

# Translation of ‘food product quality’

according to four different sales channels and the enactment  
of the small food producer Ø Laks - a case study



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Extended Master Thesis by Natascha Stenhøj Carlson & Nicklas Skov



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## Preface

This study was motivated by our case-based work during the Master Programme, Integrated Food Studies (IFS) at Aalborg University. At IFS, we have a holistic approach to different challenges that occurs when working with food. This holistic approach has motivated us to try and comprehend some of the many dimensions and nuances that are constructed within the world of food. Finally, we have been inspired by our case-based work, during the Master Programme. Hereby, we have worked with the challenges and complexities that small food entrepreneurs and producers meet when they are facing the reality of the complex food system. This was the reason why we chose to work with the case of Ø Laks, which this study has been centred around.

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

An increasing number of small food producers are entering the Danish food scene with the aim of establishing a sustainable business within a market that is dominated by conventional mass-produced food products. In order to get established in the food scene, the small food producer need to be especially aware of the requested quality parameters by the specific sales channels they are aiming for to market their product. This is crucial since it is the ‘food product quality’ that is used to mark product differentiation, and thus to promote sales. In relation to this, this study explored the case of the company Ø Laks, a company that is initiated and driven by the small food producer Mikael at Samsø, and produces cold smoked salmon. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the translation of the concept ‘food product quality’ according to four different sales channels and to assess how Ø Laks may be enacted with these sales channels.

The empirical material used for this investigation is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with five representatives from four different sales channels with relevance to the case of Ø Laks. These include representatives from; the delicatessens store Boutique Fisk, the online food store Smag Danmark, the food market organizer Rebel Food, and the high-end restaurants Era Ora and Tårnet.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) has been used as the analytical framework, together with the aspects involved in determining ‘food product quality’ according to the Total Food Quality Model (TFQM).

Based on this investigation, it was found that many of the narratives by the representatives from the sales channels are a part of a translation process where internal negotiations take place, regarding the construction of ‘food product quality’. In this, the translation is ever changing and never static, and human as well as nonhuman actors are continuously involved in the construction process. Overall, the translation of ‘food product quality’ varied according to the sales channels, in which it is an interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that form the translation. Furthermore, many elements in cohesion affect the enactment of Ø Laks, but the storytelling related to the product was mentioned by all representatives of the sales channels as having paramount importance. Thus, it is storytelling that is expressed as crucial to the enactment of Ø Laks within each of the sales channels investigated in this study. The storytelling should communicate the most crucial elements associated with the translation of the ‘food product quality’ of Ø Laks, which were expressed as being Mikael himself, Samsø as the context, and the production method (the smoking technique).

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## 1 Introduction

*“Denmark has a strong food brand. We need to preserve and develop that position and most preferable, in cooperation between research, business and public institutions. The development of new technology, increasing demands of mass production, new bacteria and new knowledge means that **we in Denmark continuously must strengthen our competences**, both within the large food companies, **among the many small niche producers** and the public authorities.”*

(Food Supply Dk 2013)

Over the past decade, the Danish media and political agendas have increasingly directed attention towards food products, which in some way deviate from the mass produced standard products that often dominate the shelves and coolers in the supermarkets. Furthermore, Danish scholars and politicians have directed significant attention towards food quality, as it is a necessity for the agricultural- and food sectors to focus on, in order to ensure the international competitiveness (Mørk et al. 2015; Regeringen 2015:1). These food products of increased attention are predominantly produced by small food producers, to whom much sympathy is given. Sympathy is especially directed towards those producers that are able to generate cohesion between the product and the story connected to the origin of the product and thereby provide product traceability and maybe even transparency. The tendency for appealing stories to be connected to the commodities or the production of the product contributes to the emerging alternative food system, which functions in parallel to the traditional volume oriented food system (VIFU 2006; Lehner M 2013).

In continuation hereof, an increasing number of small food producers have recently entered or are attempting to enter the foodscape in Denmark, and are seeking the opportunity to make their mark on the national- as well as international food scene. These includes various entrepreneurs of different backgrounds, motivation and levels of ambition. Food is no longer just a nutritional necessity for survival, rather it has also become a medium for experiences, creating social interaction, personal expression, creativity, lifestyle, political agendas and much more. As expressed by (Jan Krag (2008:15), “A sausage is no longer just a sausage but also a conveyor of meaning”. The complexity related to the area of food only makes it much more challenging for the small food producers to navigate within and to find their place in the global market.

### **Navigating within a complex food system**

The structure of the food industry makes it challenging to enter the conventional market with small scale productions, even though the products may offer a variety of different qualities to similar food products (Kidmose et al. 2013:5). Overall, small food producers face a complex and paradoxical situation, in which barriers as well as opportunities are emerging in relation to the globalized and volume oriented food industry. The barriers are very much related to the large food producers that dominate the food scene, since the small producers do not have the same benefits of scale due to their production, and neither do they have strong export organizations to bring them to international market platforms. Small food producers must therefore often rely on what might be called non-traditional or deviating methods in order to get their food products distributed on different national or international market platforms (Ibid.;VIFU 2006). However, the globalization of food production and supply chains, the concentration of processes in food production and several food scandals have simultaneously led to consumer demand for greater product transparency and information about food origin (Feldmann & Hamm 2015). The demand for greater product transparency has caused a spate of alternative food networks and distribution channels centred around the concept of local food, in favour of the small food producers. These includes, among others, Slow Food, Locavore, and Farmers' markets (Feldmann & Hamm 2014). Hence, the emerging focus on local food possibly also serves as an important incubator function for the small food producers, since it provides a low barrier route for the entry of new participants into the food market, and thus allows options for experimenting with new types of food products (Pearson et al. 2011).

### **Quality characteristics as a mean to product differentiation**

There are challenges in all food businesses, but these vary in character, depending on the production method, localisation, and general competences. This also possibly means that many different competences are needed to promote growth in small scale food productions (Hjulager et al. 2016). Small scale food producers often have a high level of expertise related to product production, but very few have professional knowledge about, or experience with, marketing (Ibid.:37). Yet, the significance of marketing is important to mention when addressing the topic of small food producers. In addition, small food producers often have a limited marketing budget, which is a significant challenge as they often face a comprehensive communication task (Brunsø et al. 2005).

For the small food producers to get familiar with the quality parameters of their product, they must obtain an understanding of which quality characteristics their consumer groups request and thereby become aware of which product characteristics imply product quality (Ibid.; Kidmose et al. 2013; Hjulager et al. 2016). The consumer perception of product value can be associated with several elements in combination. According to the Danish food organization VIFU<sup>1</sup> (Hjulager et al., 2016: 21), it is combinatorial fantasy that separates small scale food producers from other food companies, and which is promoting market penetration. In light of this, they suggest that product quality can be implied by several product characteristics according to the consumer segment, and thus also according to the sales channel in which the food product is marketed. Thus far, we have merely brushed the surface of the importance and complexity of the concept of 'food product quality', a large part of which is due to the highly subjective manner of its occurrence. This dynamic concept is precisely what this thesis aims to explore in greater depth.

## 1.1 Problem area

As outlined so far, it is a complex situation that small Danish food producers have to navigate within and there are many different considerations that must be addressed in relation to entering the national and global food market. An example of this, is the case of the company Ø Laks at Samsø in Denmark, within which this thesis project will take its point of departure.

Ø Laks is a small one-man business that deals with the production of cold-smoked salmon, and the company is founded, owned and driven by Mikael Andreassen. The salmon is imported from a farm in the Faeroe Islands, as that is what Mikael finds to be the salmon of the best quality. Thereafter, he smokes and packs the product into its final saleable form. Mikael's main mission with Ø Laks is to produce a high-quality product that gives his customers a memorable taste experience. The origin of the salmon, in combination with the company location at Samsø, is what the name Ø Laks is meant to emphasise.

As a small food producer, Mikael is facing various of challenges. The main challenge that he has currently, is that he has not yet determined the sales channel(s) to be pursued in order to reach the national market and establish a financial foundation for his food business to rely on

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<sup>1</sup> VIFU: Videncenter for fødevareudvikling may be translated to *Center for knowledge concerning food development*.

(Appendix 2). This is despite the fact that he has assessed- and tried to approach several potential national sales channels, none of which he can imagine Ø Laks being marketed through on a long-term basis. Although Mikael is active and engaged in seeking the “right” national sales channel, he has not yet been able to establish a sustainable food business or an economic surplus.

As mentioned previously, one of the most important considerations when aiming to implement a new food product on the market, is the consumer’s request for the product, and furthermore to gain an understanding of the quality parameters associated with this request. This seems to be one of the most comprehensive challenges for small Danish food producers in general, since they often have to rely on product distribution through different national sales channels in order to ensure business sustainability (Hjulager et al., 2016). Thereby, it is crucial for the business success of small food producers to focus on ‘food product quality’, and to gain an understanding of the meaning of the concept in accordance with the sales channels they are pursuing.

### 1.1.1 What are we going to investigate and why is this study relevant?

In addition to the above, the quality parameters differentiate depending on the customer segment and thereby also according to the specific sales channels. Furthermore, it can be a comprehensive and complex task for the small food producers to embrace when determining which quality characteristics to emphasise when pursuing different sales channels for their products to be distributed. Thus, the determination of ‘food product quality’ is a subjective matter, in which the definition of the concept is perceived differently according to the various actors within the food chain. This means that food characteristics associated with food quality cannot be generalized in this regard. Due to the subjectivity and actor dependency of understanding ‘food product quality’, this thesis takes its point of departure in the specific case of the small Danish food producer; Ø Laks, with the aim to understand how four different sales channels perceive ‘food product quality’, and how the product of Ø Laks can match these perceptions.

Moreover, everything in the food system is constructed by interactions as well as tensions between human and nonhuman actors - e.g. different human requests and developing technologies. Therefore, we will, with this thesis, aim to investigate the concept of ‘food product quality’ supported by an analytical framework that embraces the explorative nature of

this study, as well as addresses human and nonhuman actors on equal terms. We will thus turn to the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) when investigating 'food product quality' as a concept that is *translated* through actor-networks, and consists of interactions between human as well as nonhuman actors. ANT offers compatibility between social science and technology, and is therefore preferable as analytical framework, particularly when exploring a case and a concept that are associated with the complex and multidimensional scene of the Danish food system.

In continuation of the above, is only when we have explored how the sales channels perceive 'food product quality' that we are able to suggest how Ø Laks might match or interact with the sales channels. More specifically, we will investigate the *translation* of 'food product quality' according to four sales channels, which means that we aim to understand the interactions of actor-networks - the entities that form the concept. In this sense, we explore the quality parameters associated with specific sales channels. Furthermore, when aiming to suggest how Ø Laks might match the quality perceptions of the sales channels, we relate this to the interaction process called *enactment* according to ANT. Enactment will describe the process in which the 'food product quality' of Ø Laks can be adapted or accepted by the sales channels. The analytical framework offered by ANT is presented descriptively in section 5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework.

Finally, with the increasing focus on 'food product quality' within the food system and among the many associated actors, there arises a sharpened need to understand the many dimensions and nuances related to the reality and definition of the concept. Often the concept of quality has become rigid, or *black boxed*, according to ANT, rather than been acknowledged as a complex and nuanced phenomenon that is continuously redefined according to the context (i.e. the actor-network) in which it is constructed. We will therefore argue that the concept of 'food product quality' is often taken for granted, rather than expounded to understand its construction, as a part of the interlanguage between the many junctures within the food system. In this regard, we hope that this thesis will contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the complex and nuanced matter of 'food product quality'.

## 1.2 Research question

The above introduction, problem area, and aim of this thesis, have motivated the following research question:

*How is 'food product quality' translated according to four different Danish sales channels? And how can the food product of Ø Laks be enacted with these sales channels?*

## 1.3 Delimitations

With this research, we aim to explore the translation of the concept of 'food product quality' according to four different sales channels, with the point of departure in the case of Ø Laks. Moreover, we will aim to investigate how Ø Laks may be enacted with the sales channels. In this regard, the scope of this thesis project is solely centred around aspects that are found relevant to the case of Ø Laks and the choices of delimiting aspects to focus on have therefore occurred continuously during the research process. This is especially in relation to the many challenges of various character that the company Ø Laks is facing, as a result of which, we have made several limitations of the research areas in order to narrow down the research focus. This process of delimiting areas was conducted with the mapping approach of Situational analysis by Adele Clark (2005), which is described further in the section 4. Methodology.

In relation to the focus of this research, it is not the aim to find solutions to the challenges that Ø Laks is facing, nor to seek a generalised outcome of relevance to all small food producers. Instead, we will define this study as an exploratory single case-study, where the aim is to take point of departure in the situation of Ø Laks and thereby investigate the concept of 'food product quality'. This will be done in relation to four different sales channels, and thereafter we aim to speculate how this could affect the situation of Ø Laks when approaching the different sales channels, with the aim to enact. The overall purpose of this approach is to explore the notion that the small food producers and their products possess different quality characteristics, which they must be conscious of when aiming to differentiate themselves on the market and among the sales channels. Furthermore, the small food producers need to acknowledge that the identification and definition of 'food product quality' correlates with the quality parameters of the many different sales channels within the comprehensive foodscape in which they are trying to become established. ANT is a relevant analytical framework in this regard, because quality parameters related to food products, consists of multiple dimensions that involve both human

and nonhuman actors. In the case of Ø Laks, it could for instance be that it is the origin of the salmon (nonhuman) that is of crucial importance for the sales channels when assessing the quality. It could be the production technique (nonhuman), and it could be Mikael's personality (human) that adds value to the product. Furthermore, it is our opinion that when navigating within the food system and among its actors, we need to acknowledge that new food products increasingly involve new technologies, as well as intangible and symbolic elements. ANT offers us an approach that enables us to investigate the complex matter related to the construction of 'food product quality' according to four different sales channels.

In continuation of the above, this thesis is only going to focus on the sales channels that Ø Laks have already (in some way) been in contact with. However, with the central focus being different sales channels, we acknowledge that it concerns the matter of economics and business marketing. However, we will not focus on the economic aspects of being a small food producer, neither will we address the potential benefit of changing Ø Laks' business approach. Furthermore, we do not outline the specific customer characteristics and differentiations of the consumer segments related to the different sales channels.

Since Ø Laks produce a product of cold-smoked salmon that originates from the Faroe Islands, the case is very relevant regarding discourses and discussions concerning the extensive global industry of salmon farming. One of the discourses that could be relevant to mention is related to the discussions about farmed salmon contra wild salmon, and which species is the healthiest due to the chances of containing heavy metals and pesticides. Nonetheless, this is a complex and multidimensional aspect of the case relevance that we have chosen to omit, together with its affiliation with the general fish farming industry.

Overall, we have a pragmatic approach to this research, meaning that we have mainly focused on following the leads that have arisen from the case work, such as via mapping approaches, interviews, and different academic literature. Also, we have aimed to emphasise the use of relevant academic methods and theories with a practical usability in mind.



## 1.4 Clarification of concepts

Many different concepts will be used within this thesis report and some of them deserve to be more specifically clarified in order to explain their meaning within the context that they are used. The most important concepts to outline are what is meant by *Small food producer*; *Sales channel*; *Food product quality*; *Translation*; *Enactment*.

### 1.4.1 Small food producer

Within this thesis we use the term *Small food producer* to identify the case-person Mikael due to Ø Laks being a one-man business. Meaning that every aspect related to the company, concerns Mikael in one way or the other. However, company size has been officially defined by different government agencies, and there is a distinction between micro, small or medium-sized enterprises. The European Commission has stated that these are the “*engine of the European economy*”(European commission 2013:3). In Europe, most companies are defined as micro-enterprises, which are companies with less than 10 employees, and in Denmark 92,51 % of all companies fit this description (Syddansk Universitet 2016), including Ø Laks. Although we are aware of the definitions by the *European Commission*, this research still includes studies where all micro, small and/or medium-sized enterprises are examined and we will throughout the report use the term *small food producer*.

### 1.4.2 Sales channels

There are four different potential *sales channels* of Ø Laks that are examined within this study, and representatives from each are included. These are respectively the online food store, Smag Danmark, the delicatessens store, Boutique Fisk, the food market organizer, Rebel Food, and the restaurants Era Ora and Tårnet. When we use the term sales channel in general, we refer to every market platform in which it is possible to market a food product and we do not distinguish between conventional- and alternative distribution systems.

In general, a sales channel can be defined as:

*“A way of bringing products or services to market so that they can be purchased by consumers. A sales channel can be direct if it involves a business selling directly to its customers, or it can be indirect if an intermediary such as a retailer or dealer is involved in selling the product to customers”* (Businessdictionary 2017)

Thereby, the term sales channel used in this thesis refers to any market platform that provides a sales potential for food products of small food producers. However, only four categorised sales channels will be directly approached in relation to the current case study.

### 1.4.3 Food product quality

The concept of '*food product quality*' has a central role in this study. Although quality is a term that is widely used in various contexts, it also takes on very different meanings depending on the context. In academic- as well as popular literature, quality is often a term that is taken for granted, in which its definition is often used as rigid and of implicit meaning. It could be argued that it is a literary paradoxical term since it is used interchangeably while it is continuously redefined. Scholarly literature that approaches the concept of food quality will be presented in depth in the upcoming section 3. State of the art - 'food product quality'

'Food product quality' is associated with the business success parameter of small food producers. Thus, the focus on food product quality within this study arises from the importance for small food producers to differentiate themselves and their product on the market. In this regard, it is important for food producers to focus on product quality, since it is important for their sales potential that they are able to emphasise the product characteristics that imply product quality. 1

In continuation of the above, we aim to embrace the contextual and (inter)subjective meaning of the concept 'food product quality'. Therefore, we have initially defined how we perceive the meaning of the concept and it is thus our interpretation of the concept that creates the foundation for the empirical work. Our perception of 'food product quality' is very open and emphasises every single aspect of the food product that makes it attractive (to customers and sales channels). This is for instance, what appeals to the customers in relation to the context in which the product is produced and marketed (e.g. that the place of production can affect the perception of the product), the production method, or simply the physical appearance of the product. When we conducted the interviews with representatives from the four investigated sales channels, the quality of the product was explored according to what is perceived as *value creating aspects*, *characteristics*, or *elements* of the product. The interview guides (Appendix 1) provide specifications regarding how we have explored this matter in relation to the different sales channels.

#### 1.4.4 Translation

ANT function as the analytical framework of this research and the concept of *translation* is central in this regard. Translation is a rather abstract concept, which covers the interrelated dynamic processes that occur in heterogeneous actor-networks when constructing a common understanding about a reality. In this sense, the sales channels' translation of 'food product quality' refers to all aspects - both human and nonhuman actors - that apply to the quality parameters. Meaning, that it is the interrelated elements that, in cohesion, construct the concept of 'food product quality'.

#### 1.4.5 Enactment

*Enactment* is, in parallel to translation, the analytical concept that is used to investigate the research question of this thesis. Enactment and translation are interrelated processes, where enactment is the active process between the actors that influence the translation "outcome". More specifically, the potential enactment of Ø Laks with the different sales channels is proposed with point of departure in the different sales channels' translation of 'food product quality'. Enactment involves the perception that every actor contributes by acting together and thereby create a common reality among the actors. In this regard, we are going to match the elements that construct 'food product quality' according to the sales channels with the product quality characteristics of Ø Laks. Thereby, we will be able to suggest if there are specific elements associated with Ø Laks, that would be preferable to focus on when aiming for sale at the specific sales channels.

ANT and the central concepts of translation and enactment are unfolded more in depth in section 5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework.

### 1.5 Structure of the thesis and reading guide

This subsection includes a table that provide a short introduction of what will be presented in the different sections throughout this report. For the ease of reading there is provided cross-references that can be used by pressing the section name. Cross-references has been inserted continuously throughout the entire report, which applies for the main sections, subsections, tables, and figures.

Presentation of the sections	Short outline of section content
Section 1 Introduction	This section introduces the problem area and research question related to the case study of the company, Ø Laks. Subsequently, the most important concepts used within this thesis are outlined. These includes, Small food producer, Sales channels, Food product quality, Translation, and Enactment.
Section 2 Background - setting the scene	This section presents background knowledge about the researched matter, and thereby sets the scene for this thesis project, as well as it support its relevance. It will briefly describe our progress during the initial research process, and furthermore address the relevance of the study from an IFS perspective. Finally, the section brings a perspective on some of the challenges related to the reality of small food producers.
Section 3 State of the art - 'food product quality'	State of the art outlines relevant research related to the concept of quality and highlights some of the most important from the perspective of our research question, regarding how quality is translated according to four different national sales channels. Aspects of the Total Food Quality Model will be descriptively presented, since these aspects of the model have functioned as conceptual framework for this research, when aiming to answer the research question.
Section 4 Methodology	Within this section, we are presenting the methodological approaches used for the performance of this investigation. This includes an in-depth presentation of the research approach.
Section 5 Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework	This section present Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the analytical framework of this investigation. Hereby, the section outlines how ANT functions as ontological and epistemological support when conducting the empirical analysis.
Section 6 Case description - introducing Ø Laks	The case description provides in-depth insight to the case of Ø Laks, in this research takes its point of departure. The insight provided during this section is based on information that we have from interviews with Mikael, who is the owner of Ø Laks.
Section 7 Presenting the sales channels	Within this section we present the four sales channels investigated in this research, which are represented by five different representatives. These include, the Delicatessens store Boutique Fisk, the online food shop Smag Danmark, the food market organizer Rebel Food, and the restaurants Era Ora and Tårnet.
Section 8 Analysis	This section presents the empirical analysis of this thesis project, where we, in cohesion, have used ANT as analytical framework and the TFQM as conceptual framework. Specifically, we are going to use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the analytical framework when approaching the empirical material that has been obtained through interviews with the representatives from four different sales channels.
Section 9 Discussion	In this section we reflect upon the research, with regards to the findings, the analytical and methodological approaches used for the this research. Furthermore, we will reflect upon which future research perspectives that might be interesting and relevant to address.
Section 10 Conclusion	The conclusion will firstly provide a short sum up on the problem area related to the case of Ø Laks together with a description of the research objective. Secondly and most importantly, this section will conclude the main findings of this research. Finally, we will give our final comment on the more overall relevance of this thesis project in relation to future research.

## 2 Background - setting the scene

The intention of this section is to summarise the background of this thesis and provide a short description of our work method during the first period of the study. This will also, with regard to our background and interest, include an explanation of the relevance and why we find this study interesting. Thus, the first subsection of the work method will elaborate on our initial thoughts and actions, and further elaborate and clarify the process of answering the research questions.

During our time at the Master Program, Integrated Food Studies (IFS) we have encountered many positive experiences with case based work, and we find it inspiring to work with real-life cases and the challenges in this regard. Therefore, we quickly decided to study the case of Ø Laks when Mikael invited us to work with some of the challenges that he is facing as a small food producer. Primarily, because we saw relevant and interesting issues in the marketing strategy of Ø Laks and secondly because we wanted to conduct exploratory and hands-on work with a newly started food producer. Thus, the forthcoming subsections include: (1) *Work method during the initial period of the thesis*; (2) *Our use of expert interviews*; (3) *Why this study is interesting.*; (4) *The IFS perspective*; (5) *The challenges of being a small food producer.*

### 2.1 Work method during the initial period of the thesis

During the initial phase of the thesis we discovered many interesting themes in which to lay our focus, but in the same period we learned that it was more comprehensive than first imagined. Our ambition from the beginning was to work abductively and exploratively, which resulted in, that we in the process devoted a lot of time to research and systematically going through the knowledge acquired from our empirical gatherings. Thus, to choose the right direction, we needed more time than first expected and therefore we see it fit to present the process and to explain our thoughts and methods, and consequently, why the thesis turned out the way it did.

*“Exploratory search can be used to describe an information-seeking problem context that is open-ended, persistent, and multi-faceted; and to describe information-seeking processes that are opportunistic, iterative, and multi-tactical. In the first sense, exploratory search is commonly used in scientific discovery,*

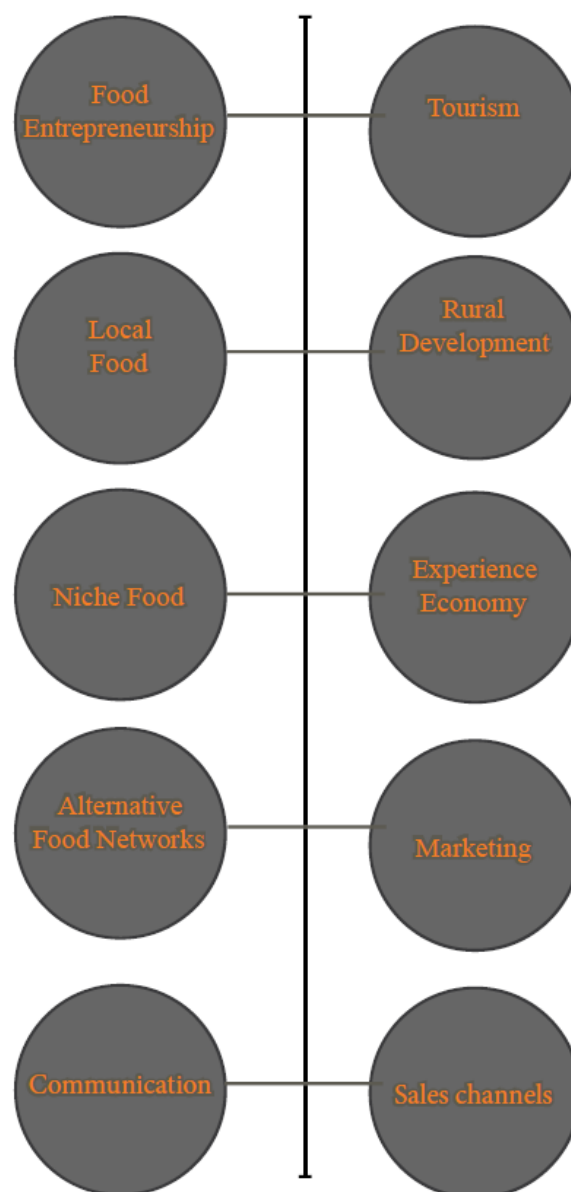
*learning, and decision making contexts. In the second sense, exploratory tactics are used in all manner of information seeking and reflect seeker preferences and experience as much as the goal.” (White et al. 2008:1)*

‘The quote presents how an exploratory search has been a part of our information search process from the beginning, and how we have tried to identify the area we wanted to work within. As seen in figure 1, many subjects were considered important, and often demanded time when we systematically had to analyse the relevance of this thesis. Thus, this complex activity of navigation through knowledge can be compared to finding a way through maze where you, on your way to the prize in the middle, can only see one step ahead, and for each new step you are confronted with new options (White et al. 2006)

*“Beginning to gather information on a new topic, or trying to resolve an ill-defined problem, can be likened to the exploration of a maze in the physical world; the process is fraught with uncertainty, one is never able to see more than one step ahead at any given time, and the navigation of the maze comprises a series of on-the-fly selections that can impact the success of the journey.” (White et al. 2006:1)*

The way through the maze provided us with many interesting twist and turns, and many of them, for short periods of time, were considered as the primary problem fields of the thesis. During an interview, Mikael informed us about his company Ø Laks and his network, and this

**Figure 1:** Overview of themes that were considered in the beginning of the thesis.



information provided us with actors and problems in which to follow (see figure 2 for an overview of the process). All themes that were brought up during the interviews were thoroughly examined, which helped us to grasp the complexity of the case, and at the same time encouraged us to unpack the knowledge that we gained. This in-depth exploration of the case led us to situational analysis by Adele Clark (2005). See section 4.3. Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis for further explanation.

## 2.2 Our use of expert interviews

As a result of the interviews with Mikael, and our own scholarly ballast, we selected to consult the co-owner of the company Nordic Foodworks, Torsten Jakobsen (Appendix 3). Torsten Jakobsen provides managerial and strategic advice to companies, networks and organisations. Nordic Foodworks is a consultancy agency that helps food entrepreneurs with guidance and in the creation of concepts that include the flavour, history, visual identity and effective staging on the market.

Thus, our aim, and the motivation for the choice of this expert informant, was to acquire insight into the issues of being a small food producer and furthermore to get insight about Ø Laks from a perspective other than Mikael's. Hence, the interview helped us gain some perspective, and a better understanding of Ø Laks, but it also raised the questions about how quality is communicated, translated and enacted between actors and sales channels. An example of this can be seen in table 1 where five quotes present part of Ø Laks' understanding of its own product. An understanding that might not necessarily be shared by others. The illustration shows quite well how Mikael sees his own product to be of superior quality, and that he perceives other smoked products not to be of a particularly high quality, which we found very interesting. Moreover, our dialogue about the communication between Ø Laks and sales channels brought us to seek the Integrated Food Studies' (IFS) perspective, as represented by the Coordinator, Thorkild Nielsen.

It could be argued that there are some sampling errors, or a selection bias, as a results of the fact that the experts and informants had knowledge about Ø Laks, Mikael and the product (Bryman 2012). It is also possible that our interviewees could have refrained from providing information. However, we have still chosen the process based on the assumption that the best information for us, in relation to the research question, would be available from informants



who had knowledge about the product, and would therefore be able to provide the best description of the perceived quality.

During the next section our considerations about the relevance in a IFS perspective will be clarified, and a presentation of the most common issues of being a small food producer will follow.

**Table 1:** Quotes from the first interview with Mikael, illustrations of his thoughts on quality.

Mikael's statements about his ambitions of quality
<p><i>"I would define it [Ø Laks] as a one-man company where quality is superior, and the concept revolves around it. I think, without insulting anyone that smoked food today, generally is not of a particularly high quality. "</i></p> <p>(Appendix 2:03)</p>
<p><i>"I think it's good that we have this dialogue because it makes the consumers aware that there is a difference in where the salmon comes from, and also that consumers starts making demands for quality."</i></p> <p>(Appendix 2:04)</p>
<p>[Ø Laks vision] <i>"Make sure to constantly maintain a high quality and make sure it remains unique and it will not be industrial."</i></p> <p>(Appendix 2:05)</p>
<p><i>"Quality is really important to me. It is quite clearly the focus point for my product. It's quality."</i></p> <p>(Appendix 2:06)</p>
<p><i>"My salmon is close to my heart and it's high quality, so I cannot be met by some dilettante who does not know the difference between a mackerel and herring."</i></p> <p>(Appendix 2:29)</p>

## 2.3 Why this study is interesting.

Denmark has a strong and globally oriented food sector, which develops knowledge and solutions, and it is internationally known for high food safety and high-quality food products. All of these competencies combined, have resulted in exports of approximately 148 billion Danish kroner – equal to nearly a quarter of total Danish exports(MAPP, Aarhus Universitet



et al. 2014; Regeringen 2015). Thus, knowledge about food quality is especially important for the Danish exports and competitiveness on the global market, and some of the most common quality parameters include the focus on local food, trust in the Danish food system, food transparency and sustainability (Fødevarepartnerskabet 2016). In addition, Denmark has also attracted attention on the global culinary scene with catalysts such as the opening of Noma in 2003, the New Nordic Food Manifesto in 2004(The Nordic Council n.d.), and Rasmus Kofoeds success in Bocuse d'Or in 2011 (Københavns Kommune 2016). Furthermore, the global food market has recently directed much attention towards Danish food markets, street food vendors and events, such as the annual food festival, Copenhagen Cooking, which celebrates the gastro-scene of Copenhagen. (Ibid.). These events have contributed to a more creative process when creating food concepts, and it is argued that an increased cooperation between food actors will increase opportunities for continued development and greater market access.

