillars of the Master's degree programme Integrated Food Studies has been emphasised, namely the one led by the research group Foodscapes, Innovation and Networks (FINE). This has particularly influenced our choice of scientific approach. However, we would like to mention that the theme of commensality could just as well have been approached from other angles.

In regards to the Meal Science and Public Health Nutrition research group (MENU), which is the second pillar of the education, commensality, the act of eating together, could be viewed in a public health perspective to a greater extend than executed in this thesis. In this perspective it would be relevant to ask if the Danes' habit of grazing and eating lead to an increased intake of calories and which health problems this may create. Does commensal eating contributes positively to our choice of healthy food or will commensal meals and more time spent around the table with family or friends just lead to unhealthy food consumption on an everyday basis?

If we were to emphasise the Design pillar of the education we could investigate the Danes' individual eating and the phenomena of grazing, by taking use of the method *Mapping*⁹ in order to investigate the foodscapes e.g. in a selected urban area. Or we could take use of the

⁹ The method of Mapping is a design instrument used for collecting observed data. Mapping is a creative process, which seeks to enlighten and reveal characteristics of a selected area. A map is used to transform data often seen as iconographic, geometric sketches or illustration of the reality (Tenna Doctor Olsen Tvedebrink). Lecture 5, Food Concept Design, October 14, 2013.

*Customer Journey Map*¹⁰ in order to describe the experiences that consumers gain when passing through a selected area e.g. how cafés and restaurants either promote individual eating with their choice of interior such as high chairs, window view, easy access to fast food and interior design that only invites for a short stay. Or how other initiators arranging pop-up restaurants invite for interactions when sharing a table and sometime even food with an unfamiliar person seated next to you.

These are just some of the perspectives one could imagine the theme commensality as well could be considered from. As earlier described in the thesis we see a great amount of opportunities to approach certain topics from a multi-disciplinary angle.

As soon to be MSc in Integrated Food Studies we know about segmentation of consumers, personas, meal patterns, needs and food choices among certain groups of the population. Additionally, we possess knowledge of the public health situation, just as we are acquainted with the food system, the networks of actors and decision-makers, and the governance and politics within the field. This integrated understanding is what makes a MSc in Integrated Food Studies stand out from other health and food related educations.

One of the competencies we have achieved through the integrated approach is the ability to understand the dynamics of sociology and materiality, such as how human beings behave in relation to food. This socio-technical approach towards commensality have contributed with a holistic point of view that is related to the reality we find ourselves in and can answer how we in the future are able to approach some of the problems revolving around humans and food, which is difficult to solve by mono-disciplinary endeavours.

¹⁰ A customer Journey Map is an oriented "graph" that describes the journey of a user by representing the different touch points that characterise his or her interaction with the service or the product (Søren Bolvig). Lecture 5, Food Concept Design, October 14, 2013.

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