



Development Review

When food systems meet sustainability – Current narratives and implications for actions



Christophe Béné^{a,*}, Peter Oosterveer^b, Lea Lamotte^a, Inge D. Brouwer^c, Stef de Haan^d, Steve D. Prager^a, Elise F. Talsma^c, Colin K. Khoury^{a,e}

^a Decision and Policy Analysis Program, International Center for Tropical Agriculture, Cali, Colombia

^b Department of Social Sciences, Wageningen University, The Netherlands

^c Division of Human Nutrition, Wageningen University and Research, The Netherlands

^d International Center for Tropical Agriculture, CIAT-Asia Office, Hanoi, Viet Nam

^e National Laboratory for Genetic Resources Preservation, USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Fort Collins, CO, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 26 August 2018

Keywords:

Food systems
Discourse analysis
Food security and nutrition
Healthy diet
Sustainability

ABSTRACT

The concept of food system has gained prominence in recent years amongst both scholars and policy-makers. Experts from diverse disciplines and backgrounds have in particular discussed the nature and origin of the “unsustainability” of our modern food systems. These efforts tend, however, to be framed within distinctive disciplinary narratives. In this paper we propose to explore these narratives and to shed light on the explicit –or implicit– epistemological assumptions, mental models, and disciplinary paradigms that underpin those. The analysis indicates that different views and interpretations prevail amongst experts about the nature of the “crisis”, and consequently about the research and priorities needed to “fix” the problem. We then explore how sustainability is included in these different narratives and the link to the question of healthy diets. The analysis reveals that the concept of sustainability, although widely used by all the different communities of practice, remains poorly defined, and applied in different ways and usually based on a relatively narrow interpretation. In so doing we argue that current attempts to equate or subsume healthy diets within sustainability in the context of food system may be misleading and need to be challenged. We stress that trade-offs between different dimensions of food system sustainability are unavoidable and need to be navigated in an explicit manner when developing or implementing sustainable food system initiatives. Building on this overall analysis, a framework structured around several entry points including outcomes, core activities, trade-offs and feedbacks is then proposed, which allows to identify key elements necessary to support the transition toward sustainable food systems.

© 2018 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Contents

1. Introduction	117
2. Methodology	117
3. Narratives about food systems	118
3.1. Our food system is failing us	118
3.2. Divergence of interpretations	119
3.3. Divergent but also confusing explanations	120
4. Revisiting the meaning of sustainability in the context of food systems	121
4.1. Mapping the current communities engaging in the food system agenda	121
4.1.1 Agriculture	121
4.1.2. Nutrition	121
4.1.3. (Social)-Ecology	122

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: c.bene@cgiar.org (C. Béné), peter.oosterveer@wur.nl (P. Oosterveer), lamotte.lea@gmail.com (L. Lamotte), inge.brouwer@wur.nl (I.D. Brouwer), s.dehaan@cgiar.org (S. de Haan), s.prager@cgiar.org (S.D. Prager), elise.talsma@wur.nl (E.F. Talsma), c.khoury@cgiar.org (C.K. Khoury).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.08.011>

0305-750X/© 2018 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

4.2.	Navigating the concept of sustainability	123
4.3.	The messy “culturally acceptable” dimension of food system sustainability	124
5.	Discussion: from food systems to sustainable food systems	124
5.1.	Expected outcomes of food systems	125
5.2.	Food system core activities	126
5.3.	Acknowledging trade-offs and the need to guide hard choices	127
5.4.	Feedbacks	127
6.	Concluding remarks	127
	Conflict of interest statement	128
	Acknowledgement	128
	References	128

1. Introduction

The concept of food system goes back several decades (Kneen, 1989; Marion, 1986; Sobal, 1978), but has (re-)gained prominence in recent years and nowadays has become a substantive body of research and a subject of interest for policy-makers. Food systems are indeed identified as a central entry point for action in a growing number of high-profile reports on nutrition and food security (e.g. Global Panel, 2016; HLPE, 2017; IPES, 2016).

