



## Social drivers and barriers for climate-friendly diet

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Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen  
Denmark's green think tank CONCITO

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## Introduction

The composition of the food we eat has consequences for the climate. The food sector is estimated to account for approximately 30% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. The emissions from the food system originate, among other things, from the direct emissions from agricultural production and from the deforestation caused by agricultural production. Cows, pigs, and other livestock have a big contribution to climate change due to their emission of greenhouse gases in the form of methane from cows and methane and nitrous oxide from manure (Climate Council, 2021).

Danes' consumption of food is associated with a large climate burden. Denmark has one of the highest climate footprints from food consumption in the world measured per capita. This is due to Danes' relatively large consumption of animal products i.e. meat and dairy products, compared to both a European and a global average (Willett et al, 2019).

One measure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is therefore to get the Danes to eat a more climate-friendly and plant-based diet. A more climate-friendly dietary composition includes various elements such as reducing both the intake of animal foods and reducing the amount of food waste. In this report, we focus on reducing the consumption of animal products and a climate-friendly diet is thus rich in plants. This is completely in line with the official international research on a healthy and sustainable dietary composition, as defined in, e.g., the Eat –Lancet report (Willett et al, 2019).

But social science research indicates that it is not that easy for consumers to change their eating habits (Halkier, 2019), and various barriers come into play, such as price, uncertain knowledge, habit inertia, availability, and social identity. The more social aspects of these barriers to consuming less meat have been insufficiently studied, and there has also been too little emphasis on what can contribute to supporting the transition of dietary habits towards more climate-friendly food. Back in 2019, we were therefore a group consisting of researchers from the University of Copenhagen and employees at Denmark's green think tank CONCITO, who asked ourselves the question, how is the reduction of Danes' meat consumption progressing, and what are the challenges and opportunities for adopting a more plant-based diet. Fortunately, we received a grant from the VELUX FOUNDATION under the HUM- Praxis funds, and from 2020–2023 we have conducted the project "Social drivers and barriers for climate-friendly diet" as a collaboration between the Institute of Sociology, the University of Copenhagen, and CONCITO.

During the project, we have examined the following research questions empirically:

- What are the drivers and barriers for changing to a more climate-friendly diet in the Danish population?
- What are the drivers and barriers for changing to a more climate-friendly diet among young people aged 18–30?
- How can one understand drivers and barriers for changing to and maintaining climate-friendly dietary patterns in light of the social dynamics in the everyday life of young people?

The project consists of three sub-projects. Firstly, there is a quantitative survey study with a representative sample of the Danish population about the Danes' relationship to plant-rich food. Secondly, there is a qualitative study on young Danes' transition to more plant-rich or plant-based food based on interviews, telephone diaries and focus groups. Thirdly, there is a change project, called "Green conversation dinners" with 350+ young participants distributed across Denmark.

This report describes the most important results from the two research sub-projects and from the change project.

The participants in the project are:

- Bente Halkier, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen (project manager)
- Morten Wendler Jørgensen, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen
- Thomas Bøker Lund, Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen
- Michael Minter, CONCITO
- Mikael Bellers Madsen, CONCITO
- Synnøve Kjærland, CONCITO
- Martha Nørgaard, CONCITO

## What do we generally know about Danes' attitude towards eating more meat?

To illustrate this, we have used the data set from the quantitative sub-project. The data set consists of a survey study with a representative sample of 3,000 people from the Danish population. The committee has been asked a wide range of questions over the phone, about, e.g., demographic background, what they eat, how they position themselves in relation to eating plant-rich food, what they experience as obstacles to and support for changing to plant-rich food, and how long a possible change to plant-rich food has lasted.

In the following, four results of the survey study are highlighted.

### 1. Young people do not take the lead in changing dietary habits

The first important result concerns the differences among recognized group divisions based on demographic background. In other words, is there a difference in how Danes, categorized by factors such as gender, age, place of residence, and education, respond to key questions about how often they eat meat? The answer is yes, there are differences, and they align with the results found in survey studies from other countries of similar phenomena, and are thus consistent with what we expect when looking at associations with gender, place of residence, and education (e.g., Pohjolainen et al., 2015). However, the results do not follow the expectations when it comes to age.

