School meals as a cultural bridge builder

Report from the visit of the School Nutrition Reform Team in Ukraine to Denmark and Sweden June 2026



Department of Geosciences & Natural Resource Management
University of Copenhagen

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

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Curated and edited by Bent Egberg Mikkelsen, Ib Keld Jensen and Anastasiia Shevchenko

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Preface

School meals are one of the most effective and scalable ways to promote a transition to healthier, more sustainable, and equitable food systems because they tie nutrition, education, food production, and local economies together. Since the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, school feeding programmes as a strategy have succeeded in taking the place as one of the most effective strategies for improving public health nutrition. Denmark joined the International School Meals Coalition, one of the initiatives decided during the same UN summit, as early as August 2021.[1] And Ukraine is another country that has embraced this idea. And since Denmark and Ukraine already have close ties in many policy areas why not take the opportunity to learn from each other. The majority of Danes support school meals, a considerable amount of money has been set aside for an ambitious pilot project over the next four years. But in Denmark, so far not a lot is known about how school meals are best done in terms of practicality, logistics and all the building-related things. Here we can learn something from Ukraine, which is a few years ahead in the school meal domains and which also knows a lot about how to create resilience - robustness. Ukraine has shown how to make school meals work – even during a devastating war. This is one of the questions we address when a Ukrainian school food delegation visits Denmark to take a closer look at Danish experiences, share some of the Ukrainian experiences and to discuss a mutual future cooperation between the two countries. The visit concludes at the People's Festival – with a panel debate.

The participants in the UA Delegation were Mr. Orest Stepanyak, Head of the School nutrition reform team in Ukraine, Mr. Dmytro Sivak, Deputy Head of the School nutrition reform team in Ukraine and Dr Anastasiia Shevchenko, International cooperation manager of the School nutrition reform team in Ukraine, Professor of the National university of food technologies. The visit was arranged as part of the research carried out on international school meal diplomacy by University of Copenhagen and Lund University in cooperation with National university of food technologies in Kyiv and Ukraine School nutrition reform team in Ukraine. The visit was supported by a network consisting of Danish Dairy Board, Danish Union of Public Employees, Madkulturen, Skolemad.dk and Fru Hansens Kælder. The initial contacts between Denmark and Ukraine came in place with assistance from Professor Donald Bundy from the School Meal Coalition. Thanks to journalist and communication adviser Ib Keld Jensen, teacher Frederikke Zacho, Lindevang School, school garden coordinator Betina Lauritsen, co-CEO Camilla Rud Otte, Haver til Maver, deputy headmaster Símon A. Sigurbergsson, School of Sydhavn, school food coordinator Johan Roos, Municipality of Malmö, community gardeners Jenny De Souza and Lena Fridblick, Social Innovation Lab, Malmö, headmaster Pia Tofte, School of Paradisbakken, Birgitte Jallov, Empowerhouse, Peter Haag and Andreas Hansen, World Food Program; hub coordinator Khrystyna Melnichuk, Crossing Borders, direktør Pil Amundsen, Fru Hansens kælder, direktør Tommy Johannesen, Skolemad.dk, spokesperson Pia Heidi Nielsen, FOA, Sylwester & Barbara Gawel, Aronia Food Service and Henrik Søndergård, Lund University.

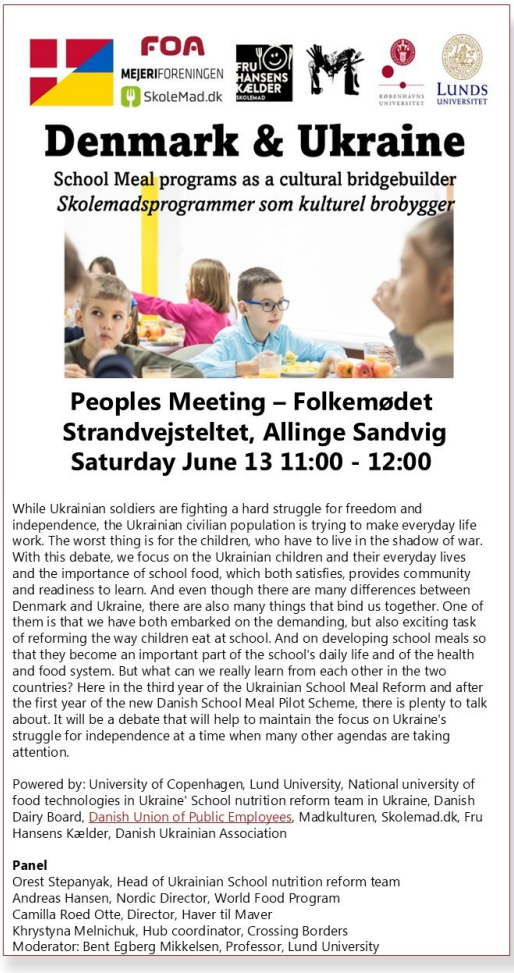
Bent Egberg Mikkelsen
Professor Lund University

[1] https://schoolmealscoalition.org/member/denmark

Introduction

School meal programs have attracted increasing attention internationally in recent years as way to improve nutrition, secure food security, facilitate learning and foster local food systems resilience. More than hundred countries have joined the international collaboration in the School Meal Coalition and it illustrates the fact that the significant belief and trust that exists in the impact of school meals program. There is also a widespread trust in the importance of international cooperation and in the potential of diplomacy to drive innovation when it comes to school meal programs.