*“The food scene of Copenhagen has been through a major development and during the past six years, approximately 6.000 new jobs have been created in the metropolitan area.” (Københavns Kommune 2016:11)*

The quote originates from a strategy proposal developed by the municipality of Copenhagen, which focus on keeping Copenhagen as a place of gastronomic development, where innovative projects and food experiences create new professions (Ibid.). It is stated in the strategy proposal, that the municipality of Copenhagen would like to contribute to the continuation of the rising food trends. Thus, in collaboration with the food industry, four suggestions for further development were proposed, including the following (Københavns Kommune 2016):

- More focus on food entrepreneurs and small food producers to help Copenhagen be perceived as an internationally recognized city for eating.
- A need for competent service staff, and further career opportunities.
- Better start-up opportunities for innovative entrepreneurs.
- Stronger networks within the food business.

With these actions in motion, we see multiple reason for IFS to collaborate with the various actors in the foodscape, which will be presented in the following subsection.

## 2.4 The IFS perspective

*“Initiatives to strengthen innovation and business. This set of initiatives include the promotion of the food sector in emerging partnerships and to use the state and regional Innovation and Technology programs. It includes new structures of alliances between universities and knowledge environments that can help solve challenges like when small-scale food producers increase production but still want to maintain a high craft-based quality.”* (Hjulager et al. 2016:7)

There is a request for cooperation between actants, and with the new course at IFS, *Food and Entrepreneurship*, we can see a compatibility with the ideas and future perspective of the IFS education. The Master program, IFS is an interdisciplinary study program that addresses national and global challenges in the food sector, and the education program is based on a combination of three different pillars: *Food Sociology and Innovation*, *Public Health*, and *Design* (Aalborg Universitet 2017). The holistic approach offered by IFS provides the ability to navigate in a complex world of food related situations, both in the public and private sector (Ibid.). Student coordinator from IFS at Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Thorkild Nielsen (Appendix 4), comments in an interview for this study that he perceives IFS students as *food-translators*, implying that the students possess skills necessary to translate complex knowledge, as well as the ability to communicate this knowledge to individuals outside the food sector.

*“If you want to manoeuvre in this universe, you need some actors who understand food, and to survive in this world, you need tools to translate. Many of them (Kitcheneurs) have no (food) education, but they’ve got flair and good ideas.”*  
(Appendix 4:4)

During the education, IFS students are introduced to the field of food entrepreneurship and small food producers through courses, excursions, projects and collaboration with Kitcheneurs from Kitchen Collective<sup>2</sup>. Working hands-on with these creative minds has had a major influence on our decision to work with a small food producer. During this study, we

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<sup>2</sup> “Kitchen Collective is a practical, culinary breeding ground, where gastronomic ideas can be tested, developed and produced on a smaller scale. Kitchen Collective enables culinary entrepreneurs to make their ideas appetizing by offering production facilities at Foodscape Lab AAU” (Aalborg University 2017)

have become more aware of the challenging reality that many small food producers are facing, which involves various of aspects. Thus, the next section will clarify some of the most challenging issues of being a small food producer.

## 2.5 The challenges of being a small food producer

Small food producers operate under many different shapes of behaviour and they are driven by a countless number of motivations, thus it would be reasonable to state that much of each company's competitiveness is generally derived from their agility and focus, rather than from their resources (Hjulager et al. 2016; O'Connor & Kelly 2006).

As a result of the interviews with Mikael, we have acquired knowledge about some of the issues of being a small food producers, and to see if the problems of Ø Laks were relatable with other small businesses, we consulted the report 'Qualitative study of small and medium-sized food producers' experience in increasing the sales of their products' (MAPP, Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014). The aim of the report was to examine the complexity and difficulties related to being a small food business, in which interviews were conducted with 10 regional business owners and leaders, and three interviews with experts in the market for Danish regional food (Ibid.).

The interviews were conducted to provide insight into the various challenges that could be located within the small producers' business models. The framework for the interviews and observations were based on Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2010), which includes 10 themes (Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014), which are presented in Table 2

**Table 2:** The Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder (2010) is a method of describing and developing a business model for a company or project. We have used to as a tool to identify issues of being a small food producer.

Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder, 2010).	
<b>1. Key resources</b>	Economy. Qualified labour. Management of the company.
<b>2. Key activities</b>	Production process. The professionalized production. Product variants.
<b>3. Key partners</b>	Networks, Time as a scarce resource. Cooperation with scientific institutions.
<b>4. Product value</b>	Flexibility. Quality. Organic. Price. Trustworthiness.
<b>5. Sales channels and distribution</b>	Retail. Institutions and larger kitchens. private sales. Farmer markets. Trade. sales via the Internet. Distribution.
<b>6. Customer segments and customer relationships</b>	Product differentiation. Private label. Stronger customer relationships.
<b>7. Macroeconomic forces</b>	Consolidation of the food market. The financial crisis. Supportive organizations.
<b>8. External conditions</b>	Legislation. Food control. Food safety. Labelling and quality standards.
<b>9. Marketing Activities</b>	Webpages. Social media. Events and Sponsorships.
<b>10. Growth strategy</b>	growth's impact on the quality of products.

In this regard, it should be noted that not all producers experienced the same problems and, due to the individuality of the producers, it was not possible to identify single barriers that systematically hinder small food producers from exploiting their potential (Hjulager et al. 2016). Furthermore, depending on the production method, localisation, and general competencies, each company has different challenges (Hjulager et al. 2016). Consequently, small food producers can be considered vulnerable in competitive contexts because they do not have access to the same resources as larger companies (Saru 2007).

As outlined in table 2 there is a significant number of areas in which small producers can experience challenges, and they can face many of them simultaneously. However, due to our empirical knowledge provided by Mikael (the owner of Ø Laks), expert interviews and our exploratory approach, we have chosen to direct our attention towards the sales channels and their perception of food product quality.

### 2.5.1 Sales channels

The challenge of how to reach the market and choose the sales channels is one that is most common among small food producers (Hjulager et al. 2016). Some producers pursue the more traditional sales channels, such as the retail chains, while others use the alternative sales channels, such as private distribution via food markets. Overall, most of the small food producers are testing their market potential through improvisation and a trial-and-error approach, where they experiment with different ways of distributing their products and targeting different types of customers (Table 2) (Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014). Each sales channel has its advantages and disadvantages, thus it is the company's mission to decide which one is the most suitable in the given context. Many of the food producers attempt to sell their products in the traditional retail chains, but they express scepticism because of the strict procurement processes and policies, which are difficult to comprehend, and they have difficulties assessing whether it is profitable (MAPP, Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014). Consequently, the producers distribute their products outside traditional sales channels, through more alternative ones, such as restaurants, specialty shops, food markets or directly to the end-customer via the internet.

Some producers cooperate with colleagues, meaning that they help each other with sales and distribution. The distribution process is especially troublesome, and is an area in which they experience demanding challenges, largely because it extends beyond their core competencies.

### 2.5.2 Quality

Quality is a recurring theme when interviewing small producers (MAPP, Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014; Hjulager et al. 2016), and the story is often a fundamental part of the food product and what the food producers can offer their customers. Quality is linked with the identity, history of the food producers, and they identify price, reliability, transparency and flexibility as an essential part of the product value (MAPP, Aarhus Universitet et al. 2014). Product price in particular is often linked to quality, since the producers generally have problems competing

solely on price, and therefore, to get the appropriate price the quality needs to be noteworthy (Ibid.). Furthermore, it was evident that some of the producers' growth strategies were inadequate, where some even seemed sceptical about growing their business because they were anxious about how a growth would affect their product quality (Ibid.).

### 3 State of the art - 'food product quality'

This section will outline the concepts of quality and highlight the relevant research to our question of how quality is translated according to four different sales channels. To explore the concept of 'food product quality', we have investigated aspects of the *Total Food Quality Model* by Grunert et al. (1996). The model provides an overview of the complexity of working with the concept of 'food product quality' and it has helped us to work more systematically, unfolding the concept of quality with categories that make it possible for us to analyse specific aspects that are associated with 'food product quality'. The following subsections include:

*(1) Literature criteria; (2) What is food quality?; (3) A marketing perspective on 'food product quality'.; (4) Defining quality; (5) The Total Food Quality Model; (6) State of the art - summary.*

#### 3.1 Literature criteria

The purpose of the literature review is to provide an overview of publications and other relevant sources in relation to quality and sales channel. The sources we have chosen cover scholarly journal articles, books, government reports, and web sites. Thus, the aim of the literature review was to provide a critical account of the current state of research, presenting primary and new sources. Hence, we have worked systematically using libraries, and relevant online databases; ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight (British Food Journal) SAGE journals, Ebscohost, Web of Science Core Collection (Thomson Reuters), Aalborg University (Primo) and Google Scholar.

The relevant literature was found by conducting searches of the combination of words such as: Food, Quality, Perceived Quality, and Consumer, Denmark, Europe. Initially, focus was on recent literature originating from Denmark, but during the process the research went further back in time, and to other countries, similar to Denmark. See Table 3 below for an overview of the literature.

**Table 3:** Overview of the literature used in relation to investigate 'food product quality'

Authors	Year	Title	Journal/Magazine/Institution
Mørk, Trine Tsalis, George Grunert, Klaus G Bech-Larsen, Tino	2015	Kvalitetsindeks 2014 Et instrument til kortlægning af fødevarer-forbrugernes kvalitetsopfattelser	Aarhus Universitet DCA 56- Nationalt Center for Fødevarer og Jordbrug
Kidmose, Ulla Henckel, Poul Mortensen, Grith	2013	Udredning om fødevarekvalitet	Aarhus Universitet DCA 16- Nationalt Center for Fødevarer og Jordbrug
Brunsø, Karen Fjord, Thomas Ahle Grunert, Klaus G	2002	Consumers' Food Choice and Quality Perception	Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University, MAPP Centre, 2002.
Meiselman, Herbert L.	1995 vol. 6 issue 3	Quality: Introduction to the special issue	Food Quality and Preference
Ophuis, Peter A M Oude Trijp, Hans C M Van	1995 vol. 6 issue 3	Perceived quality – A market driven and consumer oriented approach	Food Quality and Preference
Cardello, Armand V	1995 vol. 6 issue 3	Food quality: Relativity, context and consumer expectations	Food Quality and Preference
Grunert, Klaus G	1995 vol. 6 issue 3	Food Quality: a Means-End Perspective Three Views on Food Quality	Food Quality and Preference
Olson, Jerry C. Jacoby, Jacob	1972	Cue utilization in the quality perception process	Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference of the of the Association for Consumer Research
Steenkamp, Jan-Benedict Van Trijp, Hans	1996	Quality guidance: A consumer-based approach to food quality improvement using partial least squares	Eur. Rev. Agric. Econ.
Grunert, Klaus G Larsen, Hanne Hartvig Madsen, Tage Koed Baadsgaard, Allan	1996	Market Orientation in Food and Agriculture	Market Orientation in Food and Agriculture
Poulsen, Carsten Stig Juhl, Hans Jørn Kristensen, Kai Bech, Anne C. Engelund, Erling	1996	Quality guidance and quality formation	Food Quality and Preference



### 3.2 What is food quality?

*“Is the concept so broad that we cannot get our arms around it? Is it so vague that we cannot define it adequately? Is it so qualitative and so individual that we cannot measure it in any meaningful way?”* (Meiselman 1995)

The concept of quality is an important aspect concerning the food sector, and both producers and consumers are becoming more aware of the fact, that quality characteristics often determine the acceptance of a food product (Mørk et al. 2015). The special issue of *Food Quality and Preference* (volume 6, 1995) provides an overview of the many ways to approach the concept of quality, and clarifies why it has not been clearly defined, but varies according to the product category and to the consumers' preferences; the *perceived quality*. In the issue of *Food Quality and Preference* (Elsevier 1995) each contributor to the special issue was asked to define quality and how it can be measured. The articles were then commented on by other authors in the same issue and in the following sections, some of these articles and comments will be used to present our understanding of quality.

Food quality can generally be divided into objective and subjective quality. Objective quality comprises the characteristics or cues of the products that can be measured and documented, while subjective quality is concerned with the consumer's perception (Kidmose et al. 2013). The concept of quality characteristics or cues was developed by Olson & Jacoby (1972) and is a broad concept regarding various product related aspects characterized as intrinsic and extrinsic cues. The intrinsic cues are associated with the product's physical properties such as, colour, shape and size, while the extrinsic quality cues include pricing, branding, and production information (Brunsø et al. 2002). Quality cues are thought of differentially in the formation of quality expectations, where intrinsic cues are usually seen as more important than extrinsic cues (Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1996).

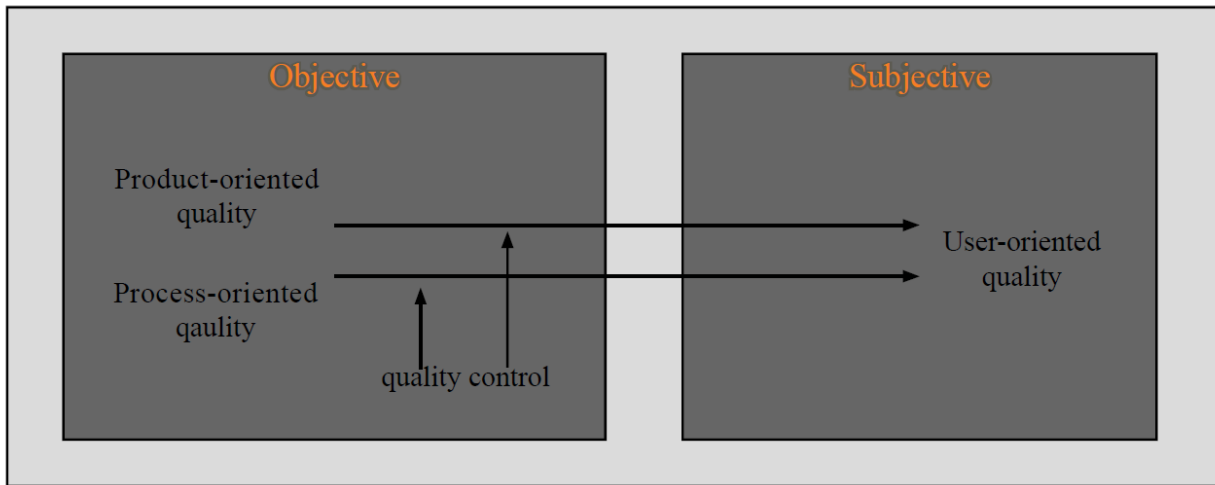
In the academic literature, there have been several attempts trying to describe food quality (Moskowitz 1995; Cardello 1995; Grunert 1995; Ophuis & Trijp 1995; Molnár 1995; Lawless 1995; Kidmose et al. 2013), but due to the complexity of the area, only a few proposals have been published that attempt to grasp the whole area of quality. In the section below, examples of how quality has been perceived by different scholars and how they contributed to a better understanding of the concept is presented.

### 3.3 A marketing perspective on 'food product quality'.

As result of the complexity, we have chosen to focus on a marketing oriented approach to quality. In this branch of science, scholars such as Klaus Grunert, Hans Van Trijp, and Jan-Benedict Steenkamp have made attempts to explain the concept of quality in relation to producer defined quality and consumer defined quality. In order to explore the concept of 'food product quality', we have investigated aspects of the Total Food Quality Model (TFQM) by Grunert et al. (1996). The model provides a nuanced image of the total quality perception, including elements of marketing and consumer behaviour (Brunsø et al. 2002). In relation to the model, four types of food quality are presented. The *product-oriented quality*, the *process-oriented quality*, and the *quality control*, which are considered objective qualities because they can be measured by specific product and process parameters, whereas the fourth, the *user-oriented quality* can be considered a subjective quality (Figure 3) (Brunsø et al. 2002).

- *Product-oriented quality* is identified by aspects of the physical product, for instance the fat percentage of meat, or alcohol strength of beer.
- *Process-oriented quality* is the way the food product has been produced, for instance by organic production, and it provides information about the procedure used to make the product.
- *Quality control* is defined as the standards a product has to meet in order to be approved for a specific quality class, for example the standard for the weight of eggs in various size classifications.
- *User-oriented quality* is the subjective quality perception of a user.

**Figure 2:** The model illustrates four types of quality. Three types of objective quality, which all are leading to subjective qualitative who is defined by the user. The model is inspired by the model 'Types of quality' by Brunso et al. (2002).

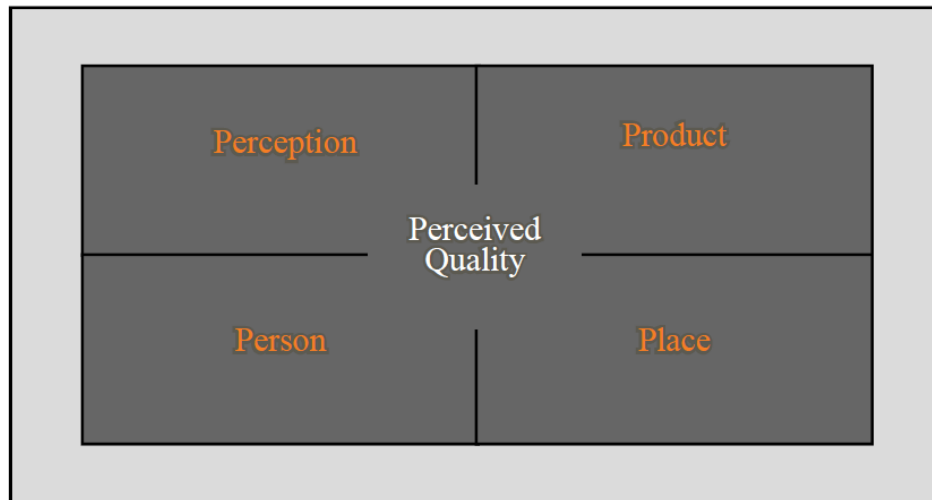


The four types of quality attempt to collect and place the many quality concepts into one model, and we have especially found the *user-oriented quality* important in relation to our thesis, because the users are often definers of quality. In the following sections, terms related to quality will be presented and encompassed in the section of the Total Food Quality Model.

### 3.4 Defining quality

As Meiselman (1995:135) questions: “*is the concept so broad that we cannot get our arms around it?*”. In relation, Ophuis & Trijp (1995) take departure in two extremes of quality definition. The first extreme claims quality impossible to define, and as an example they use Robert Pirsig’s philosophical narration, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), stating that “*quality is considered synonymous with innate excellence and cannot be analysed, but only recognized through experience* (Ophuis & Trijp 1995:177). The other extreme quality definition, claims that an objective quality approach is ideal because of the possibilities to do and standardizations of quality. Thus, they argue that a quality definition must be found in between the two extremes, and they additionally argue that the perceived quality contains four categories (see Figure 4) (Ophuis & Trijp, 1995).

**Figure 3:** The quality quadrant illustrates how perceived quality is a result of the surrounding factors – The model is inspired by from Ophuis & Trijp (1995)



The perception of quality includes visible and invisible product cues, which might have been experienced or associated with another, already evaluated product. The *product*, *persona* and *place* aspects focus on the relativity of the concept of perceived quality, and they claim that the model of quality perception offers a useful framework for unravelling the effects of cues and quality attributes on perceived quality.

In the comments to the article, Moskowitz (1995) agrees with Ophuis & Trijp's four quality categories and that quality must be seen through an integrated and subjective approach, but he disagrees with the definition by Pirsig (1974) and argues that in food-research, quality *must* be defined, and in some cases daily, otherwise, decision making would be impossible:

*"We depend upon food for survival. If people are starving, then 'quality be damned'. Given this reality, it does not suffice to avoid the definition of the quality concept"* (Moskowitz- Ophuis & Trijp 1995:183).

In continuation, he explains that researchers have always been interested in measuring quality and they typically use scales for overall liking, but he questions if the scales are sufficient to measure the whole quality and if there are other aspects of quality beyond overall liking. Hereby he mentions convenience as a factor and how this relates to quality, claiming further that even though he agrees with Ophuis & Trijp (1995), he thinks that their investigation may not be the

final definition of quality, but it has certainly provided new principles and a new way to look at and research of food.

### 3.4.1 Context dependent concept

To comment further on the four quality categories presented by Ophuis & Trijp (1995), we noted that the theme had been discussed earlier, and a good example is by Bøgh-Sørensen (1981) who claimed that:

*“Food quality is the perception, that a manufacturer, a retailer, a consumer or an authority get from a product, stating that food quality is meeting or exceeding consumers’ expectations of a product”* (Kidmose et al. 2013:6)

This definition emphasises that quality is more than objectivity and measurability, since it is also a subjective and a relative concept that occurs in relation to the product, consumer and the given context. To enlighten this, Cardello (1995) stated that it is safe to conclude that all foods are perceived within a context, and thereby he argued that a perceived quality “of a *meal of poached eggs, toast, cereal and juice may be quite high when served at breakfast, but that the same meal may be perceived as quite poor if served at dinner*” (Cardello 1995: 164). Thus, the definition of perceived food quality must consider the consumer, since it is the consumer who makes the final judgements on quality in a given context. As he further states, most food scientists would have very clear, discipline dependent definitions of what constitutes good nutritional or textural quality of food.

*“Unfortunately, food scientists represent only a small percentage of people concerned with food quality. The remainder are consumers - the people whose definition of food quality drives the economy of the global food industry. Yet, it is precisely the consumer’s definition of food quality about which we know the least and which we are most challenged to quantify.”* (Cardello 1995:163).

In agreement with the statement above by Cardello (1995), about the consumers as definers of food quality, a report conducted by Aarhus University (Kidmose et. Al. 2013), in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark, argues that it is noticeable that the consumers are the most important link in the production chain when it comes to defining food

product quality, and that the different actors involved with food products all consider quality in different ways, especially within consumer segment, where many aspects are seen as quality (Kidmose et al. 2013).

### 3.4.2 Quality dimensions and consumer segmentation

As stated earlier, we are approaching the concept of 'food product quality' from a marketing point of view, thus this section will describe quality dimensions and consumer segments presented by Brunsø et al. (2002). Consumers are often the last link in the production chain and they are regarded as the final judges of quality (Kidmose et al. 2013; Brunsø et al. 2002). Furthermore, their perception of quality is very subjective and individual and therefore it depends on a variety of factors, including geographical, cultural, religious, social, and age-related conditions. But according to Grunert (2005), there are also an apparent correlation between the consumers' perceived quality, the demand for quality and the supply of quality. This relationship can be seen in the figure below (Figure 5). The circle to the right, deals with the request and the consumers' willingness to pay extra for added value (Kidmose et al. 2013). The left circle deals with the supply, and together with the circle of demand, these two represent the traditional economic approach of supply and demand. The middle circle is the consumer's view of quality and how perception influences consumer purchasing decisions. This circle can therefore be seen as a mediator between supply and demand, as it is the perception of the quality which leads to the demand of products (Grunert 2005). This is because it has been argued that business success of food producers is basically depended on whether there is a presence of consumer demand for the product. Meaning that it is depended on the producer's ability to meet this demand, through a differentiation of the product regarding the requested quality parameters, and to make this transparent through marketing (Ibid.: 21;Schou 2016).

**Figure 4:** The model illustrates the interaction between supply, consumer perception and the demand for quality. The model is inspired by Kidmose et al. (2013).



### 3.5 The Total Food Quality Model

The Total Food Quality Model (TFQM) (Figure 5) integrates a multi-attribute quality approach, which considers quality as a combining number of quality characteristics, hence the overall quality is described by cues that are perceived by the consumer (Olson & Jacoby 1972; Brunsø et al. 2002).

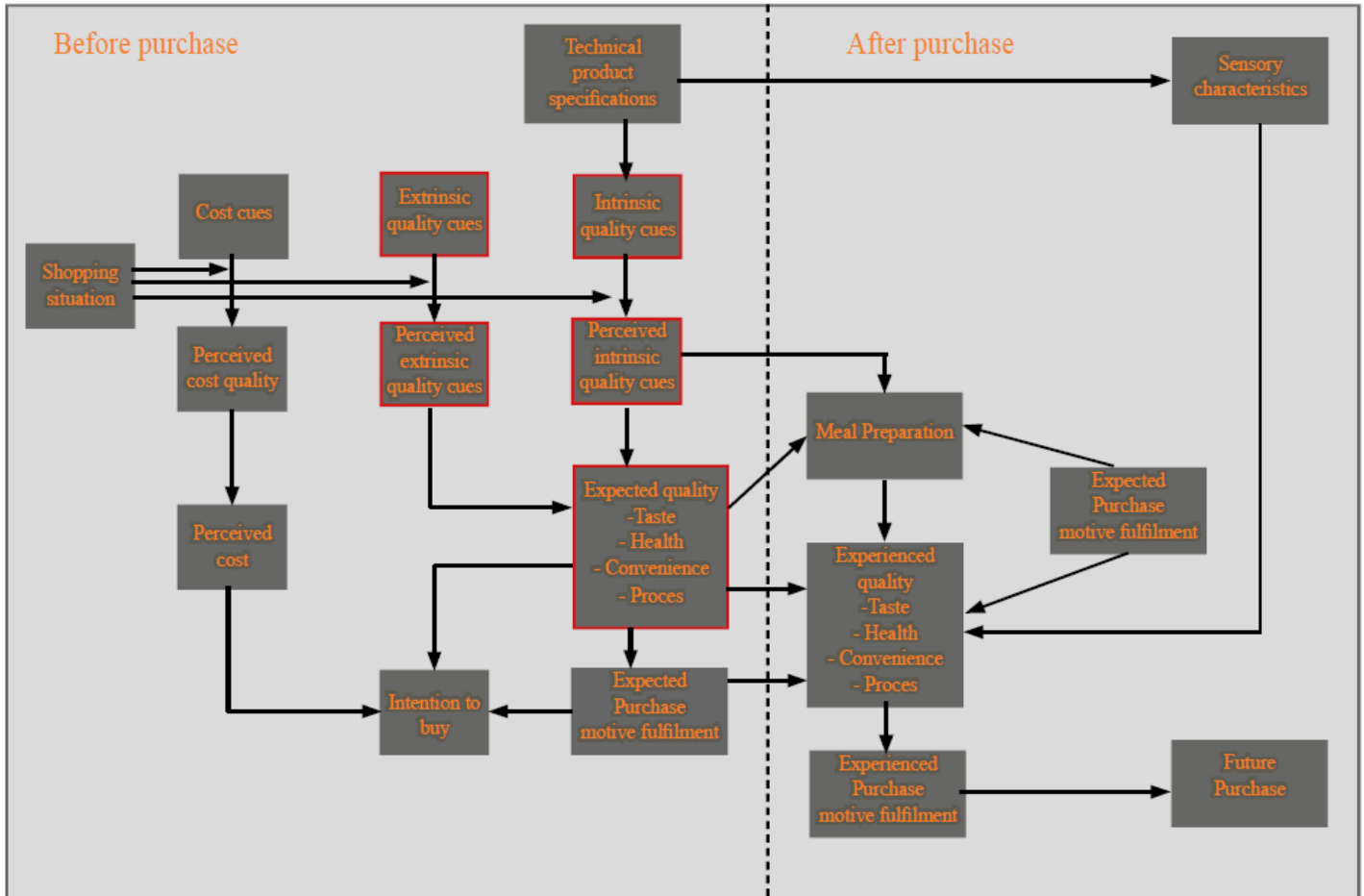
- *Intrinsic cues* include colour and texture, and are part of the physical product and they cannot be changed without also changing the physical product itself. (Olson & Jacoby 1972)
- *Extrinsic cues* include price, brand name, country of origin and are related to the product, but are not physically a part of it (Ibid.).

Before making a choice, consumers will use their quality expectations and it is only after consumption that the experienced quality can be determined, and this is even more limited if there are credence characteristics (Brunsø et al. 2002). Thus, the model distinguishes between *before* and *after* purchase evaluations because few cues are available from a first-time buyer point of view, and only by repurchasing a product, quality-attributes such as taste or odour can be used to evaluate the quality of the food product (Ibid.).

The model is closely related to consumer perception, which can be divided into expected and experienced quality perceptions, as seen in the four quality dimensions *process, taste and appearance, health and convenience*. Of all the cues consumers are exposed to, only those which are perceived will have an influence on expected quality, however it should be noted that according to the TFQM, quality is not the aim, but rather, a quality food product is desired, because it helps satisfy purchase motives and values (Brunsø et al. 2002), henceforth meaning that the model contains motives to buy or for value fulfilment, in order to explain how food products contribute to the achievement of desired consequences and values (Ibid.). For instance, extrinsic cues, found on labels, can cause expectations of exceptionally high eating quality, thus giving the consumer a feeling of luxury (Ibid.) The values that the consumers are looking for will have an impact on which quality dimensions are sought, and how different cues are perceived and evaluated. In particular, the relationship between quality expectation and quality

experience is commonly believed to determine product satisfaction, and consequently the probability of purchasing the product again (Olson & Jacoby 1972; Brunsø et al. 2002).

**Figure 5:** The Total Food Quality Model. To frame the concept of 'food product quality' we integrate the framework by the Total Quality Model. The boxed marked red are the elements we are using in the translation of 'food product quality'. The model is inspired by Brunsø et. al (2002)



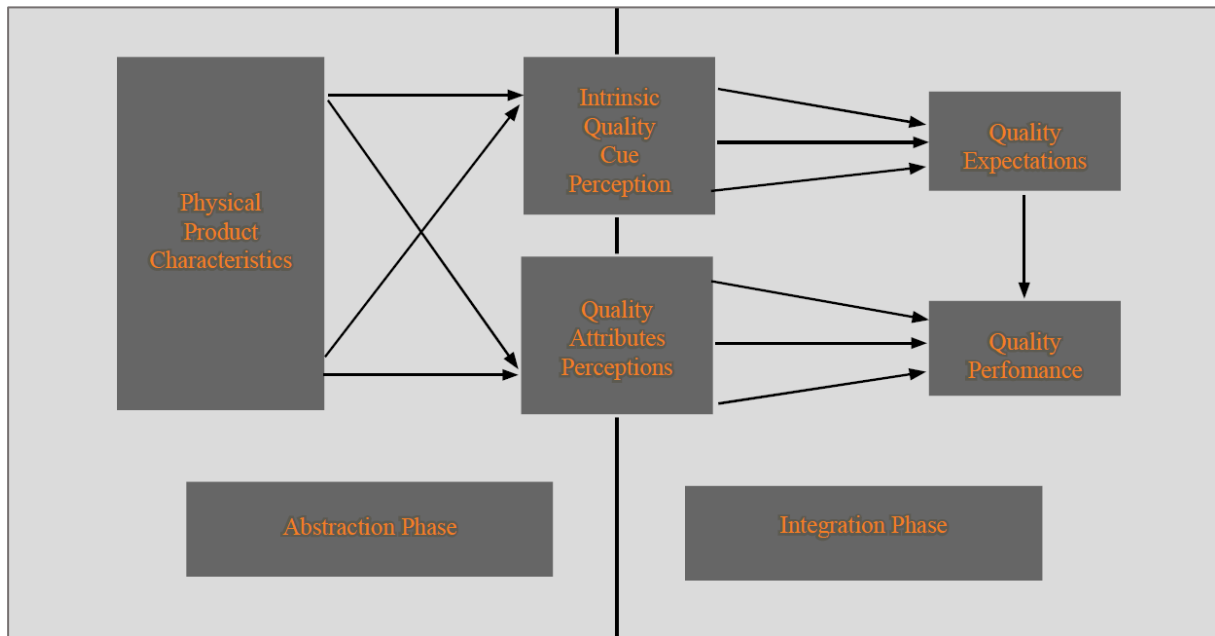
### 3.5.1 Why Grunert and not Steenkamp?

Although we have chosen to use the TFQM (Grunert et al. 1996) as conceptual framework that enables us to approach the concept of perceived 'food product quality', we have noticed that the research on quality is accomplished in what could be described as an indirect collaboration between researchers. More quality models were developed in the same period of time (Andersen 1994; Poulsen et al. 1996; Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1996), elaborating on each other's work, adding additional knowledge and thus contributing to a better understanding of consumers' perceived quality. This is especially true of the *Quality Guidance Model* (Figure 6) by Steenkamp & Van Trijp (1996). This model was developed as an integrated consumer based



approach to quality improvement, and the model distinguishes between expected and experienced quality, as well as on the dimension that covers consumers' thoughts on expected quality.