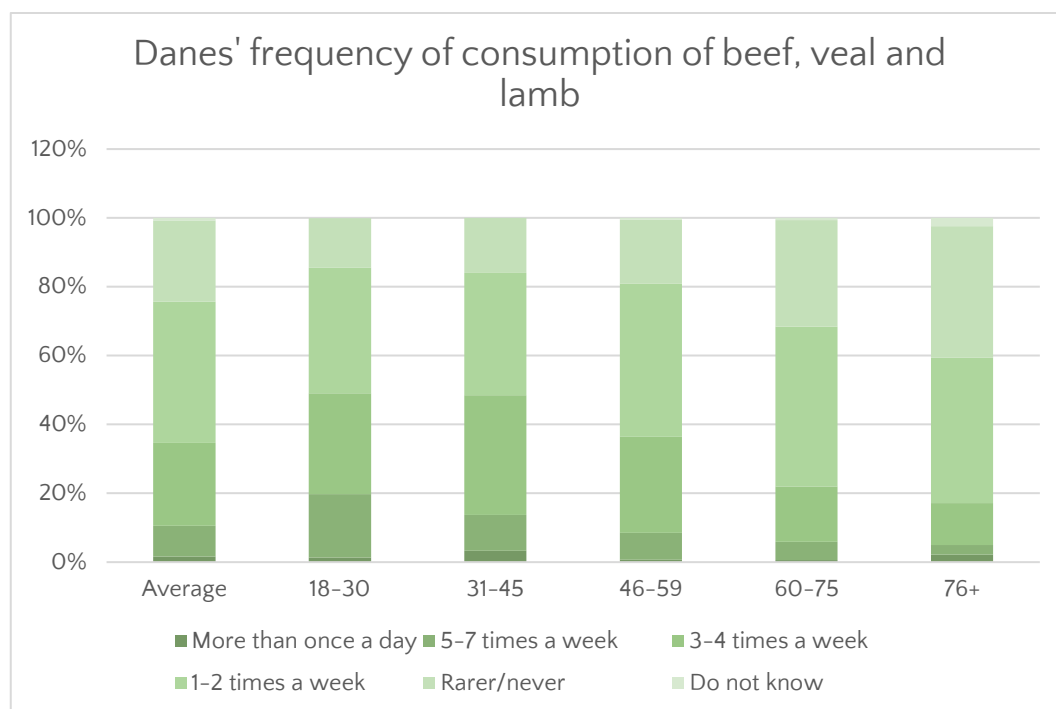


Figure 1: How often do you eat beef, veal, or lamb? Number of respondents: 3000. (CONCITO, 2021)

Figure 1 only shows the distribution across age group of how often Danes report eating beef, veal and lamb. Typically, the expectation is that young people eat less of these products because, in surveys, also in a Danish context (CONCITO, 2020),

they express the greatest climate concern compared to other age groups. However, this is not reflected in our numbers.

As seen from figure 1, young people significantly surpasses the other age groups in terms of eating beef, veal, or lamb 5-7 times a week. When looking at the distribution based on both gender, place of residence, and education (unpublished frequency data), the patterns in our survey data more closely align with the expectation based on the existing international knowledge. Women report less frequently than men that they eat red meat 5-7 times a week, Danes living in the capital region report less frequently than those in other parts of Denmark that they eat red meat 5-7 times a week, and Danes with long-term higher education report significantly less frequently than Danes with other types of education that they eat red meat 5-7 times a week.

The same pattern emerges when we look at the distribution of a question posed to the subset of the survey sample that identifies themselves as "I eat meat".

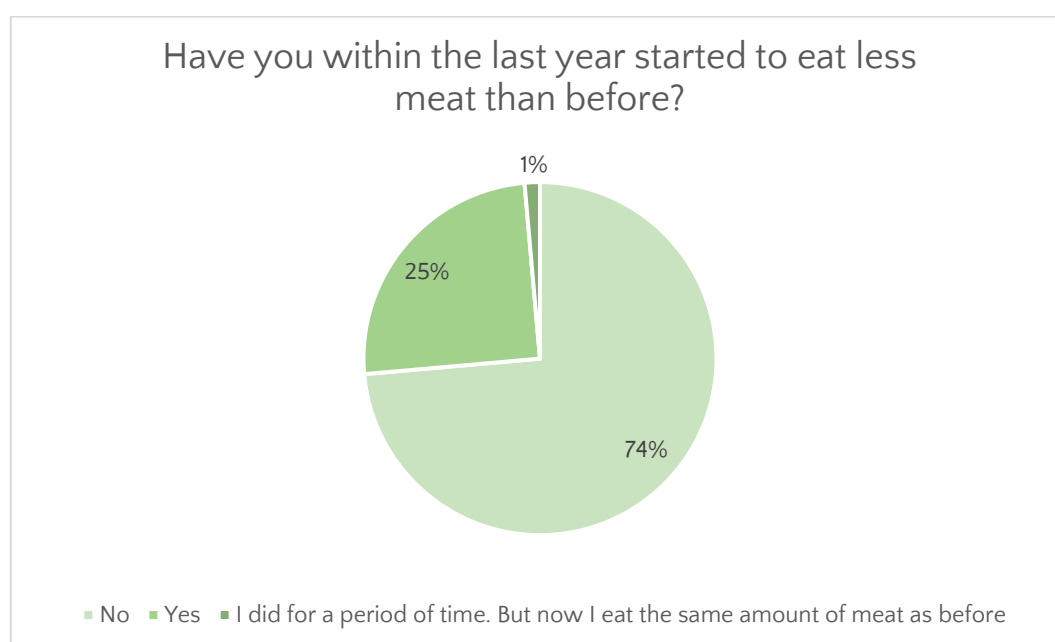


Figure 2: Within the last year, have you started to eat less meat than before? The question is only asked to the respondents who in the above question say that they eat meat. Number of respondents: 2167. (CONCITO, 2021)

Here, too, it is to a greater extent women, people living in the capital region, and people with longer-term higher education who respond as expected – namely, that they have started to eat less meat than before within the last year. Contrary to the expectations for the age group, the young people to a lesser extent than the other age groups answer “yes” to this (unpublished frequency data). On the other hand, a higher percentage of the young people (compared to the other age groups) who had not started eating less meat than before answered yes to having considered eating less meat at some point (unpublished frequency data).

