

SCHOOL MEALS AND INCLUSIVITY: A QUESTION OF PRICE?

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SF4C is a four year project that started January this year, we have until 2026 and the main point of the project is to use SCHOOL MEALS as a CATALYST for food systems' transformation towards diets that are fair, healthy and sustainable towards people and the planet, looking at the fact that school meals in many EU countries are a big part of public procurement, it is a way with which local governments, authorities and regions can spend their budgets towards supporting FARMING and FOOD SYSTEMS that are healthier, fairer and more sustainable in social and environmental terms.

On 17 November the Fair Trade Advocacy Office and WFTO Europe organized a webinar entitled *School meals and inclusivity – a question of price?* in the framework of the School Food for Change project. The recording is available [here](#).

This specific webinar looks at INCLUSIVITY, namely the potential conflict of interest you might have between school meals that healthy, sustainable and fair have a certain price compared to those who are not sustainable. This does not necessarily mean that they are more expensive and we are going to explore today HOW can we make a good balance between school meals that are fair on the producers' side, but also inclusive for children in school and low-income households are not excluded but cannot afford them.

The webinar explored different approaches to the apparent conflict of interests between school meals that are sustainable, fair and healthy and the price for all this which can be exclusive to some families and students. Best practices from Italy, Finland, Belgium, Germany and Denmark were covered and discussed amongst speakers and participants. Challenges and potential solutions were viewed in a different light with particular focus on social sustainability. Together, speakers and participants explored how local food initiatives, as well as regional and national policies and approaches to public procurement play key roles in ensuring social inclusion – and sustainability – on both sides of any school meal.

Moderated by Virginia Pignata and professor Tomaso Ferrando, the webinar was kicked off with a keynote from Claudia Paltrinieri, Director of Food Insider, demonstrating how *FoodInsider* monitors the quality of food canteens. She further shared best practices in working with schools and local governments to move from school canteens that simply feed children, to ones that nurture the children as well as the local community (farmers, food producers and local environment).

Jatta Makkula from *Fairtrade Finland* and national coordinator of the *Fair Trade Towns* network in Finland shared the experience of Fair Trade Towns in Finland, while Lisa Hermann, Head of Campaigning & Engagement at *Fairtrade Deutschland* and *Fair Trade Schools and Universities* Coordinator, shared the Fair Trade School and Universities in Germany one.

Estelle Compere-Leroy, project manager of *Manger Demain*, showed us the project, which is developed by the Region of Wallonia (Belgium) and whose goal is to accompany the canteens towards a more sustainable transition.

Following this, Astrid Dahl from *Municipality of Copenhagen* shared the food strategy of Copenhagen, where school meals are a political priority – this is significant, since school meals are not a tradition in Denmark.

1. BEST PRACTICES FROM FOOD INSIDER BY CLAUDIA PALTRINIERI

- Food Insider is a platform that analyses food canteens in Italy and it is accredited as the national observatory on this specific matter.
- Every year they publish a survey that monitors the quality of the main meals of about 50 school canteens.
- They are part of a project that accompanies Italian municipalities in a path to change and increase quality of food canteens, make it connected to the territory and healthier for children.
- What they have learned is that the change is possible, best case example of Sesto Fiorentino's school, its canteen service went from a very low ranking to a top one. It was possible because parents complained so much that the mayor decided to change this situation. They brought in experts to teach cooks how to cook from raw materials to avoid processed food. Example of good practice that led to: increase in local food, short supply chains, organic food, recipes of local gastronomy.
- They realized that each catering service has different goal, there are those who have basic menus, which the main goal is **FEEDING**, others is **NOURISH HEALTHILY**, others to **NOURISH THE COMMUNITY**. When local farmers are involved, they can triple their business and increase the production to have more fields and change this production as well in organic and sustainable crops like legumes, this is a good example of how **school canteens can affect the countryside**.
- These changes were depending on vision and commitment of single individuals. The discovery of this year's survey: the new Italian law as driver of change, **Minimum**

Environmental Criteria Law (CAM), which defines the rules of tenders for school canteen service and fits SDG12 (Sustainable consumption and production).

- **COSTS:** Meal rate is a political choice of Municipalities. They make a tender and they decide maximum cost per meal. They decide whether the families pay the full cost or whether the administration covers a part of it. They define the cost of each family in relation to their incomes.
- You can say that you can lower cost of the meal rate with industrial kitchens, processed food and plastic, but actually you increase the cost in terms of health and environment, we have to consider how it is an investment. Claudia's conclusion: **the meal rate is a political choice and depends on the goal** of the service. If it considers school canteens as a way to feed, or to nourish healthy or as an instrument of social, environmental and economic policy and in this case the role of municipality is to invest and it will result in better results in terms of health, green local development, wealth, more workers on the countryside, no food waste and no *pollutants*.
- Involvement of **stakeholders** is essential. We say that food is important but that communication around it is as important as food itself. If you speak the right language, if you involve with passion, data, right information.