**Figure 6:** - The Quality Guidance Model by Steenkamp & Van Trijp (1996). The model illustrates how physical product characteristics are linked to perceived quality judgement.



The TFQM was created based on the works of Steenkamp (1989) and Andersen (1994), and thus integrated the existing work into the new own model (Grunert et al. 1996). The main difference between the two models is that the focus is somewhat different. Steenkamp & Van Trijp (1996) explain that the difference between the TFQM and the Quality Guidance Model can be seen in the two phases of the Quality Guidance Model. In Figure 6, it can be seen that the model is constructed of two phases, the abstraction phase and the integration phase.

- *The abstraction phase* illustrates the psychophysical relationships between physical product characteristics and perceived intrinsic cues (colour, texture) and quality attributes (taste, leanness, tenderness) (Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1996).
- *The integration phase* illustrates the way intrinsic cue perceptions and quality attribute perceptions are integrated into a judgement about quality expectation and quality performance (quality performance is based on the integration of product perceptions of quality attributes).

Hence the TFQM elaborates on the integration phase by including aspects like meal preparation, extrinsic cues and purchase intention (Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1996), while the Quality Guidance Model gives attention to the abstraction phase, which focuses on the psychophysical relationship between physical product characteristics and intrinsic cues (Steenkamp & Van Trijp 1996).

That Steenkamp & Van Trijp (1996) mainly focus on intrinsic cues is a limitation to the Quality Guidance Model where Poulsen et al. (1996:9) explains:

*“While Quality Guidance, strictly speaking, is concerned with intrinsic cues only, extrinsic cues like price, promotion, and distribution may have an important influence on the quality formation process.”*

Thus, we have chosen to use the TFQM as conceptual framework that enables us to approach the complex concept of quality. The model enables us to use the extrinsic and intrinsic product cues to understand food quality perception and to provide an overview of the different the aspects and dimensions associated with 'food product quality'. Furthermore, it has given us a concrete vocabulary and understanding of the concepts that can be used in analysing how the sales channels perceive quality.

With regards to this thesis, it is mentioned by (Grunert et al. 1996) that in practical applications it is sufficient to only look at parts of the model. Hence, this study will be focusing on aspects related to the 'before purchase part' of the model, and especially the expected quality (see section 3.7.2 about quality dimension), that works as an overall framework for the analysis of sales channels food quality perception, the intention to purchase and the design of food products. (Brunsø et al. 2002).

### 3.5.2 Quality dimensions

In continuation of the above, according to the TFQM, four types of quality dimensions are considered important from a consumer's point of view when assessing the expected 'food product quality'. Specifically these dimensions include the *process, taste and appearance, health and convenience*, see Figure 05 (Brunsø et al. 2002).

- *The process dimension* has, in recent years' experience, had a large impact on the consumer's perception on quality. This dimension covers among others, organically produced food and/or animal welfare. Some of these production characteristics are

referred to as 'credence attributes', which means that the consumer has to trust the guarantees, labels and declarations given by the producers. For example, organic foods are all labelled with the red Ø, which provides the consumer with the guarantee that the products are manufactured according to the organic regulations (Brunsø et al. 2002; Kidmose et al. 2013).

- *The taste and appearance dimension* covers the extrinsic factors, but also the experience quality characteristics of a product, since taste and/or appearance can usually only become established after buying or consuming a food product. For example, if consumers buy a product, and it has a stale taste, there is a high probability that consumers will not repurchase the product. But if the product looks fresh and tastes good, there is a significant chance that consumers will repurchase the product. (Ibid.).
- *The health dimension* is also an important factor for many consumers and it is argued that the health dimension is almost as important as the taste and appearances dimension (Brunsø et al. 2002). Health is perceived as a quality property related to how the product will affect the health of the consumer, including functional foods, fortified foods and specific food product groups, such as fruits and vegetables. Health related qualities are mostly credence attributes like the process dimension, since the health-related consequences when eating a specific food is a matter of trust, and can rarely be determined after consumption. (Brunsø et al. 2002; Kidmose et al. 2013).
- *The Convenience dimension* is the last dimension from the consumer's point of view, and it includes the comfort of quick consumption. This implies saving time, such as saving both physical and mental energy, at one or more stages of the overall meal process. Examples of convenience within the food business are packed, chopped, and washed vegetables (Ibid.).

The four quality dimensions should not be perceived as independent, rather as interrelated, as they will interact with each other and vary, depending on the different food products. For instance, consumers sometimes perceive good taste and healthiness to be positively correlated, and at other times to be negatively correlated. In addition, taste is sometimes perceived in relation to the process quality dimension and at other times not, which is a matter of subjectivity

and in accordance with the specific consumer segments (Brunsø et al. 2002; Kidmose et al. 2013).

### 3.6 State of the art - summary

This section aims to sum up on this state of the art section, in which the intention was to explore how scholars have approached the concept of 'food product quality', and thereby investigated how we should approach the concept with this thesis projects.

Food quality can generally be divided into objective and subjective quality, in which it is the objective quality characteristics of the products that can be measured and documented, while the subjective quality characteristics are concerned with the consumer's perception. Thus, we are going to investigate subjective quality.

The *Total Food Quality Model* (TFQM) by Grunert et al. (1996) provides an illustration of the total quality perception, including elements of marketing and consumer behaviour, and, seen from a marketing point of view, it is argued that quality can be seen within the economic model of demand and supply. In relation to the TFQM, four types of food quality dimensions were presented. The *product-oriented quality*, the *process-oriented quality*, and the *quality control* and we discovered that the *user-oriented quality* was especially important in relation to our thesis, because it is the subjective quality perception of the user.

It is emphasised that quality is a relative concept that occurs in relation to the product, the consumer and the given context. Thus, the definition of perceived food quality must consider the consumer, since it is the consumer who makes the final judgements on quality.

The TFQM integrates the above mentioned dimensions, a multi-attribute quality approach, which considers quality as comprising a number of quality characteristics. Hence, the overall quality is described by a set of both intrinsic and extrinsic cues that are perceived by the consumer. Thus, the model functions as a conceptual framework that enables us to approach the concept of quality and the analysis of consumers' food quality perceptions. It also enables us to provide an overview of the different aspects associated with quality in situations before and after purchase. In addition, it has given us a concrete vocabulary and understanding of the concepts that can be used in analysing how the sales channels perceive quality. (Brunsø et al. 2002).

## 4 Methodology

Within this section, we outline the methods that we have chosen to use, both in relation to the theoretical and empirical work, when approaching the problem area of this thesis. Specifically regarding the translation of 'food product quality' associated with four different sales channels that are of relevance to the company Ø Laks. Furthermore, we elaborate on the research design chosen to investigate the research objective, as well as address issues that the research approach may cause for the analytical process.

The research design is a case study, and it is based on a qualitative approach, where semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted with relevant actors as well as individual representatives of four different sales channels. Overall, we have chosen a pragmatic approach to this thesis project, meaning that the research design is emphasised through the implication of different epistemological positions, rather than being occupied with the paradigmatic legitimisation of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:69-70). Thus, this section will provide short descriptions of the different approaches we have used, with focus on presenting the practical implications of why and how these are used within this study. This section includes the following subsections: (1) *A case study*; (2) *Qualitative research approach*; (3) *Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis*; (4) *Ontology and Epistemology*; (5) *Abductive research process* (6) *Semi-structured in-depth research interviews*; (7) *Us as researchers and our ethical considerations*.

### 4.1 A case study

This research takes its starting point in a single case study of the company Ø Laks. This is a small one-man business, from Samsø in Denmark, that produces cold-smoked salmon, and which is owned and driven by Mikael Andreassen. Our motivation for initiating a case based study for this thesis was fostered during our time at the Master program, Integrated Food Studies, where we have had many positive experiences with case based work. Especially because we are motivated by applying and integrating our theoretical 'toolbox' within a real-life context.

In addition to the above, a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin 2009:18). Furthermore, such studies can be useful for answering 'how' and 'why' questions, and for considering how a phenomenon

is influenced by the real-life context in which it is situated (Bjørner 2015:30) (Bjørner, 2015: 30). This current case study is indeed of *exploratory* character, because we have explored the reality of the case by starting the data collection before we had decided upon the research question (Ibid.: 31; Yin 2009). The explorative nature of this research process called for a “tool” that could help us handle the complex matter, including the many dimensions of the case. The overwhelming complexity of the case situation led us to the approach of situational analysis, in which we found great inspiration. This progress will be further described in the section: 4.3. Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis

In short, this research takes its point of departure in the real-life context of Ø Laks, in which we aim to understand the concept [phenomenon] of food product quality in depth. Based on the subjective matter of the concept, we have chosen to explore it by using a qualitative research approach, which will be addressed in the next section.

## 4.2 Qualitative research approach

There does not exist one generally accepted definition of what qualitative research is, nor of what qualitative research methods are. The concept of *qualitative* is, however, in opposition to *quantitative*. Qualitative research often implies an interest in understanding the subjective matter of *how* something is done, said, experienced, appears, or develops (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2010:17). In contradiction, quantitative research is preoccupied with the examination of how much there is to be found of something and thus, typically tries to ascribe a measurable numerical value (Ibid.). Thereby it can be expressed that the qualitative approach emphasises in-depth insight into to the field of research, whereas the quantitative approach represents a discipline that aims for measurable and generalisable knowledge. In addition, it should be noted that qualitative and quantitative research can be performed in combination, referred to as mixed methods, which over time has become more commonly used (Bjørner 2015: 20-25), especially in relation to case studies (Yin 2009).

In continuation, qualitative research is committed to a human world of meanings and values, and has an interest in the perspectives and narratives of human actors (Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2010: 17-19). Thus, in relation to the subjective matter of the concept ‘food product quality’, which is explored within this study, it seems obviously for us to use a qualitative approach. This approach is chosen based on the aim of obtaining an in-depth insight to the explored matter of the food product characteristics, which impart the implication of ‘food product quality’

according to the actors that represent the different sales channels in the context of the current case study.

The next section presents how we have handled and approached the complex situation of working exploratively with the case of Ø Laks, where multiple aspects required our attention.

### 4.3 Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis

The explorative research process of this thesis project has at times overwhelmed us, through the many elements and dimensions that the case of Ø Laks revealed. Therefore, we needed a tool that could help us grasp the complexity of the case and at the same time encourage us to unfold the knowledge and explore the case more in depth. This requirement led us to *Situational analysis* by Clarke (2005), which offers a way of visualizing and analysing the knowledge that we obtained by providing us with the approach of *situational maps*. Including *messy maps*, *ordered maps* and *relational maps*. The purpose of the process of making situational maps is to provide “*the big picture*” by getting all information and assumptions into the maps, thus allowing us as researchers to move into and around in the data (Ibid.: 84-85). Hence, the application of situational maps has functioned as a strategy for articulating the elements in the situation of Ø Laks, and examining the relations among them. To clarify what the situation refers to in this regard, Clark (2005: 25) describe it as the following:

*“[...] a situation is always greater than the sum of its parts because it includes their relationality in a particular temporal and spatial movement.”*

This also means that ‘the situation’ within situational analysis “*is both an object confronted and an ongoing process subsequent to the confrontation – they are linked to other situations*” (Clark, 2005: 21). And therefore, this method supports that Ø Laks is affected by, and linked to various situations that needed to be addressed within the initial research process. It has been especially beneficial to us, and this study, that we used this approach, as we tended to prematurely concentrate on the aspects of the case that first caught our attention. Overall, the initial part of this research process was comprehensive and time consuming, due to the many aspects of the case that needed to be explored. However, it is important to note that the approach offered by situational analysis provided us with an overview of the case situation(s) and thus helped us establish the foundation of knowledge that led us to determine the focus of this thesis project.



### 4.3.1 Conducting the situational maps

Using situational maps as an approach for handling elements concerning the case of Ø Laks was useful in the regard that Clark (2005:30) describes in the following quote:

*“Because maps are visual representations, they helpfully rupture (some/most of) our normal ways of working and may provoke us to see things afresh.[...] Maps also work more easily as discursive devices for making assemblages and connections – relational analyses.”*

In light of this, when we performed the situational analysis, the aim was first, to conduct messy maps where we descriptively laid out all the most important human and nonhuman, material, symbolic and discursive elements surrounding the case of Ø Laks - in a broadly conceived manner. This process was based on the insight that we had obtained from an interview with Mikael, and it was centred around the questions: ‘who and what are in the broader situation of Ø Laks?’, ‘who and what matters in the situation?’ and ‘who and what else is involved?’. This “messy” way of handling our knowledge helped us brainstorm and elaborate in a free-spirited way, without being limited by details concern regarding each element and its relevance to our thesis project. The locus of this abstract approach is the precaution that “[T]oo much order provokes premature closure” (Clark 2005: 95). During this process, not all elements remained of interest, but all were specified anyway in the messy map, which is shown in Figure 7.

After conducting the messy maps, we decided to construct an ordered map (Clark, 2005: 96), so that we could relate to each element that we had laid out, as well as for us to embrace the material without getting dizzy. Hereby, we identified different headings and placed the elements under the headings in which they belonged. Some elements appear multiple times, under different heading, as their meaning can be quite differently influenced and all aspects of their appearance deserved consideration (Ibid.: 99). Table 4 shows the ordered map that we conducted for the situation of Ø Laks.

Once the messy maps and the ordered map were drafted, they were used to conduct a “*quick and dirty relational analyses*” (Ibid.: 102), in which we took each element in turn, considering it in relation to the other elements on the map. This was an ongoing process where we



**Figure 7:** The messy map. In this map different types of elements, both human and non-human elements were noted. Not all elements are included, but the figure illustrate the use of the messy map.



**Table 4:** The ordered map that we conducted for the situation of Ø Laks.

Individual Human Elements/Actors E.g. Key individuals and significant people in the situation		Nonhuman/ actants E.g. technologies; material infrastructures; specialised information and/or knowledges material "things"	
Mikael Torsten Friends, family	Lawyers Consumers/customers Consultancy	Sawdust Smokeowen Materials Packing Equipment Webpage Niche product Fish feed	Education Professional experience Water Price of Ø Laks The supply Production Transport money
Collective Human elements/actors. E.g. particular groups, specific organisations		Implicated/ silent actors/Actants - As found in the situation	
Nicklas and Natascha Wholesalers AAU CPH Foodspace Rebel Food Partnerships Foodducer	Menu, Coop, Dansk sm. Kalu Expo Restaurants Bakkafrost Food markets Other businesses	Salmon Consumers Faro Islands fishermen Fishermen	Other salmon producers Smoked products Other fish products Other products
Discursive constructions of individual and/or collective human actors (as found in the situation)		Discursive construction of nonhuman actants - As found in the situation	
Stigmatization of salmon farming Consumer demand/attitudes	Consumer contact Taste Tasting Mouth to mouth	Environment – Water condition Standardisation Different delivery locations	Socio economics status Niche production Local food Bankruptcy
Political/Economic elements E.g. the state; industries; local/regional global orders; political parties, NGOs		Sociocultural/symbolic elements E.g. Religion; race; sexuality; gender; ethnicity; nationality; logos; icons; other visual and/or symbols	
Globalisation Economy – affected by the fish industry Danish food administration 10 culinary guidelines Legislations (laws) Regulations	Food systems The fishing industry The food industry HACCP Taxes Politics Mass-market/retail	Logo Smiley reports Ø	Customer characteristic Products transparency
Major issues/ debates (usually contested) - As found in the situation; and see positional map		Spatial elements E.g. spaces in the situation, geographical aspects, local, regional, national, global spatial issues	
Heavy metal Fish welfare Animal welfare	Pesticides Local food	Storage Variation in distribution volume Limited production volume Regional differences Different delivery location Samsø	International, jylland, sjælland Placement of firm Faroe Islands Rural Denmark Rural agriculture USA
Other kinds of elements - As found in the situation		Related discourses (historical, narrative, and/or visual) E.g. normative expectations of actors, actants, and/or other specified elements; mora/ethical elements; mass media and other popular cultural discourses; situation specific discourses	
Sushi Delicacy	Alternative suppliers Where does the salmon live	Entrepreneurship Globalisation Storytelling No family Background Seasonal traditions Facebook Social media Spot deal Competition Local food Marketing	Management strategy Business plan Ambition Passion Quality Earning money Media Trends Gastronomy Truism Agriculture Publicity

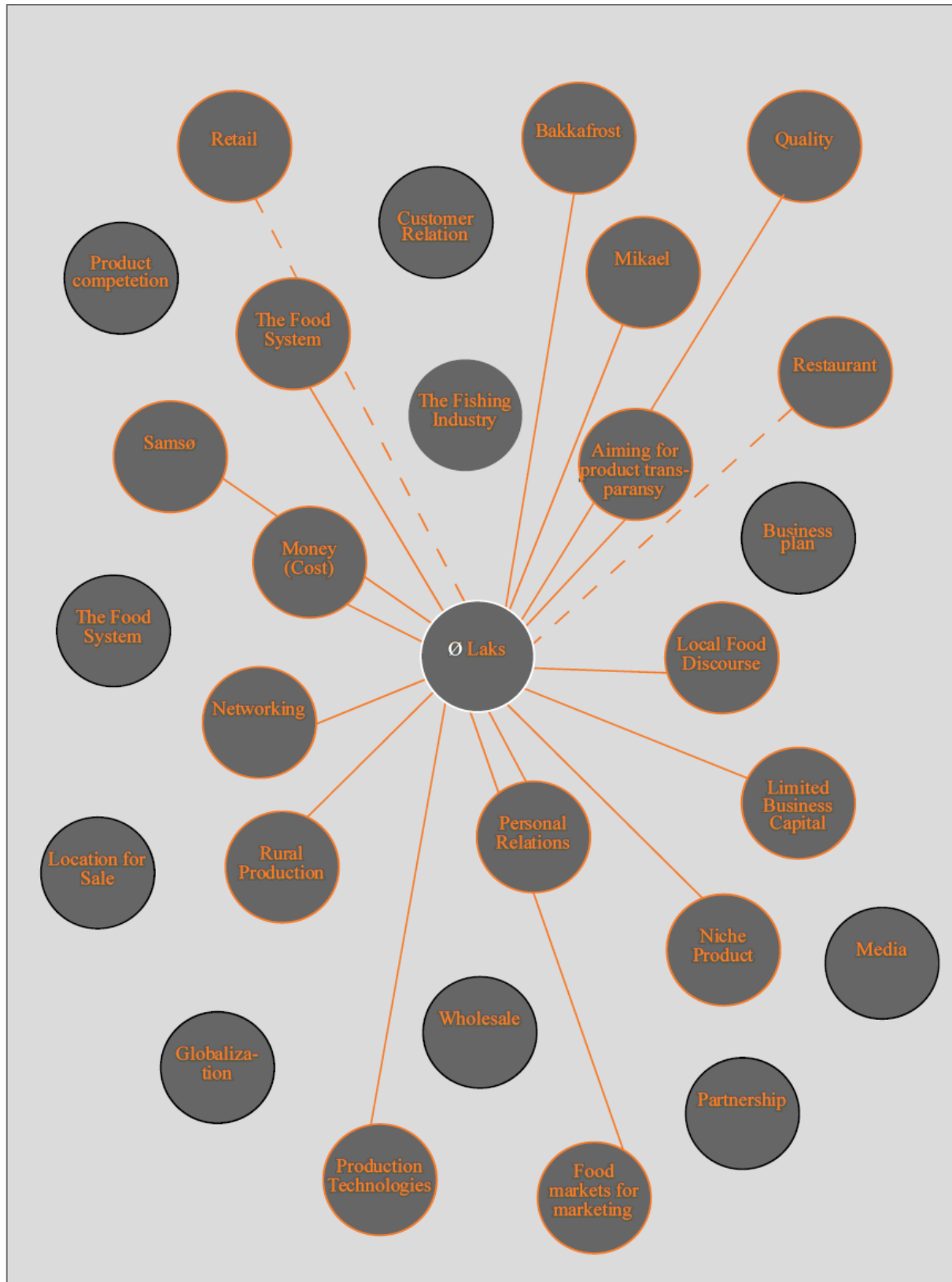
simultaneously conducted smaller messy maps and thereafter used these for relational maps (see examples in Figure 8). The relational analyses provided us with a systematic and a somewhat coherent way of entering the complexities of the Ø-Laks-case. Furthermore, these maps and endless aspects of considerations helped us decide which stories (which relations) to pursue.

During the process of the relational analyses we continuously ended up, in some way or the other, circulating around the elements involved with the marketing challenges of Ø Laks, in spite of its rather large professional network. Therefore, we decided to contact one of the actors that seemed to possess important insight about the situation of Ø Laks and businesses of small food producers in general. This being a business consultant from the company Nordic Foodworks. In parallel with this, we had directed our attention to some of the sales channels that could function as potential marketing platforms for Ø Laks. However, after the interview with a consultant from Nordic Foodworks, we decide to direct our full attention towards the sales channels. This was because many aspects, regarding Ø Laks and its potential sales channels, have been an ongoing matter, associated with the case relevant situations. This was also the case, regardless of which actors and relational maps we addressed. It should of course also be noted that due to the limited time frame of this thesis project, we have far from been able to follow every lead and actor relevant to the case.

Figure 9 provides an overview of how we followed the “leads” provided by the relational analyses. Thereby situational analysis with situational maps has functioned as a strategy for the procedural progress of our empirical work. Finally, we wish to draw attention to the fact that this approach of situational analysis complements the approach referred to as ‘follow the actor’, which is recommended by the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). ANT will function as our analytical framework for the empirical analysis of this research, hence the outline in section 5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework.

To clarify our overall research approach and understanding of how we construct the knowledge that this research is aiming for, the next section will present the ontological and epistemological perspective of this research.

**Figure 8:** The relational map – This map illustrates Ø Laks current position and show the relationship that exist between the elements.



**Figure 9:** Illustration of the initial research process. The top of the figure illustrates the themes that were considered. The lower part of the model illustrates our process of our empirical gathering.



## 4.4 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology is defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:352) as “*The doctrine of being and infancy; regarding the fundamental nature of existence*” and it is a philosophical approach that is concerned with understanding the reality of being (Jacquette 2014:3-4). According to our understanding of the researched concept, ‘food product quality’, we assume that there exist various realities, depended on interrelated processes within a social, cultural or physical context. Thereby, the meaning of the concept is constructed between actors through dynamic processes, rather than defined in an objective matter. Thus, the ontological approach of this study is framed and expressed by the research questions.

In extension of the above, epistemology is, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:349), defined as “*the doctrine of knowledge’s nature and reasons*”, meaning that it is concerned with how to obtain and comprehend the knowledge that we are aiming for with the study. In this regard, the overall approach that functions as the foundation for the framework of our research is based on a *constructivist* approach. In which our epistemological assumptions are based on the *phenomenological* and *hermeneutic* understanding of how knowledge is constructed. In short, this means that we perceive all the knowledge that this research obtains through the different interviews as constructed through interrelated processes between aspects of both human and nonhuman character. Many elements have influenced the constructed knowledge of this research, such as the context (e.g. the purpose) of the different sales channels, the personal relations (e.g. between us and the interviewees), the subjective understandings of different terms and our choices, among many more. This supports our entire research approach - our choice of research questions, methods and theory, and will be further outlined in the following part of this section. However, due to our pragmatic approach we are not going to describe the historical origin of the assumptions, nor will we go into depth with the philosophical discussions or discourses.

### 4.4.1 Constructivism

From a methodological point of view, constructivism implies that the research findings [observations] are sought to be understood within the context of an interrelated network (Rønn 2006:74). Our constructivist approach to this thesis project relates to our preliminary assumption about how the concept of ‘food product quality’ is to be understood, meaning our understanding of the concept’s reality. Thereby we assume that there does not exist one

objective and unanimous definition of 'food product quality'. Instead we believe that the concept (as well as all concepts in general) are defined differently according to the given context – not only the physical, but also such as the cultural or historical context. Thus, the meaning of 'food product quality' is to be understood in its construction through interrelated and dynamic processes between different actors. This implies that the meaning of 'food product quality' will vary according the actors that represent the sales channels investigated within this research. In addition, we do not expect to find one version of 'food product quality', instead we expect to open up the concept and explore the many aspects and nuances related to its reality. This is relevant, since the construction of the concept is dependent on the interrelated actor-network in which it is defined (translated). Meaning that 'food product quality' depends on “the eyes that see” and “the mouth that speaks”, which always needs to be of concern when addressing phenomena within the complex food system.

Regarding our constructivist approach, it is also important that we acknowledge our role as researcher, since we must assume that we will affect the research outcome (Rønn 2006: 73-75; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Thereby it is important to describe our own presumptions regarding the researched concept, in order for us to provide a complete picture of the approach, and thereby achieve our aim to provide insight into to the analytical process. Our role as researcher will be addressed in the section: 4.7 Us as researchers and our ethical considerations

#### 4.4.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the doctrine of *what* appears for a consciousness. It focusses on investigating the subjective experience, by aiming to understand the *what* before the *how* and *why* (Rønn 2006:180-182). The main assumption of this approach is expressed by Jacobsen et al. (2010: 186) as:

*“According to phenomenology one should never take it for granted, that one knows what another person feels, thinks or wishes, even when it is our spouse or our child.”*

This quote emphasises a central aspect of phenomenology, meaning that it is important to approach the phenomenon as unprejudiced as possible. The research ambition is to understand a social phenomenon based on the actors' own perspectives and thereby describe reality

(Jacobsen et al. 2010). As an example of this, we have, during the interviews, aimed to ask as open questions as possible in order to get the interviewees to open up and express their understanding in their own words. Thus, we have aimed to avoid asking any leading questions, but instead asked the interviewees to elaborate on their own statements.

From a pragmatic point of view, it is important to note that we do not regard phenomenology as our research method, instead we use it as a guiding research philosophy in relation to the many phases of the research processes. More specifically, the phenomenological philosophical approach of this research may be most significant to address in relation to our empirical work with interviews. The significance lies primarily in the attempt to provide a clear understanding of the investigated phenomenon (the concept of 'food product quality') without presuming that we know *what* the interviewees' responses or perceptions are going to be. Furthermore, we assume that the interviewed person should always be perceived in relation to something else, since that is where the person's reality is defined (Rønn 2006: 182). This complements the hermeneutic research tradition, where people are perceived as self-interpretive, historical creatures, whose perceptions are conditioned according to tradition and historical life (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 69). Thereby, we also assume that the constructed knowledge of this research is not solely to be understood as a correlation of the perception of the different actors, but that it is also affected by our reality as researchers. This leads us to the following about hermeneutics.

#### 4.4.3 Hermeneutic

*Traditionally, hermeneutics* belongs to the sphere of grammar and rhetoric and has been widely used to interpret texts (Gadamer 2004:385). However, it is also a paradigm that is commonly recognized within qualitative research in general (Ibid.; Rønn 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Brinkmann & Tangaard 2010). Hermeneutic argues that knowledge is always to be obtained according to the individual person's reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thus, it is not concerned about correct mastery, instead it is about coming to a proper understanding about the subject matter (Gadamer, 2004: 387). This means that the knowledge that we can construct with this study is based on interconnected processes of interpretation, and thereby we emphasise that the experience of meanings that takes place in understanding always includes application (Ibid.: 385). In order for us to comprehend the complexity of subjective perceptions, the hermeneutic tradition offers a methodological approach called the *hermeneutic circle*. This circular approach to interpretation is referred to as a spiral that provides the opportunity for grasping the *whole* as



well as alternating between its different *parts* (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 233). Thereby, it is a method that supports our attempt to comprehend the complexity of the interrelated processes that contribute the construction of knowledge in this research. More specifically, the hermeneutic approach is central for the *abductive research process* of this study, with which we have approached this case study, by alternating between the theoretical and empirical work. The abductive research process will be presented more in depth in the following.

## 4.5 Abductive research process

Abduction refers to the process of generating social scientific accounts based on the accounts of social actors, thus it is associated with interpretivism (Blaikie 2004:2). Abduction is addressed in contrast to deductive and inductive research approaches, in which abduction is the only approach with the true aim of discovery (Levin-Rozalis 2010). More specifically, deduction could be described as a tool for checking theories, and on the other hand, induction is used for checking probabilities, whereas abduction is “*the logic of discovery*” that seeks the best explanation (Ibid.:6). In continuation hereof, Ong (2012:423) states that an abductive research process requires that:

*“... social explanations need to go beyond the specific meanings that people give to their actions. This means that researchers need to deal with typical meanings produced by typical social actors, involving the use of abstractions and approximations.”*

This research process has been based on an abductive approach. Thus, we have alternated between the theoretical and empirical work in order to organize how to approach the analysis. As a consequence, we enjoyed a very dynamic research process that is directly associated with the hermeneutical approach (outlined in the section 4.4 Ontology and Epistemology). Overall, the research process of this thesis has been very open, meaning that we have tried to face the investigated reality with an open mind, together with an on-going analysis of the knowledge that we have continuously obtained. This being through the academic literature, the conducted interviews, as well as through everyday conversations with different people. The horizon of this study has thus continuously been nuanced and adjusted. As a result, we would argue that the abductive approach of this research has involved both inductive and deductive processes.

As an example of our abductive process, we started this project with very different expectations of what the scope of this research was going to address, and we had discussed some of the concrete methods that we thought would be useful. However, to keep a long story short, the explorative process, and the extent of the complexity of the reality that we have faced throughout this project, quickly impressed on us the enormous scope of the project that we had initially envisaged, as well as the number of the multitude of complex aspects that we would realistically be able to embrace. Therefore, we have had to adjust our theoretical and empirical considerations to make it match, and to make the research objective, realistic and obtainable.

The next section will outline the practical procedure related to the conducted research interviews, as well as present the most crucial considerations in this regard.

#### 4.6 Semi-structured in-depth research interviews

The data that we have used for the performance of this study is based on material that we have constructed through semi-structured in-depth interviews with different case-relevant actors. Regarding our interview approach, we see ourselves as what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 66-68) refer to as *the Traveller*, in which we do not perceive the interviews as the gathering of knowledge, rather it is a construction of knowledge. This means that we regard the insight that we obtain through the interviews, and the analysis as interconnected dimensions of the research process (Ibid.). Thus, we see these processes as interwoven phases in the construction of knowledge, with emphasis on the material that arises hereof.

Within this research, we have conducted semi-structured interviews with eight different actors (See Table 5), with point of departure in our aim of understanding the concept (phenomenon) of 'food product quality'. The semi-structured interview is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the interviewee's reality (life world) with the aim of interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 19). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the point of departure in the interviewees' own perspectives and thereafter the meaning of the descriptions can be interpreted (Ibid.: 45). This is especially where the phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches clearly complement each other in relation to the practical methodological progress. An example could be that the phenomenological approach supports the practical and ethical implications related to the conduct of the interviews, whereas the hermeneutic approach supports the succeeding empirical analysis, which is based on interpretation of the interviews from different perspectives.

A semi-structured interview is not an open, everyday conversation, nor a fixed questionnaire. Instead it is conducted in compliance with an interview guide that focus on certain topics (see Table 6 for an example), in which it at the same time accommodates emerging suggestions for new questions (Ibid.: 45-46; Bjørner, 2015: 87). By using such an open approach, we have been able to pursue specific answers, as well as the narratives by the interviewees (Ibid.: 144). Overall, we have focused on the research topic by asking open questions, in an attempt to reveal dimensions of the topic that we found to be relevant. Hereby, the in-depth interview approach is especially suitable, partly due to the fact that the mission of this research was to work with a specific case and the corresponding complex matters, and also because it is suited to grasp the complex issue of understanding 'food product quality'. Finally, this leads us to the following section, which will outline the *practical procedure* that has been used when conducting the interviews and the handling of the obtained material afterwards.