Despite significant differences Denmark and Ukraine have both embarked on the challenging task of reforming the way children eat at school. They have both started developing school meal programs so that they become an important part of the school's daily life and of the health and food system. As such there seems to be a significant learning potential for both researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the two countries. The Ukrainian School Nutrition Reform is in its seventh year of development and Ukrainian program of free school meals is in its third year of development. And in Denmark have now completed the first year of the new Danish School Meal Pilot Scheme.



Against this background a Ukrainian delegation was invited to Denmark to initiate an exchange of experiences about the implementation of school meal programs in the 2 countries. The program ran for 3 days and included visits in both Denmark and Sweden and participation in a panel debate at the annual Peoples Meeting at the island of Bornholm. The flow of the visit is described in detail in the following along with the panel debate. Ukraine was represented on the panel by Orest Stepanyak, Head of the School Nutrition Reform Team in Ukraine. The panel brought together Khrystyna Melnichuk from Copenhagen Centre Coordinator at Crossing Borders; Andreas Hansen, Director for Northern Europe at the United Nations World Food Programme; and Camilla Roed Otte, Programme Director at Haver til Maver “Gardens for Bellies”. The debate was organised by University of Copenhagen, Lund University, National university of food technologies, School nutrition reform team in Ukraine, Danish Dairy Board, Danish Union of Public Employees, Madkulturen, Skolemad.dk and Fru Hansens Kælder.

The debate and the visit were covered by both TV media, newspapers, professional magazines and SoMe. The report gives an account of that coverage along with links to the sources. The aim of the report is to document the visit and the panel and to give an account of the main outcomes of the visit.

The visit

The program was developed in cooperation with the Ukrainian Embassy in Copenhagen and lasted 3 days and began in Copenhagen on June 10. On June the 11th the delegation visited Lindevang School in the Municipality of Frederiksberg. The themes included Integrated Food Literacy teaching and walkabout in the adjacent Haver til Maver school garden and the Climate Hack EdTech initiative that allows pupils to model different versions of a school food recipe and to optimize it in terms of climate and nutritional profile. The host of the visit was home economics teacher Frederikke Zacho. Next stop was a visit to Ellebjerg Food School in the Copenhagen that operates the Food School concept. Host of the meeting was Mr. Símon A. Sigurbergsson, head of upper school section and the visit included a visit to the School Garden and before a lunch with the staff in the canteen the school presented their work within the UNICEF framework of Rights Respecting School. In the afternoon the delegation continued over the bridge of Øresund to visits in Malmö. The delegation visited the Johannes School restaurant, in the Malmö neighbourhood of Triangeln. Host was Johan Roos from Malmö School Restaurant. The visit included a presentation of the Swedish national school meal program. Afterwards the delegation went for a visit to the Botildenborg Soil Innovation Lab (SOIL). Host was founder Lena Fridblick that presented their work on social gastronomy and gardening.

Program
June 10 Check in Ørestad, Copenhagen

Thursday June 11
7:45 Pick up at hotel
8:30 Visit to Lindevang School. Integrated Food Literacy teaching and walkabout in the Haver til Maver school garden, the Bike Kitchen and the Climate Hack initiative. Host Frederikke Zacho, home economics teacher
10:30 Visit to Ellebjerg Food School Copenhagen. Host Mr. Símon A. Sigurbergsson, head of upper school section
11:30 Lunch at Ellebjerg Food School
12:15 Transfer to Malmö (SE) by car
13:00 Visit at Johannes School restaurant, at Malmö Triangeln. Host Johan Roos from Malmö School Restaurant
15:00 Visit to Botildenborg Soil Innovation Lab (SOIL). Host Jenny Ahlqvist De Souza
16:30 Transfer to Höllviksnäs – meetings, food & lodging
18:30 Dinner
Friday June 12
6:35 Breakfast and leave (7:05) for port of Ystad
8:30 Transfer to Rønne by Speed Ferry
9:50 Arrival Port of Rønne
11:00 Visit to the Integrated Food School at Paradisbakken, town of Nexø
12:00 Lunch at Integrated Food School at Paradisbakken
13:30 Transfer to Folkemødet in Allinge Sandvig
15:30 Panel debate on School Food & Teaching at House of Danish Teachers Assoc (DLF). Danish but translation provided
17:00 Dinner & Overnight stay in Østermarie at Bornholm
Saturday June 13
8:00 Breakfast In Østermarie
9:00 Leave for Allinge/Sandvig
11:00 Panel debate DK/UA together around School Food. Strandvejsteltet
12:15 Goodbye and transfer to sea or airport