This emerging or renewed interest in food systems is the result of multiple concerns ranging from environmental, equity and power, trade, to dietary and health issues. It includes the realization that feeding the world today and in the future requires more than a simple ‘more-food’ approach and that particular attention is needed for diet quality and nutrition, the environmental ‘food print’ (i.e. the environmental impact) of production and distribution of food commodities, and the socioeconomic imprints of supply chains. In recent years, another major issue emerged as experts came to realize that even with a new focus on nutrition and diets, making food systems more nutrition-sensitive and sustainable will not be enough to address the triple burden of malnutrition (under-nutrition, micro-nutrient deficiencies and overnutrition), and that, in the increasingly urbanized and globalized world in which we live, more attention needs to be paid to food system governance, actors and drivers (Tschirley, Haggblade, & Reardon, 2013).

In this context, a whole new set of questions is emerging around the roles and responsibilities of the different (formal and informal, public and private) actors to ensure that food remains available, affordable, accessible and acceptable to the different segments of the population living in both rural and urban areas. Very little is known, however, on how food systems work at different levels and only partial knowledge is available to help decision-makers influence the system and drive it towards more sustainable and higher diet quality outcomes.

Over the last decades, scholars from diverse disciplines and intellectual traditions have documented the critical threats to food system sustainability and attempted to define an appropriate agenda for action. These efforts tended, however, to be framed within distinctive disciplinary narratives (Eakin et al., 2016; Foran et al., 2014). In particular these narratives reflect underlying values which shape the way these experts view and interpret the world, and ultimately drive policy responses.

In this paper, we are interested in exploring these narratives more thoroughly, with the intention to unpack the different interpretation(s) of sustainability that are entailed when the different communities of experts and practitioners refer to the “sustainability of food systems”. Relying on interpretive ontology, our objective is therefore to clarify the commonalities and divergences that exist between these different interpretations and to explore how this discussion can help inform food system transformation plans and actions. From a geographical perspective, our interest is essentially on low- and middle-income countries where food systems are both

driving and driven by rapid transformations and where the prevalence of the triple burden of malnutrition is high.

The scope of the paper is on both the form and functions of food systems and food system narratives, especially relating to the sustainability thereof, with specific attention to the role of “healthy diets” being both an outcome (as dimension of sustainability) and a driver (through demands) of food systems in different contexts. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the ‘upstream’ part of the policy agenda setting, where policy narratives are constructed and debated, as this policy agenda setting represents the initial step within the policy process. As such we do not analyze (the content of) policies *per se*, nor do we engage and discuss how the different actors (public and private entities, civil society and consumers) interact with each other at the *policy implementation stage*.

This paper starts by presenting an overview of the narratives that dominate the current debates on food systems and their future. The analysis will reveal how different views and interpretations prevail amongst ‘experts’ about what the problems are, and consequently what the solutions addressing these problems should be. Next, we explore how sustainability is included (or not) in these different narratives and how this relates to the question of healthy diets. In doing so, we focus our analysis essentially on food systems and will not discuss in great depth other related themes such as e.g., sustainable agriculture, which are debated elsewhere -see e.g. Velten, Leventon, Jager, and Newig (2015). We conclude with a discussion of unavoidable trade-offs between different dimensions of food system sustainability and the need to navigate those trade-offs in an explicit manner when developing or implementing sustainable food system initiatives.

2. Methodology

The analysis builds on an in-depth review of the recent literature. More than seventy documents were identified on ‘food system(s)’, using two research engines: ScienceDirect and Google Scholar. The research scanning included academic research documents, journal articles, books and book chapters, government and international institution studies, reports, working papers, and other gray literature sources, published in English (language) between 2000 and 2017.

Adopting an interpretive analytic approach, we identified the narratives and story-lines (Gabriel, 2000; Roe, 1994) adopted by the authors of these documents in relation to food systems. The term ‘narrative’ here is used in a generic manner, to emphasize the constructed nature of the *framings* (in the van Hulst & Yanow, 2016 sense) of the ‘stories’ around food systems. ‘Stories’ are characterized by a beginning, middle and end (Roe, 1994; Yanow, 2000). In the context of our analysis, this meant we looked specifically at these different experts’ story-lines around ‘what the failure of food systems is about’ (the origin of the problem = the beginning), ‘what is threatened and needs to be fixed?’ (the core

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10147170>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10147170>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)