**Table 5:** Overview of interviews, interviewees, and the purpose of the interviews.

Interviews	Representatives/ Interviewees	Purpose
Background Material		Creating the foundation for the research process
The owner of Ø Laks	Mikael Andreasen	Exploring the case: Obtaining in depth insight about the situation of Ø Laks. What is the problem area(s)? Which actors are involved?
Expert – working with small food producers and food entrepreneurs	Consultant from Nordic Foodworks	Exploring the field of being a small food producer and entrepreneur. Pursuing a relevant actor from Ø Laks' network. Hereby to obtain further insight about Ø Laks from others than Mikael, with knowledge about the case. Furthermore, the purpose was to gain expert insight about what the situation of small food producers and food entrepreneurs often involves.
IFS Perspective	Thorkild Nielsen – Associate professor	Strengthen the IFS perspective. Supporting our professional argument as IFS students, for why it is relevant for us to work with a case as Ø Laks. Why is IFS going to increase the focus on food entrepreneurship?
Sales Channels		Investigating the research questions
Delicatessens store	Boutique Fisk	<i>How is 'food product quality' translated according to four different Danish sales channels? And how can the food product of Ø Laks be enacted with these sales channels?</i>
Online food store	Smag Danmark	
Food Market	Rebel food	
Restaurants	Era Ora: Former head chef Tårnet: Head chef	

### 4.6.1 Practical procedure

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) has functioned as our solid companion within the practical procedure of planning and conducting the interviews included in this research. As beginners within the field of qualitative and academic research, we have strived to live up to the many precautions that should be taken when working with the craft of research interviews.

The interviewees were contacted either by phone or email, and, in advance, they were all given information about our motivation for contacting them and the aim of an interview. Thereby the contact and informed consent were established, and the face to face interviews were arranged. Furthermore, we initiated the interviews by giving a short briefing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 149) in which we informed them more in depth about the purpose and the overall topics that we were going to address. Each interview was recorded with consent from the interviewees and afterwards transcribed. Thus, both text and sound represent the material that is used for the subsequent interpretation within the analysis.

Before initiating the interviews, we conducted interview guides [scripts] for each of the interviewees (see Table 6 for an example), which provided us with an overview of topics that was to be covered during the interview. Each topic was complemented with suggestions for questions. These interview guides functioned as a guiding tool that helped us ensure that the interviews were addressing topics relevant to the objective of this research.

The subsequent transcription was performed by use of the software Express Scribe. The transcription is perceived as a part of our interpretation process since the conversation that we have had in physical attendance, becomes abstracted and fixed in writing based on our decision about how to do so (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 199-200). Also, some elements are lost when transcribing, such as for instance body language, tone of voice, and generally intonation. Furthermore, we decided to make the transcription process less time consuming and easier to read afterwards by limiting some of the common expression used in everyday conversations (such as “øhh” and “Hmm”) and we also omitting the side stories that we found irrelevant to the research. The ethical issues that arises in relation to the interviews and the transcription process, will be addressed further in the later section *Us as researchers and our ethical considerations*.

**Table 6:** An example: the interview guide for the interview with the online sales channel; Smag Danmark (translated from Danish).

Topics and Research questions	Interview questions
<b>PRODUCT POTENTIAL</b> What is the criteria that a product should meet in order to be considered as having market potential?	What expectations do you have for the products that you choose to market/sell?  Which criteria does the product need to meet?
<b>PRODUCT CREATING VALUES</b> What aspects are considered to create product value?	What do you perceive as product aspects/characteristics that create product value?  What contribute to a positive product experience?  Which elements do you consider as the most paramount for a product to successful?  (closed question) Are there specific factors that you are looking for if assessing how a product differentiate from other products? If yes - Which factors?
<b>SEGMENT REQUEST AND EXPECTATIONS</b> How is the segment defined and what do they request?	How will you define your segment?  What do your customers request?  (closed question) Is it important that a product is recognizable? If yes – How?

#### 4.6.2 The interviewees

We started our research process by conducting a three-hour long interview with the central case person, Mikael. This was conducted via the online communication platform Skype (Appendix 2), with the aim of getting as much insight as possible about Mikael and his company Ø Laks. Thus, the material that we obtained from that interview has been the starting point for this research. However, we have followed the progress of the company Ø Laks by having had ongoing conversations with Michael during the period of this thesis project.

The primary material, which functions as the foundation for investigating the perceptions of food product quality, is based on interviews with five actors that each represent different sales channels that, in one way or the other, have knowledge about Ø Laks. These include respectively, the delicatessens store *Boutique Fisk* (Appendix 5), the online sales platform *Smag Danmark* (Appendix 6), the food market organizer *Rebel Food* (Appendix 7), and the

restaurants *Tårnet* (Appendix 8) and *Era Ora* (Appendix 9). In this regard, it should be mentioned that the representative from Era Ora does not work at the restaurant anymore. However, the person did work there when Ø Laks was on the menu and therefore has great knowledge about both the product and Mikael from the perspective of the sales channel Era Ora.

The two additional actors that we have interviewed were the IFS associated professor, Thorkild Nielsen (Appendix 4) and the co-owner of the consultancy company Nordic Foodworks, Torsten Jakobsen (Appendix 3). The latter were used as expert informants that we found to have relevant knowledge about the matter of working with a case of a small food entrepreneur. The interviewees chose the location for the interview to take place, and, coincidentally, all interviews were conducted at the interviewees' workplaces. Each interview lasted between one to two hours.

In continuation of the above, we wish to outline our concern regarding the fact that we are using the statements of the interviewed actors to represent the general attitude of the sales channel they are representing. This generalization of attitude is especially relevant to address due to the subjective matter of the concept 'food product quality'. As argued in the initial *State of the art* section of this report, the perception of 'food product quality' can vary, even within the different parts of the food supply chain. Despite of this, the statements of the interviewees will act as the general perception of the sales channel they are representing. The concern is also highly relevant in relation to the next subsection 4.7. Us as researchers and our ethical considerations, where we intend to address the essential ethical issues of this research.

#### 4.7 Us as researchers and our ethical considerations

The conversation based research interview is an intersubjective and social process, since it involves an interconnectedness between us as researchers and the interviewees in its construction of knowledge about the researched topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:34). Therefore, it is important for us to acknowledge ourselves as actors who affect the outcome of this research. Thus, we as researchers also represent self-interpretive creatures, and thereby we approach this study with a personal and academic agenda (that may be) far from the reality of the interviewed actors. Furthermore, ethics is essential to interview based research since the research is significantly influenced by our experience and personal judgments (Ibid.:32-35). Thereby, a research interview is not just a conversation between people of equal terms, because

we as researchers define and control the situation (Ibid.:19). The researchers are a dominant influence in the research outcome, in which Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:51) states that:

*“The researcher has as the “great interpreter” the exclusive privilege to interpret and report what the interviewee really meant”*

Interpretation is the key word in relation to our ethical consideration, in which interpretation is implied within every choice and deselection during this research process. As an essential example, we have translated the concept 'food product quality' in terms that represent our understanding of the concept. We have not used the word 'quality' in the interviews, instead we have used our interpretation by focusing on investigating the aspects of a food product that represent value creating product characteristics (see Table 6 for specific example).

Another important example of ethical issues is found in relation to the transcription process, since we have chosen to omit some of the common speech expressions and side stories that we found irrelevant to the research topic. Furthermore, spoken language, as it has been transcribed, can possibly appear as incoherent and confusing, it can even imply lower intellectual level (Ibid: 209-210). It is therefore with great caution that we have quoted the different interviewees within this report, and it is with substantial awareness of the fact that any representation is created by us.

Finally, and particularly with regard to the construction of the starting point of this research, that we have recognised the extent to which we have had an effect on this research. As an example, we, already from our initial acquaintance with Mikael and Ø Laks, interpreted the situation of Mikael and his company Ø Laks. This interpretation was affected by our previous case based work within the Master Program; Integrated Food Studies. Thus, we had preconceptions of *how* we were going to work with the case of Ø Laks, before we had explored the complexity of the case. However, while exploring the case more thoroughly, we learned the importance of knowing the different dimensions of issues that the case contains, before we could determine the problem area we should work with.

## 4.8 Section summary

The aim of this section, has been to provide a presentation of the different approaches that we have used for this research, with a focus on outlining the practical implications of why and how

these are used within this study. This section has included the following subsections: (1) *A case study*; (2) *Qualitative research approach*; (3) *Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis*; (4) *Ontology and Epistemology*; (5) *Abductive research process* (6) *Semi-structured in-depth research interviews*; (7) *Us as researchers and our ethical considerations*.

In short, this thesis project is based on a qualitative research approach to the case study of Ø Laks. To unfold the case and grasp its complexities in a structured manner, we have used the mapping methods offered by Situational Analysis. Overall, this research is to be identified as an abductive research process, which is supported by our constructivist understanding of 'reality' as well as the phenomenological and hermeneutical research approaches. We also assume that the concept of 'food product quality' does not exist as a single, objective and unanimous definition. Instead, we assume that the definition is constructed in the context of an interrelated actor-network, where we, accompanied by Actor-network theory (ANT), refer to this process as *translation*. Thereby, the translation of 'food product quality' is understood in its construction through interrelated and dynamic processes between different elements (referred to as actors).

Finally, the main intention of this section has been to provide an understand of cohesion between the research objective and the methodological research approach, where ongoing and interrelated processes are fundamental. This understanding of cohesion and interrelatedness leads to the following section about ANT (5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework), which functions as the analytical framework of this research.



## 5 Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework

Within this section, we are going to present Actor-Network Theory (ANT) since that is the framework we have chosen to use for the analysis, with the aim of exploring the concept of 'food product quality' according to four different sales channels related to the case of Ø Laks. This has become the aim of this thesis, since, as mentioned above, we discovered that the main challenge, that the company Ø Laks faces, is a general lack of a structural evaluation approach to the sales channels pursued for product sale. More specifically, the product Ø Laks has not yet established a solid market platform, and the sales potential of the different sales channels has not been evaluated in a structured or in-depth manner until now. While exploring the literature concerned with the market potential of small food producers, it became clear that the most important aspect to focus on is quality characteristics. Meaning that it is important for the small food producers to be aware of which quality parameters to emphasise when targeting specific sales channels, since these often vary depended on the given context and segment of the sales channel (as addressed in section 3 State of the art - 'food product quality').

Regarding the above, the analysis of this research is based on the data represented by the transcribed interviews of the representatives from the four different sales channels. Following this, we analyse how it might be possible for Ø Laks to match the 'food product quality' perceptions, according to the sales channels.

As mentioned previously, we do not aim to find a general version of 'food product quality', instead we aim to open up the concept and explore the many aspects and nuances related to its reality, from the perspective of Ø Laks. Thus, we attempt to comprehend the complexity of the interrelated processes that cause the construction of knowledge in this research, based on the materiel from the different interviews. This means that the knowledge that we seek to construct with this research is based on interconnected processes of interpretations, which is why we have turned to the analytical framework of ANT. Furthermore, we have chosen ANT because we seek support for the matter of resisting singularities that are usually performed in "*the act of naming*" (Law 1999:11). Thus, we aim to dismiss the rigidity that is associated with the term *quality*, as is abundantly used in relation to the context of food. ANT invites us to pursue the reality in which the concept of 'food product quality' is constructed, by tracing the interaction of heterogeneous networks (Latour 2005:132).

The following presentation of ANT is mainly based on literature by Bruno Latour (Latour 1996; Latour 1999; Latour 2005) Michel Callon (Callon 1986; Callon 1999) and John Law (Law 1999; Law 2007), who represent the primary authors of ANT.

## 5.1 ANT principles

*“Actor network theory is a ruthless application of semiotics<sup>3</sup>. It tells that entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities. In this scheme of things entities have no inherent qualities: essentialist divisions are thrown on the bonfire of the dualisms. Truth and falsehood. Large and small. Agency and structure. Human and nonhuman. Before and after. Knowledge and power. Context and content. Materiality and sociality. Activity and passivity. In one way or another all of these divides have been rubbished in work undertaken in the name of actor network theory.” (Law 1999:3)*

ANT originates in studies of science, technology and society (STS), and in academia it has also been referred to as the ‘sociology of translation’, ‘actant-rhizomes’ and ‘semiotic relationality’ (Callon 1986; Law 2007). ANT was developed based on a need for a theoretical approach that seeks compatibility of social science and technology. In this regard, ANT has the purpose to analyse situations where it is difficult to separate humans and nonhumans, and in which the actors have variable forms and competencies (Callon 1999:183). Thus, this is especially ideal for the investigation of the concept ‘food product quality’ in this research, in the context of Ø Laks, since the case situation has been shown through the Situational Analysis to be constantly affected by human and nonhuman actors.

ANT also advocates an analytical view and is an approach that defies the idea that the term ‘social’ only concerns interaction between human actors (Latour 2005). In attempt to comprehend complex situations, an ANT analysis rejects any sundering of human and nonhuman, social and technical elements. This means that ANT embraces nonhuman actors equally with the human actors (Ibid.), which is relevant to this research objective, because we aim to explore all actors relevant to the identification of ‘food product quality’ on equal terms. Latour (Ibid:64-65) describes in the following quote how the ‘social’ in ANT is different from how it is commonly perceived in social science:

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<sup>3</sup> Semiotics refers to the meaning making process.

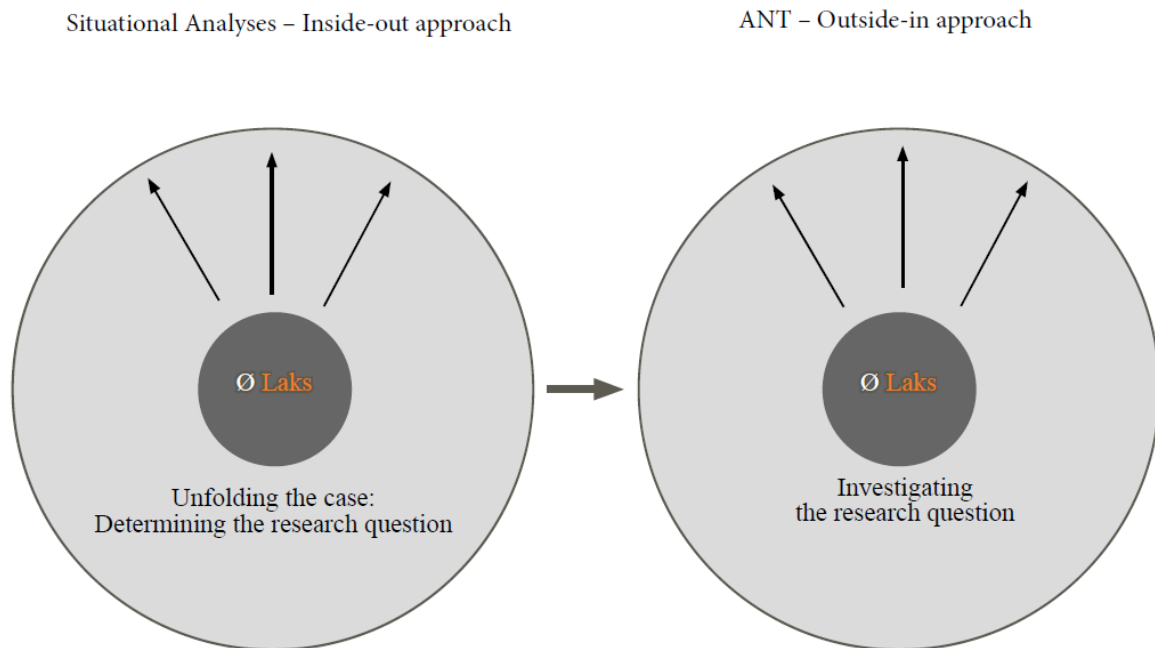
*“the definition of the term [social] is different: it doesn’t designate a domain of reality or some particular item, but rather is the name of a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrolment. Thus, social for ANT, is the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes”*

Furthermore, the locus of ANT research is that it is within the detail that we are able to find the elements that represent the meaning of a phenomenon. Therefore, ANT advocates for a ‘follow the actor’ approach, in which the attention is directed towards the actor in an attempt to understand the elements that construct the explanations of the explored research objective. In this regard, Latour (2005:12;62) states:

*“Using a slogan from ANT, you have ‘to follow the actors themselves’, that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish.(...) ANT is simply the social theory that has made the decision to follow the natives, no matter which metaphysical imbroglios they lead us into.”*

As mentioned in the previous section 4. Methodology, one could argue that we have used the ‘follow the actor’ approach continuously in this research process. Specifically, we have used it in the research phase, where we conducted the situational analyses and thereafter pursued some of the actors to get more insight related to the case of Ø Laks. However, in the situational analyses we did partly distinguish between human and nonhuman actors, and we did primarily follow the natives by human actors. Now, when conducting the main and final empirical analysis, we have rejected any sundering between human and nonhuman actors. In this sense, we have used the Situational Analysis as an *inside-out approach* to grasp the overwhelming number of actors that were found relevant to the case-study, whereas ANT will function as an *outside-in approach* to support the in-depth exploration of the research question (See Figure 10).

**Figure 10:** Illustrating how we have used the two analytical approaches of respectively Situational Analysis and ANT within the research process of this thesis project.



## 5.2 Actor-Network

In relation to the mention of Situational Analysis and ANT as complementing analytical tools, it should be noted that the 'actor' in ANT is more controversial and complex than may immediately be perceived. From the perspective of ANT, an 'actor' is a semiotic definition, also referred to as an 'actant', "*that is something that acts or to which activity is granted by others*" (Latour 1996:373). The description is used for both human and nonhuman actors, e.g. both a person and a food product can be described as an actant or actor. In this way, the characteristics and actions of the actors are determined by interactions, and therefore "*when we speak of actor we should always add the large network of attachments making it act*" (Latour, 2005:217-218) - hence the name Actor-Network. So, a network is what connects the actors together and so, Actor and Network represent two faces of the same phenomenon (Latour 1999: 19; 2005:180). Networks are not networks in a substantive or technical sense of stable systems connecting enduring entities, rather it is a conceptual metaphor that supports us when aiming to trace and understand action (Latour 2005). In the context of ANT, Latour (Ibid:44) describes 'action' as the following:

*“Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled. It is this venerable source of uncertainty that we wish to render vivid again in the odd expression of actor-network.”*

We find that this quote by Latour not only clarifies how action is to be understood, but also it grasps the rather abstract matter of the ANT approach. It should be noted that ANT is not perceived by its authors as a theory, despite the term theory in its name. Theories usually try to explain why something happens, but ANT is descriptive rather than fixed and foundational in explanatory terms. It tells stories about 'how' relations assemble or do not (Law 2007). Law suggests that it is better to talk about 'material semiotics' instead of ANT (Ibid.:2) because entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located (Law, 1999:4). In this sense, we interpret Law's point to be that one working with ANT should appreciate and embrace the abstract nature of the ANT approach. Also, it does not offer any concrete instruction for the approach, rather, it can function as an ontological and epistemological guide - an analytical framework.

The most common principles of ANT are the following<sup>4</sup>:

1. Both human and nonhuman actors can be considered actants in networks.
2. Ontologically, actors are also networks themselves.
3. The interactions are the most important. Duality is not important (e.g. social or technical, good or bad).

From a practical oriented point of view, the use of ANT means that we, within the later analysis (see section 8. Analysis), view and approach the empirical data (i.e. the transcribed interviews) as being a network of different actors that engage in interactive actions. The narratives given by the actors from the different sales channels are addressed as actors, and the perceptions related to the concept 'food product quality' are also explored. This is related to the notion that any human, natural, artefactual or inanimate entity becomes an actor in ANT terminology, as soon as it can be shown to have an effect on others. Meaning that we recognize the concept as an effect - an element, rather than a naturalized source of action. However, this does not mean

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<sup>4</sup> Inspired by Dahlgaard-Park (2015: 2)

that there is no such concept as 'food product quality', but instead that complex, heterogeneous networks need to interact for the concept to be defined (Latour, 2005).

Since actor-networks are *ruthless* interactions (Law, 1999:3), our interpretation of the concept 'food product quality' (i.e. value creating product characteristic) could be said to function as the frame and delimitation of the analysis. The analysis will, with support from ANT and its terminology, describe the generative path of any narration related to 'food product quality' (Latour 1996:374).

### 5.3 Presenting ANT concepts

During the empirical analysis, we are going to be supported by the two central concepts; 'translation'<sup>5</sup> and 'enactment', and at the same time be alert to the phenomenon of 'black boxes'. Since these are central ANT concepts used for the analysis, they are going to be further presented in the following.

*“Translation refers to the processes that is needed for something to spread across time and space through assiduous association and transformation. Thus, complex assemblages of materials, technologies, people and discourse have to be enacted for actors to exist and action to be taken. It is the **enactment** of such assemblages or actor-networks that attracts the primary interest of ANT.”* (Latour, 2005:217).

#### 5.3.1 Conceptualizing Translation

As the above quote by Latour strongly indicates, translation processes are the primary interest of ANT and it has, since the origin of ANT, been the central concept of its terminology, as implied by the name 'Sociology of translation' (Callon 1986). Callon (Ibid.:18-19) states that:

*“To translate is to displace [...] But to translate is also to express in one's own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other: it is to establish oneself as a spokesman”*

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<sup>5</sup> We wish to note that we are aware that the process of translation contains four steps, including problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization (see Callon 1986). However, this detailed process outline is not going to be incorporated within the analysis of this thesis.

In this regard, Latour (1996:375) complement the statement by Callon, by referring to translation as an *infralanguage* rather than being a metalanguage. Thus, translation does not imply a descriptive vocabulary, but simply opens all priori reductions by making it possible to describe irreductions (Ibid.). Therefore, within the analysis, we will attempt to dismiss any rigid use of terms while at the same time outline our empirical interpretations in a descriptive manner true to the narrations of the interviewees.

Moreover, the concept of translation covers the understanding of the dynamics in heterogeneous networks, in which concepts are translated by actants and thereby transferred to a network. According to Law (2007:5):

*“...translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. It is about moving terms around, about linking and changing them.”*

Thereby, we understand translation as a phenomenon that is concerned with *how* processes are interpreted. Even ANT has been translated, since it has converted itself into a range of different practices (e.g. cultural studies, organizational studies and social geography) (Law 1999:10), and we will therefore argue, that we are now translating it into the practice of this study. Thus, in relation to this research, the translation process refers to our aim of understanding how the concept of 'food product quality' is perceived according to the four different sales channels. Meaning that we are going to use the term when exploring the perceptions among the sales channels. To do so, we will follow the narrations of the interviewed representatives from the sales channels and further descriptively present these in the section of the empirical analysis (section 8. Analysis).

### 5.3.2 Conceptualizing Enactment

*“Actor-network theory is a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treats everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations.”* (Law, 2007:2)

In short, Actor-networks are “*webs that enact the real*” (Law 2007). There is clearly a parallel between the concept of translation and the one of enactment, as they are interrelated processes. The way in which processes are translated through actors is essential for the “outcome”. In this regard, the concept of enactment involves the perception that every actor contributes, by acting together, to the creation of a common reality among the actors. This also means that enactment always involves acting – action with a series of effects (Ibid.). We aim to capture this through the narrations of the interviewed representatives of the sales channels by investigating their translation of ‘food product quality’ and afterwards assess how Ø Laks may match the different perceptions. As expressed by Mol (2010:260):

*“Actors are enacted, enabled, and adapted by their associates while in their turn enacting, enabling and adapting these.”*

In continuation hereof, we understand the concept of enactment as the interaction between actors which is necessary for a translation process. Thus, in the later analysis of this thesis we allow ourselves to roughly distinguish between enactment and translation, in which we understand enactment as being the (inter)action among the actors, whereas translation is the common (infra)language between the actors. In this sense, something cannot be translated unless it has been enacted (Law 2007). It is hereby our understanding that ‘reality’ is enacted and distributed in many ways - endless even - where heterogeneous elements work together to enact ‘reality’. This means that from the perspective of this research, the concept of ‘food product quality’ is not an independent momentum, rather it is the effect of interactions between different types of human and nonhuman actors that align their interest in a certain way. Furthermore, there need to be preconditions for a concept to emerge, and it is only when there occurs agreement among the actors that the enactment has been successful, which means that the process of enactment can possibly fail (Callon 1886; Law 2007).

### 5.3.3 Black boxes

The phenomenon of black boxes is something that we must be alert to when conducting the empirical analysis. This is a phenomenon that often happens when networks have become stabilized and drifted in the background or become invisible, meaning that a phenomenon is taken for granted and no longer is associated with a complex constellation of actors (Sismondo 2011). In this regard, Law (2007:8) argues that:



*“An actor is always a network of elements that it does not fully recognise or know: simplification or ‘black boxing’ is a necessary part of agency.”*

This is for example what happens often when complex terms, such as ‘quality’, become rigid. Thereby, black boxes are assumptions that have become consensus in a form of “common sense” and we will therefore argue that the term ‘quality’ has often been black boxed in public debates related to the Danish food system. Moreover, when analysing the interviews of the representatives from the sales channels, we will aim to pay attention to eventual black boxes, and thereby make the invisible somewhat visible.

## 5.4 Section summary

The purpose of this current section has been to present the main points of ANT and some of its central terminologies. Most importantly, the semiotic approach of ANT will be used as a framework for the later analysis of this thesis, where it will act as our epistemological support when investigating the research question.

The main aim of ANT is to sum up the interactions through various kinds of entities. Hence, we are going to explore the *translations* of ‘food product quality’ according to the four sales channels and based on this, we will aim to suggest how Ø Laks may be able to *enact* with the sales channels. During the analysis, we will be alert to the *black boxes* that may occur when addressing (following) the different narrations.

## 6 Case description - introducing Ø Laks

The study of this thesis is based on the case of the one-man business and food company Ø Laks. Ø Laks is a small, newly started company that produces cold-smoked salmon, and is located on the island Samsø in Denmark. Ø Laks is initiated, owned and driven by Mikael whom one could shortly describe as a passionate and engaged entrepreneur.

*“It’s gonna sound so amateur-ish and it is. I’m just a happy amateur. I’ve just thrown myself into it. I wanna do it myself - That’s my education”* (Appendix 2:19)

Mikael established Ø Laks in April 2016, motivated by the passion for smoking food and the ability to produce a simple but high quality food product. The fact that it is a newly started business driven solely by the work of Mikael, will dominantly characterize this case description and the outline of Mikael’s business approach. Furthermore, the information gathered in this regard is based on a three hour long interview of Mikael (Appendix 2) combined with different informal conversations that we have had with him during our initial working process of this thesis project.

### 6.1 How it all started

Mikael and a partner established a restaurant called Smokehouse in 2011, and that was when his passion for smoking food and producing food of high quality sprouted. He experienced that the customers were very fond of the smoked foods, because they found them unique and different from what they had tried elsewhere.

*“Many of our customer noticed that our smoked food was quite unique and tasted different, and with the increased amount of satisfied customers, I started experimenting with more smoke.”* (Appendix 2:01)

The positive customer reactions to the smoked foods served at the restaurant sparked Mikael’s motivation for starting to experiment more with the process and techniques of smoking. When Mikael and his partner decided to quit the restaurant, and go separate ways, Mikael had not lost his passion for smoking and wanted to continue experimenting.

## 6.2 Mikael and his approach

Mikael is educated as a school teacher, plumber and plumbing assembler, and during his time as an employee he found that it was not for him - he wanted to be his own boss. Also, he has no constraints due to his private life since he is single and has no children. Thereby he expresses that Ø Laks is his "little darling" to which he devotes all his time and money.

During the starting process of establishing-, developing- and promoting Ø Laks, Mikael has generally consulted with friends and family, and drawn on his experience from his time working at Smokehouse. During his time at Smokehouse he had extensive demands of his suppliers, which means that he has a lot of knowledge about what products one can be found in Denmark, what 'quality' is available, and at what price. However, Mikael's approach has been mainly pragmatic and not systematically oriented, meaning that he follows every opportunity that he meets on his way without too much consideration. Thus, when he eventually established Ø Laks, and had the final product, he just threw himself into it and aimed wide on the market with the product from the beginning.

*"It gonna sound a bit Clumsy Hans-ish, just riding in, reverse on the donkey, but what the hell, if it works. Maybe it gonna take a long time, but it's cool if it happens like that."* (Appendix 2:24)

This very pragmatic approach has not yet led to the establishment of a market platform for Ø Laks, but it has resulted in a broad and competent professional network of various interesting people. Mikael has used a lot of time on networking because he finds it relevant to get different perceptions regarding his product and how to market it. The actors that he has been in contact with include, chefs, media people, people from the fish industry, wholesalers and consultants from food businesses.

## 6.3 Why smoked salmon

What appeals to Mikael and has sparked his fascination of smoking food is related to Nordic and Danish traditional processing method, and thereby, the fact that smoking food is an ancient and traditional way of conserving.

*"It's appealing to me that it's old, a very old tradition and it's Nordic and it fascinate me in some way. [...] The thing with smoke and preservatives, it's something that lies deep inside all of us, and a thing everybody can relate to."*  
(Appendix 2:03:)

The simplicity of the craft of smoking also appeals to him, and that it is possible to keep on generating, improving, and refining skills. Mikael has used a lot of time experimenting with how to smoke foods, as well as the concept of smoking and the processing. While experimenting with the smoking process he decided to focus on only one product, in which he has chosen salmon, because he perceives it as an exclusive product and thinks that it is an amazing fish which is consumed and enjoyed widely by a lot of people.

*"The salmon is the crown jewel and the most exclusive and preeminent food. It's exclusive dining."* (Appendix 2:03)

## 6.4 The vision of quality

Mikael describes Ø Laks as a one-man-army where *quality* is the pride of the place, and that it is quality that the concept is centred around. Mikael's focus on high quality is affected by the fact that he finds that the smoked products on the market today are generally not of particularly high quality, and that they are often too salty.

*"I would define it as a one-man company where quality is superior, and the concept revolves around it. I think, without insulting anyone that smoked food today, generally is not of a particularly high quality."* (Appendix 2:03)

Overall, he thinks that the way smoked products are processed and produced today lacks innovative approaches, thus he associates industrialisation with compromising the product quality. According to Mikael, the most important characteristic that imply the quality of Ø Laks is the taste of the product which is created by what he has found to be the best quality salmon in cohesion with his unique smoking technique.

During the process of determining how the final products should taste and when it had reached the most optimal quality, Mikael worked with the aim of exploring how it was possible to process and smoke the salmon best to make it complementary.

*“I really like, because I’m very engaged in cooking, that things are complementary [...] how can you smoke a salmon so it’s complimentary, and so it’s not only the smoke that dominates the preservation [...] so you get the opportunity to taste the fish” (Appendix 2:02)*

By complementary Mikael means that his aim was that the smoke should not be too dominating, but instead be complementary so that one can still taste the fish in itself. This experimentation process was conducted in cooperation with some chefs, where they made different tasting samples with shifting time intervals of smoking and with variation in the processing methods. Moreover, he has decided only to produce one product because that gives him the possibility to continuously develop it and improve the quality.

## 6.5 The product

Ø Laks consists of cold-smoked salmon which is processed entirely manually by Mikael, based on ancient and traditional methods, i.e. salting, drying, and homemade sawdust of cherry-wood for the cold-smoking. The salmon is farmed at the Faroe Islands and is, according to Mikael, some of the best salmon available on the market. This is because it comes from a sustainable salmon farm with no use of antibiotics and GMOs, and where the fish feed is rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Also, the growth rate of the salmon is slower than the that of the Norwegian salmon farms, there are less fish in the cages, and each salmon is put to death individually, in a humane way, to minimize the stress of the fish. Furthermore, the homemade sawdust is a very important contributor to the *taste* of Ø Laks, and is also a part of what differentiates it from other similar products. According to Mikael, Ø Laks does not have the same dominating smoke-flavour as many of the other similar products on the market.