After an overnight stopover in the village of Höllviksnäs the delegation continued to the ferry port of Ystad for the transfer to the island of Bornholm. The delegation was welcomed at the Integrated Food School at Paradisbakken in the town of Nexø. Headmaster Pia Laub Tofte was the host and presented their work on developing an integrated approach to teaching and eating at the school. Important themes were the school gardening, the functioning of the school meal program, the pupil's involvement in the meal preparation and the activities in the green house. Afterwards the delegation was transferred to the site of the Peoples Meeting (Folkemødet) in the village of Allinge Sandvig. Here a panel debate on School Food & Teaching took place at House of Danish Teachers Assoc (DLF) – see announcement above. The debate evolved around the first findings and experiences with the new Danish School Meal pilot program and in particular the first results from a interview study with teachers and headmasters participating in the program. (See the summary here: https://ign.ku.dk/sesam/En_h_jere_enhed.pdf)

Panel debate. The announcement of the panel debate DK/UA together around School Food that took place in the Strandvejsteltet at 11 o'clock. https://folkemoedet-app.dk/events/35355



Highlights

This section reports on the main touch points and highlights the topics of common interest discussed during the visit.

Food waste at school



Food waste at school in Denmark is a considerable problem both in cases where pupils take their home packed lunch and in cases where school is offered by the school. Studies from the think tank OneThird shows that for lunch packs around 20% are thrown and studies from DTU and Thorsen et al 2015 shows that plate waste counts vary between 40 and 80 g pr meal. As such initiatives against food waste at school high on the agenda. Initiative such as the M3 learning portal are examples of actions that have been launched as a way to counteract food waste at school. This topic was touched upon in more of the visits and in the discussions. Every day, the students at Johanneskolen in Sweden weigh the food they leave on their plates. The results for each class are presented on a board. Unlike many other school meal schemes, it is the students themselves who help themselves at the buffet, but if you do not eat up, it costs in the class accounts. Since the scheme was introduced, food waste has been reduced from a daily 12 kilos to now only 1 kilo of leftover food. There is ice cream for the class that performs the least food waste.

Focus on climate impact



Initiatives to link the nutritional impact with the environmental impacts - that is to couple the individual health perspective with the planetary health perspective – are widespread in Denmark and an important part of the discussion on future school food. For instance the City of Copenhagen has banned the use of red meat in public catering for the sake of the climate, and there is little doubt that the climate impact will be an important quality parameter for school food in the coming years. At Lindevang School in Frederiksberg, students and a PhD student from the University of Copenhagen has been working on a climate impact calculator that pupils can use to develop recipes and to adjust them according to the best climate and nutrition profile.

Food schools - pupils in the kitchen

The debate on school meal for the future and food waste has put a significant focus on the role of pupils school meal programmes. At one of the visits - Ellebjerg School in Copenhagen's South Harbour - the

students participate in the kitchen and, together with the school's chef and an assistant, prepare meals for the school's students. This is the idea of the Food School (Madskole) – a Danish concept that is in operation in a number of municipalities. One of the assumptions are that by involving students in the school meal programme the food waste will decrease. And that food literacy will increase. For some pupils the food school also functions as a temporary get away from class and for some pupils it can be a relief to do something complete the difference for a period.



The same idea of Food School is practised at Paradisbakken school in Nexø. During the visit several hundred students of all ages are gathered in the canteen and the students sit quietly and talk to each other while they eat the spicy chicken sandwich that 5th grade has made for them together with chef Kasper and two nutrition assistants. The overall impression is that there is more peace here than in a regular staff canteen. The students themselves help decide on the weekly menu. And this involvement of pupils in the decision making is one of the things that are done to reduce the likelihood of food waste. And the pupils reports that it is considered a pleasure and an honour serving schoolmates a good meal during the week when they are on duty in the kitchen.

Gardening and food at school

Integrating knowledge and skills about cultivation and growing in school settings in has been growing in popularity in Denmark over the past years. More initiatives have been launched and School Gardens are one of the successful initiative that is now on the Finance Act. It works in the way that Growing Classes are offered in adjacency to the schools for the participating municipalities against a small payment.



