

# Ø-specialiteter® (Island Specialties) - a terroir in Danish

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## Summary

EU approved regional brand protections have never been widely used in Danish food production. For cultural and geographical reasons, it is difficult to apply a Southern European model for a durable terroir concept in Denmark with all its many islands and moraine landscape. Soil conditions change radically within very short distances and even on the smallest islands the climate can vary significantly between inland and coastal areas and with orientation of the latter between east and west. The terroir concept Ø-Specialiteter® (Island Specialties) is seeking to promote a rediscovery of the diversity of natural conditions where food production can better accommodate the differences in these natural conditions and thus potentially promote greater sustainability in production. Ø-specialiteter® is not just a local brand, it is also a quality label developed with the aim of promoting diversification and sustainability in the food landscape. It has been created in Denmark but aims to develop into an internationally recognized terroir concept <sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Among more than 400 islands in Denmark, 27 stand out by defining themselves as inhabited, non-bridged and non-privately owned. Each has a population of less than 1000 people - taken together less than 5000 individuals. The 27 islands are organised in *the Association of Danish Small Islands* (SaDS) founded in 1974. Together with similar organizations in Europa, they form *the European Small Island Network* (ESIN).

Food production, historically, has been of high socio-economic importance in these communities, but development lags far behind the increasing size and specialized production of farms in other parts of Denmark. Logistic costs on small islands are negatively capitalised, and a combination of low prices on farm land and high costs of logistics result in an incentive to combine primary production with local processing and profiling of these locations. Since the turn of the millennium, farms on these islands have been bought by newcomers who have been driven partly by a vision to produce food in a different way than conventionally. This has resulted in a number of speciality food producers who are characterised by mastering the many links in the production chain from farm to fork (see <http://www.oe-specialiteter.dk>).

Production of food in small businesses on small islands cannot compete on price with mainstream food production. However, it can compete on quality, history and on the special "fair trade" tradition where consumers are willing to pay an additional price in order to support vulnerable communities. The *Small Islands Food Network* (SIFN) in 2010 registered the brand Ø-specialiteter®. This was done to create collective impact in the marketing of island products, to obtain a quantity discount in distribution logistics and to counter non-authentic attempts to exploit the favourable market position developed by island producers. Not insignificantly, island producers of quality foods also add value by helping to raise the profile of small islands and thereby attracting tourism and encouraging residential development.

<sup>1</sup> Activities on the development of Ø-specialiteter® to an internationally recognized terroir concept are based in the REFRAME Project supported by the EU InterReg 5B NSR programme.

## The criteria in Ø specialiteter®

Ø-specialiteter® was established as a registered trademark of the SIFN as the simplest way to secure the rights to the concept. Ø-specialiteter®, however, is also an intellectual copyright relating to a locality. A producer can only obtain permission to use the trademark if it is generally assessed that the producer is an ambassador for small islands in general as well as for the island where the producer operates. This means that parameters such as animal welfare, sustainability of production, and willingness and ability to collaborate locally will be included in the assessment. In addition, 2 of 3 key criteria must be met:

1. Raw materials must, as far as possible, be sourced locally and there should be evidence that the locality has specific natural conditions that are reflected in the raw material and thus in the quality of the food product.
2. It should be documented that the production creates employment, and, whenever possible, the labour force must reside locally.
3. It should be possible to justify that the idea behind the specific qualities of the product have their starting point in a traditional or innovative adaptation of specific natural conditions occurring in the locality.

These criteria are very similar to, but not identical with the criteria underlying the three local brand protections recognized by the European Council regulations, No. 510/2006 and No. 1898/2006: i) Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), ii) Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), and iii) Guaranteed Traditional Speciality (GTS). Consideration was not given to the regulatory framework for the EU Commission recognised local brand protections, and there are good reasons why they are not identical. The criteria behind Ø-specialiteter® were formulated to create optimal conditions for innovation on the basis of the diverse natural conditions occurring locally. Regardless of which two of the three key criteria are being met, Ø-specialiteter® should have a locality dependent specific quality. This is *the* essential substance of the quality mark. That only two of the three criteria must be met is due to the perspective that sustainable ideas based on natural conditions must be allowed the possibility of future scaling up for – ultimately - the global market. A number of Ø-specialiteter® – although produced by very small companies – are already marketed globally. As scaling up obviously involves collaboration with a world outside the small island, freedom to establish such collaborations must be allowed for. The criteria strike a balance between production and intellectual contribution and allow for raw materials and labour to be imported to the island if necessary. A production concept also is allowed to expand from the island if growth determines it necessary, provided reference is given to the island origin and a connection to the island is maintained.

The differences in natural conditions are very varied on small islands and include the amount of sunshine and rainfall, wind and soil conditions, the salinity of sea fog, the absence of predators such as foxes but also zoosanitary conditions such as the absence of certain infections in relatively closed ecosystems. The quality parameters of differentiation of Ø-specialiteter® are equally diverse. In addition to less environmental footprint of production such qualities might include taste, texture, nutritional value, anti-inflammatory and other health-promoting properties and even zoosanitary status as well as anti- and probiotic properties (Christensen et al., 2012, Christensen, 2012, Christensen, 2013).

## Discussion

For the consumer, a regional mark on a product provides a reassurance that the product has a certain origin and /or a particular and consistent quality. There is a willingness to pay for this as the EU-recognized regional brands generally command a price premium of 20-30% (Schamel, 2007). The willingness to pay above average prices for unique qualities is emphasized by the fact that Ø-specialiteter®, although they are

at the very high end of the Danish pricing, generally do not experience problems of marketing and sales. Rather, the great challenge is to meet the demand both nationally and internationally.

Diversification of the Danish food landscape over the past decades has been largely driven by small and medium sized food companies. For companies/producers like these, attempts to define a site of special natural conditions will often result in a very small region/area and with it limited growth opportunities, or it will result in pools of similar types of landscape spread across municipal, regional and even national borders – like e.g. small islands and marsh landscapes. Ø-specialiteter® is the first, unique territorial and quality label developed in Denmark as a result of the fact that the EU-recognised regional brand protections are not always applicable or the best form of labelling products with very specific and localised qualities. Ø-specialiteter® can be equated with the concept *Facultative quality terms*, also mentioned in the EU Parliament and Council Regulation No. 1152/2012 as a complement to the three local labels, PGI, PDO and TSG, applying for regions with similar characteristics, just spread out across Europe. The Danish SIFN in collaboration with the SaDS has taken the initiative of seeking a consensus for an international terroir concept of island specialties. Small island associations in other European countries have expressed an interest in engaging in such cooperation the objective being internationally to increase the marketing value of quality specificities which are based in terms of food production on these small islands. On the basis of producer networks within the European ESIN it may be possible to reach a critical mass where Ø-specialiteter® can be developed into an EU-approved facultative quality term.

## References

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