For more details, you can find her presentation attached to the mail you received.

2. THE EXPERIENCE OF FAIR TRADE TOWNS IN FINLAND BY JATTA MAKKULA

- Jatta is a member of the steering committee of fair trade towns, representing Europe. She works at Fairtrade Finland collaborating with fair trade towns, schools and universities and in public procurement.
- There are 15 fairtrade towns in Finland (covering 30% of Finnish population), 8 fairtrade universities, 7 fairtrade schools.
- School catering in Finland refers to FREE school meals all taxed based to which every Finnish pre-school and elementary student, as well as secondary student is entitled. The responsibility for organizing and planning meals is divided amongst several entities, but the municipality are responsible for the local organization of school meals and they are organized by a public tendering.

- In order to make Finnish school meals more sustainable, we are campaigning for more responsible public procurement. Together with other well respected sustainability certifications, we have been campaigning for 2 municipal elections as well in 2017 and 2021. In the last elections, we have asked the candidates to make a commitment to promote SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT in their municipalities before the elections. We have organized trainings for counsellors, shared good examples and participated to municipal fairs and other events.
- In Finland every day, around 9000 school meals are served and in 2019 the price of one meal offered was around 2,92 cents which includes food, personal costs, equipment and transportation.
- The total volume of public procurement in Finland is estimated at 35 billion euros per year which is approximately one fifth of the GDP and the 75% of public procurement in Finland are made in the municipalities.
- When one town becomes a fair trade town and changes all their bananas into fair trade bananas, that means approximately 70000 kg of fair trade bananas bought more annually. By choosing fair trade bananas and other fair trade products, that means that we are supporting workers' rights to a decent income and putting more money directly in the hands of workers themselves.
- **Challenges:** thigh budgets for public procurement, municipalities must procure many other things besides school meals and the budgets are very tight and during last years the municipalities have experienced news expenses due to instabilities, social and health care, covid19 and general price crisis.
- Finland first national public procurement strategy was published in autumn 2020 and the goal of that strategy is to increase the effectiveness and the ecological, social responsibility of public procurement.

3. THE EXPERIENCE OF FAIR TRADE SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES IN GERMANY BY LISA HERMANN

- Lisa is head of Campaigning and Engagement at Fairtrade Deutschland.
- They work with more than 800 fair trade towns, covering half of the population in Germany living in a fair trade town. They work with more than 850 schools and 40 fair trade universities (representing 10% of universities in Germany).

- Public Procurement is a huge topic for them, they also run campaigns, at the last elections for German government, on a local level and in schools. The Fair trade schools campaigns is a great movement for young people to learn that whatever age they are, they can make a difference and also related to the food and the nutrition at their schools.
- To become a fair trade school, you need to fulfill some criteria like setting up a steering committee, adopt a fair trade policy, how you'd like to support fair trade at your school, commit to fair trade products, here public procurement and school canteens come in. Also learning about fair trade should be part of the schools' curriculum and actions and events related to fair trade shall be organized.
- Overall, they are not campaigning only for fair prices Germany, but also in the global south, for smallholder farmers to have living income for bananas producers and they have a best practice case in Germany, we are happy that primary schools in Berlin they use fairtrade bananas, rice and pineapples.
- **Challenges:** Many universities cite higher costs as a barrier, but it's also a question of knowledge. For some, the cheapest tender is still considered the best tender you have to choose. We need to work on this issue: which is the best tender? Is it always the cheapest one? This should not be the way we go about it. Also, universities are often not aware of what they are buying, there's no central officer coordinating the procurement in universities and it's difficult for procurers to be aware of sustainability standards, on all the marks, approaches. That's why they work together with other NGOs and give trainings on sustainability issues and they are also afraid that their tender is not legally water tied.
- The best way to reach a more sustainable public procurement is having internal guidelines and to have support of schools and municipalities.

4. THE EXPERIENCE OF MANGER DEMAIN IN WALLONIA BY ESTELLE COMPERE LEROY

- Manger Demain is located in Wallonia, they work on the regional strategy for more sustainable food systems.
- Their association was created in 2017, Wallonia had different stakeholders from the entire food chain that got together to create a common vision for a more sustainable food systems and this was the result.