A visit to Haver-til- Maver was included in the activities during the Copenhagen part of the visit. Haver-til- Maver is a nationwide non-profit association that works to develop food and gardening literacy. Also the School Garden at Paradisbakken school was included in the Bornholmer part of the visit and illustrated some of the food literacy potentials that can be achieved in school gardening. In addition the Copenhagen School Gardens is a federation of six urban gardens located around Copenhagen, where children can participate in gardening as part of a school, day care, or leisure-time activity. As a part of a school or day care activity, pupils participate in a tailor made program that integrates practical gardening with theory based learning.

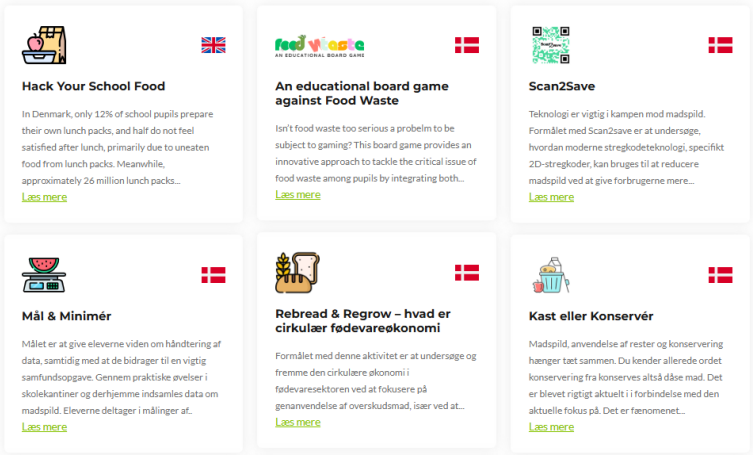
Operational models and infrastructure

Ukraine is far ahead in ensuring all children a hot meal using a permanent investment in the food service infrastructure such as kitchen facilities and sit down eating facilities. This approach is different from the Danish approach that is used in the pilot program where focus is on food supply and not on infrastructure and where light weight flexible approaches to infrastructure prevails. This reflects to some extent also the two different realities that exist in the countries. In Ukraine emphasis is on survival and safety school meals serve as an important mental and physical reference point for children and families during the war. The debate about school meals in Denmark as a contrast more often about health, pedagogical integration, the future of the packed lunch culture and on social differences. However the Ukrainian experts were inspired by the Danish tradition of the food schools, where students in are involved in cooking together with professionals and where the pedagogical interventions god hand in hand with the meal supply practicalities.



EdTech & food literacy

One of the differences between Denmark and Ukraine that was discussed and highlighted during the visit is the differences in the use of educational technology at school. In Denmark the level of digitalization at school is high and there's a significant interest in promoting collaboration and educational enhancement through the development and use of educational technologies. This also led to considerable progress when it comes to combining educational technology (EdTech) and effort to promote food literacy (maddannelse). Several examples Were shown and demonstrated during the visit including the Climate Hack and [M3 learning initiative](#) on food waste at school. Common to these efforts uh that they promote food and food systems literacy through innovative hands-on learning models, supported by academic research to develop interactive tools designed for school children.



Summary



Although both Denmark and Ukraine have come a long way when it comes to gathering experience about school meals, the visit, the meetings and the panel debate suggested that there are significant opportunities for cooperation and further development ahead. In both countries, schools still need pedagogical approaches, development of additional services, communities need citizen support and local food economies and farming will be able to benefit from more holistic approaches

Denmark will be able to learn from the experiences in Ukraine on development of food service infrastructures and capacity building and education for food service professionals. The Danish pilot program that so far has been building on flexible and light weight approaches to infrastructure can be expected within not to long to be able to benefit from know how on how to furnish and operate large scale kitchens in the best possible and most economically sound way. And even though there is great popular support for school meals in both countries, it is important to continue to carry out activities that maintain broad support. Without the support of the multiple stakeholders who benefit from the school meal programme, problems can quickly arise. Experience shows that school feeding programmes are something that the public sector can not take care of alone.

There needs to be support from and cooperation with suppliers, companies, organisations, civil society, pupils, parents and a wide range of other stakeholders. Also when it comes to monitoring, research, collection of key performance indicators and evaluation the countries can learn from each other. Methods have already been developed to assess the nutritional effects but for other parameters such as well-being, well-being and, not least, readiness to learn, there is still a great need for effective measurement methods. Financial key figures must also be collected in order to ensure the most rational operation in the future. Another important direction is the development of a healthy eating culture through education, communication and the active involvement of children, parents, teachers and communities. This cultural transformation may be the most important part of the cooperation because it is not only about food served at school, but also about the long-term investment in a healthier and more responsible future generation. The International School Meals Coalition has already shown how far international diplomacy and cooperation can go in the field of school meals. Denmark and Ukraine will also be able to create many common benefits from increased cooperation in this field.