The first main result from the survey study shows that young people, as an age group, do not necessarily lead the way in changing to a plant-rich diet. This further shows that in society, we must be careful not having unrealistic expectations for specific life stage groups and assuming that attitudes necessarily lead to actions.

## 2. Large group answers that they reduce their meat consumption

The other important result consists of an estimate of how many Danes identify themselves with different dietary practices. We must emphasize that survey data does not measure what the respondents actually do, so the result should of course be seen in that light. We will return to that.

Survey respondents across the entire sample identified themselves with the following categories (Halkier & Lund, 2023, 5):

- Omnivores: 54%
- Reduces meat: 42.7%
- Vegetarian: 2.3%
- Vegan: 0.8%

In other words, there is a tendency for a majority of Danes to generally report that they eat everything and therefore meat, while relatively few Danes generally identify with mainly eating vegetarian or vegan, and thus no meat. In between, there is a relatively large group of Danes who report that they are reducing their meat consumption.

As mentioned before, the result does not necessarily mean that a relatively large group of Danes are actually reducing their meat intake. The Danish sales figures do not show this either (Fagt et al, 2023). Our numbers also show that when comparing the group of omnivores and the group that reduces meat in terms of whether they ate red meat the night before, the difference is not striking, even though those reducing meat have the lowest percentage (Halkier & Lund, 2023, 7). However, it is interesting that such a relatively large group of Danes generally want to signal that they are in the process of cutting down meat consumption. This can be interpreted as a sign of change in the social norms surrounding the composition of food in Denmark. And that makes this group particularly interesting to study when it comes to drivers and barriers for eating less meat and more plant-based.

### **3. Flexitars are a diverse group**

The third important result therefore concerns the group reporting that they reduce their meat consumption. We call them flexitarians, both for convenience and because that is what we call them in the academic publication about this group. We are aware that there are discussions about when one can define people as flexitarians (Dagevos, 2021), and that some may argue that people must then eat only a very small amount of meat. However, we wanted to investigate the potential breadth and variation in the group of Danes who reduce their meat consumption because we believe that it is more interesting that people are engaged in the process rather than whether they precisely fit within a debated definition.

The main barriers to reducing meat consumption among flexitarians in general are the following three: *"I like the taste of meat"*; *"I am used to eating meals with meat"*; and *"There are other things in my everyday life that are more important than food"* (Halkier & Lund, 2023, 6).

The 'used to eating' barrier directly shows that it is the routines of everyday life that make it more difficult to change habits, while the 'like the taste' barrier is of course directly about the sensory and enjoyment of food but can also be interpreted as people being used to the taste that meat provides. Finally, the 'other more important' barrier is about other everyday activities being more important, and that



food in everyday life functions more as fuel and background than as something that occupies consciousness.

The three main drivers for reducing and maintaining the reduction in meat consumption among flexitarians generally also revolve around routines that people have established: "*You can always make something from the vegetables you have in the cupboards*"; "*I'm used to eating a lot of vegetable dishes*"; and "*It's easy to make a meal without meat*". Finally, almost as many flexitarians, in general, mentioned the daily driver that "*There have become more plant-based products available in the shops*" (Halkier & Lund, 2023, 6). This reflects an experience that there are more options to buy meat substitute products, making it easier to eat more plant-based, without having to change the meal format from well-known meat dishes, such as meatballs and burgers.

Our survey study shows that the Danish flexitarians are a diverse group. We can identify four different subgroups that differ significantly from each other (Halkier & Lund, 2023, 6):

- Group 1: 28% of flexitarians (12% of population). This group experiences many barriers in everyday life, not just the three most important ones described above.
- Group 2: 17% of flexitarians (7% of population). This group experiences almost no barriers in everyday life but at the same time does not score particularly high on the various drivers.
- Group 3: 17% of flexitarians (7% of population). This group does not experience any barriers, but instead scores high on many different drivers, including the generally most important ones mentioned above.
- Group 4: 37% of flexitarians (16% of population). This group is the largest among the flexitarians. They apparently experience a lot of support in everyday life for their reduction of meat consumption, with only a few specific barriers in everyday life. These barriers align exactly with the three most important barriers for flexitarians in general – the taste of meat, being used to eating meat, and the fact that there are other things in everyday life more important than food.

In addition to showing that there are different ways of living with reduced meat consumption, our analysis of the flexitarian subgroups also shows that routines are central when comparing the four subgroups in terms of how long they have been in the process of changing their dietary habits.