- Their goal is to accompany public canteens towards a transition for more sustainable food systems and they do that by working on the basis of a label that the region has created (green deal sustainable canteens) which focuses on 6 main objectives and one of those is to make canteens sustainable food canteens accessible to all, objective of inclusivity. For them, this means that every child should access at least one hot meal a day at school and this implies that every actor in the food chain and especially farmers and producers should have the adequate means of production, so another important issue for them is s access to land.
- They also connect canteens with local producers, they have a big work on **public procurement**, they published a GUIDE to help canteens to make public procurement more sustainable, they have a PETITION that they want to present to the Parliament to make an exception for food in the public procurement laws in Europe. They organize workshops online to answer public procurement questions. They organize FREE TRAININGS for people working in the canteens, so they can teach them some very specific practices about sustainable food, they can teach them about a healthy cooking, how to cook local products.
- Another mission of Manger Demain, is to relocate the food systems, to raise number of local products that are eaten in the canteens and guarantee a fair price for producers.
- They work on what is on the plate, what and how they can replace some elements by increasing the amount of veggies, for instance using lentils. Working with legumes decreases the cost, they also work with food waste, because it is a big loss of money for canteens.
- The Wallon region is providing subsidies for local food in canteens, so any can get 15 cent per day and per meal to buy more local product, which is a very big leverage, even though schools need to fill a lot of paperwork.

5. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF COPENHAGEN BY ASTRID DAHL

- School meals are not common in Denmark and most children bring their own packed lunch from home.
- Since 2017, it has been in the agenda in Copenhagen. Now they have school meals in almost all of their public schools. They have public kitchens; 16 schools hire chefs and

kitchen staff to do the food daily together with some children and the rest of the schools have central kitchen that deliver freshly food and they are heated in the small kitchens in the school.

- They have a **Food Strategy** since 2019 which foresees that as many children as possible should have access to healthy meals, there is a system where they can apply for receiving reduced prices. They are allowed to look at the parents' income and they can decide how much families pay. Also, low income households pay less for school meals and it's not visible what you pay, food is ordered in advance.
- What they focus about school meals in Copenhagen:
 - - Healthy meals
 - High quality food
 - Climate reduction
 - 90% organic
 - Variation (both new and wellknown food)
 - Student involvement (they have a week everyday in which they cook with the cooks instead of going to school)
 - Food education
 - Focus on food wast
 - Subsidies for low income houselds
- Link to Copenhagen's food strategy: <https://maaltider.kk.dk/english>
- Best practice: if they look back the way they got 90% organics was they invested in education and they also did it by reducing the meat, using more lentils and also reducing food waste

For reference, you can find her presentation attached to the mail.

OUTCOMES

One of the things that emerged from the webinar was the importance of **stakeholder engagement**, considering that all stakeholders in a local food system have a role to play in achieving social inclusion and environmental and social sustainability throughout the system – from primary producer to final user (e.g. pupils in schools). Linking up, doing consultations, and exchanging information and practices are key elements to achieving or improving positive impact. A participant shared a good example of the need for this from the Czech Republic, where school meals are mandatory, and parents must apply for subsidies if they cannot afford

it. Many end up not applying, either because they do not have the capacity or because they feel ashamed of having to ‘beg for money.’ An illustrative example of the positive impact of stakeholder engagement was shared by a participant who is a teacher, working with school children in two municipalities within the Brussels Region in Belgium: Involving school children in their school meals, e.g. through cooking or making meals socialising, they improve the children’s food literacy and the children eat more diversified – and eat up.

The SF4C project targets school meals in order to approach a bigger challenge: The transition towards more environmentally and socially sustainable food systems that provide healthy – and affordable – food to all members of society. In this sense, food plays a key role in combating social exclusion, inequality and poverty.

Many challenges were raised during the webinar, and many approaches – with potential solutions – were shared and discussed. The webinar demonstrated a range of local initiatives in different countries and the massive impact they manage to have on local, regional and sometimes national food policies - but it is only a glimpse of the wealth of initiatives that exist in Europe. Connecting them, whether initiatives that are private, by civil society, municipalities, or other actors, for cross-pollination is an obvious low-hanging fruit with significant impact.

USEFUL LINKS

[Criteri ambientali minimi](#)

[Petition manger demain](#)

[Manger demain guide](#)

[School Food 4 Change approach](#)

[It’s on Our Plate and we care](#)

[Kookmet](#)

CONTACTS

Moderators:

- **Virginia Pignata**, passionate about food systems interning at WFTO (Global)
- **Tomaso Ferrando**, professor at law, Development Policies Institute (IOB) at Universiteit Antwerpen

Speakers:

- **Claudia Platrinieri, Food Insider (Italy)**, info@foodinsider.it
- **Astrid Dahl, Municipality of Copenhagen (Denmark)**, astrda@kk.dk
- **Estelle Compere-Leroy, Manger Demain (Belgium)**,
estelle.compereleroy@mangerdemain.be
- **Lisa Herrmann, Fairtrade Deutschland (Germany)**, l.herrmann@fairtrade-deutschland.de
- **Jatta Makkula, Fairtrade Finland and national coordinator of the Fair Trade Towns network in Finland**, jatta.makkula@fairtrade.fi

Further contacts working on the topic:

- **Sarah Bruinaars, City of Ghent (Belgium)**, sarah.bruinaars@stad.gent

THANKS FOR THE FOOD!



It's time for a new menu

info@schoolfood4change.eu

www.schoolfood4change.eu

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