Press coverage





180 skoler er i fuld gang med at afprøve skolemad. En stor kvantitativ evaluering følger forsøgene, men forsker Bent Egberg Mikkelsen har allerede nu gennemført en kvalitativ evaluering, hvor han har interviewet lærere og skoleledere på 18 folkeskoler. Den bliver præsenteret i morgen fredag som oplæg til en debat om skolemad på Folkemødet på Bornholm.

De adspurgte lærere er generelt positive over for skolemaden. De tør endnu ikke sige, at det giver læringsmæssige fordele. Men de er ikke i tvivl om, at de på den sociale og trivselsmæssige side er fordele.

"Spisningen i fællesskab - hvor kort den end måtte være - betyder færre konflikter. Og mange lærere vurderer, at eleverne kommer tilbage i klassen efter frokost på en mere parat måde," lyder det i evalueringen.

Samtidig fremhæver flere lærere og skoleledere, at de er stolte af, at skolen med skolemaden kan give en slags fællesnævner, der udligner de sociale forskelle, der ellers bliver tydelige i madpakkerne. Og samtidig kan skolerne tilbyde en 'prøv noget nyt'-mulighed, som eleverne ikke nødvendigvis får hjemme.

"En slags 'ok, ikke broccoli i dag, men måske i morgen'-tilgang. Mange giver samtidig udtryk for, at skolen kan tilbyde noget, der er ernæringsmæssigt mere seriøst end det, eleverne ellers er vant til, herunder ikke mindst de ældre elever. Det er der en del lærere, der er ganske stolte over," lyder det i rapporten.

Teachers on the new Danish School Meal pilot. Its only going to be really good when its for free and for all. Coverage by teachers magazine Folkskolen. https://www.folkeskolen.dk/laerere-om-skolemadsforsoeg-det-bliver-kun-rigtigt-godt-hvis-det-er-gratis-og-for-alle/



Foto: Ib Keld Jensen
På billedet ses Heidi Pedersen og Susan Gørges sammen med de to gæster fra den ukrainske School Nutrition Reform Team lektor Anastasiia Shevchenko og viceleder Dmytro Sivak.



School meal in war and peace. Coverage of the visit to the food school at Paradisbakken in Danish Dietitians professional magazine.

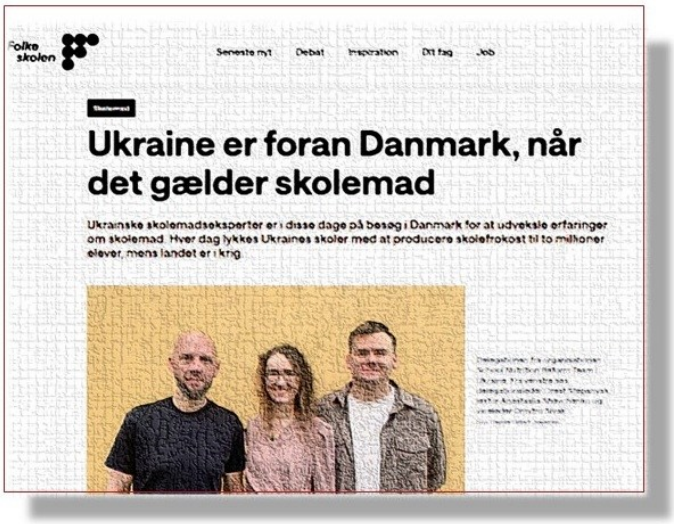


School food as a cultural bridgebuilder. Editorial in Newsletter of the Danish Home Economics Teachers Association ("Madkundskab"). https://madkundskab.nu/2026/06/16/dansk-ukrainsk-delegationsmoede/. The full text of the article can be found here: https://madkundskab.nu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Dansk-ukrainsk-delegationamoede.pdf

School food in war and peace. Post by Danish Dietetic Accusation on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/forbundet/posts/skolemad-i-krig-og-fred-hvad-kan-danske-skolemadsakt%C3%B8rer-l%C3%A6re-af-et-land-der-mid/1579063170894577/



Ukraine is ahead of Denmark when it comes to school food. Coverage in Danish Teachers organizations magazine Folkeskolen, https://www.folkeskolen.dk/ukraine-er-foran-danmark-naar-det-gaelder-skolemad/



Can food at school be a cultural bridgebuilder? Coverage in Editorial in Newsletter of the Danish Home Economics Teachers Association ("Madkundskab"). https://madkundskab.nu/2026/06/20/ukraine-og-danmark-kan-nogetsammen-naar-det-gaelder-mad-paa-skolen/




Skolemonitor

Professor, direktør og FN's Fødevareprogram: Her er fire ting, Danmark bør lære af Ukraines skolemadsreform

Ukraine holder skolemad liv i håbet for elever i over 100 underjordiske skoler. Hvad kan Danmark lære af det? Fire vigtige ting, skriver professor Bent Egberg Mikkelsen og direktører.