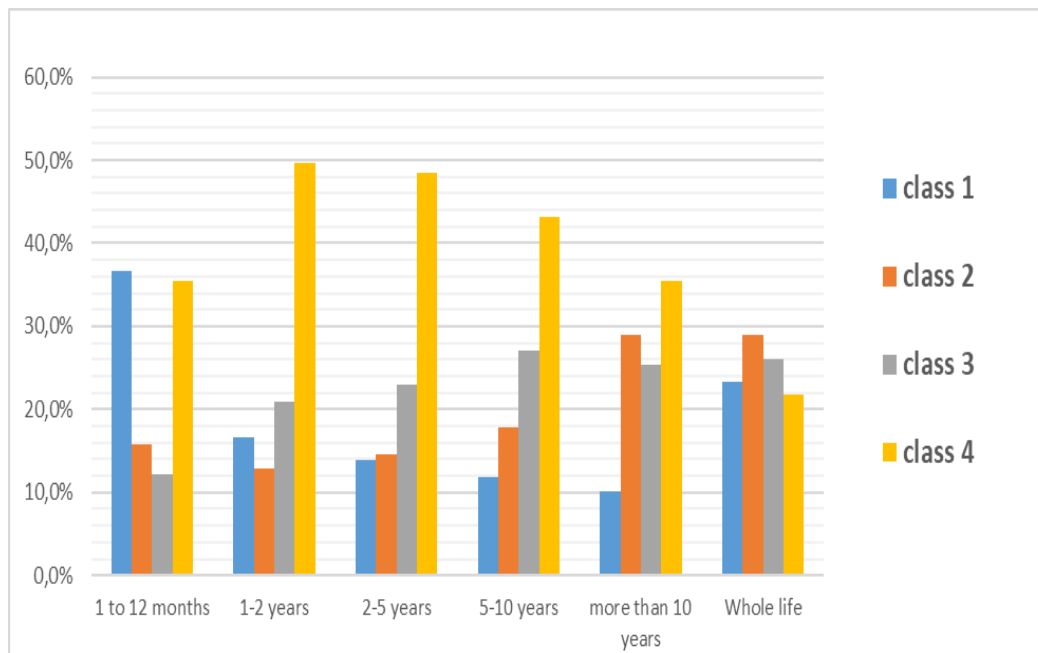


Figure 3: Subgroups of flexiters (Halkier & Lund, 2023). The four groups are explained above.

Based on Figure 3, it can be seen that subgroup 1, which experiences many barriers, gradually becomes smaller the longer people have been reducing their meat consumption. But there will continue to be barriers for a long time – even though they decrease in significance. This is especially evident in subgroup 4, those who actually experience support for reducing meat consumption in their everyday life, but also continue to experience the three most important barriers. At the same time, the proportion of the subgroup experiencing the most support (group 3) increases the longer people have been eating less meat. We interpret this as the more experience flexitarians get with eating less meat and more plant-based food, the easier it becomes for them because they get used to prepare and eat different meals than before.

#### 4. Social relationships are of great importance

The fourth and final important result of the survey study concerns the importance of social networks for eating less meat and more plant-rich food. These analyses have not yet been published, so we do not show the actual tables and graphs, but provide some overall results. For example, we compare the all-consuming group of Danes (54% – see above) with the three groups of Danes who are in the process of changing their eating habits to more plant-based food – flexitarians, vegetarians, and vegans – in terms of how often they talk to people in their network about plant-rich food. All three "transition groups" talk to a greater extent with close relationships in their network such as family and friends, as well as more distant relationships such as colleagues and acquaintances, than the all-consuming Danes do.

Zooming in on the flexitarians, a multivariable logistic regression analysis shows that more conversations about plant-rich food with close relationships in their network increases the likelihood of starting to eat flexitarian. The analysis also shows that if there are not particularly many conversations with close relationships (such as friends, partners, children), then the conversations with the more distant

relationships (such as acquaintances and colleagues) in their network become more important in order to start reducing meat consumption.

It can be interpreted in at least two ways. First, close relationships in one's network are often people with whom one eats, and some are even members of one's household. This means that there is practical coordination about meals among a number of close relationships, which can help to push for a change in eating habits (Wendler & Halkier, 2023). We return to this in the section on the results from the qualitative study. If there is not much conversation about coordinating meals, then conversations with more distant relationships in the social network may become more important in order to start eating more flexitarian food. Here, it is likely that repeated experiences of eating next to each other without coordinating, for example with colleagues and fellow students, can affect the social expectations and norms regarding how to eat (Halkier, 2022). We will also return to this under the results from the qualitative study. Moreover, we see parallel results when we look at the importance of the support from social relationships for the maintenance of flexitarian as well as vegetarian and vegan diets.

## What do we know about young adults in the process of reducing their meat consumption?

To illustrate this, we have used the data sets from the qualitative study with young adults (18–30 years), who are in the process of changing their eating habits to less meat and more plant-based food. Data consists of qualitative interviews with 29 young adults, photo-diaries from the same individuals, as well as four focus groups with members of the same social network, where one of the participants has already been interviewed individually and has made a photo-diary.

The 29 young adults were recruited through participants in the survey study, and they vary in terms of gender, age, place of residence, level of education, type of household and self-reported eating habits. The focus groups were diversified in such a way that one consisted mostly of omnivores, two included a mix of flexitarians and vegetarians, and one consisted of vegans.

In the following, five results of the qualitative study are highlighted.