## 6.6 The name

The choice of the name *Ø Laks* was that based on collaboration with one of his friends, who is a chef, and together they agreed that the name should be simple. Since the salmon is farmed at the Faroe Islands and afterwards produced at Samsø, Mikael decided that *Ø Laks* was suitable for the product.

*“I just thought it should be simple and Ø Laks seemed to fit. - Faroe Islands, that’s where my product comes from, and it’s an island. Samsø, where my smokehouse is, is also an island and the product is created on an island. So I thought Ø Laks.”*

(Appendix 2:12)

## 6.7 Availability and price

At the moment *Ø Laks* is available in the following stores: *Menu* in Hellerup; *Dalgaard* in Hørsholm; *Boutique Fisk (Magasin)* in Copenhagen and *Fiskerikajen* in Rungsted. Also, Mikael has sold *Ø Laks* to several high-end restaurants e.g. *Tårnet* in Copenhagen and *Era Ora* in Copenhagen. The price of the product within the stores is 800 to 900 DKK per kilo, which is determined by the individual store manager, and according Mikael that is too expensive. There are two other possible ways for people to purchase *Ø Laks*, and those are directly through Mikael via email, phone or the company webpage.

Currently the price for the product has not been determined, but Mikael predicts that the 100 gram packages should cost approximately 50 to 55 DKK. However, the product is currently sold for 790 DKK per kilo. According to Mikael, it is important that the price does not get too high in order for *Ø Laks* to be as appealing and competitive as possible on the market. In addition, Mikael is not concerned about the product being “a bit” more expensive than some of the convenient salmon, as long as the taste is extraordinary. He is convinced that people will buy *Ø Laks* because of its uniqueness and the fact that it is differentiated from other similar products on the market.

*"My point is, that I think you should be honest with what you do. There's too much cheating and too many people who would like to earn a little extra, you know, cutting corners. It's not worth it."* (Appendix 2:08)

## 6.8 The mission

Mikael's ambition with Ø Laks is to keep it niche oriented and unique because that is how he predicts the best future for the product and the business. His mission is that he wants people to rediscover salmon in a new and different way, in which the product should promote an eating experience that people will remember and talk about.

*"It's to spread awareness, first and foremost to my product, of course, but also to encourage or maybe rediscover the salmon in a new and different way so people gonna eat salmon again [...] Maybe it cost a bit more, but then we buy a little less and enjoying it more, and maybe we only eat it once a week. But then it's really tasty and delicate. It's something we remember, something we talk about, something we share with the people around us, our families and friends."* (Appendix 2:08)

## 6.9 The problem area

As a small food producer who is running a small one-man-business, Mikael is facing various challenges. According to Mikael, his main challenge is that he is a small food producer trying to "make it" in the food business that is dominated by the industrialized food industry and retail business. From our point of view, which is based on a comprehensive initial work phase of case mapping (see section 4.3 Unfolding the case study with Situational Analysis for further elaboration), his main challenge is that he has currently not determined the sales channel(s) to pursue in order to penetrate the market and establish a financial foundation for his business to rely on. This is despite of the fact that he has assessed- and tried to approach several potential sales channels, including delicacy stores, online platforms, new initiatives such as Landmad (Agricultural Food), supermarkets, and wholesalers.

*"I had a lot of thoughts and ideas about how to approach it. First I tried the restaurant's, but I quickly realized that it didn't work for me to deliver three sides to one restaurant and two sides to another one. So, I promptly discovered, that the*

*way I should distribute, had to be a wholesaler that could take a larger amount. I started, but in the process, I discovered that price price price price price, it's the price that determines everything and the pressure on you is HUGE"*

(Appendix 2:22)

However, there currently is not any sales channel that he can identify as the most optimal for his business, nor one in which he can imagine Ø Laks being marketed on a long-term basis. Although Mikael is active and engaged in seeking the "right" sales channel, he has not yet been able to establish a sustainable business or an economic surplus.

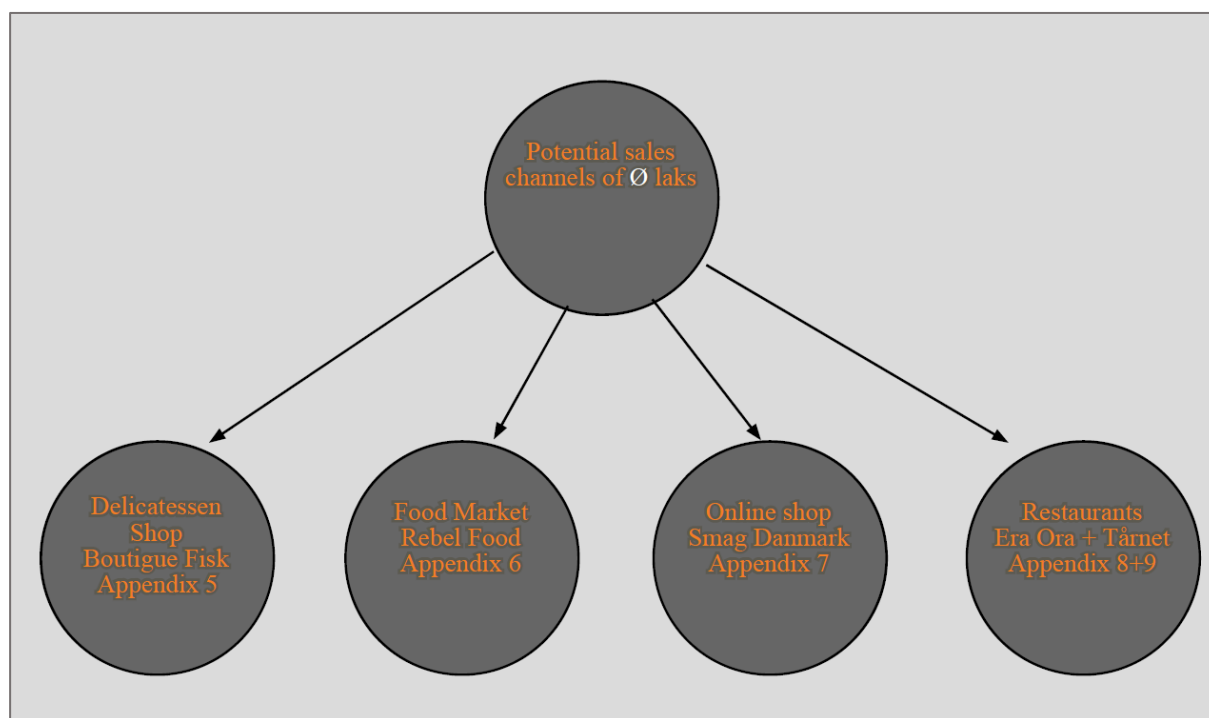


## 7 Presenting the sales channels

Within this section, we present the five representatives from the four different sales channels. All five companies are familiar with Ø Laks and the interviews were conducted with a representative from each sales channel. The reason why there are five representatives is that we have interviewed two representatives from the sales channel of restaurants, with two different restaurants included. The presentation of the sales channels will be based on the information we got from the interviews, together with what additional information we could obtain from their webpages. All sales channels that participated in the interviews have knowledge about the product of Ø Laks.

This section will address the following: (1) *Delicatessens store - Boutique Fisk*; (2) *Online food store - Smag Danmark*; (3) *Food Market - Rebel Food*; (4) *Restaurant - Era Ora*; (5) *Restaurant - Tårnet*.

**Figure 11:** Illustration of the potential sales channels



## 7.1 Delicatessens store - Boutique Fisk



*“Boutique Fish is based on the values that it should be easy to get high quality fish and you should be able to buy and enjoy the best from the sea without being a chef and without having to spend two hours in the kitchen. We call it quality and convenience, and the two words are some of our core values” (Boutique Fisk)*

Boutique Fish represents the offline sales channel, which is a part of a retail business and it was established in January 2007 at Frederiksberg, and in July 2007 they started a collaboration with Magasin at Kongens Nytorv, Copenhagen, in the fish section of Food & Wine.

The vision of Boutique Fisk is to manage a modern-day fish business that provides high quality fish products in different settings to those normally experienced in classic fishmongers. A place with of great service and convenient fish products that are cleaned, skinned, deboned and ready to use.

*“We are probably in the expensive end, so we go a long way for quality. We do not have cheap fish, we do not have any pangasius, so I expect a lot, but I also give a lot. The prices are also fairly high.” (Appendix 5:1)*

They intend to sell fish products through exceptional service in pleasant surroundings and as conveniently as possible. A large portion of their products are created from a convenience mind-set, trying to make it easy and less time-consuming for everybody to cook delicious fish based meals. However, there are also possibilities to shop with the Slow Food mind-set as well, where everything is to be prepared at home. With the possibility for consumers to visit Boutique Fisk and ask questions about the products, it provides a great advantage compared to other vendors, as there is time for conversation and storytelling.

*“The problem is, that when you sell salmon at a restaurant the customer have no idea where the salmon comes from.” (Appendix 5:4)*

As stated above, Boutique Fisk is of the opinion that the best place for creating a name and a brand as a small producer is to be represented at places where consumers can get information and try the products. It does not necessarily have to be in their store, but it has to be a place where the products can be presented in a respectable way.

*"I think his product is great. Both the salmon and the method he's using [...] I have told Mikael before, his advantage is that I am here and I can tell the customer about it."* (Appendix 5:2)

To be successful in the retail business, the representative from Boutique Fish explains that it requires patience and visibility, meaning that to get people to recognise a product, it demands time and funds, because consumers need to experience the products before purchasing it.

## 7.2 Online food store - Smag Danmark



*"Smagdanmark.com is a movement for all of us who dream that our food must be healthy and produced under proper conditions. It's a new initiative, so it's as much as your movement, as it is ours. Whether you are a producer, consumer or just passionate about good ingredients - we are looking forward to welcoming you on your trip."*  
(Smag Danmark)

Smag Danmark (Taste Denmark) is a new internet portal established in 2016 and it represents the online sales channel. It is a part of the umbrella organisation Smagen af Danmark (Taste of Denmark) that aims to improve conditions for small and medium-sized food producers. Their mission is the creation of a new movement that increases culinary development in Denmark, as well as the preservation and development of rural jobs (Smagen af Danmark 2017).

*"Smag Danmark is a movement where we like to involve consumers in quality and specialties. We are well aware that we will not become an everyday supermarket, but we will be offering a range of specialties they cannot find other places."*  
(Appendix 6:4)

Smag Danmark clarifies that they deviate from the other online web portals like Coop.dk and Nemlig.com that offer the same traditional assortments in their offline and online supermarkets. Hence the idea with Smag Danmark is to create a network consisting of small and local producers, that can provide consumers with alternative products.

*“We have made something called SmagDanmark.com, which now becomes a cooperative. Those who sell their products on the page are also the owners of the company and it runs with a collective impact. So, if Mikael add customers to the page and other producers add theirs, they help each other out.”* (Appendix 6:2)

Smag Danmark functions as a web shop, where small food producers can sell their products online, but still be part of a network. According to Smag Danmark, they are a digital marketplace where consumers are given the chance to meet local farmers, fish mongers, microbreweries, and butchers from all over Denmark. The idea is that the consumers can locate the local foods and learn more about how they were produced without actually visiting the producers.

*“Our thought is that we should be able to tell the story in a much better way than we do at the moment [...] Currently, it is described what their philosophy is (online), but we try to make small videos with them, so they can tell in their own words what they are focusing on and what they do.”* (Appendix 6:4)

The only requirements from Smag Danmark are that the food products are manufactured on a small scale in Denmark, and that the companies are registered within the Danish food administration<sup>6</sup>. When becoming a part of the network, each producer acquires an online profile where they have the opportunity to inform the consumer of how they have grown, bred, harvested or processed their products. Additionally, there is also the possibility for the customers to have direct contact with the producers. Thus, it is possible to choose food products that match the consumer's principles, and moreover the convenience aspect can help people discover authenticity from home.

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<sup>6</sup> ”Inspection Reports - In reports to retailers, the overall result of the inspection is summarised in one of four more or less smiling smiley-faces” (Miljø- og Fødevarerministeriet 2016)

*“When you are in the countryside at summer, it’s romantic and exciting the first time you go to a producer and shop. The second time is just annoying, because the product is not in front of the door. And we have to make it easy.”* (Appendix 6:4)

To be a part of the network, the fee is 500 DKK a month, and with the membership follows the possibility of utilizing the resources of the network, such as discounts on packaging, labels and distribution. Distribution has especially been a large issue, but a cooperation agreement with Postnord and Smag Danmark have made it easier, and cheaper for producers to ship their products. The network also provides guidance, and with the online products information the consumers can see how the products are differentiated from those in the supermarkets. The segment of Smag Danmark is expressed in the following:

*“We have a sense of who [which customers] it is. It actually shows that there are two poles, those who are plus 50 where the children have moved from home. They have money and they want to pay for quality. And then there are families with children who want to know what they are putting in the mouth of their children. And then there’s all of them in the middle, where we try to figure out how to reach them.”* (Appendix 6:13)

As mentioned, this specific channel is newly established, and they are still working on adding more producers to the network, but according to Smag Danmark it is only a question of time before more producers are added, because of the opportunity to advertise products to a whole new segment. However, there is still competition from offline supermarkets and other food networks such as Aarstiderne and Københavns Fødevarerfælleskab (Copenhagen food community), who can provide meal boxes with some of the same ingredients and services as Smag Danmark.

### 7.3 Food Market - Rebel Food



*“Rebel Food is an operating and development organization that brings together the best street food actors in Copenhagen. We gather street food actors with authentic stories, that are passionate about good street food. Inside the organisation, we facilitate a network for street food actors, in order to create a community, to share knowledge and create further development. On the outside, we will facilitate street food markets around the city with a diverse selection of street food. The mix of street food, music, culture, summer and happy faces creates a complete dining experiences that will ultimately lead to more life in the streets.” (Rebel Food 2016)*

Rebel Food was established by Ingrid Kofoed, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, and Frederik Aske Sønksen in 2015, and the reason for the establishment of Rebel food was their common vision of the integration of food, life, entrepreneurship and communities. Rebel Food represents one of the offline sales channels, and they embody food markets and the food truck society in the area of Copenhagen. The mission of Rebel Food is to raise the level and quality of street food in Copenhagen, thus they have developed a dogma – A food manifest with six criteria, which aims to ensure that the quality of their Rebels is as high as possible. The criteria consist of (1) Originality; (2) Presentation; (3) Commodity; (4) Expression; (5) Responsibility; (6) Production. (Rebel Food). The manifesto has been utilized primarily in the acquisition of new street food actors, and it is used as a tool for new Rebels to reflect upon their own food and vision.

*“The producers who participates, must have a unique product in that sense that they have a product that is distinctive to them, so they stand out in one way or another. And there can be incredibly many different producers, so the focus can be on vegetable, fish or meat.” (Appendix 7:2)*

Because of the many possibilities for creating different food concepts there are equally numerous segments that can be targeted. For example, Rebel Foods' main segment is women from the age of 25-40 years, but many of them bring their partners, who consequently also form a segment. Aside from food, placement of the food trucks is also a prominent factor in relation to the segment, for instance the red square at Nørrebro, is where the younger segment come to

party, eat and drink, whilst families and older people visit the events at Vesterbro. Thus, *“Both groups exist and they cross paths all the time, so it’s not because we have one or the other. We have a bit of both.”* (Appendix 7:8). Moreover, is it possible to divide the segments into a healthy and an unhealthy segment. For example, it is the women from 25-40 of age who choose the healthy, sustainable and organic food, while the other group prefers more unhealthy and greasy food.

*“When the segment is primarily women from 25 to 40, they want the healthy, sustainable, organic food [...] There is also a tendency that when people go out and eat street food, they allow themselves to be treated. So, they want to buy that steak sandwich or a beer or those fish’n’chips that have been deep-fried because now is Saturday and now we just have to be good to ourselves.”* (Appendix 7:8)

Rebel Food is, aside from food trucks, also interested in food markets or farmer markets that could be used as alternative sales channels, but for the moment it has proven difficult, due to the large amount of time and money needed to administer these markets.

*“The big challenge is that there are a lot of these farmers who have to spend a lot of time investing in farmers markets, because they have to transfer their product back and forth ... These markets are having a hard time working in Denmark, and in general, there is simply too much time associated with these kind of activities so there is a need for a new model.”* (Appendix 7:3)

Rebel Food suggest a model where the farmers are offered a guaranteed sale and an alternative sales channel. Hence, a suggestion was to make a collective distribution channel where food products were collected during the night and brought to the markets to save time. Furthermore, there is also the possibility for paying the farmers to be present and to make sure 50 % of the commodities were sold to restaurants or food trucks in advance.

*“We do not really know how it should work, but I know that there are many who have done it in different ways. The classic way is to pay a fee, but there are also some who have worked with giving the farmers money to come [...] so that it’s economically profitable for them.”* (Appendix 7:3)

So even though they have some ideas for the future where food markets and food trucks may work in collaboration, Rebel Food still see some barriers. For example, it is debatable whether people want to attend farmer markets, and furthermore, competition from the food communities has been observed. Some of the same challenges were noted by Rebel Food to those identified by Smag Danmark, particularly in that Københavns Fødevarerfællesskab and Aarstiderne offer commodity boxes of alternative meat and vegetables products that are not available in supermarkets.

## 7.4 Restaurant - Era Ora



*“Era Ora has always focused on delicate and creative Italian dishes. Starting out in 1983 as the only authentic Italian restaurant in Copenhagen it has gradually developed into an institution of high gastronomy, reaching an important climax in 1997 when obtaining one Michelin star – an honor that it has maintained ever since being now the oldest of its kind among Denmark’s gastronomic flag ships.” (Era Ora)*

In Italian, ‘Era Ora’ is translated ‘about time’, and it was established in 1983 by Elvio Milleri and Edelvita Santos and it represents the first offline sales channel of restaurants. In 2017 they celebrated their Michelin star number 21, in the same number of years, and it is Denmark’s only Italian restaurant with a Michelin star.

Era Ora first opened at Tovegade in Copenhagen, but changed location, and has for the last 20 years been placed alongside one of the old channels of Christianshavn, also in Copenhagen. The concept of Era Ora is to administer an Italian restaurant with only the best products, which also means that almost all products used in the kitchen, such as meat, vegetables, oil, vinegar, coffee and wine are imported from Italy.

*“In Era Ora we chose products from Italy, from our network of Italian producers, they sell us, cheese, meat, fresh meat, all vegetables, so that we chose because we go to Italy and speak with the producers and see the products.” (Appendix 8:1)*



Elvio Milleri calls his philosophy “Italian Inner Fusion”, where normally fusion kitchens refer to the interaction between countries, the Italian Inner Fusion refers to the variety within its own borders, where local history and climate have created its own cuisine (Era Ora). According to our interviewee the products are treated with Italian simplicity, but not strictly according to the tradition. However, mozzarella has to originate from Campania and the oranges from Sardinia, and the only ingredients which are not imported from Italy are fish products, because as the say; *“Fish is impossible to import. Fish we buy from Denmark.”* (Appendix 8:6)

*“Because now we live in a world that... There is not a lot of knowledge about, how the food is made. You are going in the supermarket, and you find a piece of salmon, you don't care how it is made. You just buy because it is convenient” [...] “How much is the products made in a more natural way, and can influence your body and also your life for a long time. That is what I mean and why I care...”* (Appendix 8:6)

One of the important aspects for Era Ora is that the products they use are produced in a way that does not necessarily have to be organic, but where there has to be respect for ingredients. They must also be grown in a natural way, to preserve the flavour and to exclude pesticides. These values and characteristics are factors which could explain the popularity of the restaurant, because when we asked what their guests expected, the representative answered:

*“Traditional Italian food, made in a good way, [...] that is actually what Era Ora was, and all know Era Ora from a lot of years ago, so they go there to eat that... That kind of food, and more or less all Italian products.”* (Appendix 8:6)

Hence, their long history, philosophy and truthfulness to their concepts are important factors in relation to their popularity. These factors also function as a an enticement which attracts attention from the segment of people ranging from 40-60 years of age. According to our representative, the segment expects a cultural experience of “going” to Italy, which also includes a story of the products and a high standard.

## 7.5 Restaurant - Tårnet



*“Tårnet is a restaurant in the middle of Danish democracy. It’s a popular restaurant where the Foreign minister eats steak tartare at one table and your neighbour eats spicy herring at the next. In Tårnet we use Danish food traditions - Freshly baked tartlets, grandma’s pickled green tomatoes and raspberries from the backyard. The furniture, plates, cutlery and lamps are Danish - and that’s the raw materials in the kitchen too” (Tårnet)*

Restaurant Tårnet represents the second offline sales channel of restaurants. It was established in June 2014 at the top of Christiansborg (Presidium of the Danish Parliament), in Copenhagen. The vision was to make a popular restaurant with room for everyone and the restaurant originated from the idea of traditional Danish cuisine, such as smørrebrød (open faced sandwich), herring and local dishes from all over Denmark. Likewise, the interior consists of furniture, lamps and service, which all are made by small Danish producers and designers.

The concept of Tårnet is to celebrate the Danish culture, and to customize the products to the environment and segment, which is “*obvious*”, according the representative, who states that it would be pointless to make an Indian restaurant at the top of the Danish democracy (Appendix 9). This also illustrates the motivation of the restaurant, in aiming to differentiate themselves from other restaurants by locating special and local products from all over Denmark. Thus, they prefer to use Danish products with an interesting story, but it does not necessarily have to be organic or sustainable as long as the flavour is good and the story is interesting.

*“It’s not because we are a dogma kitchen. We are not Noma in any way. We just take Danish dishes and modernize them and sometimes it requires that there will be some things that is not Danish, but almost all fish and meat are Danish so we can tell that story.” (Appendix 9:7)*

According to the representative, the segment that uses the restaurant Tårnet, are usually between the age of 50-60 years. This particular segment enjoys the restaurant because of the traditional

food, but also because of the red thread consisting of Danish interior and ingredients from all around Denmark.

*“They (The elderly people) may also have a bigger wish to come in and eat at Christiansborg than if you are 22, at that age I don’t you want to go here, I mean Saturday evening on date, than I think you find something cheaper, perhaps a hip Cofoco place instead, and it’s fine, but I think we have some culture here that the others place don’t have and we are also a bit more expensive.” (Appendix 9:12)*

The reason for the popularity is also a matter of prestige when eating at Tårnet, because of the location and the price. However, it could be argued, that the concept and location also exclude the younger segment, who, with all the eating possibilities in Copenhagen, chose other and maybe cheaper restaurants.

## 8 Analysis

The aim of this section is to present the empirical analysis of this thesis project. Specifically, we use Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the analytical framework when approaching the empirical material that has been obtained through interviews with the representatives from four different sales channels. ANT was presented in section 5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework.

. The four sales channels that are addressed this analysis were presented in section 7. Presenting the sales channels, and these include the following:

- Delicatessens store, represented by *Boutique Fisk*
- Online sales channel, represented by *Smag Danmark*
- Food market, represented by *Rebel Food*
- Restaurant, represented by *Era Ora* and *Tårnet*

With regard to this analysis, we will recall our abductive research process, because it clearly appears within the analytical phase. We have not categorized themes in advance that we should make the material fit into, neither is it completely without a theoretical understanding that we approach the narratives of the representatives from the sales channels. Specifically, the transcribed interviews by each of the representatives have been thoroughly analysed, by which we have identified headlines according to the themes that we perceived as being the most significant in relation to the different attitudes observed, and with relevance to the research question of this study.

### **ANT as analytical framework**

In the analysis, it will appear that there is a difference in the translations of 'food product quality' and thus also a difference in how Ø Laks can potentially enact with the different sales channels. The translation is crucial to understand in order to predict how enactment is potentially successful. Meaning that before we are able to propose a potential enactment of Ø Laks with the different sales channels, we need to investigate which aspects, associated with food products, imply 'food product quality' according to the sales channels. In theoretical terms, we will investigate the *translation* and *enactment* via the cues, elements, choice of words and actions that are associated with 'food product quality' in general, and the quality of Ø Laks, in

relation to the different sales channels. In ANT terminology, we will describe the *constructed meaning* of 'food product quality' as the translation process which involves different actors that represent different quality cues, and which takes place in the local context of the different sales channels. In addition, the locus of the enactment term in relation to 'food product quality' of Ø Laks, is the way in which Ø Laks is able to be adapted or integrated to match the context and understanding of the sales channels.

### **Integrating the Total Food Quality Model**

To frame the concept of 'food product quality' we integrate the framework with the Total Food Quality Model (TFQM) which was presented in section 3 State of the art - 'food product quality'. More specifically, we have used the TFQM to reflect upon the narratives of the representatives of the sales channel. Meaning that we compare the elements that are involved in the translation of 'food product quality' with the aspects that are outlined in the TFQM. Thereby, we assess whether the quality cues are either *intrinsic* or *extrinsic*, and how the four types of quality dimensions may be a part of the translation process. Recall that the intrinsic cues are associated with the product's physical properties whereas the extrinsic cues include everything surrounding the product. The four quality dimensions include the following:

*Process:* This dimension includes everything that has to do with the production.

*Taste and appearance:* This dimension covers the experienced quality of a food product.

*Health:* This is perceived as a quality property related to how the product will affect the health of the consumers.

*Convenience:* This implies saving time and it includes the comfort of quick consumption.

Using the TFQM to set the frame regarding elements associated with 'food product quality', functions as a parallel to the analytical framework of ANT, in that both frameworks embrace the importance of perceiving the elements related to 'food product quality' as interrelated instead of being independent aspects.

## 8.1 Delicatessens store - Boutique Fisk

The delicatessens store Boutique Fisk is an integrated part of the fine food store 'Mad & Vin' in the shopping mall Magasin in Copenhagen. Boutique Fisk is, according to its representative, a store with focus on quality fish, in which the first expressed quality parameter concerned the price of the products:

*"We're placed within Mad & Vin, we've got two stores, we're both within Mad & Vin and in Torvehallerne. And we're probably in the more expensive end of the stores, so we're very focused on quality. We don't have any cheap fish, we don't have pangasius or... we're very focused on quality, so I expect much, but I also pay a lot for it. The prices are pretty high."* (Appendix 5:1)

*"As I said before, they [the customers] know that they maybe pay extra for it... and then they also know that they pay for quality. And I must say that it's very rarely that I experience to get complaints for our products. It's all the way through, not just smoked salmon, but also the fresh products. So that's it – people expect much of us."* (Appendix 5:2)

As illustrated by these two quotes above, the price of the products is, according to the representative from Boutique Fisk, a quality parameter that indicates the 'food product quality'. It is not only when they buy new products for the store that the price is an indicator, it is also something that is somewhat expected by the customers, meaning that it has implicitly become a part of the store's quality-brand. This means that when the customers at Boutique Fisk pay a high price for the products they expect that it corresponds with a high quality. The criteria for selecting these high-quality fish products will be addressed in the following.

### 8.1.1 Selecting quality products

The fish products that are selected for sale at the Delicatessens store, Boutique Fisk have to meet certain quality criteria to have sales potential. The most emphasised criteria include animal welfare, the packaging of the product and product differentiation.

Animal welfare is something that is significant in relation to the upbringing of the fish, which refers to the circumstances under which the fish have been farmed:

*“It’s like that with the Icelandic and Faroese salmon, they’re farmed in a bit of a special way, at least at Iceland. There they get much more space and they get something totally different to eat compared to the ones in other countries. They simply get to eat food and that gives a lot.”* (Appendix 5:1)

This statement not only indicates that animal welfare is an important criterion for determining the 'food product quality', but also shows that trust related to the origin of the fish is important. It is important that there exists accessible knowledge about the conditions under which the fish are farmed. Traceability and transparency are two more important criteria to add in this regard.

Another aspect that is important to consider when selecting products to be marketed at Boutique Fisk is the packaging of the product. The packaging reflects the product and thus it communicates the 'food product quality' of the product. In addition, the representative argues that the packaging is a crucial element to consider when aiming to promote sales potential of a product:

*“It [the sales potential] has a lot to do with how the packaging looks like. If you don’t have control over the packaging, then it’s difficult.”* (Appendix 5:3)

In this sense, the focus is very much on the extrinsic quality cues when translating the 'food product quality' of fish products. The packaging may not be directly a part of the translation process of 'food product quality', but it indicates the quality of the product and is therefore an important aspect to consider in relation to marketing.

The third clearly identified criteria that is considered when selecting quality products is the significance of product differentiation. Meaning that it is important that the product differs in comparison to other similar products on the market:

*“I try all the time to find some products that you can’t find anywhere else.”*  
(Appendix 5: 4)

Thus, it is important to have a selection of unique and special products. But to implement such endeavour, also implies the necessity of having substantial of knowledge about the product activities on the markets associated with fish products. Furthermore, the quote illustrates the

subjective matter of determining 'food product quality', since it seems to be only one person from Boutique Fisk that chooses the products to be marketed at the sales channel.

### 8.1.2 Storytelling communicates 'food product quality'

According to the representative from Boutique Fisk, storytelling is an important aspect to incorporate in relation to the promotion of product sales. This is because it differentiates the product from other similar products and it indicates the quality of the product. As an example of this, the representative states the following:

“We’re very focussed on telling the customers a bit about the products, what is the difference between Faroese salmon and Norwegian salmon. Norwegian salmon – right now Norwegian salmon is not that great.” (Appendix 5:1)

It is thus about product differentiation through providing customers with additional knowledge about the origin of the fish. Also, they are able to illustrate what a product is, by telling what it is not.

Another important element that should be included in the storytelling about a product is the production process, since that was considered to indicate 'food product quality' as well as to contribute to differentiation of the product. More specifically, it is an important element to consider in relation to the story of Ø Laks, since it is from the perspective of Ø Laks that the representative from Boutique Fisk is given statements regarding the matter.

*“That is also one of those things that I think is exciting. That is that I can tell the customers a lot of stories about what he [Mikael] makes and people like that. Well, that he himself smokes it and walks around in the woods and all that. That’s a good story, and not just a story, it’s also made from scratch and that’s what the customers really like. And that’s quality... and then it even tastes really good too”*  
(Appendix 5:2)

According to the above statement, it is the story about how Mikael produces Ø Laks that is the essence, whereas the taste of the products seems to function as added value instead of the main value. Hereby it seems that it is the production process that functions as the main quality dimension to focus on in relation to storytelling, in which the story about the production method and Mikael brings proximity to the products. More specifically, it is our understanding that the



essence of storytelling is to bring in product transparency and a personal story that people can relate to. Thus, it is about focussing on extrinsic quality cues by using emotional product cues to illustrate the 'food product quality'.

*“The problem is just that it's not the same to sell one's salmon at some restaurant, because the customer in the restaurant doesn't know where the salmon comes from – it comes from the Faroe Islands, but have no idea that it's someone called Mikael who stands and enjoy himself with the salmon for several days – nobody knows that. But that's what I can tell the costumer. So, I make a sign where it says a bit about Mikael and the way in which he makes it and stuff like that. But that's just what it takes.”* (Appendix 5:4-5)

As indicated by this quote, the storytelling may need to be rather detailed, which is not necessarily suited to all sales channels. As an example, the representative mentioned restaurants as being less beneficial for a small food producer such as Mikael to pursue for sales, as they are not considered effective enough at telling the story about Ø Laks. Accordingly, it is the perception that it is the story that expresses the 'food product quality' and therefore it is important to emphasise storytelling when aiming for product success. This leads us to the following subsection where we will address the potential enactment of Ø Laks in Boutique Fisk.

