

FOOD4SUSTAINABILITY

WP2. Mapping collective processes in transition pathways in food systems in Belgium

Work package 2 will conduct a comparative analysis of collective processes relying both on extrinsic motivations (based on monetary and non-monetary external rewards) and intrinsic motivations (personal values and social norms) in transition pathways in food systems in Belgium. More specifically it will focus on 3 categories of practices which have sufficiently similar institutional features (Spaargaren et al., 2012, p. 16): practices of (i) food production and processing, (ii) food distribution and retail and (iii) food consumption. All three kinds of food practices are constitutive and interconnected elements of the food systems.

The methodology of the work under WP2 will build upon the agency formulation of transition theory, with a view to emphasizing the role of human actors as the ultimate sources and carriers of change. This approach has already been applied successfully to the analysis of transition pathways in the field of food consumption, retail and production in various country case studies (Spaargaren et al., 2012). However, while this previous research on transition pathways in food systems addressed the mediation between niche innovations and regime change, and social learning on the level of the landscape (Roep and Wiskerke, 2012), the innovation in this project is to systematically analyse the drivers for collective action at the level of behavioural motivations of actors involved in pioneer initiatives and evaluate the effectiveness of rules of collective action that aim to link these initiatives to a broader set of actors in the field of food consumption, retail and production. Therefore, we will draw upon the most relevant elements of the literature on social innovation, and social practices (Shove and Walker, 2010; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012), on the role of intrinsic and social motivations in behavioural economics (Diamond and Vartiainen 2007; Schwartz 2008) and the literature on behavioural routines in evolutionary economics (Maréchal 2007 and 2009).

To achieve this objective, each of the tasks under WP2 will be organized in two components:

- (Task 2.1) : mapping the existing national, regional and local initiatives that aim to contribute to the transition towards sustainable food systems and selecting the most relevant of these initiatives for further analysis ;
- (Task 2.2): conducting a diagnostic comparative analysis of the success and failures of the governance arrangements in these initiatives.

Task 2.1. Mapping and analysis of collective processes in transition pathways in agriculture (CPDR-CEB)

Transition initiatives can take the form of the emergence of alternative food systems, often at citizens' initiative, and often with a view to relocalizing food systems by shortening the supply chains. Short supply chains are systems in which consumers prefer to buy their food from local sources for both social and environmental reasons. Often, but not necessarily, such systems are based on direct contact between producers and consumers. The establishment of short supply chains is based on a combination of supply-driven, demand-driven and institutional factors. Research has confirmed the importance of consumer concern for food safety, animal welfare, environmental effects, regional development and the interest in better quality and fresher food (Nygard and Storstad, 1998; Hinrichs, 2000; Vannoppen et al., 2001; La Trobe, 2001; Weatherell et al., 2003). Farmers turn to direct marketing practices as a key strategy for survival. Among these initiatives that lead to the emergence of alternative food

systems are a range of initiatives to support organic agriculture or agro-ecological practices (such as the movement for “Agriculture de conservation” in Wallonia); community supported agriculture; or local groups that rely on food baskets (GAC, AMAP, Voedselteams, etc.). This is a fast-growing and diverse area. However, to establish short supply chains substantial transaction costs need to be overcome. Cooperation is crucial in saving on such transaction costs (Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck, 2001).

The search for sustainability is not limited to bottom-up, citizen-driven initiatives : it is one that cuts across different food systems, and the various actors operating within them. For instance, some recent foresight studies insist on a specific trend in the private sector linked to agriculture and food, from an agro-industrial model to a “tertiarised agro-industrial model”, where food products tend to become services more than industrial or primary products (EC-SCAR, 2011, p. 89). In such a model, the multinational and large national companies of the food processing and retail industry play a crucial role in enabling changes in both the production paradigm and the consumption patterns. In this context, a number of companies are developing a set of initiatives for greening the supply chains as an integral part of their strategy (van der Grijp, 2008), often by joining forces (e.g., SAI platform) or by entering into new governance initiatives together with NGOs (such as the Marine Stewardship Council). This also leads to an increasing adoption of codes of conduct and of social and environmental standards, and an increasing role for certified products (De Schutter 2012b).

We shall map these various initiatives, and then assess them that are considered to be the most illustrative and promising in the collective search that is underway. We will include in our survey some major initiatives that seek to change the behavior of consumers, and encourage more reasonable modes of consumption. Among these are the development by the non-profit organisation EVA (Ethisch Vegetarisch Alternatief, <http://www.evavzw.be/>) of a network of local sections in Brussels and Flanders; the slow food section in Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia (9 convivium, cf. www.slowfood.com); or the growing success of urban vegetable gardens. This workpackage includes two tasks.

The first task will be to **document the existing national, regional and local collective initiatives** related to production and processing; to distribution and retail; and to consumption. As already mentioned, this will cover a whole range of processes in mainstream food systems, but also in short food chains / localized food systems, and it will include initiatives related to sustainable diets and diversified nutrition. These processes involve a wide range of actors, ranging from multinational and large national companies to NGOs investing in multistakeholder initiatives, to individual citizens involved in bottom-up local grassroots initiatives.