### 1. Changing eating habits requires work

The first result is that changing eating habits towards more plant-rich food requires work from the one making the change. Regardless of whether the change in eating habits is in the direction of less meat, no meat, or no animal foods. In other words, we see the same pattern, namely that it takes work to change eating habits to a more climate-friendly diet, across the differences among the young adults participating in the study. Changing eating habits requires the development of new shopping and cooking routines, such as replacing familiar dishes that can be prepared without thinking about it, with others containing less or no meat or animal foods (Wendler & Halkier, 2023, 7). This is expressed by Freja, for example, in the quote below (all names are anonymized):

**Interviewer:** *Has anything changed in the way you shop and cook since you made the switch?*

**Freya:** *Yes (...) At least right when the change happened, it was also a challenge, because you were like "okay, I have these five classic dishes. If I can't think of anything else, I can always make one of them". All of a sudden, there weren't really any of them that I could make like I usually do. "Okay, pasta with meat sauce. Lasagna. That good salmon pasta. Oh. There's none of them I can make. What do I do then?". So, you kind of start from scratch, one way or another. And then I think it's been a lot of fun trying to find out that "okay, cauliflower is actually not just super boring. Cauliflower can be all kinds of things, which can be really delicious". So, I've got a completely different relationship with especially vegetables. Like how many ways you can actually use them.*

Freja's experiences illustrate that eating habits are indeed routines, and therefore requires extra effort – what we call work here – to do something different than what she usually does because she is not used to neither thinking about it nor talking about it. The conversion to a climate-friendly diet requires work, because the food practices of young adults are characterized by routines, aligning with one of the main results from the quantitative survey study described above: That the majority of the key barriers to reducing meat consumption revolve around existing routines.

## 2. Social coordination around meals is important

Another result from the qualitative study is that maintaining social coordination around meals is important for young adults navigating the processes of changing to a more plant-rich diet (Wendler & Halkier, 2023, 9-11). Social coordination around meals comes from the fact that many meals are eaten in the company of others, and if you share a household, you usually also have to coordinate shopping and cooking. For the young adults who are in a process of restructuring or have restructured, this means that it will be necessary to renegotiate this social coordination of food activities with family and friends. As explained by Johanna in the quote below:

*"I would say, in my study group on Tuesdays and Fridays, when we are so many vegetarians and vegans in that study there. [...] We usually find some vegetarian or vegan food together afterwards. So, it's not because it's difficult to meet with the people I know now. It is in Jutland though. There it's just like "okay, we have to find a place that has both meat dishes and something for me". Whereas the friends I have here, they are much like me. The few meat eaters there are, they're like "well, I'll just have something vegetarian. It doesn't matter, we'll just do that."*

The management of social coordination around meals comes in three types, which can be seen across the differences among the young adult participants. Firstly, there may be an adjustment of eating habits to enable coordination with others. There are young people who, for example, "eat around" the meat in the cooked dish at their parents' house. Secondly, there can be a negotiation of ways to coordinate food activities. Here, young adults have negotiated to eat vegetarian in their everyday life but accept to be served meat when they eat at other people's homes. Thirdly, young adults can also act proactively, meaning they take control in the coordination to avoid conflict and unpleasant situations. There are young adults who always make sure to be the ones to order the take-away pizzas when they get together with friends so they can order from a place where they know they can also get vegetarian or vegan pizzas. Finally, there are examples among the young adults where the change to eat more plant-rich has begun due to social coordination. For example, by moving in with a partner who already eats plant-based, rather than the beginning of the process being a conscious decision to eat less meat (Wendler & Halkier, 2023, 12-14).

## 3. Interactions with others can prevent or support dietary change

A third important result is that the young adults' social interactions with others can both prevent and support a more plant-rich food composition (Wendler, 2023). The social interaction and conversations in people's social networks shape understandings of the role of meat in food. This happens both through recommendations of new dishes and ingredients, and by challenging previous understandings of the role of meat. Below follows an example of recommendations in the network:

**Moderator:** *If we could just have a quick yes or no from you on whether you - do you think you would consider buying this tempeh. Would you buy it if you saw it in the supermarket?*

**Nanny:** *Well, I probably would. I mean, now I would probably like to try it. Because we've seen that movie. But if I hadn't, I probably wouldn't have done it either.*

**Idun:** *I would rather say that it was Sanne's recommendation, i.e. the fact that you said you had tried it and that it actually tasted fine. I could actually see myself, the next time I'm in Føtex or whatever, then...*

**Sanne:** *But then you have to take the one that has been marinated already.*

**Idun:** *(laughs) I think I would like to try it, but it's also because I actually think it's a lot of fun to try these new substitutes to see how hideous or delicious they actually taste. But it's not because of the video. It's more because you said it actually tasted okay.*

**Rikke:** *I agree with that too.*

**Anna:** *I've also heard about it before, so I don't think it's because of the video either. But with what I've heard about, I've been like, "well, how exciting, now I think I've heard about it quite a few times, so what is it really?"*

**Sanne:** *I think it tasted pretty good. But I got it in such a meal box from Årstiderne. So it wasn't something I came up with myself. Because I probably hadn't done it myself. If I hadn't got it there.*

The young adults' social interactions in their networks also shape their norms about how non-meat eaters should be treated at social gatherings. Here follows an example from a focus group with participants with habits:

**Moderator:** *You look thoughtful, Ingrid?*

**Ingrid:** *It's because I don't quite know where I stand, because if it was us who celebrated Christmas at home, we would have just made it for everyone, that is, so there was one and the other, right. But like that, if you think about the Christmas food, okay, the meat, it's roast pork and duck... how much more meat is there?*

**Josefine:** *So, you're mostly just serving the usual Christmas food?*

**Ingrid:** *No, no – no, no... or yes. I do not know. Because there are still things that are not meat.*

**Moderator:** *Brown potatoes and white potatoes?*

**Ingrid:** *And red cabbage [...] I mean, we might make a salad too, because we know people like it, right? [...] Then there are both one and the other type of people who eat one thing or another, and if you invite them, you can make something so that everyone can eat it.*

**Moderator:** *But there shouldn't be anything special for the vegetarians?*

**Ingrid:** *Well. ... A salad could be there, you know, without meat. But then again, those are also salads they normally eat, I think.*

**Josefine:** *Well, I don't eat that much salad.*

Across the qualitative data materials, we can see that the more central meat is seen within the social circle, and the less the social circle accommodates the opt-out of meat, the more socially challenging it becomes to reduce meat consumption.

#### **4. Eating habits are rooted in other everyday activities**

A fourth result from the qualitative study concerns to what extent people's eating habits are "entangled" in their other daily live activities, and therefore the other people they have close relationships with. The eating habits of young adults are

anchored to their other everyday activities, and through this their eating habits are also anchored to the everyday lives of their closest social relations. This anchoring affects how the young people structure their daily routines with food, for example, when they eat and how they cook. A clear example is seen in the case of young parents, where eating habits and the structure of everyday life are strongly influenced by their children. Stefan's story below is a good example of this.

**Interviewer:** *If we look at it a little more schematically, what does such an average week look like in broad terms?*

**Stephen:** *If I have my son, I get up at exactly 6.45. If I have my son, otherwise I get up a little later. Then I drive him to kindergarten, and go to work until 3 p.m., pick him up. When he goes to bed at seven o'clock, I probably continue to work for an extra two or three hours. [...] When I don't have him, I sit in the office maybe from 9 am to 6-7 pm. [...] I don't have time to cook, so I cook all the food, then I cook for three days at a time. I might vary his food a bit more. So, I still make a large portion, and then throw some into the freezer, so that his food varies a bit more. For myself, I usually eat the same dinner three or four days in a row. [...] It is also easier. It was hard for me to get it together, to find time to just cook when I had him. [...]*

**Interviewer:** *You said you make something different for you and him. Is it the same dish, where one is plant-based, or is it something completely different?*

**Stephen:** *It is something completely different. I mean, he mostly eats something like pasta carbonara with some vegetables on the side, meatballs in curry, meatballs. All the classics. And I mostly eat curries of one kind or another, I think. It's probably just a period right now. But it will be too strong for him, anyway. So, he can't eat that. And stewed dishes aren't so good for him at the moment either, because he can't see what's in them.*

This practical and social anchoring of eating habits means that consumers cannot necessarily immediately decide to change the food they cook at home, because their eating habits are entangled with those of their family, their partners, or their cohabitants.

## **5. Exceptions to vegetarian and vegan diets are widespread**

A fifth and final key result from the qualitative study is about exceptions from eating vegetarian and vegan. When we look more closely at the participants in the qualitative study, who are vegetarians and vegans, it turns out that exceptions to the diet are common. This should be understood as vegetarians sometimes eating meat or fish, or vegans eating animal products.

These results agree with previous international studies also showing that exceptions are widespread (Ruby, 2012). However, such exceptions are sometimes interpreted negatively in research as "dietary violations" (Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2019), and also in the public debate, it is often viewed in a skewed way when those who call themselves vegetarians, for example, eat meat. The study shows that the exceptions are not an expression of lack of commitment or hypocrisy. Firstly, because the participants relate pragmatically to labels such as "vegetarian" or "vegan" and use them to communicate their dietary preferences to the outside world. Secondly, because the exceptions often happen in situations where other things are seen as more important than diet compliance. This could include being a good guest and daughter-in-law, as in Louise's case in the example below.

**Interviewer:** *How about meat and such?*

**Louise:** *Well, I try to live vegetarian, and have actually called myself vegetarian for about four years, I think. But if, for example, I am visiting my in-laws, they eat quite a lot of meat, where it is sometimes included in the dish...*

**Interviewer:** *In some kind of stew or?*

**Louise:** *Yes, exactly. Then I eat it. But if it's something like roast or something else on the side, I don't eat it. Then I just eat side dishes. And again, I think that's what it's all about. So, I don't want to cause a stir either, if that makes sense. (...) It is probably also very personal that I think that cooking for guests also have some social value. So, I think it's a bit strange if I start sorting out and putting my own set of values into their community.*

In a way, you can say that the last main result here reflects the four others: Changing eating habits towards a more climate-friendly and therefore more plant-rich food is an effort, is connected to the social coordination in the household and network, is part of the norm negotiations about what to eat, and are entangled in the everyday activities of close social relations.