### 8.1.3 Enactment of Ø Laks

Boutique Fisk is a sales channel where Ø Laks has recently been marketed. The product was included in the product selection at the time that we did the interview with the representative from Boutique Fisk, but it was no longer in the store when we went there to observe later during the research process. One of the reasons that Ø Laks not is marketed there anymore may relate to some disagreement between the store representative and Mikael. Specifically, they had different expectations regarding the price and how the product should be presented:

*“As I said to him, his salmon is a bit, very expensive compared to the others and that is a bit difficult for me to sell a product that no one knows in that end. That is a bit difficult. I understand that it should be expensive because it's something that is special made, I understand it, but we could not sell it the way he would have done it. I made some 100 grams' packages, 50 gram packages, I cut them in slices and packed it, but it didn't look so appealing, so we remade it a bit and made thicker*

*slices which he meant we could sell, but they didn't sell either. So, I ended up lowering the price and then I've cut some pieces of 150-200 gram (Appendix 5:3)*

This quote illustrates that Mikael and the representative from Boutique Fisk did not agree on how Ø Laks should be marketed, neither in relation to the physical presentation nor the price of the product. According to the representative, it is important that the product "sell" itself by its physical appearance, and it is also in this regard that the significance of the packaging plays an important role. In addition, the representative did not find Ø Laks' packaging particularly appealing and therefore it was repacked by the management of Boutique Fisk.

Another element that has limited the enactment of Ø Laks is the origin of the salmon, which means that the representative would have preferred if the fish was from Denmark, so that the product could be marketed as a Danish product:

*"I actually think it's a bit of a shame that he doesn't have any Danish salmon, so that I could vouch for it all the way. But that's just difficult..." (Appendix 5:2)*

This implies that an important element in the translation of 'food product quality' is related to the origin of the food product. In this case of Ø Laks it is important to consider that the salmon is from the Faroe Island and not from Denmark, when the strong story of the product is related to being a Danish product produced in the idyll of Samsø by this local man Mikael. This issue stands in contrast to the fact that Boutique Fisk decided to market Ø Laks at their sales channel because of its story:

*"It definitely has to have a good story, that is absolutely the best today if you have a producer that has a good story, which you can tell the costumer. That is definitely the way we must go. That's just a bit difficult because there's not that many of those. And that's why I took in Mikael, because I think his story is genius."*  
(Appendix 5:3)

It follows that it is not only significant that Mikael has a great story about Ø Laks, it is also important that he gets to tell the story to the costumers. It is important to create cohesion between the producer and the product because it personalises the story about the product, and thus the product becomes differentiated from the ones produced at industrialized factories:

*“Currently with Mikael, then I think that his product is super delicious... both the salmon and the method he uses to make his thing. So, it's clear, as I've also said to Mikael, his advantage is that I can stand and tell the costumer that it's himself, that it's Mikael who makes all of this himself... Compared to the large factories that makes smoked salmon around the clock. And he doesn't do that and that's the difference and there isn't many of them anymore.” (Appendix 5:2)*

Finally, it is clear that Mikael and the representative from Boutique Fisk have had some differences regarding the marketing of Ø Laks. This has specifically been related to the physical presentation of the product as well as the price setting, and may have caused the enactment of Ø Laks to have failed within this sales channel. However, the story of Ø Laks seems to be of paramount importance with regards of marketing the product, in that it is crucial to emphasise the extrinsic quality cues such as the process oriented quality dimension as well as the story about the producer Mikael. When it comes to the physical product presenting itself in the store, it is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that carries important implications for the 'food product quality'. It is especially the process combined with the taste and appearance quality dimension that seem to be in focus.

## 8.2 Online sales channel - Smag Danmark

It is clear from the narrative of the representative, that the online sales channel Smag Danmark is a market platform that was recently established in 2016, and since it is so newly started, the vision and mission have not been clearly identified. This also reflects that the translation of 'food product quality' is still undergoing a negotiation process between different elements (actors) that may construct the reality of the concept. Overall, the only expectation that Smag Danmark has of producers and products to be marketed, is that they should be officially certified by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration (Fødevarestyrelsen). Hereby the following statements:

*“...everybody can be a part of it [Smag Danmark], as long as they have a CVR number related to foods and have a smiley from the Veterinary and Food Administration [Fødevarestyrelsen], then all can participate.” (Appendix 6:5)*

*"They [the food producers] have to be approved by the Veterinary and Food Administration [Fødevarestyrelsen] and the Danish food agency is really tough. They are out there all the time, so if they fulfil the requirements by the Danish food agency, then there is not much left that you can do."* (Appendix 6:6)

The above statements reflect that Smag Danmark distance themselves from the responsibility of determining specific expectations of the food producers and the products that are represented on their sales platform. Thus, it could be argued that there are no explicit quality parameters set by Smag Danmark, instead, these are settled by the Danish government. However, when exploring the narratives in depth and in cohesion, a different reality emerges, where many implicit aspects seem to add to the construction of 'food product quality'. As an example of this, small food producers implicitly represent a higher level of quality. Despite this being implied, the representative also expressed that *"Just because it's small it's not necessarily good quality"* (Ibid.: 5). Based on our investigation, it is our impression that many of the statements are a part of a translation process where internal negotiations take place, regarding food quality aspects. The essential aspects regarding perceived 'food product quality' involve discourses and intersubjective discussions, and these will be further outlined in the following.

### 8.2.1 A contrast to the supermarkets and local food

Smag Danmark is a sales channel that aims to function as a contrast to the supermarkets and the conventional food system, where they want to embrace the small Danish food producers as well as to remain open to conventional products.

*"Denmark is far more interesting than what we in reality can see is being reflected in the supermarkets. Because supermarkets can one thing – they can only market for volume and needs volume, and therefore they can't support small things [small suppliers/food producers]. And they say so much about local food in the supermarkets, but they don't really live it, and they can't either tell the story, they can only tell what the packaging says."* (Appendix 6:3)

According to this quote, it seems that it is the products of the small local food producers that represent the higher 'food product quality' compared to the conventional and industrial food product. Also, the more intimate relation to the food producers, and transparent knowledge one

is able to get about the food producers and the products at Smag Danmark's online platform, seem to imply quality characteristics. However, in this regard, a discourse related to local food arises since they aim to focus on local Danish food producers, but at the same time it is expressed to be a difficult matter to identify what is local. To elaborate on the difficult situation of focusing on local food, the representative from Smag Danmark presented the following example:

*"There was an investigation of a pig from the Netherlands. One didn't know where it would end up, so a chip was attached to its ear, and then it was followed. It was sold three times at a wagon. It doesn't know about it, but it ended up in South of Spain. That is completely ridiculous. Spain has enough pig, it doesn't need to come from the Netherlands. And that just shows that there is something wrong with the way we act at the moment."* (Appendix 6:7)

Following this statement, the representative expressed that the requirement, that the food producers must live up to in order to be perceived as local, is that they have to produce the food products in Denmark. Also, in this regard a central discourse is reflected upon, since it is argued that it is difficult to define what a Danish food product is (Appendix 6:8).

In a similar vein, the distinction from the supermarket is much more than just about the physical attributes of products, it is about storytelling and feelings, as the next quote illustrates:

*"There is no history, there is no soul in it [the products in the supermarkets], it's there in this [Smag Danmark]. Here it is specialities that you get, which is made with love and engagement..."* (Appendix 6:18)

Hereby, it is illustrated that it is not only the intrinsic quality cues that imply 'food product quality', rather it seems to be the extrinsic product cues that have paramount importance to the translation of the concept. Furthermore, an important actor of the translation process is to emphasise the passion that drives the food producers and brings soul to the product, together with the special characteristics of the production methods and progressiveness. This is communicated through storytelling, which is an important marketing strategy for the food producers to use at Smag Danmark. This aspect will be addressed more in depth below.

Moreover, Smag Danmark does not only imply that a contrast to what the supermarkets offer reflects food quality (including their emphasis on local Danish foods), but also associate food product variety, easy accessibility and competitiveness as a part of the quality parameter.

*“How often do we come in a fish shop or fish store? Not that often, right? How often do we come in a butcher? Nor that often, right? Cheese, no... But think, if we could create a customer flow down to them, so they could show what they got. And at the same time then they should deliver some products which might compete with what they had in the counter, but that should be accepted... Like, but I have some which is better.” (Appendix 6:12)*

Smag Danmark aims to make a more convenient market platform for both the customers and the food producers. Meaning that the purpose is to provide the costumers with an accessible sales platform where it is easy to purchase delicatessens product, which one would usually have to go to delicatessens stores to buy. At the same time Smag Danmark offers food producers a platform to demonstrate product differentiation as well as a “short cut” to reach the costumers. In this context, it is our understanding that Smag Danmark associate 'food product quality' with bringing a feeling of authenticity, traceability and transparency to the food product.

### 8.2.2 Storytelling and product quality

Storytelling related to a food product and the translation of 'food product quality' seem to correlate, since the storytelling should include all the elements related to the food product that makes the product attractive. Storytelling is the most crucial aspect for the food producers to emphasise when marketing their food products at Smag Danmark. It is the story that the producers tell about themselves and the product that communicates the translation of 'food product quality' related to the specific product. It is also the story that makes the customers buy the products and remember them afterwards – storytelling makes the food product special and different.

*“What we want is that people tell the stories to each other, so when you came to dinner at my place, then I would tell that it was a special ox that I had found somewhere over in Jutland, right? And then you would think that he has made an*

*effort right? I signal that I have made an effort and that it is special and everything.  
And that is the kind of storytelling we would like for people to use.”*  
(Appendix 6:13)

In this regard, it is the elements that are used within the construction of the story that represent the translation of the specific 'food product quality', which reflect that the concept is indeed subjective and negotiable according to the context in which it is formed. The representative from Smag Danmark mentioned the concept of quality, but did not unfold the concept to reveal what is specifically meant by it. Instead it was exemplified how easily the concept becomes rigid, when it is associated with goods such as organic foods:

*“Quality is something that we ourselves invent in our heads. There are so many who says that organic is quality, but no it's not. It is just a designation for a way it is cultivated. You have no guaranty that it is better quality in any way, but it has just been lifted to something that is good quality.”* (Appendix 6:14)

This quote also illustrates how intersubjective the translation of quality is, in which it is not a specific element related to the food product that identifies the 'food product quality', rather it is the cohesion between different product related characteristic that constructs the quality parameter. One of the most important elements to include in the storytelling about food products, is the sense of authenticity, as the following statement reflects:

*“Authenticity is very important, right? They are all exciting. Some is of course better at telling than others, and so we [Smag Danmark] must help them to get them to find out what the core of their story is.”* (Appendix 6:18)

Hereby, it is not only stated that authenticity is an important aspect related to the translation of 'food product quality', it is also important that the food producers themselves are aware of which product characteristics are associated with the 'food product quality' of their product. Because if they are not aware of these value-creating elements of their product, then they are not able to construct the best possible story about the product.



Smag Danmark does not have a specific definition of 'food product quality', rather they embrace that many aspects related to the product are crucial for the construction of 'food product quality'. First of all, it is implied by this online sales channel that products by small food producers are associated with higher product quality compared to industrial and mass-produced products. In addition, we got the impression that a sales channel that represents a contrast to the conventional food system is, in itself, perceived as a quality characteristic. Secondly, it is important that the food producers are able to attach an appealing story to their food product, through which they communicate the most crucial value creating product characteristics. To use storytelling effectively, the producers need awareness about the core qualities of their food products. These have often been mentioned in relation to aspects of the process dimension, in which it is important to bring cohesion between the production process and the final product. Thus, the translation of 'food product quality' depends on the food producer, the production process and the physical products, and it is an interrelated negotiation between these elements that determines the aspects to include in the storytelling.

The online sales channel Smag Danmark, embraces all four quality dimensions in the TFQM, which include the process, taste and appearance, health and convenience. However, it seems that the process dimension is the key dimension to focus on when marketing a food product at Smag Danmark. By including this dimension in the storytelling, they bring authenticity into the story, as well as provide product traceability and transparency.

### 8.2.3 Enactment of Ø Laks

Ø Laks is not yet marketed on the online sales channel Smag Danmark, but the representative does think that Smag Danmark would be an optimal market platform for Ø Laks. They are familiar with Mikael and his product Ø Laks, and they have previously tried to recruit the product to be marketed on the sales channel. According to Mikael, this did not succeed since he did not perceive the platform to represent a product of as high a level of quality as Ø Laks, a perception that was related to a poor visual presentation. Thus, he was not interested in being associated with the different products marketed at Smag Danmark. However, Smag Danmark see potential in Ø Laks, but even more clearly, it was expressed that the story about Ø Laks brings quality to the product:



*"...he [Mikael] has a good story and that is what he has to live on, and then he has a great product." (Appendix 6:18)*

*"They [the small food producers] need to reinvent themselves and I think he [Mikael] has found something which is exciting. He has taken some salmon, taken it from up there, but tries to make a differentiated product, compared to all the others. That is cumbersome and exciting." (Appendix 6:18)*

These two quotes also illustrate that it is via the storytelling that the product is differentiated from other similar products on the market. It is the story that has paramount importance to the enactment of Ø Laks on the market. Thus, the story should include the elements that have the best potential of ensuring a successful enactment of Ø Laks at the sales channel, and these include two elements according to the representative:

*"There are two elements in this. He is where he is [at Samsø] and then there is the way he smokes it – it's a whole new way to smoke, which is not done by any others." (Appendix 6:19)*

This also implies that Mikael is an element that is just as important for the story about Ø Laks as the product itself. Thus, the potential enactment of Ø Laks is dependent on Mikael in many ways. It is Mikael who is responsible for, the story to be told, the entire production process, and the personal relations that are created to the sales channel and the customers. In addition, it is also the context of the production that are of importance, which means that Samsø as the location for Mikael and his production of Ø Laks contributes to the 'food product quality'. The importance of mentioning Samsø in the story about Ø Laks could be related to the existing food networks on the island and the food brand that has been developed in this regard. Therefore, it may be beneficial for Mikael to use this existing brand in the marketing of Ø Laks in order to have a reference that customers can relate to. Thus, it is Samsø as the context, and Mikael's personality, social skills, and technical skills that are important elements for the enactment of Ø Laks. In this sense, it is only Mikael who can contribute with the important quality characteristic of authenticity, which is important to the perceived 'food product quality'.

*“He [Mikael] must hold on to the name Ø Laks. That is a good word. And he must get stuck on the way he smokes the salmon. Also, it could be that he should tell where he gets the salmon from [...], but in reality, it comes in third row, whereas the other comes in first row.” (Appendix 6:19)*

By this statement it is clear that according to the representative of Smag Danmark, the core of Ø Laks' story is related to the context of Samsø and the production process, rather than the origin of the product. In this regard, it is Samsø as the location for Mikael's unique way of smoking the salmon that differentiates the product when compared to others, and which makes the story special.

In continuation of the above, the enactment of Ø Laks with the online sales channel Smag Danmark is dependent on the story, and Ø Laks' story is really good according to the representative, which could indicate that an enactment may be successful. The most important elements to introduce in an enactment process are, in this regard, Mikael and the production process of Ø Laks. Hereby, it is the extrinsic product cues that are of importance for the enactment, rather than it is the intrinsic cues.

### 8.3 Food Market - Rebel Food

Rebel Food has not yet established a food market that could be relevant for Ø Laks to be marketed on, but it is their intention to conduct food markets for small food producers in the future. Until now, Rebel Food has established food markets where some of the many food trucks in Copenhagen have the potential to reach a broad customer segment. In this regard, it is not every food truck that has the possibility to be included in Rebel Food's food markets, since there are certain quality standards that needs to be fulfilled:

*“Now we have also set requirements regarding organic food, but when that's said, then it's more important to us that our members are conscious about their choice of commodities...and that they use commodities with a good story.”*  
(Appendix 7:1)

What the representative from Rebel Food argues is that it is important for the food truck owners to have a genuine concern and respect for the commodities that they use in their cooking. It is

not only about the taste, it about a holistic food experience (Ibid: 1). The requirements for organic food will be analysed more in depth further down, where we will address the black box of organic and how it is something of a paradox.

Furthermore, the requirements for higher quality food products will also be applicable for the food markets with small food producers. Hereby, it is clear that products produced by small food producers are associated with a higher quality when compared to the industrial and mass-produced products, which are represented in the retail businesses. As an example, the representative from Rebel Food states the following:

*“The fact that it is not from retail can be a quality in itself [...] It’s definitely super important that those who are going to attend our farmers’ markets, is people who have some products which can more than the products on the shelves out in the supermarkets. And in my opinion it’s just about finding the small food producers who care about producing the products they produce, because then it happens completely naturally.”* (Appendix 7:3)

Based on this statement, it is our understanding that the food markets with small food producers shall function as an alternative to the conventional food system, where customers are offered higher quality food products. It could be interpreted that the passion and engagement that drives the small food producers in some way cause them to produce high quality products.

*“The small producers which shall participate [in Rebel Food’s food markets], that is the producers that has a unique product, in the sense that they have a product which is special – which stands out in some way.”* (Appendix 7:2)

Overall, it seems that it is a cohesion between the intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues that together are constructing the quality parameters according to Rebel Food. However, the extrinsic cues are immediately the most important when it comes to communicating the ‘food product quality’. Until now, there are three main aspects that have been mentioned as important quality aspects, and they include, that the passion and engagement by the small food producers are associated with higher ‘food product quality’, organic food is associated with higher quality,

and the story about the commodities. All three aspects will be analysed more in depth in the following.

### 8.3.1 Organic requirements – a paradox

Rebel Food has recently decided to set requirements for organic food, which shall function as a quality parameter that sets a standard for the food trucks at the food markets. They have decided on the following requirement:

*“We have set requirement that all of our food actors must have at least 30-60 % organic in their food concepts, from this season.”* (Appendix 7:13)

Organic food is in this sense equated with the concept of 'food product quality' and it thereby becomes a symbol of quality instead of just being a label that represents the production process. Thus, the process dimension of TFQM becomes the most significant aspect related to the perception of 'food product quality'. It is not Rebel Food who makes this linkage, rather, it is a consumer request that they have detected.

*“It is obvious that it is people who are conscious about the food and their choice of commodities, that prefer the organic, and it hasn't been like that in the years before. So, in some way the sheep have been separated from the bucks.”* (Appendix 7:2)

*“There is also some at our markets that choose which food, which food truck they want to buy from based on whether it's organic. There are other who chooses based on if it's vegan or vegetarian.”* (Appendix 7:6)

These two quotes illustrate that organic is used as a quality parameter, because the consumers seem to generally associate organic food with high quality. This can of course be an effect that is caused by the intense focus on organic food production by the supermarkets, media, scholars and many more. Often, organic food has both been associated with animal welfare and increased health benefits, this being due to the farming conditions of the organic animal and the restrictions regarding use of GMO and pesticides for any kind of farming. Also, different organic labels have been developed for food products, which may have influenced consumers

to believe that it is the better choice. Hereby, organic food production may generally be associated with the process- and health dimension of the TFQM.

Overall, Rebel Food acknowledge that there exist many different quality indicators, in which vegan and vegetarian foods are used as an example. What we cannot interpret or analyse is which specific implications related to organic food it is that result in an association with high-quality foods. In this regard, it is not necessarily only the process dimension which is in play, but rather it can be an interrelated enactment of all four quality dimensions. Organic is currently the only useful quality parameter for Rebel Food:

*“We really want people to work with a lot of small producers, but at the same time we tell them that they have to be organic... and that totally contradict each other, so the reason why we have chosen to work with organic, is because it is the only system that at present time works, as a means to apply to the consumer. We can't really use other systems to tell that we work with quality. That we can't do with local commodities, that we can't do with small producers. As a combined effort, organic is the only one.”* (Appendix 7:14)

In continuation of the above, the representative from Rebel Food expressed that it is actual a paradox that they face with the requirement to organic food, since it at times directly contradicts their aim of supporting and promoting small food producers. Thus, they are bound by some implicit quality parameters set by consumer requests, which force Rebel Food to compromise their own translation of 'food product quality' and the important aspects in this regard.

*“We actually contradict ourselves pretty much by setting these requirements of 30-60 % organic, because it is important to us that our actors are conscious about the commodities they use, and we would like much more for people to work with small food producers that have some amazing products, rather than if they have 100 % organic or so...”* (Appendix 7:13)

In this regard, we will argue that organic has been black boxed by Rebel Food's consumer group. The representative does not really state which of the aspects related to organic food

imply higher quality, instead it is expressed as being a common understanding among the consumers, that organic can be translated as an indicator of high quality.

*“Some of those with the highest percentages of organic is those who has had the very worst commodities out of those applicants we have had. And there are really a lot of consumers who believe that organic per definition is good, and there just is good organic farmers and bad organic farmers, and that is really really difficult to communicate to the consumer. So, in reality, it is not the organic that we aim for, but we use the organic as a tool to tell that we are working with quality, although we don't necessarily think that organic is quality.” (Appendix 7:14)*

This quote clearly reflects the paradox which is promoted when using the organic label as a quality indicator. However, organic food is associated with higher quality foods whether Rebel Food agrees or not. Therefore, they have been forced to incorporate organic as an important element within the actor-network that forms the translation of 'food product quality'. Another aspect that is important in relation to 'food product quality' is the ability of the food producers to tell the story about their product, and thereby differentiate the products from others on the market. Thus, product differentiation via storytelling will be addressed in the following.

### 8.3.2 Product differentiation via storytelling

As mentioned previously, it is important that the small food producers are capable of producing products that are differentiated from other similar food products. But, according to the representative from Rebel Food, it is not enough to produce unique and special products. The food producers must be able to communicate the quality of the product through storytelling. Actually, storytelling seems to be the most crucial element for small food producers to implement when aiming for product marketing at the sales channel Rebel Food, since the story seems to be of paramount importance for sale.

*“If one has a really good product but can't figure out how to communicate it, then it may be completely indifferent, because then there is no one who knows that your product exists, so to speak - whereas, if you're good at communicating, well, then you can sell a product that is really bad right.” (Appendix 7:8)*

*“Currently, where there is a lot of competition for selling one’s products, then one really must be good at standing out... and of course one can’t do that without having a great product, because then you don’t have a story to tell, and that is what we emphasise a lot.”* (Appendix 7:8)

*“...the point of departure is to figure out how one’s product stand out from the other similar products on the market.”* (Appendix 7:9)

In relation to the above statements, it is our understanding that the story represents the ‘food product quality’, which means that it should contain all the elements that are associated with the quality of the product. Thus, the story is not only a communication tool for illustrating product differentiation, it may also indicate the translation of ‘food product quality’ related to the specific product. Maybe, the focus on product differentiation, storytelling and ‘food products quality’ are not aspects that should be separated. Rather, these seem to correlate and be interrelated aspects to consider when addressing Rebel Food’s translation of ‘food product quality’. Which means that the concept cannot be defined without considering the perspective of products differentiation and storytelling.

Specifically, the representative from Rebel Food mentioned three concrete product elements that are important to emphasise in the story about a food product:

*“First of all, then it’s of course the product’s characteristics – its taste and its expression and the production that lies behind, in which one can stand out.”*  
(Appendix 7:5)

It is hereby a focus on both the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that are important to emphasise in the storytelling. Furthermore, it is the process and the taste and appearance that are the two most significant quality dimensions to focus on when communicating the ‘food product quality’ and thereby make it appealing for purchase. Although the intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues are both important, it is our understanding that the extrinsic cues are the most significant to focus on, since it is just as important to create the right atmosphere around a product as it is to focus on the physical product. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

*"...if you have a good product but doesn't understand to create the right atmosphere to sell it within or to be a part of, then people will not remember it because they won't get the value from the products." (Appendix 7:11)*

*"Far down the road I think that it's all the soft values which are difficult to measure, that they are the far most important. Which is about what mood you're in, which people you're with and which atmosphere there is in the room you're in or at the market you're at. Far down the road I think that's what cause the you get the really good and strong experiences related to the product that you taste." (Appendix 7:11)*

Thereby, 'food product quality' is just as much about mood and atmosphere as it is about the intrinsic product ques – it is about human relations and physical settings, which means that endless aspects can enact in the translation process of 'food product quality'. This also implies that the translation is ever changing and never static and human as well as nonhuman actors are continuously involved in the construction process. As the next quote indicates, 'food product quality' is indeed constructed within human relations:

*"I think the story is very close connected to the production, so if one is a small actor who produce a high-quality product, then there almost always follows a story. And then it is also having a lot to with meeting the man or woman – the producer who has produced it. That is really important because there gets created some kind of tie, a fellowship between the consumer and the producer [...] There comes an awareness about the commodity [...] I think that when you get familiar with a product and with the person who has produced the product, then you also get connected a relation to both the product and the producer, which can be really strong." (Appendix 7:5)*

According to Rebel Food 'food product quality' is a very intersubjective concept and is therefore not something that can be specifically defined. However, storytelling is important for the small food producers to use for communicating the quality of their products, and in this regard, it is important to incorporate the quality characteristics of the product in the story. Thus, the story represents the translation of the 'food product quality' related to the given product. In particular, a focus on the two quality dimensions, the process and the taste and appearance



seemed important, in which the taste, impression and production process related to a food product were mentioned as significant. Overall, storytelling is about differentiating the food product compared to similar products on the market, as well as about communicating the product characteristics that imply quality. Moreover, food markets such as the ones Rebel Food plan to arrange in the future offer the opportunity for the food producers to have direct contact with their customers, and thereby use this to promote a relationship with the customers, in which they can induce trust and product transparency to a degree that is more difficult (or not possible) through other sales channels.

### 8.3.3 Enactment of Ø Laks

Since Rebel Food has not yet established the food market that we have hypothetically investigated during the interview, Ø Laks is not marketed on this sales channel. However, the representative from Rebel Food is familiar with Mikael and his product and has therefore been able to articulate his attitude towards Ø Laks.

*“He [Mikael] has a product that stands out from other similar products. Both in taste and story and texture.” (Appendix 7:12)*

*“Mikael is in the situation where he has a really good product and he has a great drive, he is the kind of person that when you’ve met him, then you want to buy his product, but he just uses incredibly amount of time at the production and hasn’t much time to communicate his product and his business and get out with it...” (Appendix 7:12)*

*“I really think that he has a need for that there are more people who tastes his product and meet him, because he is really good at telling his story – you get inspired by it when you hear him talk about his product.” (Appendix 7:12)*

These above statements illustrate that the representative from Rebel Food sees a lot of potential in Ø Laks, but that there are different aspects that may restrain the enactment of Ø Laks. He noted that Ø Laks is a great product with a good taste a good story that differentiate the product from other similar products, and that Mikael is passionate and great at telling the story. In spite of this, it is only by talking to Mikael that the story gets communicated and thereby, the only

way people can get familiar with it. In this sense, Mikael is a crucial element related to the 'food product quality' of Ø Laks, because he is responsible for telling the story about Ø Laks and getting it communicated more broadly, and his passion and engagement function as an important element in the translation of Ø Laks' 'food product quality'.

*"The strength is his [Mikael's] passion and the weakness is his lack of ability to communicate [...] I think he needs to find someone who can help him get out with it in some way." (Appendix 7:13)*

The enactment of Ø Laks in food markets by Rebel Food seems to have potential if Mikael creates a clearer storytelling about Ø Laks. Thus, it is the storytelling that is perceived as the missing element before a potential enactment can be successful. And in this regard, it is important that Mikael creates product transparency, since that is an important quality aspect to consider.

*"I think that maybe he should stop being so secretive. Of course, he shouldn't reveal his recipes in detail so others can replicate them, but I think that it often prevents the possibility to get out with a product when you're very secretive about your product." (Appendix 7:12)*

Another aspect that was mentioned in relation to the enactment of Ø Laks, is the organic paradox that we addressed previously. This paradox may also come to influence the market potential of Ø Laks, both because the name Ø Laks resembles that organic label in Denmark (Ø mærket), but also because changing the salmon for an organic one might make the brand stronger. The representative from Rebel Food even described this organic paradox as a battle within the food system, which Ø Laks most likely is too small to win.

*"He should not fight that battle when he is small, and there might pass 10 years or maybe more before the consumer starts to understand that organic per definition isn't good. So, if he wants to sell his product now, then it would probably help him to become organic. Especially when there is that god dammed Ø [...] It must be a really strong thing to be organic salmon from the island." (Appendix 7:15)*

The enactment of Ø Laks is dependent on several aspects, such as taste, atmosphere, Mikael's passion and communication skills, the production process and the ability to differentiate the product from others. It is first of all extrinsic quality cues that should be emphasised within the storytelling about the product, and as we understand it, the storytelling indicates the translation of 'food product quality' associated with the specific product. To ensure a successful enactment of Ø Laks with Rebel Food, then Mikael needs to be clearer in his storytelling and he should consider converting to organic salmon.

## 8.4 Restaurants

Restaurant is the only sales channel, out of the four investigated within this thesis, that is represented by two different representatives. These include the Italian Michelin restaurant Era Ora and the high-end restaurant Tårnet. Both restaurants are located in Copenhagen and they have both used Ø Laks as an ingredient within their menus, but it is only Tårnet that still uses the product. The reason why we have included two restaurants to represent this sales channel is largely due to coincidence, as we had requested an interview with both of them via e-mail and they both agreed to participate at the same time. In this regard, we obtained a more nuanced insight into restaurant as a potential sales channel for Ø Laks compared to the other three sales channels, which only have one representative in this investigation.

## 8.5 Restaurant - Era Ora

Ø Laks has been served at the Michelin restaurant Era Ora and it was chosen by the owner and the former head chef, who found it to be a unique product of cold smoked salmon. Era Ora serves Italian cuisine and is known for the high-quality food that they serve, and thus there is a certain quality that a food products need to meet to be used for the cuisine at the restaurant. As the representative from Era Ora expresses:

*"Actually, for this selection was always to choose the... the quality, like fresh, super nice, first quality..."* (Appendix 8:1)

*"Always fight for have the good quality and the good product, because you know. It's in everyone's interest."* (Appendix 8:11)

This means that the chef must aim for the food products of the highest quality on the market. In this way, the food products that they chose to serve at the restaurant may reflect the quality perception of the costumers' eating experiences, and thus affect the reputation of the restaurant. Thus, it is the chef's responsibility to determine the 'food product quality' of the food products they are introduced to via the profession as a chef.

### 8.5.1 Sensory impression construct 'food product quality'

In continuation of the above, the sensory impression of the food product is the most crucial element for the translation of 'food product quality', since it is the chef who uses his senses to determine the 'food product quality' of the food served in the restaurant. This mean that the subjective (human) senses function as the parameter that judges and determines the quality of foods. Specifically, the representative outlined three sensory elements that are crucial for the translation of 'food product quality':

*"The first, the visual aspect, for example for everything actually. Second of course the taste, like for the visual part, when you see, for example a vegetable, a zucchini is not so big, it's nice, it's small, it's a beautiful asparagus for example a beautiful salad, that looks very nice and fresh, also from the visual part. Okay. After when you going to taste you øh... what you expect from the taste, okay, because it tastes really actually good, from meat, fish, vegetable okay, so... I feel like it the two things, and after, that the smell..."* (Appendix 8:3)

Hereby, the visual impression of the food product together with its taste and smell, are the most important interrelated elements that interact in the translation process of 'food product quality'. In addition,, the following was stated:

*"Because also the smell is a lot important, when it a lot strong, that mean also that it is a really good product, it is made in a good way, okay. When there is not much smell, it is more... industry product..."* (Appendix 8:4)

The above quote is an example of how the smell is expressed as a quality indicator, in which you can smell the difference between a product produced by the conventional food industry and

one produced by a small food producer. By that statement, it is also implicit that conventional food products are associated with low quality foods.

Furthermore, the representative of Era Ora states that there is a difference in taste preferences between people from Denmark and the ones from Italy, to which an Italian chef working in Denmark has to adapt.

*"I have to change some of the taste. Because in Italy you can cook in a different way that, is maybe more light, more light in the taste, okay. And in Italy, for sure, a bit more strong. That's the difference."* (Appendix 8:9)

This statement illustrates that taste is subjective and affected by culture. Thus, the translation of 'food product quality' is depended on the context in which it is constructed. Furthermore, the quote indicates that taste is changeable and adaptable, rather than fixed in its construction. Therefore, the translation of 'food product quality' must equally be changing continuously, according to the context of the translation process. Despite these indications, the representative from Era Ora still perceived it as the chef's responsibility to master the determination of 'food product quality':

*"That is our job, to be a chef, you need to recognise the difference between a good quality product and a product that is not the same level. And you haven't got a machine that can do that for you, but you need to, of course you need to train all this sense, like, smell, visual, and taste... And after one point to recognize... Immediately, because I clear the difference between one high quality product and one that is not. That it our way..."* (Appendix 8:5)

Thus, it is a professional expectation that a chef must master the ability to distinguish between the food qualities based on a product's visually presentation, its taste and smell.

