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Danish Centre for Rural Research

Over the past decades, Danish rural and peripheral areas have undergone significant changes. Similar to what is happening in many other countries, a strong urbanization process has led to demographic and economic decline, particularly in peripheral rural areas. At the same time, development patterns in rural and peripheral areas exhibit a great diversity. For example, it is not unusual to find villages and areas that thrive against all odds.

The Danish Centre for Rural Research does research on important issues within regional development and rural sociology. The research addresses the intrinsic driving forces, which impact the living conditions for people and enterprises in rural and peripheral areas. The Centre seeks to provide both general scientific and practical knowledge, as well as knowledge that can be used in policy processes at all levels.

The Danish Centre for Rural Research is embedded in the Department of Environmental and Business Economics, and it draws on a portfolio of disciplines within the social sciences. Specific research projects combine relevant sub-disciplines such as sociology, economics, policy studies, anthropology, geography, and planning. Collaboration with other institutions provides possibilities to include health issues, agricultural science and other disciplines in the studies.

National bodies such as the Ministry of Interior and Health and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries are primary cooperative partners for the Centre. However, the Center also launches projects in collaboration with other authorities, both at national and local levels, and with a variety of NGOs. Joint ventures with private organizations and other universities are commonplace in order to ensure high research quality as well as a continuous development of the research portfolio.

At a more specific level, key words for the prioritized research areas are:

- Economic development and business innovation
- Living conditions, networking, social entrepreneurship, and demographic development
- Rural and regional policies, governance, democratic processes, and partnerships

CLF disseminates findings to stakeholders in rural areas through meetings, courses, seminars and appearance in public media. CLF staff members teach at university courses in, for example, cultural studies, economics and management. The research has a significant academic publication record, including both national and international publications.

PH.D. -DISSERTATION OF

TOVE BRINK

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND BUSINESS ECONOMICS

**'ESSAYS ON INNOVATION AND GROWTH
IN FOOD NETWORKS.
AN ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH'**

27TH SEPTEMBER 2011



Essays on Innovation and Growth in Food Networks. An Organisational Approach

This doctoral thesis addresses the innovation and growth in networks of food-producing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in rural areas. Its aim is to reveal how organising the boundaries of organisations can enable innovation. The thesis consists of a compilation of five essays and an extended summary. The research reported in the thesis is based on a combination of inductive and qualitative single case studies and multiple comparative case studies and quantitative deductive hypothesis tests on data from the food networking SMEs. The core research is conducted in three food networks: 'Sønderjyske Madglæder', referred to in English as 'Food Joys'; 'Vadehavssprodukter', referred to in English as 'Wadden Sea'; and 'Småøernes Fødevarer-netværk', referred to in English as 'Small Islands' and among participants in an innovation programme. The three networks included 93 SMEs that participated in the network during the research period.

The results indicate a strong innovation and growth potential in food-producing SMEs participating in food networks in rural areas. The findings also demonstrate the challenges of organising boundaries to enable innovation. Boundaries are understood as areas of tension that are tested by participants. SME firm networks are a relatively new organisational form situated between the hierarchical and market organisational approaches. Moreover, the SMEs, with their own relatively small organisations, are joining together into a larger, loosely coupled organisational form with a relatively large number of participants. This arrangement is a new experience for the SMEs. The research reveals many different boundaries. Moreover, the research identifies human agency and the capacity of information flows as important factors to organise for traversing boundaries. The thesis emphasises the need to be aware of the underlying composite boundaries. The research findings also emphasise the need to increase the uncertainty level in the organisation. This recommendation contradicts typical organisational theory, which seeks to reduce uncertainty in organisations. The thesis developed based on the research findings provides a model for navigating the variety of business challenges and the diversity of resources that must be drawn upon in the network context. The model integrates information flow, human agency, antecedents of behaviour and connections and increased uncertainty within the organisation.

Combined Innovation Enablement Process:

CIEP

Exploration – Exploitation

Facing heterogeneity in business challenges