## What do we know about what works in practice to switch to more climate-friendly food?

This section is mainly about the transformative project “Green conversation dinners”, and, in conclusion, we describe a new policy tool in climate policy regarding changing consumption habits, namely the support for normalization.

Green conversation dinners can be seen as a kind of social laboratory for changing food habits in a more climate-friendly direction. The conversation dinner in general is a proven concept, where people with different backgrounds and different knowledge about a given topic meet and exchange experiences and views over a shared dinner.

At these special dinners, the participants were engaged in a direct exchange of their own experiences with and attitudes towards food, followed by a discussion about the possibilities for changing habits in the direction of more climate-friendly food. CONCITO contributed as facilitator and knowledge actor with relevant knowledge about climate footprint of food.

### Samtalemenu

DEL I

Hvordan vil du beskrive dine madvaner?

Hvad lægger du vægt på, når du køber ind?

Hvad kunne få dig til at spise mere klimavenligt?

Laver du helst mad, du kender i forvejen, eller prøver du tit nye retter?

Er der forskel på den mad, du laver til andre, og den mad, du laver til dig selv?

Er klimavenlig mad noget, du normalt taler om med andre? Med dine venner?  
Familien?

§

DEL II

Fortæl om en oplevelse, du har haft, der gjorde dig bevidst om en af dine madvaner?

Hvad motiverer dig til at ændre madvaner eller prøve noget nyt?

Hvad forhindrer dig i at ændre madvaner?

Hvilken af dine madvaner ville skabe de største forandringer, hvis du ændrede den?  
- for dig selv? - for dine nærmeste?

§

Above is the conversation menu for the green conversation dinners. The questions for the conversations were inspired by both the knowledge gained in the project "Social driving forces and barriers for climate-friendly diet", and also informed by CONCITO's knowledge about the climate footprint of food and other work in the food area.

More than 15 green conversation dinners with 350+ young participants have been carried out. The green conversation dinners have been held across the country, mainly at different types of educational institutions, dormitories, and other places where young people already gather. It varied whether the young people prepared the climate-friendly meal themselves (e.g. in a dormitory) or whether it was prepared by others (e.g. in a canteen at an educational institution).

As part of the project, a plant-based recipe collection has been prepared to promote good food experiences and conversations about food habits. The recipe collection consists of contributions from various skilled food actors who are passionate about good taste, climate awareness, food aesthetics and social media. The contributors include: Eva Hurtigkarl, Planetarisk Kogebog, Suhrs Højskole, Rasmus Bredahl, Baka d'busk, Meyers, Planterødderne, Johan Borups Højskole, Celina Gram, Michael Minter and Gitte Mary.

The collection of recipes was distributed at the conversation dinners that were held after the publication and in other relevant contexts. At the back of the collection, there is a guide on how to facilitate a conversation dinner yourself as well as an example of a conversation menu. The recipe booklet and recipes are also shared via GRO SELV and CONCITO's social media channels and are available on [CONCITO's project page](#), where the project's progress and experiences are described and shared.

The experiences with the green conversation dinners with the young people from different parts of the country were very diverse and positive in terms of bringing forth the young people's knowledge of, attitudes towards and experiences with more climate-friendly food. Below are some snapshots from three of the green conversation dinners.

Green conversation dinner at **the Maritime School in Svendborg**, 20 young participants



Here, the staff at the educational institution prepared the climate-friendly meal for the young people. A kitchen employee had never cooked a vegetarian meal before the chili sin carne she made for the conversation dinner.

The kitchen staff were generally happy and excited that the meal had been so cheap, as a large part of their budget is allocated to meat. The kitchen staff also mentioned that the food they usually serve is what they thought the students would prefer. In return, the students said they repeatedly asked for more vegetarian food. A group of 12 people stayed long after the conversation dinner ended to discuss barriers to climate-friendly food.

Green conversation dinner at **Oure Højskole**, 100 young participants



Here, too, it was the kitchen staff who prepared the climate-friendly meal for the young people. The overall experience among the young people was that the food was fantastic and that it was nice that the chef explained where the vegetables came from.

Several students mentioned that they liked the kitchen manager explaining the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint of the meatballs, where the vegetables came from, etc. The facilitator from CONCITO noted that several students had difficult academic questions for which answers weren't necessarily known. For instance, the climate footprint of a greenhouse tomato compared to the climate footprint of a free-range tomato turned into a conversation about the many dilemmas we face when we shop. Both in relation to packaging, free range, local, meat vs. green etc.



Green conversation dinner at **Gazzværket Åbenrå** , 20 young participants



Here, the young people prepared the climate-friendly meal themselves. In the starting point, there were several who pointed out that they had never eaten vegetarian before. For some, it was a challenge to cook and eat more climate-friendly when you don't know the recipes in advance. And there were some who emphasized that it was nice to have a place where the focus was on conversation and the opportunity to talk about climate and food. It was seen as topics that are rarely talked about.

In connection with some of the conversation dinners, video interviews were conducted with some of the participating young people. GRO SELV has edited the interviews into short videos, where the young participants convey how they experienced taking part in a conversation dinner as well as their reflections on climate, habits, and food. The videos are used both to share knowledge and experiences about the project, i.e. in teaching courses and other relevant contexts. See video example on [Instagram](#).