### 8.5.2 Natural food

Another crucial element that is connected to the sensory aspect of translating 'food product quality' is naturally grown or produced foods. Which means that it is important that the

production process involves natural processes, since the opposite is associated with contamination of the food:

*“...when they grow up in a farm, actually they don't eat natural... elements from the sea, but they... The farmers, like put inside the water antibiotic for them... Not die or be more, more, more right, okay and it is all about antibiotics, but it is not healthy for the man.” (Appendix 8:1)*

Specifically, the representative from Era Ora refers to the salmon farms where they use antibiotics and pesticides to keep the environment clean for the fish, which is perceived as unhealthy to humans. In this sense, the health dimension is an important quality indicator that is affected by the production process.

*“...producer that buy bio, biology fruit and vegetables, so he buy not from industry, but from a small producer, so this determine a lot, like because for one asparagus that grow up in a normal and natural way is a lot bigger, like the one grown I Denmark are super quality, are big because they grow up in a natural way. If you... grow up in an industry, they push for a lot of quantity in a small area, so there isn't this space for the asparagus, for example to grow up... bigger and with the space he need for, have all the nutrients and all...” (Appendix 8:2)*

This quote illustrates that the health dimension, the process dimension and the taste and appearance dimension are all interrelated, in which they, in cohesion, reflect the 'food product quality' of a product. Also, naturally grown or produced foods are associated with the food produced by small food producers, hence they are associated with higher 'food product quality'. Again, food products by the conventional food industry are perceived as being low-quality food since it is not produced in a way that is natural.

*“Products, like, going to farm, see how grow up, vegetables. Understand the difference, you need to taste, and this means you also need to make research of what is now in the market, because now for is a lot... like a... difference from a lot of years ago, you can actually have everything you want in one place [...] because now it's more convenient, is more easy, is more fast than go around and make*

*research about small producers, small farm that work in a natural way like there are a lot here in Denmark, but also the cost of the product is more high, that is also why... now the people start to go in an cash and carry or, find more cheaper products.” (Appendix 8:2)*

The products bought in the big retail chains are not perceived as being quality products, instead they are convenient and cheaper choices, where you can buy all the food products that you need in one place. The representative prefers to do thorough research about the small food producer, to assess the 'food product quality' of the products available on the market. The small food producers are associated with higher 'food product quality' compared to the industrial produced ones, since they assumingly produce their products in a more natural way.

*“When, you force an animal to do something that is not in his routine, you have like more... of meat... you have more of the meat, less tasty...” (Appendix 8:3)*

Here the process dimension seems to be the most significant quality indication, since it is the production process that affects the taste. So generally, it is the intrinsic product cues (i.e. visual impression, taste and smell) that explicitly translate the 'food product quality', in which the extrinsic cues cause the intrinsic cues. This means that it is a correlation between the intrinsic and extrinsic cues that interact within the translation process. Furthermore, the translation of 'food product quality' according to the representative from Era Ora, is associated with an interaction between the three quality dimensions; the process-, the taste and appearance-, and the health dimensions.

### 8.5.3 The background story communicates quality

The story about the food product is used as an important indicator of 'food product quality', since it is the story that communicates how the specific food product is produced. It is the story that implies how the product is differentiated from other similar products and in what way the product is special.

*“I like to hear how the way, they grow up, the way the treat the, for example, land for vegetables and fruits. The way the catch the fish, the way the grow on animal, chicken, cow or pork, and what they are going to eat. For example, for animal, what*

*the give to eat, and for vegetables. What the use for, if the use, or not chemics, chemical products. If they use for example machine. All this kind stuff, that also influence the quality..."* (Appendix 8:5)

*"Like if the product is full of chemicals. Or... medicine inside is not healthy."*  
(Appendix 8:6)

According to these two quotes, it is important that the story emphasises the production process, so that the costumer can assess the quality indicators, such as the health concerns related to the product. Again, it is illustrated that the process dimension is correlated with the health dimension, and that both are significant elements related to 'food product quality'.

Although the representative perceives the story about the product as an important indicator of the 'food product quality', it is not used actively inside the restaurant. Instead, storytelling is used as a marketing approach to communicate the 'food product quality' to customers.

*"I do more in social media or with the marketing. That, because when people come in restaurant to eat, it's a bit annoying that I stand there say to them all the story about because then they have to stay there all day, and they haven't got all day. That's why we don't do, it's more communication and marketing communication, we do that."* (Appendix 8:7)

Thus, the background story about a product is told in order to communicate 'food product quality', and to create trust and product transparency among the customers, prior to their entering of the physical space of the restaurant.

#### 8.5.4 Enactment of Ø Laks

Ø Laks has been an integrated ingredient of the Italian cuisine served at the Michelin restaurant Era Ora, but due to change of season and menu, they do not currently use Ø Laks. However, the representative from Era Ora expressed that he would definitely chose Ø Laks for the menu at his own new restaurant. Mikael personally pursued Era Ora to sell Ø Laks, where he gave tasting samples and told about the product.



*“Of course, for the salmon, the colour, first of all, the colour. Like I said if it’s more like... With Mikael, he showed me when it more natural, it’s not too strong in the colour... Like a light orange, okay, also you see on the... On the meat... like, not dried, it is not dry, because there is all the natural fat, that make the meat lucid, okay, and the... yes, that is two things, after you smell, if there is a strong smell of salmon, after on the taste, if something really really good. It a... bit sweet, fatty... I can say... Soft also, it not hard... And the taste and this natural strong flavour of salmon is super good, super good.” (Appendix 8:4)*

As mentioned, it is the sensory impressions that translate the ‘food product quality’ and it is no difference in the case of Ø Laks. Ø Laks has been enacted in Era Ora because of its visual presentation, its taste and its smell, but maybe also because of the story told by Mikael. These four aspects in cohesion affected the enactment of Ø Laks and, most importantly, made it successful.

*“Because I did all this phase of the taste, like I smelled, visual, and the... I compared it to others, and his was the best.” (Appendix 8:4)*

Also, when compared to other similar products, Ø Laks was considered the best product on the market, thus it was compared critically with other products and still it was perceived as the best. In this sense, there is a new aspect that is important for the translation of ‘food product quality’ as well as the enactment of Ø Laks, and that is that it is affected by products with other characteristics. These comparative product characteristics may also be important elements to consider when identifying a quality parameter.

Ø Laks was chosen by Era Ora because Mikael managed to differentiate the product from other similar product by exposing the product to the chef’s sensory quality-test, as well as because he told the background story about the product. The background story included elements such as the origin of the salmon and the production method used in the smoking process. Finally, Ø Laks was perceived as the product of the highest quality:

*“..but he was the best. Because he like go to, buy specific type of salmon in a specific area, he doesn’t compromise nothing, he wants just high quality, doesn’t care about*

*the price if you like, you buy to that price, also if it high or not high, but it not like...  
For produces a lot of salmon is like compromise the quality.” (Appendix 8:4)*

The enactment of Ø Laks has been depended on several aspects, such as the sensory impression of visual presentation, taste and smell, together with the story about the production process of the product which was told by Mikael. Thus, it is first of all intrinsic product ques that determine the 'food product quality' of the product and therefore affect the enactment. However, implicitly it was expressed by the representative that the story about the production method also has paramount influence on the enactment. By the last quote, it was indicated that it is important that the chef can trust to the producer, meaning that it is important that the chef agree with Mikael about the ethical approach toward the selection of salmon and the choice of production method.

## 8.6 Restaurant - Tårnet

The owner of Tårnet met Mikael at an expo, where he tasted the product and talked to Mikael about it. The owner, together with the head chef of Tårnet decide to use Ø Laks as an element within their lunch menu. Tårnet is what we would define as a high-end restaurant, since the prices are higher than the average restaurant. Tårnet is placed in the tower at the building of the Danish parliament, Christiansborg Palace in Copenhagen. Ø Laks is at the moment a part of the lunch menu at Tårnet, where it is used to complement the restaurant's concept related to an emphasis on Danish food and storytelling. The representative from Tårnet has expressed that the main aspects that construct the quality of a food product are related to the sensory impression, small Danish food producers and storytelling. This will be addressed further in the following.

### 8.6.1 The sensory impression imply quality

According to the representative from Tårnet, the sensory impression of a food product is the primary essential aspect related to the translation of 'food product quality'.

*“...the first [aspect we look for] is the taste, it has to taste good you could say. We don't just take it in because it has a story, it has to make sense both in relation to taste and the visual part, where we want to go.” (Appendix 9:2)*

*"If it doesn't taste good then it's not going to be on the menu. So, the important part is that it tastes good. It's the first [impression] ...that it looks good, that you can use it for the meals and see possibilities in it."* (Appendix 9:7)

These two quotes illustrate that taste is the primary quality indication, together with the visual impression and the story about the product. Thus, it is an interrelation of the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that construct the translation of 'food product quality'. It is a construction process that involves a correlation between the process dimension and the taste and appearance dimension. Furthermore, the food product has to fit into the concept of the restaurant in order to be comprehensively assessed for its 'food product quality'.

*"I think taste is the essential together with the story... I think that you can see that many of the products at the market which has success and is doing well, is because they have a story"* (Appendix 9:9)

Again, taste is the primary quality indicator, but the story is almost equally as important for the construction of 'food product quality'. Based on this investigation, we understand it as it is the story that stages the product on the food scene among other products. The importance of storytelling will be addressed more in depth later within this analysis of Tårnet.

*"We take a classic point of departure in relation to the taste, how we divide them and make some other elements from them. And I think that hits pretty reasonable, because we affect people when they come, while they at the same time get something they can recognize."* (Appendix 9:11)

The taste is not only the primary quality parameter, it is also the point of departure for how they at Tårnet construct new menus of new impressions. They interpret traditional Danish dishes into something modern in which the taste is the centre of attention.

### 8.6.2 Small Danish food producers

Since the concept of the restaurant is centred around Danish food, they also associate small Danish food producers with higher 'food product quality', in which the Danish food producers indicate a value creating aspect that reflects the quality of the restaurant.

*"...for the restaurant, up here we take something Danish, some Danish products, and preferable where one take an old [traditional] Danish product and make it new and modern."* (Appendix 9:6)

There is something aesthetic related to the focus on Danish product. It is not only central in relation to the food products used, it is essential to the holistic impression and brand of the restaurant as well. Additionally, innovative thinking is also important, in which they aim to make traditional Danish products new and modern – providing it preserves elements of the traditional food types. Also, the furniture and cutlery are made by Danish designers and producers. So, the quality of Danish food producers lies within the holistic impression of the restaurant, in which they are bringing cohesion and value to the brand.

*"That is what we seek first and then we try to find some products that are not used by everybody else [other restaurants...] we have also done it with this small dairy at Møn, which is called Hårbølle Mejeri, which also is a small local, that makes really good cheeses. So, in that way we try to find those around in the country and try to get some of the Danish food culture. We think that obvious when we are placed on top of Christiansborg..."* (Appendix 9:2)

Hereby, the representative indicates that Tårnet actively seeks the small Danish food producers since they are often different from what is usually expected of a specific product. They are also perceived to represent nuances of the Danish food culture that are not necessarily experienced by the general population. Thus, small food producers possess value creating characteristics and are therefore associated with the translation of high 'food product quality'.

*"...but there are both benefits and disadvantages with small producers. They can be hard to get to deliver. That is also sometimes the case with Ø Laks, if I can be a bit critical. Sometimes it can be hard for him when I call and say that I need 30 pieces of salmon, then he gives me a smear about something..."* (Appendix 9:3)

*"...but that is the disadvantaged of having the small, and it is the same with the dairy, in relation to the cheeses that I wanted, then she called the day before and*

*says that the camembert that has gone bad or something. That is why we don't just use small producers since we need to have some [stability].” (Appendix 9:3)*

As indicated by these statements, small food producers do not have stable enough productions and they do not have the ability to produce the volume that is needed for a restaurant like Tårnet to rely solely on them for food supply. Therefore, Tårnet relies mainly on food deliveries from the larger food producers and from the retail, and decorates those food products with 'food product quality' by integrating food products of small food producers into the meals:

*“...there can also arrive a bag of carrots from the Netherlands, so in that way there has to be volume and if we are making a carrot purée, then it is important that it's the bit of carrots that lies on top that you're able to talk about...” (Appendix 9:7)*

By this quote it is clear that it is the small food producer that adds the 'food product quality' because of the story about the product, thus it is the story that has a significant influence on the quality perception of the meal. Storytelling as an indicator of 'food product quality' will be approached further in the following.

### 8.6.3 Storytelling as a quality-indicator

Storytelling is the essence of the concept at the restaurant Tårnet, where it is used actively to communicate 'food product quality' to customers.

*“...we are living a great deal on storytelling and the ability to create an experience [...] What you remember is that you get that bonus info and the story.” (Appendix 9:1)*

Thus, storytelling is not only used to communicate quality cues related to a food product, it is also used to create *experience economy*, meaning that it adds value to the experience of eating at Tårnet.

*“But that [storytelling] is also what can be the difficult. That's the art. That's what causes that you, in my world can rise over the restaurant down at the corner. That you add that.” (Appendix 9:2)*

*"...that you're able to tell that extra, so it's not just a smoked salmon that you get, but that there is a story behind that you can tell, you can create these stories and values which you not necessarily get when you go somewhere random."*

(Appendix 9:2)

In this regard, storytelling creates the ability for Tårnet to differentiate from other restaurants, since it reflects the concept and quality aspects related to the restaurant. The story adds value in the sense that it illuminates the effort that lies within the professional initiatives of the chef.

*"I just believe that if you get a story instead of an enumeration about what a dish is, then you remember it better and it becomes a better experience. We have all tried that if you get explained about some wine and you get told about this grape, this field and this bla bla... 'well that farmer walks around in his rubber boots and stamps his soil and picks these with his bare hands' – that story will be easier to remember than the other..."* (Appendix 9:5)

*"You can tell that people increase their attention when you tell some story instead of just enumerating something..."* (Appendix 9:13)

Again, storytelling is an essential part of the concept of Tårnet, and is perceived as the primary aspect that affects the *experience economy* of the eating experience offered at the restaurant. More specifically, the two most recent quotes illustrate that the stories about the products indicate the translation of 'food product quality', as well as create a sense of authenticity related to the product. Hereby, it is mainly the extrinsic product cues that are used to communicate 'food product quality' to the customers, because it seems that it is the process dimension which is of most importance when explicitly expressing the quality characteristics to the costumers. However, 'food product quality' is translated according to an interrelation of aspects related to the process dimension of the product and the taste and appearance dimension – it is an interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic product cues.

### 8.6.4 Enactment of Ø Laks

As mentioned initially in this section, Ø Laks is still marketed within the restaurant Tårnet, where it is specifically used as an integrated ingredient of the lunch menu. According to the representative, it seems that Ø Laks is associated with both advantages and disadvantages, and both are related to the product being produced and distributed by a small food producer. Overall, the enactment of Ø Laks in Tårnet has been successful so far, but it seems that there may possibly be some threats related to the current matter. Both the advantages and disadvantages related to the enactment of Ø Laks will be addressed further.

*“I think that it’s a really nice product and it taste lovely. I really like that it’s – when you get smoked, like cold smoked, then it’s often a pretty hard piece that you have to cut slices from, but this is quite soft and delicious, while at the same time it has a pretty intense flavour of smoke. I think that functions really good and it becomes like a whole other profile than what you normally associate with smoked salmon. [...] However, I think it’s a bit too expensive, but at the same time I think it has so much history – now I get back to it again – that I think it adds so much value that it wins on that account.”* (Appendix 9:4)

By this statement, the representative from Tårnet outlines very specifically the most important elements of 'food product quality' related to his perception of Ø Laks, which were the reasons that the owner and the head chef of Tårnet chose to purchase the product. First of all, it is perceived as being better than other similar products of smoked salmon, both in the taste and texture of the meat. Secondly, it has “so much history” that can add value to the eating experience at Tårnet. So in this regard, it is the essential focus on storytelling, taste and appearance that affect the enactment of Ø Laks.

*“Ø Laks is one of those product that we got with a lot of storytelling, where we can tell that it is a salmon smoked at Samsø, and that he himself has been standing by his own, his trees which he himself has felled, and also those trees he has used for the smoking, and so on and so forth. We believe that the story sells much more than to say that it’s smoked salmon...”* (Appendix 9:1)

*"...we got some menu descriptions which hangs on the walls in the kitchen, where it also says that it's Ø Laks which has been caught sustainable at the Faroe Islands, gets smoked at Samsø and so on. So, one can tell that story." (Appendix 9:2)*

Hereby it is illustrated which elements are crucial for the enactment of Ø Laks, and in which they indicate the 'food product quality' associated with the product, according to the representative from Tårnet. These elements are all related to the process dimension of the product, in which it is the origin of the salmon together with the location at Samsø and the production method by Mikael that are essential to integrate within the story. Furthermore, the process may imply a sense of authenticity that is so valuable for the determination of 'food product quality'. The fact that the salmon is farmed under sustainable conditions may provide an indication of ethical considerations regarding the production. We do not understand the importance of mentioning Samsø as being related to the food brand of the island. Rather, we interpret that it is found to be important because it adds the impression of an idyllic environment for the production. This interpretation is supported by the following statement where Ø Laks is compared to Fanoe Laks:

*"And at the same time, it's [Fanoe] also known to be a small cosy place where there are a lot, especially that I know, who has a summerhouse down at Fanoe, so it's something you talk about, something like Fanoe Laks, and there you might not have it like that with Ø Laks, but you could hope to get there. But it also takes more than a couple of years, where you smoke at home." (Appendix 9:5)*

By this quote, the representative compares the brand of Fanoe Laks with the brand of Ø Laks, and by this comparison it is expressed that Fanoe Laks has created a brand that Ø Laks is not yet able to compete with. However, it is also indicated that Ø Laks has the conditions to create the same type of brand for its product, and that it is related to the intrinsic quality cues as well as the location at Samsø. And as mentioned earlier, the fact that Ø Laks can be associated with the existing food brand of Samsø may increase the enactment potential of the product.

In continuation of the above, it is not only the taste and appearance of the product together with its story that are important elements in relation to the enactment of Ø Laks, it is also Mikael's personal approach that affects the holistic impression of the product:



*"...there is some personal relation that means insane a lot in relation to the small sales, and the sale that he has made by being out there, which you obtain a lot from instead of just sitting at home and sending out pieces – then people don't care. Well, in that case I wouldn't pay that price for example."* (Appendix 9:4)

Thus, it is the personal relation that adds value to the product, as well as the effort that Mikael as a small food producer makes to produce and market the product that influence the enactment. Also, the value that the personal relation adds is not only related to the quality characteristics of the product, since it also adds value to the price of the product, as Tårnet are willing to pay more.

Until now, we have addressed some of the elements that are positively related to the 'food product quality' and enactment of Ø Laks. To contrast this, the following part of this analysis will address the potential disadvantages of Ø Laks. The clearest disadvantages that the representative continuously expressed were with regards the price of the product and Mikael's limited ability to produce large volumes.

*"We would not use the salmon on the menu that is being served for all, because I would simply not trust that he [Mikael] would be able to keep up with it for that long time, with so much [volume]. That is the disadvantage with the small products, so that why we try to use storytelling and take those out and make them a part of the lunch menu. At a lunch serving you get a small pie where it's [Ø Laks] is in it. Then we sell maybe 10 a day instead of selling 100. In that way, we get the small story into the different dishes."* (Appendix 9:3)

*"But it's also there where the small [food producers] - of course he can't just smoke a lot and have it lying there... You have to understand that of course. But it also means that you maybe not use him for the big lots. And then he is more expensive."* (Appendix 9:3)

In this regard, it is both an advantage and a disadvantage for the enactment of Ø Laks that it is a product of a small food producer. The fact that Mikael is a small food producer adds value to

the product and is a central element in the translation of 'food product quality', but at the same time it is a disadvantage because Mikael is not able to deliver the volumes requested by a restaurant like Tårnet. Therefore, since they do not trust that Mikael can deliver what they request, they devote less attention to using Ø Laks as an ingredient in the parts of the menu that are sold in larger volumes. Thus, it compromises the sales and market potential of the product. All of this, together with the high price of the product may threaten the future enactment of Ø Laks in Tårnet.

## 8.7 Partial conclusion

Within this analysis we have investigated the translation of 'food product quality' according to four sales channels, which include the online sales channel *Smag Danmark*, the food market by *Rebel Food*, the delicatessens store *Boutique Fisk* and restaurants represented by *Era Ora* and *Tårnet*. Hereby, we aimed to investigate the interactions of actor-networks - the elements that form the concept. In this sense, we have explored the quality parameters associated with specific sales channels. Furthermore, when aiming to suggest how Ø Laks might match the quality perceptions of the sales channels, we relate this to the interaction process of enactment. Thus, enactment is the process in which the 'food product quality' of Ø Laks can be adapted or accepted by the sales channels. For a recall on ANT as the analytical framework, see section 5. Actor-Network Theory - the analytical framework.

## 8.8 Translation of 'food product quality'

The translation by the sales channels of 'food product quality' refers to all aspects - both human and nonhuman actors - that apply to the quality parameters. Meaning, that it is the interrelated elements that in cohesion construct the concept of 'food product quality'. Based on our investigation, it is our interpretation that many of the narratives by the representatives from the sales channels are a part of a translation process where internal negotiations take place, regarding food quality aspects. The essential aspects regarding perceived 'food product quality' involve discourses and intersubjective discussions. What we found was that the translation is ever changing and never static, and human and nonhuman actors are continuously involved in the construction process. In the following, we briefly summarise the translation of 'food product quality' according to different representatives of the sales channels.

### 8.8.1 Boutique Fisk

Boutique Fisk is the only one of the representatives that directly associate price and 'food product quality'. It is not only when they buy new products for the store that the price is an indicator, it is also something that is somewhat expected by the customers, meaning that it has implicitly become a part of the store's quality-brand.

The main elements that interact in the translation of 'food product quality' are the price, animal welfare, the visual presentation via packaging and a focus on product differentiation. Animal welfare refers to the importance of the upbringing of the fish, where it is important that there exists accessible knowledge about the conditions under which the fish are farmed. Traceability and transparency are two more important criteria to add in this regard. The packaging reflects the 'food product quality' of the product and it visually shows how the product is differentiated from other similar products.

### 8.8.2 Smag Danmark

According to Smag Danmark, it is not only the intrinsic quality cues that imply 'food product quality', rather it seems to be the extrinsic product cues that are of paramount importance to the translation of the concept. In this regard, the most important actor of the translation is the passion that drives the small food producers, which adds soul to the product, together with the special characteristics of the production methods and progressiveness. This 'food product quality' is communicated through storytelling, which is an important marketing strategy for the food producers to use at Smag Danmark. Finally, it is our understanding that Smag Danmark associates 'food product quality' with bringing a feeling of authenticity, traceability and transparency to the food product through storytelling.

### 8.8.3 Rebel Food

Based on our investigation, it seems that it is the cohesion between the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that together form the quality parameters according to Rebel Food. However, the extrinsic cues are immediately the most important when it comes to communicating the 'food product quality'. Specifically, there are three main aspects that are mentioned as important quality elements, and they include, that the passion and engagement by the small food producers are associated with higher 'food product quality', that organic food is associated with higher quality, and that the story about the final food product indicate 'food product quality'. According to Rebel Food, the intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues are both important elements

in the translation of 'food product quality', in which they are interrelated aspects. However, it is our understanding that the extrinsic cues are the most significant to focus on when communicating 'food product quality', since it is just as important to create the right atmosphere around a product as it is to focus on the physical product. We also found that Rebel Food experience organic food as being black boxed by their customers. Thus, they face a paradox situation in relation to organic foods, since they experience that their customer segment perceives organic as an indicator of quality. In this regard, it has been necessary for Rebel Food to compromise their own translation of 'food product quality' in order to meet the request by their customers.

#### 8.8.4 Era Ora

According to the representative from Era Ora, the sensory impressions of the food product correlates with what translates 'food product quality', which includes the visual impression, taste and smell. In this regard, the process dimension seems to be the most significant quality indicator, since it is the production process that affects the taste. So generally, it is the intrinsic product cues (i.e. visual impression, taste and smell) that explicitly translate the 'food product quality', and the extrinsic cues that cause the intrinsic cues. This means that it is a correlation between the intrinsic and extrinsic cues that interact within the translation process. Furthermore, the translation of 'food product quality' is associated with an interaction between the three quality dimensions; the process-, the taste and appearance-, and the health dimension.

#### 8.8.5 Tårnet

In agreement with Era Ora, the representative from Tårnet also finds the sensory impression of a food product to be the primary and most essential aspect related to the translation of 'food product quality'. In parallel to this, it was expressed that storytelling was of essential importance to the construction of 'food product quality' because without storytelling they are not able to communicate the 'food product quality' to the customers. Thus, that fact that a product is produced by a small food producer adds to the quality of the product, because they are then able to tell a story about the product that makes the product unique and different from other similar products. Overall, 'food product quality' is translated according to an interrelation of aspects related to the process dimension of the product and the taste and appearance dimension. So, it is again an interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic product cues.

### 8.8.6 Integration of findings

Overall, there is a difference between the translation of 'food product quality' according to the four sales channels. Even the two representatives of restaurants as a sales channel had different perceptions, in which they identified and emphasised different aspects.

Based on the analysis, the process dimension of the TFQM corresponds with the most significant elements for the translation of 'food product quality' related to each of the investigated sales channels. The dimension seems to function as a conditional framework for all of the other elements that enact in the translation process of 'food product quality'. Meaning that all of the involved elements are related to the processing of the food product. Including the taste and appearance dimension and the health dimension, which have also been mentioned as associated with important translation aspects.

Most of the representatives associate small food producers with higher 'food product quality' than the conventional and mass-produced products from the food industry. Actually, it was only Boutique Fisk that did not express this correlation, which may be because Boutique Fisk is the only one of the investigated sales channels that we would categorize as belonging to the conventional food system. The other three sales channel we would categorize as being a part of the alternative food system, which may explain their emphasis on small Danish food producers. The association between small food producers and 'food product quality' is related to different aspects. One of these aspects is the discourse of local food, which is, among others, associated with local economic growth and sustainability. Another important aspect is that the small food producer is perceived as making a bigger effort than the industry, where the products are produced with care and passion. Thus, small food producers often have a story that provides product traceability and a feeling of authenticity to the customers.

The sensory impression of a food product was, according to both Era Ora and Tårnet, the most essential for the translation of 'food product quality'. It is the visual impression together with the taste and smell that construct the quality parameter of a food product.

The translation of 'food product quality' according to the representative from Era Ora, is associated with an interaction between the three quality dimensions; the process-, the taste and appearance-, and the health dimension. In which it is the processing of the product that affects the other two dimensions. In this regard, Tårnet agrees that it is an interrelation of the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that construct the translation of 'food product quality', and it is a

construction process that involves a correlation between the process dimension and the taste and appearance dimension. However, Tårnet find the story about the product to be of crucial importance for the implication of 'food product quality' since it is the story that stages the product on the food scene among other products.

The last and most significant finding of this research is that storytelling is closely linked to the translation of 'food product quality'. Storytelling was mentioned by all five representatives from the four sales channels as being the most significant communication tool in relation to marketing. Based on this analysis we have found that storytelling indicates the 'food product quality' of a specific product, since the story should contain all of the most essential product cues that are associated with a product's value creating characteristics. In this regard, storytelling should be oriented towards the process dimension of the TFQM, meaning that the focus should be on the origin of the commodity (nonhuman), the production context (nonhuman), the production method (nonhuman), and the producer (human). This approach may promote a sense of authenticity and trust for the producer, based on the promotion of product transparency and traceability. Finally, and maybe most importantly, storytelling promotes and reflects product differentiation, which as a small food producers are crucial concerns when aiming for attention and product success within the market.

## 8.9 Enactment of Ø Laks

Enactment and translation are interrelated processes, where enactment is the active process between the actors that influence the translation "outcome". More specifically, the potential enactment of Ø Laks with the different sales channels is proposed with point of departure in translation by the different sales channels of 'food product quality'. Enactment involves the perception that every actor contributes by acting together and thereby create a common reality among the actors. In this regard, we will match the elements that construct 'food product quality' according to the sales channels with the product quality characteristics of Ø Laks.

### 8.9.1 Boutique Fisk

Mikael and the representative from Boutique Fisk did not agree on how Ø Laks should be marketed, not in relation to the physical presentation nor the price of the products. The representative would have preferred if the fish was from Denmark, so that the product could be marketed as a Danish product. Also, Boutique Fisk would have preferred that Mikael had

integrated more storytelling into the product packaging. Generally, the packaging was not found to be adequate. We will argue, that it was because of the differences between Boutique Fisk and Mikael, the enactment of Ø Laks failed.

Ø Laks may have had a more successful enactment if he had used storytelling more actively. According to Boutique Fisk, it is important to bring cohesion between the producer and the product because it personalises the story about the product, and thus the product becomes differentiated from other similar products.

### 8.9.2 Smag Danmark

According to the representative from Smag Danmark, it is both Samsø as the context, Mikael's personality, his social skills, and technical skills which are of important elements to the enactment of Ø Laks. As it is expressed that the core of Ø Laks' story is related to the context Samsø and the production process, rather than the origin of the product. Thus, the enactment of Ø Laks with the online sales channel Smag Danmark is dependent on the story, and that is really good according to the representative, which could indicate that the enactment may be successful. The most important elements to introduce in an enactment process is in this regard would be Mikael and the production process of Ø Laks. Hereby, it the extrinsic product cues that are of importance for the enactment, rather than the intrinsic.

### 8.9.3 Rebel Food

Rebel Food perceives Ø Laks as a great product with a good taste, and a good story that differentiates the product from other similar products. Also, it was emphasised that Mikael is passionate and great at telling the story about Ø Laks, which is important when marketing at a food market. In this regard, it is only by talking to Mikael that the story gets communicated and thereby the only way people can get familiar with it. It is first of all extrinsic product cues that should be emphasised within the story about Ø Laks. A current organic paradox were also mentioned, where organic food is generally associated with high 'food product quality' by the costumers at Rebel Food's food markets. This organic paradox may have an impact on the market potential of Ø Laks, both because the name Ø Laks resembles that organic label in Denmark, but also because changing the salmon for an organic one might make the brand stronger. The representative from Rebel Food even described this organic paradox as a battle within the food system, which Ø Laks most likely is too small to win. Thus, it is likely that Ø

Laks should convert to organic salmon in order to ensure a successful enactment within the food markets of Rebel Food.

#### 8.9.4 Era Ora

According to the representative from Era Ora, it is the sensory impressions that translate the 'food product quality' and it is no difference in the case of Ø Laks. Ø Laks has been enacted in Era Ora because of its visual presentation, its taste and its smell, but maybe also because of the story told by Mikael. These four aspects in cohesion affected the enactment of Ø Laks and, most importantly, made it successful. The enactment of Ø Laks has been dependent on the sensory impression of the product's visual presentation, its taste and smell, together with the story about the production process which was told by Mikael. Thus, it is first of all intrinsic product cues that determine the 'food product quality' of the product and therefore affect the enactment.

#### 8.9.5 Tårnet

First of all, Ø Laks is perceived as being better than other similar products of smoked salmon, both in the taste and texture of the meat. Secondly, it has a great story which can add value to the eating experience at Tårnet. So, in this regard, it is the essential focus on storytelling, taste and appearance that affect the enactment of Ø Laks. The elements that are important to the story are all related to the process dimension of the product, in which it is the origin of the salmon together with the location at Samsø and the production method by Mikael that are essential to integrate within the story. Also, the fact that Ø Laks can be associated with the existing food brand of Samsø may increase the enactment potential of the product.