Four things Denmark can learn from Ukraine. Editorial in professional school magazine: Skolemonitor. https://skolemonitor.dk/nyheder/debat/article19360297.ece


Bornholms Tidende

Tæt på frontlinjen er skolemad en prioritet

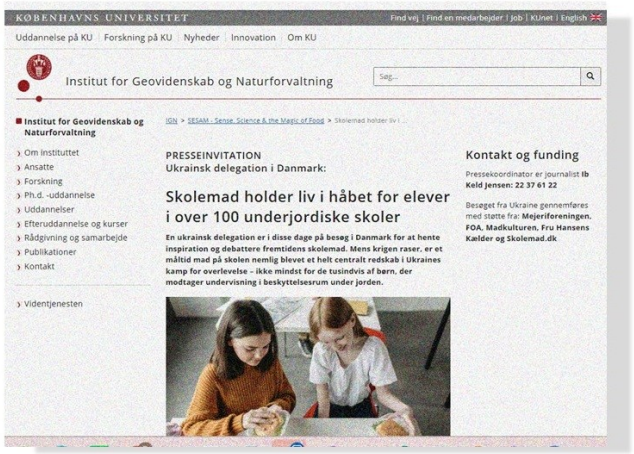
Sarah Thun Kristensen
Journalist

Mens krigen raser, er skolemad blevet et centralt redskab i Ukraines kamp for overlevelse. En delegation er derfor rejst til Danmark for at inspirere og blive inspireret.

En ukrainsk delegation er i disse dage på besøg i Danmark for at hente inspiration og

Close to the front line school food is a priority. Coverage by newspaper Bornholms Tidende. https://tidende.dk/bornholm/taet-paa-frontlinjen-er-skolemad-en-prioritet/167442

Press invitation about the visit. The invitation published on UCPH web. https://ign.ku.dk/sesam/skolemad-holder-liv-i-haabet-for-elever-i-over-100-underjordiske-skoler/


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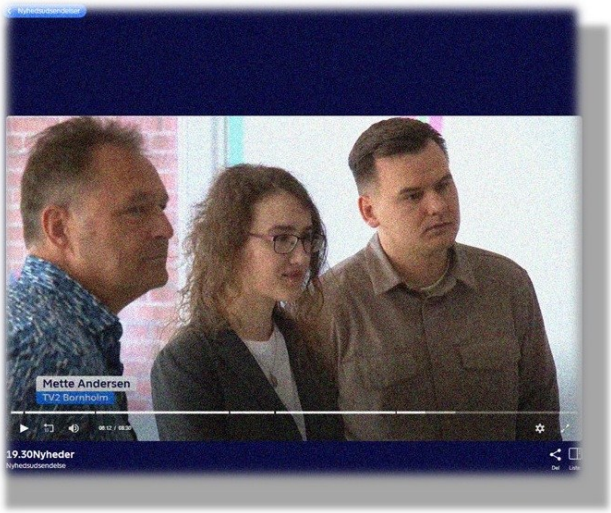
PRESSEINVITATION
Ukrainsk delegation i Danmark:

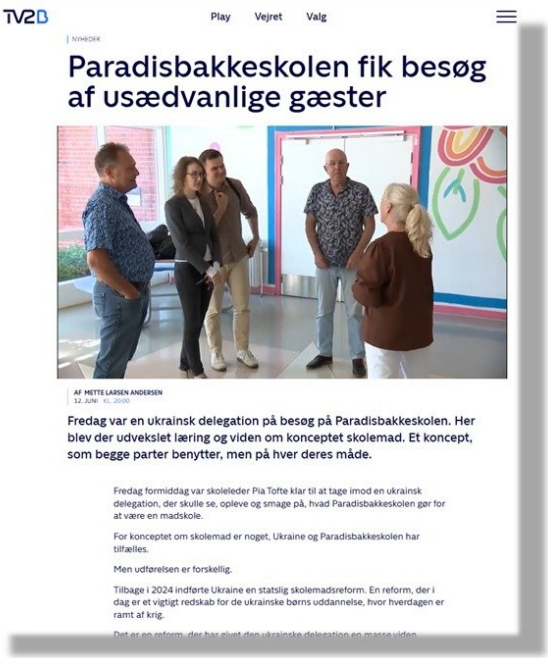
Skolemad holder liv i håbet for elever i over 100 underjordiske skoler

En ukrainsk delegation er i disse dage på besøg i Danmark for at hente inspiration og debattere fremtidens skolemad. Mens krigen raser, er et måltid mad på skolen nemlig blevet et helt centralt redskab i Ukraines kamp for overlevelse – ikke mindst for de tusindvis af børn, der modtager undervisning i beskyttelsesrum under jorden.