The second part of this task will consist in **selecting the most relevant initiatives for deeper analysis**. Beyond the initial mapping, we shall focus on a limited range of initiatives. The sample will be chosen to cover the different food systems (from the most globalized / mainstream to the localized / shortest) and to address the different stages of production, processing, distribution and consumption. Our choice will also be guided to cover initiatives that driven by different categories of actors: large agribusiness corporations and retailers; public authorities, at national, regional and municipal levels; and NGOs and citizens' organizations. We shall not be exhaustive, but we shall provide an in-depth study that will be representative of the full range of initiatives identified in our mapping. This will allow us to raise the key questions, and to enter into a dialogue with all major stakeholders, consistent with our aim which is to arrive at a better understanding of the various motivations of actors and how these various motivations interact with socio-technical regimes and the regulatory environment, as well as how they could serve as a leverage for policies in support of transition. To guide this part of the inquiry, we intend to have between 120 and 180 semi-structured interviews, over a period of one year, addressing the mainstream food system,

alternative/local food systems, and initiatives aimed at sustainable diets/consumption (this methodology is described in greater detail under 8 below).

Task 2.2. Comparative analysis of the key factors for emergence, success and failure of the governance arrangements in the selected initiatives

Building on Task 2.1. and our selection of a representative range of initiatives, Task 2.2. will consist in a comparative analysis of the key factors that shape the trajectory of the transition initiatives over time. This analysis will be carried out by focusing on four sets of core variables: (i) the diverse motivations of actors (ranging from economic/financial incentives to values related to the identity of actors and social norms enforced by peer pressure), (ii) the organizational architectures (distributed versus vertical integration of local initiatives), (iii) the collective action rules in use (strong boundaries versus partial or total openness to more heterogeneous set of actors), and (iv) the role of public agencies (or their absence) in the success of such initiatives.

(i) The various motivations of actors shall be identified through semi-structured interviews with these actors. Though we will primarily focus on the actors already involved in certain transition initiatives, we will also ask them about their position towards initiatives in which they are not involved, because they ignore them, distrust them, or have not been provided an opportunity to be invited to join them. Our objective through these interviews is to understand better why certain initiatives remain confined to "niches", why others succeed in being scaled up or replicated beyond the initial experiment, and why others are short-lived: what are the ingredients of success, and what are the reasons for failure? While motivations of actors are of course only one part of the explanation -- and of course, motivations are shaped by the environment and can be transformed --, we believe they are a major part, though often neglected and misunderstood.

(ii) Another factor which, we believe, must be studied, concerns the organizational structures that allow certain initiatives to flourish, while others die. By "organizational structures", we mean for instance the existence of networks that can accelerate the diffusion of certain initiatives beyond their experimental stage, or that can favor the exercise of peer pressure to join certain initiatives; the ability for the actors that have the greatest stake in transition (such as concerned citizens, environmental NGOs, or retailers concerned to preserve and enhance their reputation) to mobilize around an initiative in order to garner support and to make it succeed; or the ability for different levels of governance to be addressed in order for local initiatives to benefit from a supportive environment, and for national-level or sector-wide initiatives to obtain a "buy-in" from the local environments in which they are to be implemented.

(iii) A third factor we shall study is the emergence of collective action in the shaping and development of certain initiatives. By this, we mean that new actors and new institutions may have to be established in support of such initiatives, and that networks of actors may have to be reconfigured. For instance, environmental groups could join forces with unions in order to encourage a particular retailer or food processor to join a multistakeholder initiative; local citizens organisations could team with a retailer in order to ensure improved access to supermarket shelves to local producers; NGOs could work with municipalities to design a policy for sustainable sourcing of food for public purchases. These alliances can be ad hoc, but they can also lead to the institution of new actors, and lead the traditional actors to redefine their interests -- as when unions find that there may be advantages in insisting on environmental sustainability, or as when retailers discover that sourcing food locally, as demanded by their clients, may in fact, beyond the reputational gain, present advantages from the point of view of logistics.

(iv) Fourth, we will pay particular attention to the role of public authorities at all levels. In the range of factors that contribute to success or explain the failures of transition initiatives, the regulatory framework -- including by labelling and hence endorsing private-led and voluntary initiatives --, public policies, public subsidies or fiscal incentives, or the role of public authorities in facilitating the emergence of networks or new actors, can be essential. We will seek not only to highlight this role, but through our structured initiatives, to identify what other roles the public authorities could play to favor transition initiatives: what are the expectations of the actors involved in such initiatives? And how to have public authorities support and facilitate transition initiatives, without this leading to stifle innovation and limit the imagination from bottom-up initiatives?

On the basis of this comparative analysis, we will identify the key success and failure factors and the type of governance that is most supportive of transition initiatives. We will move from testing our hypotheses about key factors and the relevance, in the analysis of such initiatives, of motivational factors, to the development of a grid of analysis that can serve in public debates about how to organize and support transitions in the food systems. Before that grid of analysis can be proposed, however, another component of the transition towards sustainable food systems, more directly connected to governance issues, must be addressed.

**For the reference of the literature, please see the global project description available on the website: www.food4sustainability.be*