Furthermore, the personal relation adds value to the product, as well as the effort that Mikael as a small food producer makes to produce and market the product that influences the enactment. Meaning that Mikael's ability to establish a personal relation to the people with responsibility for purchase of food products will affect the enactment of Ø Laks.

The biggest threat to the enactment of Ø Laks is related to the high price of the product and Mikael's limited ability to produce large volumes.



### 8.9.6 Integration of findings

All of the sales channels that is included in this investigation agreed that aspects associated with the process dimension of Ø Laks is important for the enactment, which is mostly in relation to the smoking approach by Mikael.

The representatives from Rebel Food, Boutique Fisk and Era Ora all found the origin and upbringing of the salmon as important elements to consider. This being in relation to the farming conditions of the salmon and the branding of Ø Laks as a Danish product. The farming conditions was by Rebel Food associated with the organic paradox that they are facing at the food markets, in which it may promote a successful enactment if Ø Laks converted to organic salmon. As another perspective in this regard, Boutique Fisk associated the farming conditions with influence on animal welfare, which is an important element to consider due to marketing the product. Also, Boutique Fisk would have preferred if Ø Laks converted to a Danish salmon, so that the product would be a completely Danish product. Furthermore, it was only the representative from Era Ora that directly associated the origin of the salmon with the health quality dimension and the taste and appearance dimension, since the feed given to fish will affect the healthiness of the end product as well as the taste and appearance of the product.

As a final remark for the above, there is a discourse related to Mikael's perception of Ø Laks since he perceives it as a Danish product although the salmon is imported from the Faroe Islands. Thereby, Ø Laks may encounter conflicts and confusions regarding product transparency and the storytelling that Mikael wishes to link to the product. The product may be misleading the customers, since the name Ø Laks can be associated with something local (and maybe also organic due to the Danish Ø-label), but instead it is a salmon imported from the international food market which is produced in Denmark and marketed as being a Danish food product. Thus, this potentially misleading matter may influence the enactment negatively.

All sales channels agreed, that the fact that Ø Laks is produced by a small food producer causes the product to be associated with a higher 'food product quality' than the food products produced by the conventional food industry. Also, small food producers are associated with the discourse of local food which is considered as being connected to ethical and sustainable consumption. Small food producers are also associated with great passion and effort regarding the product production, which add a feeling of authenticity and sympathy to the story about the product. This passion and effort was associated, by the representative from Era Ora, with higher

'food product quality', meaning a greater sensory impression of the product, i.e. greater taste, smell and visual appearance. Generally, it was the two restaurants Era Ora and Tårnet that found the sensory impression of Ø Laks to be the aspect of paramount importance for the enactment of the product. Thus, it is mainly the intrinsic product cues that determined the enactment success.

Many elements in cohesion affect the enactment of Ø Laks, but the one aspect that was mentioned by all sales channels as having significant importance, was the storytelling related to the product. It is therefore storytelling that is expressed as being crucial to the enactment of Ø Laks. In this regard, it is our interpretation that storytelling indicates and communicates the 'food product quality' of a product, and without the story it is hard for Ø Laks to be staged within the overwhelming food scene alongside the multitude of other food products. It was a general perception among the sales channels that the process dimension was the most important to include in the storytelling about Ø Laks, in which it is an interaction between extrinsic product cues that cause the enactment.

This section of the empirical analysis has investigated the research question with ANT as analytical framework and the TFQM as conceptual framework for the elements associated with 'food product quality. This section will be followed by the section 9. Discussion, which then will be followed by the section 10. Conclusion.

## 9 Discussion

The initiative for writing this thesis project is based on our motivation to work case-based, where we have the ability to get in-depth knowledge about the complexities involved in the reality and the challenges that a small food producer faces. Thus, the aim has been to use the case of Ø Laks as the point of departure for this research, by which we have come to investigate the perceptions of 'food product quality' according to different sales channels and thereby assess the enactment potential of the product Ø Laks within these sales channels.

The concept of 'food product quality' is often used as a part of the (infra)language used in the food system, in which it has become rigid and taken for granted – it has been 'black boxed' according to Actor-Network Theory. 'Food product quality' is important to focus on as a small food producer that aims to stage a product within the food scene. It is the 'food product quality' that is of paramount importance for the enactment of a product on a certain market platform. Therefore, it has been our intention with this study to open up this black boxed concept and reveal some of its many interrelated dimensions.

Through the analysis of the narratives by the representatives from the four different sales channels investigated within this study, we found that it is not the determination of 'food product quality' in itself that can be used as an indicator for a successful enactment of Ø Laks. Instead, it is important to use storytelling to communicate the 'food product quality' of a product in order to promote sales. This means that the story about Ø Laks should include important elements associated with the translated 'food product quality' of Ø Laks in order to positively affect the enactment. Hereby, it is not crucial to focus on all the elements involved in the translation of Ø Laks' 'food product quality', rather it is important to incorporate the most crucial extrinsic product cues of the product into a story about the product. According to the sales channels, it is Mikael's (the owner of Ø Laks) personality, the company's location at Samsø, together with the production process (the smoking technique) that seem to be perceived as the most significant product cues to emphasise within the storytelling about Ø Laks.

The overall aim of this section is to present our reflections regarding significant aspects of this study. These include the following: (1) *The Total Food Quality Model and the findings*; (2) ***Fejl! Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.***; (3) *Methodological reflections*; (4) *Evaluation of the case study*; (5) *Future research perspectives*.

## 9.1 The Total Food Quality Model and the findings

This subsection will address the findings of this research in comparison with the Total Food Quality Model (TFQM), which we have used for this project, to get a fundamental understanding of the concept 'food product quality' (see section 3 State of the art - 'food product quality'). The TFQM describes many aspects associated with determining 'food product quality' from a consumer's perspective (Grunert et al. 1996; Brunsø et al. 2002). Specifically, we have taken point of departure in distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic product cues associated with 'food product quality', together with detecting the four interrelated quality dimensions which are considered to be the most significant for the identification of quality parameters (Brunso et al. 2002). These dimensions include *the process, taste and appearance, health, and convenience* (Ibid.). Furthermore, these dimensions of TFQM have been used to support the important aspects that we found in the analysis in order to create a terminological and academic framework related to the investigation of the translation of 'food product quality' according to the different sales channels, as well as the further suggested enactment of Ø Laks.

Although the TFQM approaches 'food product quality' from a consumer's perspective, we have used it to address the perceptions of different sales channels, and we argue that the perceptions of the sales channels represent the product related requests by and expectations of their customers. In this regard, it should also be noted that the TFQM is a model which functions as a conceptual framework that identifies different aspects associated with 'food product quality', but it is not the aim to reach a certain quality (Grunert 2005). Rather, higher quality is desired since it helps promote the purchase of a food product, which is the main reason for us to investigate the concept of 'food product quality' within the context of the Ø Laks case.

According to the five representatives from the four different sales channels, it was a cohesion between the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues that was crucial for the translation of 'food product quality' when it was related to intended purchase of a product. However, it was clear that it is the extrinsic product cues that are the most crucial when it comes to communicating the 'food product quality' of a product via the significant marketing approach of storytelling. The most important intrinsic product cues were found to be related to the sensory impression of a product, which means the visual impression together with the taste and smell. This was especially emphasised and appreciated by the representatives from the restaurants Tårnet and

Era Ora, whereas the other sales channels were more focussed on the visual impression in cohesion with the story about the origin of the salmon and the production process.

In relation to the four quality dimensions of the TFQM, we found that it was generally the process dimension that was indicated as being the dominant compared to the others. Meaning that the production process generally seemed to be at the centre of attention, since this functions as an indicator for the other three dimensions. In contrast, the convenience dimension was not really mentioned as an aspect associated with 'food product quality', but it might have been a different outcome if the motivation for the interviews had not been initiated based on the case of Ø Laks. A product that consists of cold smoked salmon may not be associated with aspects related to convenience. Moreover, according to the findings of this investigation, the process dimension functions as an indicator for the taste and appearance, as well as the healthiness connected to a food product in general. As an example, the representative from Era Ora expressed that the origin and upbringing of the commodity and the production process of a product determined the product's smell and taste, which indicates the healthiness of the product. Thus, we found that it is clear that the dimensions of process, taste and appearance, and health are all interrelated, where the emphasis varies depending on the translation of 'food product quality' by the specific sales channel.

The main finding of this research is not directly related to the actual translation of 'food product quality', instead it is related to the great importance of storytelling when aiming for product sales, where the storytelling should include the most crucial aspects associated with the translation of a specific food product's 'food product quality'. Specifically, it seems to be important to focus on emphasising aspects associated with the extrinsic product cues related to the process dimension. It is therefore important for the enactment of Ø Laks and the future business growth, that Mikael starts using storytelling actively and systematically as a part of the marketing strategy.

As mentioned previously, the TFQM has functioned as the conceptual framework of this study when investigating the translation of 'food product quality' according to four different sales channels related to the case of Ø Laks. From this model, we have chosen to use only the aspects that were found to be central to the focus of this investigation. Which means that we have mainly focused on the variables of *expected quality before purchase* and the four outlined *quality dimensions* in this regard (see Figure 5: The Total Food Quality Model. To frame the

concept of 'food product quality' we integrate the framework by the Total Quality Model. The boxed marked red are the elements we are using in the translation of 'food product quality'. The model is inspired by Brunsø et. al (2002)**Figure 5: The Total Food Quality Model.** To frame the concept of 'food product quality' we integrate the framework by the Total Quality Model. The boxed marked red are the elements we are using in the translation of 'food product quality'. The model is inspired by Brunsø et. al (2002) for a recall). Although it may have provided us with a more nuanced insight to the construction of 'food product quality', we have not been able to use all aspects of the model for this investigation. Overall, the model is comprehensive and complex in its many variables, which makes it difficult to integrate the entire model into one investigation. This is also the main weakness of the model, as argued by Steenkamp & Van Trijp (1996) and Grunert (2002). Finally, we do not find that the TFQM considers the perceived 'food product quality' at the abstract level in which we find the concept to be constructed.

## 9.2 Reflections regarding the analytical framework

This subsection aims to outline our reflections regarding Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as the analytical framework for this research. ANT was used as framework for the analysis of the empirical data, which consisted of five transcribed interviews of representatives from four different sales channels. Specifically, this subsection will address two main themes, which include why we chose ANT as analytical framework and how we have investigated the concept 'food product quality' in this regard.

### 9.2.1 Choice of analytical framework

ANT offers compatibility of social science and technology which was preferable to us as analytical framework, when exploring a case and a concept that is associated with the complex and multidimensional scene of the Danish food system. As IFS students, we have acknowledged the complex world of food, in which the many dimensions and nuances related to the food system need to be embraced. A food system that increasingly consists of new technologies as well as immaterialism and symbolism. In this regard, ANT has supported our aim of grasping the many aspects and dimensions involved in the construction of 'food product quality' within the context of the Ø Laks case. In line with the ANT epistemology, we have rejected a sundering between human and nonhuman actors(Callon 1986; Callon 1999; Latour 1996; Latour 1999; Latour 2005; Law 1999; Law 2007) that were found important for the construction of 'food

product quality' according to the sales channels. In continuation hereof, everything in the food system consists of interactions as well as tensions between human and nonhuman actors, e.g. different human requests and developing technologies. Therefore, this study has aimed to investigate the concept of 'food product quality' supported by ANT (Ibid.), which has supported the in-depth investigation of this study. The use of ANT as analytical framework has required that our approach to construct an understanding of 'food product quality' be very open minded, without presumptions of what we were about to find with this research. Thus, this analytical framework has supported the explorative nature of this study. Instead of offering us a concrete toolbox for how to approach the analysis (Ibid.), it has offered us a mind-set that made us open towards anything that may arise in front of us.

Although we have found ANT useful as an analytical framework for this investigation, it is also a research approach that has faced critique by different scholars (among those are (Bajde 2013; Doolin & Lowe 2002; Vandenberghe 2002) for being too abstract in its approach. One of the critiques are in line with a concern we have faced during this investigation, in which Vandenberghe (2002: 55) express the following:

*“However, humans are interconnected with non humans, at the end of the day, it is humans who encounter non humans and endow them with meaning, use or value.”*

The notion that it is human actors who provide the nonhuman actors with meaning, is an especially interesting concern related to the investigation of 'food product quality', since it our interpretation that the concept is constructed by interaction between human actors. However, the construction/translation consists of both nonhuman and human actor-networks. With regards to this, continuous interrelatedness between actors makes it difficult to keep following the actors as intended (Bajde 2013).

Within the following, we will present our reflections regarding how we have investigated the concept of 'food product quality' as the centre of attention for this study.

### 9.2.2 The concept of 'food product quality'

Before conducting the interviews with the sales channel, we outlined our own perception of how to identify 'food product quality' in terms that represented our understanding of the



concept. Therefore, we have not used the word *quality* in the interview questions, instead we have used our interpretation by focusing on investigating the aspects of a food product that represent value creating product characteristics. By this approach we have aimed to avoid the rigid use of quality and instead open up the word, by identifying the many elements involved in its construction. In order to describe this construction, we have investigated the translation process and its many aspects – human and nonhuman – associated with 'food product quality' according to the sales channels.

In relation to the investigation of this study, there is one aspect where we have not followed the approach by ANT, and that is concerned with the matter that we have not directly followed the nonhuman actors. More specifically, we have not followed Ø Laks by making observations at the sales channels where the product is interacting. If we had done so, we could have brought in the perspective more directly according to Ø Laks itself, which may have provided us with an even more nuanced understanding of the elements that are of crucial importance for the enactment of Ø Laks. Instead we have only directly addressed the narratives of the human actors – the representatives from the sales channels - in order to understand the translation of 'food product quality', and thereafter proposed the enactment of Ø Laks. Despite this deficiency, according to ANT, we have investigated all aspects that were found to be associated with the translation of 'food product quality' on equal terms. In fact, it is mainly the nonhuman elements that are associated with the translation of 'food product quality' and many of these are related to the physical product and the technological process involved in the production.

In continuation of the above, the approach by ANT corresponded with our perception of how to understand the construction of 'food product quality', as well as supported the understanding of the concept according to the TFQM with its many aspects. Finally, the initially assumed subjectivity and ever-changing definition of 'food product quality' was cohesively supported by the TFQM and the findings of this study, with ANT as analytical framework.

### 9.3 Methodological reflections

In this subsection, we will present our reflections regarding the methodological approach of this study, which was presented in section 4. Methodology. We will in this section reflect upon our qualitative approach, followed by the construction of knowledge and a discussion of our sampling methods and what we could have done differently.



In relation to the subjective circumstances of the concept 'food product quality', it seemed obviously for us to apply a qualitative approach, because of the aim of obtaining in-depth insight regarding the translation of 'food product quality'. Thus, by applying an abductive and qualitative approach, we were guided by the representatives in their fields, from which themes and discussions arose, instead of striving for a standardized empirical gathering with a fixed problem (Bryman 2012:401; Brinkmann & Tanggaard 2010:17). In relation to the research question, we managed the empirical gathering ourselves in order to achieve a personal presence and empathy in the field, which is important in qualitative abductive research. As argued by Bryman (2012: 401):

*“With abduction, the researcher grounds a theoretical understanding of the contexts and people he or she is studying in the language, meanings, and perspectives that form their worldview. The crucial step in abduction is that, having described and understood the world from his or her participants' perspectives.”*

The dynamic research process that arises from an abductive research process is, from our position, seen as a strength, though it is argued that the approach is far too subjective and too difficult to replicate (Bryman, 2012:405). However, it has never been our intention that this study should be replicated.

### 9.3.1 Qualitative research is too subjective

We are aware that qualitative research methods are sometimes criticised as being too impressionistic and too subjective (Bryman 2012:405; Brinkmann 2013:142), but this often refers to the researchers being unsystematic and where what is found to be significant and important, is based on personal relationships and opinions (Ibid.). Furthermore, qualitative research does often begin in a relatively open-ended way and gradually narrows down, which often is a process that lacks transparency and information about how and why one research focus was chosen rather than another (Ibid.). In this regard, it should be mentioned that we did, early in the process, consider narrowing down our focus area, which could have resulted in more time for empirical gathering and less time on mapping, however, we were advised to be as transparent, and systematic as possible, thus we kept asking questions until we started hearing repetitions and thus no longer obtained new information (See section 4.3 Unfolding the case

study with Situational Analysis). Hence, it can be questioned whether we had enough knowledge, and whether our process had been clear enough. But as it is stated by Bryman (2012); It is impossible to know how many interviews are needed before theoretical saturation has been achieved:

*“To a certain extent, this is not helped by the fact that the criteria for recognizing or establishing when or whether saturation has been achieved are rarely articulated in detail” (Bryman:425).*

In continuation of the theoretical saturation, we are aware that it is almost impossible to replicate qualitative research (Ibid.: 405). Even if other researchers would be able to completely understand our reasoning, their background would interfere with the process, and possibly provide other results. However, we do believe, that even if two different qualitative researchers reach different results in the investigation of the same problem, the two different results do not necessarily negate each other, but can coexist as alternative perspectives. Each perspective would contribute with knowledge of the subject (Christensen et al. 2011). Based on this, and due to the explorative nature of the thesis, we find that it would not have been beneficial for us to use a different approach to what we have done in relation to understanding the sales channels within the context of the Ø-Laks-case.

### 9.3.2 The construction of knowledge

In relation to this investigation and the construction of knowledge in this regard, we are attentive to the matter that the study may hold sampling errors or selection bias, since all the interviewees have a relation to the central case-person Mikael (the owner of Ø Laks). It can be argued that these relations may cause the withholding of some information, meaning that the true attitudes that we have aimed to investigate through the interviews could possibly cause a conflict that could compromise a potentially profitable business relationship between Mikael and his associates.

It is also important to acknowledge that there are more to sampling than just the individuals in the sales channels. According to Bryman (2012:210) time and context must be considered as prominent factors, meaning that we as researchers must make sure that we, during our empirical gathering, take these factors into account. In our opinion, we have kept bias to an utmost

minimum when handling the interviews, but we cannot exclude that there will be a small difference in how the interviews have been conducted. Both in relation to the context, but also throughout the period of a month and a half where the interviews were conducted. During this time, our focus might have been clearer towards the end, which may have influenced some of the questions.

*“One of the problems that the qualitative researcher faces is that it can be difficult to establish at the outset how many people will be interviewed if theoretical considerations guide selection. It is impossible to know, for example, how many people should be interviewed before theoretical saturation has been achieved.”*  
(Bryman 2012:425)

As illustrated by the quote above, it is frequently discussed how many participants an interview survey should include. Like all other choices in a research process, the number of respondents is also dependent on the problem, purpose and analytical methods (Christensen et al. 2011:72). It has been argued that the sufficient number of respondents is first identified when the same subjects are repeated, and the number of interviewees is also influenced by the resources of the researcher(s) in terms of time and finances (Ibid.).

In continuation of the section above, we have used a single individual to represent an entire organisation, in which this person represents a specific sales channel. Hence, it can be argued that we have given too much power to a single individual (Bryman, 2012: 406). For instance, with the representatives from the restaurants, where we saw a difference between how they identified and emphasised different aspects regarding the translation of 'food product quality'. In relation to this matter, Bryman (Ibid.: 406) states the following:

*“When qualitative interviews are conducted with a small number of individuals in a certain organization or locality, they argue that it is impossible to know how the findings can be generalized to other settings. How can just one or two cases be representative of all cases?”*

All samplings in this thesis are based on personal relationships, this precipitates the discussion on what could have been done differently and what results this could have caused. The sampling

was conducted in a purposive manner, resulting in a non-probability form of sampling, which means that we as researchers did not find the participants on a random basis, but they are selected due to their relevance to the research questions (Ibid.:418). By only interviewing individuals with knowledge about Ø Laks, it provides interesting questions regarding what could have happened if our sampling had consisted of informants with no prior knowledge about Mikael and Ø Laks. A possible outcome could have been to use an alternative expert informant to the consultant, from Nordic Foodworks, which might have resulted in other information and maybe a completely different research focus. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that the outcome could have been different if another research approach was chosen.

## 9.4 Evaluation of the case study

This subsection includes our evaluation of the case study, and provides thoughts on how the study can be further used. The purpose of a case-study is to review a specific empirical event and investigates this phenomenon in depth within its real-life context (Yin, 2009:18). In this study, the aim was to investigate the concept of 'food product quality' with a point of departure in the small one-man business from Samsø called Ø Laks, owned by Mikael. This choice of research approach was based on our professional interests in this regard, but also because we could recognize an actual problem with how small food entrepreneurs interpreted the comprehensive and complex task of determining which quality cues to emphasise when pursuing different sales channels for distribution.

When unfolding the concept of 'food product quality' we found that the concept is perceived differently according to the various actors within the food chain, meaning that food cues associated with food quality are not something that can be generalised. Overall, we saw relevant and interesting issues in the marketing strategy of Ø Laks. Regardingly, this study has investigated how 'food product quality' is translated according to four different sales channels and based on this, we have suggested how Ø Laks may enact with these sales channels. The theories and methods we have used for this research, have, in our opinion, been sufficient to answer the research question. However, we are aware that there could have been other outcomes, if we had chosen other informants. Overall, this case-study of Ø Laks has provided us with the ability gain in-depth knowledge about the complex situation of Mikael as a small food producer. In addition, the case work has enabled us to explore different perspectives related to Ø Laks via the representatives from the four sales channels.

In continuation of the above, this study has provided valuable knowledge about the situation of Ø Laks, regarding how Mikael may affect the enactment of Ø Laks with specific sales channels, by focussing on the product cues that are associated with 'food product quality'. Although we cannot give a complete description of how all sales channels translate 'food product quality', we can still assert that the definition of the concept is perceived differently according to the various actors within the food chain. We do however still asses that Ø Laks can benefit from this project when exploring new markets, but we have to accept that this study only illuminates a very narrow part of the field, and that more research is required.

From a personal point of view, working on this thesis project has provided us with many positive experiences related to the field of qualitative research, and during this process we have developed a considerable amount of knowledge about many different research areas. It has been stimulating and inspiring to work case-based until the point of saturation, and hereby, not only can we claim that we have strengthened our knowledge, but also our competences as IFS candidates.

## 9.5 Future research perspectives

In this section, we will reflect on the thoughts that have emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Seen in retrospective, we are pleased with the research process and outcome. However, the findings indicate that for future research perspectives, it would be interesting and relevant to examine storytelling as a beneficial branding strategy and Samsø Food Network as a mean for marketing promotion.

### 9.5.1 Storytelling

In relation to future perspectives, the subject of storytelling is something we have reflected upon. As a result of analysing our empirical material, the findings suggest that it could be relevant to investigate storytelling as an important aspect for small food producers to focus on when aiming for market penetration. Every actor that we interviewed brought up storytelling as the most crucial aspect for the food producers to emphasise when promoting their food products. Thus, it is the storytelling that makes the food product differ from other similar products, and it is the story that the producers tell about themselves and the product that should communicate the most important aspects associated with the translation of the products' 'food product quality'.

It does not come as a surprise that the findings show that storytelling is an important tool for marketing and communication, since people have always used storytelling as the means of making sense of life, as well as defining who they are (Fog et al. 2010:18). Storytelling has spread through cultures and historical events, to a point where it can be argued, that we, in the Western world have reached a time with a saturated market (Ibid.:21). The consequence of this is seen with companies that, now more than ever, need to tell stories about themselves and their products. It is not enough to have a quality product at an affordable price, because it is too difficult for consumers to find arguments as to why a specific company's product is better than others. Instead, consumers demand products that provide unique experiences and products that appeal to our dreams and emotions (Ibid.:22).

*“As storytelling increasingly catches the eye of the business community, the mantra has become: companies must tell a story that beats a path to the heart of the consumer. The best storytellers will be the winners of the future” (Ibid.:50).*

Thus, companies must communicate to the heart, rather than to the mind, because stories created on facts alone are not acceptable. According to the five representatives of the four sales channels, it is not enough to produce unique and special products, rather the food producers must be able to communicate the quality of the product through storytelling. However, although all sales channels claim that storytelling is important, they do not all agree on the good story. As an example, Rebel Food demands a clearer story from Ø Laks, with more focus on the process quality, whereas Smag Danmark was happy with the story as it was. This shows us that there are individual perceptions related to storytelling according to each sales channel, which is interesting as a basis for understanding the interpretations that exist. Thus, a future perspective could be to investigate storytelling and to identify the different interrelated elements included in storytelling according to different relevant actors.

### 9.5.2 Samsø Food Network

Another relevant subject for future investigation could be to investigate how Ø Laks' may benefit from the location on Samsø. In relation to the discussion about using storytelling as branding strategy, it can be questioned why Mikael is not using the existing food network at Samsø to promote Ø Laks on the market. There is an abundance of food producers on the small

Danish islands that focus on quality, and many of these have established professional businesses based on specialties from their region. One of the reasons for the success of these small food producers, is the cooperation between the small food producers (Hjulager et al., 2016: 6). Hence it can be argued that Ø Laks has optimal conditions for joining such a food network at Samsø:

*“Samsø Food Network has been established to create growth and innovation and, in particular, ensure that the strong Samsø brand is even stronger in the future”*  
(Samsø Kommune 2016).

Samsø Food Network consists of food producers, and the aim of the network is for the members to collaborate and learn from each other (Ibid.). The members range from small businesses that produce local specialties, to some of the island's largest companies that distributes their products to all of Denmark (Ibid.). The network at Samsø was founded in 2012 and it started initially as a two-year project in collaboration between local actors on Samsø, with support from the former Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Ibid.). Aside from the establishment of a food network, an additional initiative has also been conducted, concerned with how to advice newly started entrepreneurs. Thus, all new companies are being advised by specialists at Business Development Centre Central Denmark (Væksthus Midtjylland), who then aid the entrepreneurs. The combination of the food network and enhanced access to knowledge for food entrepreneurs, has had the result that Samsø is now placed fifth on the list of Danish municipalities with most entrepreneurship. According to the research institute Bisnode, 86 new companies were established at Samsø in 2016, which corresponds to 23 new companies per 1.000 inhabitants in the municipality. Furthermore, the same list also includes Fanø, which is ranked ninth and Læsø (Læsø) Municipality, which is ranked seventeenth (Bisnode 2016). We are, however, aware that this does not necessarily signify that all newly started businesses are successful, but it signifies that there are possibilities and branding opportunities that could be useful for Ø Laks in the future.

## 10 Conclusion

Within this final section, we are going to sum up on the key points regarding the aim of this study, as well as present the main findings of the empirical analysis. A detailed and in-depth description of the findings is presented in section Partial conclusion 8.7

### Short research sum-up

An increasing number of small food producers are entering the Danish foodscape, and are aiming to make their mark on the national- and international food scenes. However, the food system, which is dominated by mass-produced conventional food products, makes it difficult for small food producers to enter the market, even though their products may offer a different level of quality to similar commercial food products. In this regard, the small food producers often have to rely on more alternative and deviating methods to get their products distributed on different market platforms, in which they need special awareness about the requested quality parameters by the specific sales channels. This is crucial, since it is the 'food product quality' that is used for product differentiation, and thus to promote product sales. In continuation hereof, we have, with this study, explored the case of Ø Laks, which is a company that is initiated and driven by the small food producer Mikael on Samsø.

With a point of departure in the case of Ø Laks, we found that the main challenge that Mikael is currently facing, is that he has not yet identified what sales channel(s) he aims to pursue in order to create a brand for Ø Laks and to establish a financial foundation for the company. Ø Laks has, until now, been marketed sporadically through several different sales channels, but Mikael has not yet worked systematically or strategically when approaching these. This has caused Mikael to become confused and frustrated about the sales potential of Ø Laks on the Danish food scene. Thus, we found that it is relevant to approach the sales channels more systematically, and thereby investigate how they perceive the 'food product quality' of Ø Laks. This study has aimed to answer the following research questions:

*How is 'food product quality' translated according to four different Danish sales channels? And how can the food product of Ø Laks be enacted with these sales channels?*



### Answering the research questions

In order to investigate these research questions, we have obtained empirical material by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with five representatives from four different sales channels with relevance to the case of Ø Laks. These include representatives from; the delicatessens store Boutique Fisk, the online food store Smag Danmark, the food market organizer Rebel Food, and the restaurants Era Ora and Tårnet. Furthermore, with the aim of answering the research questions we have used Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as analytical framework, in combination with the aspects involved in determining 'food product quality' according to the Total Food Quality Model (TFQM). Hereby, ANT has functioned as an ontological and epistemological guide throughout the empirical analysis, whereas the TFQM has functioned as conceptual framework that has offered terminological support to academically frame the concept 'food product quality'.

With the first research question - *How is 'food product quality' translated according to four different Danish sales channels?* - we aimed to investigate the interactions of aspects (actor-networks) that construct and form the concept of 'food product quality', according to the narratives of the interviewed representatives. Based on our investigation in this regard, it is our impression that many of the narratives of the representatives from the different sales channels are a part of a translation process, where internal negotiations take place regarding aspects concerned with 'food product quality'. Hereby, we found that the translation is ever changing and never static, and human as well as nonhuman actors are continuously involved in the construction process. So, overall there is a difference between the translation of 'food product quality' according to the four sales channels. Even the two representatives of *restaurant* as a sales channel had different perceptions, as they identified and emphasised different aspects related to 'food product quality'. It was generally found that the process dimension of the TFQM contains the most significant elements for the translation of 'food product quality' related to each of the investigated sales channels. The process dimension seems to function as a conditional framework for all of the other elements that enact in the translation process of 'food product quality'. Meaning that all of the involved elements are related to the production process of the food product.

In continuation of the above, we will address the second research question - *how can the food product of Ø Laks be enacted with these sales channels?* – in which, it is based on the investigation of the first research question that we have aimed to propose how Ø Laks may match and adapt to the quality perceptions of the sales channels in order to successfully enact. Recall that enactment involves the perception that every actor contributes by acting together and thereby create a common reality among the actors. In this regard, we found that many elements in cohesion affect the enactment of Ø Laks, but that the storytelling related to the product was mentioned, by all representatives of the sales channels, as being of paramount importance. Thus, it is storytelling that is expressed as being crucial to the enactment of Ø Laks within each of the sales channel investigated in this study. It is our interpretation that storytelling in practice should emphasise the most crucial elements associated with the translation of a specific product's 'food product quality'. Furthermore, it was a general perception among the sales channels that the process dimension was the most important to include in the storytelling about Ø Laks, in relation to which, it is an interaction between extrinsic product cues that is important to emphasise for the potential success of the enactment. Finally, it is indicated by the findings of this study that without using storytelling as a tool for communicating the 'food product quality' of Ø Laks, it will be difficult to successfully enact with the different sales channels – in other words, it will be difficult for Ø Laks to be staged within the overwhelming food scene amongst many other food products.

### **Final comment**

Overall, this thesis project has contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the complex and nuanced matter of addressing the concept of 'food product quality'. This has been done with a point of departure in the case of the small food producer Mikael and his company Ø Laks, from which inspiration may be drawn for future investigations of the complex situations that face many small food producers. Also, this study may elucidate the relevance of approaching the challenges of small food producer with an academic perspective on the reality that they face.

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## 12 Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview guide

Appendix 2 - Interview Mikael, Ø Laks

Appendix 3 - Interview Torsten B. Jakobsen)

Appendix 4 - Interview Thorkild Nielsen, IFS coordinator

Appendix 5 - Interview Boutique Fisk

Appendix 6 - Interview Smag Danmark

Appendix 7 - Interview Rebel Food

Appendix 8 - Interview Era Ora

Appendix 9 - Interview Tårnet

All 9 appendices have been attached via USB flash drive