During the project, CONCITO's Climate Embassy has carried out a number of activities and courses focusing on food, climate and eating habits, where the conversation dinner concept has been used. It has been used as part of concrete teaching courses for secondary school students and students in secondary education and for events focusing on youth communities organized by GRO SELV. Here are some examples:

In the autumn of 2021, the Climate Embassy conducted a course on young people's consumption patterns in the Region of Southern Denmark with the participation of student groups from five youth programs in the region. The conversation dinners were incorporated in different ways and with different purposes. At several of the schools, the concept was used to achieve a more plant-based diet in the school canteen. The participating students thought the concept had an inclusive and involving effect, and a framework where those who were skeptical could participate in the dialogue in a less conflict-ridden and more constructive way. In other schools, the conversation menu was used to share experiences about how to eat plant-based more easily in your everyday life.

In the GRO SELV project, the conversation dinners were experimented with in various formats, among other things to adapt to the COVID situation. The conversations have been facilitated in groups both in Aalborg, Thisted, Aarhus, Kolding and repeatedly in Copenhagen with varying number of participants ranging from 5 - 60 people per dinner.

For all the dinners, the questions addressed the experiences and reflections of the young participants about their food intake and practices, such as shopping, cooking, preferences, and compromises. In the conversations, there seemed to be a pronounced sense of guilt and shame associated with food in relation to the climate, but also a curiosity and a desire to be heard, which, among other things, motivated the young people to participate in the events. The participants seem to want to be able to practice a more climate-friendly diet in accordance with their knowledge and ambitions, but the choices seem limited and the experiences therefore remain few, which is a pervasive barrier that clearly feeds a sense of guilt. However, the participants seek experiences by participating in the dinner and the conversation. The desire for food that is cheap, easy, and delicious is also a common theme.

Examples of conversation dinners in different formats can be seen here:

[MadTalk](#)

[Aarhus: Wild Food, Wild Nature, Wild Experience](#)

[Talk & Eat](#)

[Long table dinner](#)

What the young people who have participated in the conversation dinners have in common is that they have experienced it as a relevant and motivating framework for gaining new insights about themselves and their habits in relation to climate and food habits, and that the framework has made it easier to talk about habits and behaviour.

It is therefore a concept that CONCITO continues to work with in future events, e.g. through GRO SELV's activities, as it is common knowledge that a facilitated conversation dinner can create a space for good conversations about climate and food habits in young people's everyday life.

### **Signs of the normalization of climate-friendly food should be further supported**

The green conversation dinners are the biggest contribution in the overall project to understand what works in practice regarding switching to more climate-friendly food. However, the entire project has also provided the foundation for interpreting and developing the use of the category "normalization" as a potential new means of action in climate policy with regard to changing consumption habits.

Discussions about instruments in climate policy have for several years been dominated by, on the one hand, instruments that are focused on what the individual can do, and on the other hand, instruments that are focused on what the institutions can do. In recent years, however, ideas have emerged about instruments that focus on how social dynamics in everyday life can be used (Keller et al, 2016). The discussion about social instruments has come about because individual instruments – such as taxes, information campaigns, and nudging – typically have some unrealistic assumptions about how changing habits takes place as conscious and unconscious choices.

While the more institutional instruments – such as legislation and standards – usually only address the frameworks for how change of habits takes place, and not what the processes of change involve.

The existing research in the food area shows that successful cases for changing consumption habits occur in cases where there is a collaboration or an alliance between public and private organized actors to create the framework for the social dynamics (Halkier, 2019). It is this mindset on which the discussion about the social instruments is based, and it is in this context that the project's overall contribution to discussing the support of the "normalization" of changed dietary habits towards more climate-friendly ones should be understood.

Normalization means social processes through which consumers gain more experience of eating climate-friendly food across social contexts. More experience across social contexts means that it both becomes easier and more common to do something different than what one usually do as a consumer. Social norms are about what we socially expect from each other (Halkier, 2022). A concrete example of supporting the normalization of climate-friendly dietary habits, which has already been used in Danish policy recommendations, is to change the standard for meals served in public kitchens to follow the official dietary guidelines that meet climate-friendly diets (Climate Council, 2021).

We can see signs of the normalization of climate-friendly food in both the survey study and the qualitative study. An example from the survey study is that 63% of all-consuming Danes (omnivores) know someone personally who has reduced



their meat consumption (unpublished figures). This can be interpreted as an indication that there are probably relatively many Danes who already have an experience or perception that reducing meat consumption is becoming relatively common. The previously mentioned result with 42.7% of Danes who identify themselves as in the process of reducing their meat consumption (also called flexitarians) points in the same direction.

There are two types of examples from the qualitative study that indicate normalization processes for climate-friendly food. Firstly, the young consumers describe how institutional support, such as plant-rich food in the canteen, makes it easier to change. Secondly, the young consumers talk about how eating with others – even others than they usually do – helps to make climate-friendly food more common. Here, it is the social coordination around meals that supports an experience of normality around eating plant-based.

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