Kontakt og funding






TV2B Play Vejret Valg

NYHEDER

Paradisbakkeskolen fik besøg af usædvanlige gæster

AF METTE LARSEN ANDERSEN
12. JUNI · KL. 20:00

Fredag var en ukrainsk delegation på besøg på Paradisbakkeskolen. Her blev der udvekslet læring og viden om konceptet skolemad. Et koncept, som begge parter benytter, men på hver deres måde.

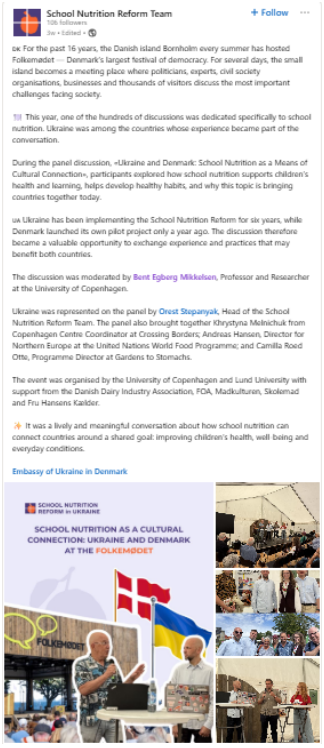
Fredag formiddag var skoleleder Pia Tofte klar til at tage imod en ukrainsk delegation, der skulle se, opleve og smage på, hvad Paradisbakkeskolen gør for at være en madskole.

For konceptet om skolemad er noget, Ukraine og Paradisbakkeskolen har tilfælles.

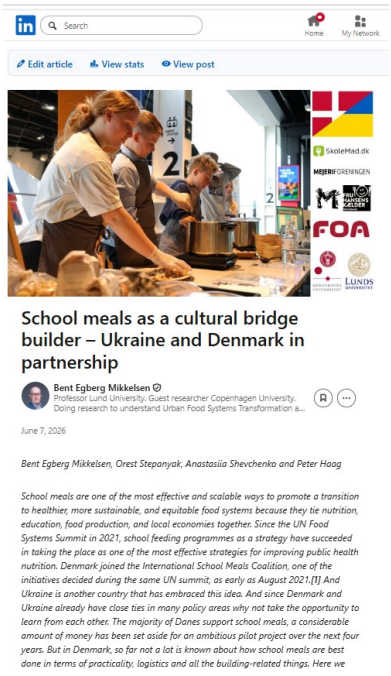
Men udførelsen er forskellig.

Tilbage i 2024 indførte Ukraine en statslig skolemadsreform. En reform, der i dag er et vigtigt redskab for de ukrainske børns uddannelse, hvor hverdagen er ramt af krig.

TV coverage. TV2B network covered the visit to the FoodSchool at Paradisbakken on Bornholm on 2 separate occasions. The coverage can be seen here https://www.tv2bornholm.dk/bornholm/paradisbakkeskolen-fik-besog-af-usaedvanlige-gaester-6c102 and here https://www.tv2bornholm.dk/nyheder/14-06-2026/1930/1906-14-jun-2026



SoMe coverage. Linked In post from UA delegation. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/for-the-past-16-years-the-danish-island-ugcPost-7483500995008851968-ZCYH/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_android&rcm=ACoAAAFZ6f8BrfMVN3vFrNY44c12BqCqxYoQIjc



SoMe coverage. An editorial in Linked In by Bent Egberg Mikkelsen, Orest Stepanyak, Anastasiia Shevchenko and Peter Haag https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/school-meals-cultural-bridge-builder-ukraine-denmark-mikkelsen-6oiye/

SoMe coverage. Post visit post by Ib Keld Jensen on Linked in**.** https://www.linkedin.com/feed/?highlightedUpdateUrn=urn%3Ali%3Aactivity%3A7473669491625889792&highlightedUpdateType=MENTIONED_YOU_IN_THIS&origin=INAPP&showCommentBox=true



Facts: School meal programs in Denmark

Denmark does not have a compulsory, nationwide school meal program or a nationwide school meal policy and decisions and strategies on eating the school has so far largely been left to local schools and municipalities. Instead most primary school children bring a packed lunch ("madpakke") from home - The traditional way of providing food for working people and pupils during the day. However, school or municipal offered food provision schemes have been growing and are now available in a little over half of the around 1500 public and private schools. Although many Danish schools offer some form of food provision, only around one-third of students use these services. In general, Danish students at school can choose between taking a lunch pack from home, eat something offered by the school, leave the school and buy something in adjacent outlets if they have permission for that or they can skip the lunch break.

