Sustainable food system transformation: participatory evaluation and leverage points

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Introduction to food system challenges and methodology to support transformations

The different food systems in today's world face various challenges from production through to consumption. Although different in context, they have in common such things as pollution and degradation of water and soils, agro- and biodiversity loss, increased dependency, significant land use changes, pressure from international markets, as well as health impacts from undernourishment to obesity and related diseases[1]. Food system transformation is not only key to achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals but also addresses normative questions such as cultural traditions or individual food preferences. The complex interrelations of food system actors and processes contribute to the difficulties in supporting food system transformations towards more sustainability.

In this pre-conference workshop, we want to introduce and jointly with the participants apply a new methodology for participatory food sustainability evaluation and the identification of leverage points within one or more specific cases. We have developed and refined this new methodology over the last years, together with partners in six countries in Latin America and Africa in our ongoing research project “Towards Food Sustainability”[2]. The methodology is also being applied in these six countries.

[1] Tribaldos, T., Jacobi, J., Rist, S. (2018). Linking sustainable diets to the concept of food system sustainability. Future of Food: Journal on Food, Agriculture and Society, 6(1), 71-84.

[2] http://www.cde.unibe.ch/research/projects/towards_food_sustainability/index_eng.html

The procedure consists of the food sustainability assessment framework and a set of sustainability indicators for assessing the state of sustainability within a specific food system[3]. These valuable tools are used for initiating a transdisciplinary process among different food system actors to jointly assess the state of sustainability within a food system and to design, plan and implement interventions for improving it. In this workshop, participants learn to identify the stumbling blocks in defining desirable food systems, designing interventions for food system transformation, and navigating their way through them.

Hence, the proposed workshop fits very well into the aim and overview of the conference to support integrative learning among scientists and societal actors for sustainability transformations. It specifically addresses the themes "Learning from each other: integrating different knowledge and thinking for transformation" and "Transformation for navigating complexity and uncertainty" but it also relates to "Learning from transformational stories and narratives" or "Agents of transformation: who, why, how and what".

Description of the activities planned, and methodology used;

The workshop consists of the following parts:

1. Introduction to the concept of food systems and their challenges
2. Introduction to the food sustainability assessment methodology
3. Presentation of one or different food system cases that will be used for the assessment
4. Group work: Food system assessment and suggestions for interventions within the presented cases

The first two points are important to make participants familiar with the topic of food systems, their challenges, and assessment options. The third point is used to provide the participants with a background of different cases they can jointly work on in the group work. One case will be the "Foodshed of Santiago". We will suggest more cases if necessary when we know the number of participants.

The methodology in point four has been applied in seven countries so far and its use has been continuously improved. The workshop procedure includes 1) a discussion of the five dimensions and 15 tentative indicators of the framework and their adaptation to the specific context of the presented case from production to consumption. 2) The workshop participants conduct a food system mapping of involved actors, processes and food system stages. 3) The group assigns values for the set of indicators on a scale from 0-4. 4) The results are presented in a spider graph and discussed in the group. 5) This visualization of the food system's sustainability is then used to identify and communicate weak points for interventions in the food system. 6) The group discusses concrete measures and policies.

Intended audience and ideal number of workshop participants

The workshop is open for all participants who are interested in food system transformation in general or who locate themselves at some point within the food system. We invite participants

[3] Rist, S., Golay, C., Bürgi Bonanomi, E., Delgado Burgoa, F., Kiteme, B.P., Haller, T., & Ifejika Speranza, C., 2016. Towards food sustainability: Reshaping the coexistence of different food systems in South America and Africa – project description (Towards Food Sustainability Working Paper 1). Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern.

from a wide range of backgrounds. As this workshop is an integrative exercise of different types of knowledge and expertise, the interaction profits from a large variety of actors.

An ideal number of people within one working group is four to five but we could imagine to have between four to six different groups. Depending on the actual size of the group, we will prepare one or more case studies to work on.

The workshop organisers both speak Spanish and English. Furthermore, Johanna Jacobi lives in Bolivia for many years and is used to facilitate workshops in both Spanish and English. Depending on the group of participants, we can discuss in English or Spanish or form groups for each language.

Expected outcomes of the TransAction workshop

The workshop has the objective to immerse the participants in the topic of assessing food system sustainability and discussing its opportunities and challenges. These include difficulties in agreeing on the assigned value for individual indicators but also policy assessments, which are particularly challenging, due to the necessity to consider legal regulations as well as political processes. Hence, the participants learn to identify the stumbling blocks in defining desirable food systems, designing interventions, and navigating their way through them. This will enable the participants to engage more actively in food system transformation while considering the key issues, be it in their own work or in their daily life in the communities they live in.

A description of the type of space and equipment required

For conducting this workshop, we need a beamer for presentations and a room setting that allows for smaller groups. White boards and flip charts are needed to collect ideas and present them to the whole group and drawing and writing material would be helpful to fuel creativity within the groups.

The names, biographies (maximum 100 words) and contact details of the workshop facilitators.

The workshop will be facilitated by Dr. Johanna Jacobi and Dr. Theresa Tribaldos. Dr. Jacobi is the coordinator of the project “Towards Food Sustainability” at the University of Bern since 2015. Based in Bolivia, she conducts research on food sustainability and resilience, and is a member of the Latin American Scientific Society of Agroecology (SOCLA). Dr. Tribaldos is a senior research scientist at CDE. She has work experience in agricultural and regional development in Switzerland and her research focuses on food systems and what is needed to make them more sustainable. Furthermore, she investigates the contributions science can make to sustainability transformations through transdisciplinary research approaches.

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