The approach varies considerably across municipalities. Three major models of school food provision exist. Central production where meals are prepared off-site and delivered to schools. On-site production with local kitchens where meals are prepared in school food service units. Both of these models can be based on outsourced or in-house business models. In addition, the concept of Food Schools exist in cities such as Elsinore, Copenhagen, Svendborg and Nexø. These integrate meal preparation, food education, meal delivery, student involvement and social eating. These school often play a role in the local urban food strategy by emphasising the use of local food and organic purchasing and sustainability. In general all meal service offered by municipalities are parent paid either full or partly. In some cases Free School Meal Entitlement (FSME's) schemes. In one case – in the municipality of Læsø - school meals are provided free of charge to all students. However, there are no nationwide requirements governing the provision and quality of school meals. Despite the limited participation, public support for school meals is strong and according to a 2024 study by Madkulturen approximately 85% of Danes support introducing a school meal programs in elementary schools.

Despite the traditional lunch pack based school food culture there has been significant political developments in the area concluding with the adoption of the 2nd National Pilot Program in 2024. In November 2024, the Danish government allocated funding through the Finance Act for a national school meal pilot program running from 2025 to 2028. The program involves around 180 selected private as well as public schools across the country and aims to study the impact of different approaches to providing school meals. The funding is intended to cover food provision and implementation primarily, but the program also includes funding for a central evaluation and is open for independent research and evaluation projects examining its implementation and outcomes.

Source:

Mikkelsen et al (2025) https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/id/eprint/4672337/

Mikkelsen et al. (2026) https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/school-meals-cultural-bridge-builder-ukraine-denmark-mikkelsen-6oiye/

Mikkelsen (2024) Lunchpacks, Libertarianism & Localness – briefing note on the State-Of-The-Art in Danish School Food anno 2024.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/399513890_Lunchpacks_Libertarianism_Localness_-_briefing_note_on_the_State-Of-The-Art_in_Danish_School_Food_anno_2024_Original_title_Madpakker_Markedsokonomi_Mangfoldighed_et_case_studie_af_dansk_skolemad_anno_

Facts: School meal programs in Ukraine

School meal programs in Ukraine has been around for seven years with the last three years functioning as a major reform of the school meal strategy. The school nutrition reform was launched in 2020 on the initiative of First Lady Olena Zelenska and the aim was not only to improve school meals, but also to create a new culture around food, health and everyday habits of school aged children and their families. The reform is considered one of the biggest transformations in education and public health in Ukraine. It emerged from a recognition of existing challenges and a desire to change the daily experience of millions of children — to make school meals not just necessary, but an expression of care, dignity and a modern education system.

Before the reform was launched, a comprehensive national survey revealed the need for profound systemic change: from upgrading physical infrastructure, cooking routines and processes to rethinking the role of nutrition in children's lives. Based on the results, the Government of Ukraine approved the National Strategy for Reforming School Nutrition System in 2023. The strategy combines strengthened focus on communities, modernization of the infrastructure, professional development for kitchen professionals, promotion of healthy eating habits and increased international cooperation. Also in 2023, Ukraine joined the School Meals Coalition, with an ambition that by 2027, all school students in the country should receive healthy school meals.[2]

Over the past years, the reform has already become very visible in the daily life of schools. Around 2 million students received free hot food till 2026 and starting from September 2026 – all students in schools all over Ukraine receive one free hot meal per day – there are about 3 million students. More than 2,200 school kitchens and related building stock have been modernized and now meet modern standards of safety, and over 9,500 chefs and food service professionals have completed professional targeted training. At the same time, national communication campaigns promoting a healthy eating culture have now reached more than 7 million people.

Its is worth mentioning that this is particularly significant as it takes place during a full-scale war. In Ukraine, school meals have not only become an issue of health and education, but have also achieved to include a strong element of resilience. As such it has become an important care for children and support for communities and local manufacturers during an exceptionally difficult period. Since 2024, the Government of Ukraine has been allocating state funds for free school meals and for the modernization of the infrastructure. At the same time, local communities and international partners play a crucial role in helping to scale the reform, adopt modern approaches and solutions and make this program sustainable.

Despite the circumstances, Ukraine continues to actively share its experience and expertise with the international community. Increasingly, the Ukrainian approach is seen not only as a reform of school nutrition, but also as an example of how food, education, and shared responsibilities can strengthen society, even in times of challenges.

Source:
Stepanyak & Sivak (2024) *School Meals Case Study: Ukraine.* Working Paper. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, https://schoolmealscoalition.org/school-meals-case-study-ukraine-working-paper

Mikkelsen et al 2026: School meals as a cultural bridge builder – Ukraine and Denmark in partnership. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/school-meals-cultural-bridge-builder-ukraine-denmark-mikkelsen-6oiye/

[2] https://schoolmealscoalition.org/member/ukraine