

*Project title:*

## **Global Transformations in Access to Sustainable Food**

*Funded Capes/Nuffic*

*Coordination: Julia S. Guivant (Brazil, UFSC), Gert Spaargaren (Holand, Wageningen University)*

*Period: April 2016/December 2017*

### **Purpose**

The project aims to analyse new collaborations in food provision networks which are set up to increase access to sustainable food, in order to gain insights in knowledge needs of key actors in sustainable food provision (SFP) networks to broaden scope for niche innovations. Focus will be non-processed fresh food (non-canned vegetables and fruits, meat, fish). Using the lenses of both practice theory and new institutional theory, the research will identify “building blocks” of sustainable food networks in the context of the European Union and in Brazil. The underlying assumption is that networks in these regions have different make-ups in terms of emphasis on sustainable food characteristics (organic/safe/fair/local/low carbon), and differ in leading agents of change (institutional entrepreneurs and their allies), and sites where innovation takes place. At the same time, comparing networks across these regions allows for finding best practices and learning opportunities (Ingram et al, 2010).

All over the world, attention for sustainable food is growing, whether it is defined as organic, healthy, local, safe, fair, low-carbon, or in specific combination of these characteristics. For a long time, sustainable food only resonated in niche-markets. But since about two decades, it has become in reach of different groups of consumers, even though shifts towards mainstream did not happen everywhere in the same way or same pace. More and more it is realized that inequalities in food-power relations do not just affect the functioning of food production systems, but also link up to the provision side of food supply chains. Access to food in general is still not evenly distributed around the globe and within societies, and this is even more true for sustainable food. While the process of supermarketization kindled the uptake of sustainable food, large supermarket chains are also criticized for putting ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ food provision channels under pressure, and for marginalizing small scale primary producers. Counter movements emerge, such as internet sales, food subscription schemes, and mainstreaming of specialized food stores (ecological/organic/health food supermarkets) (Dauvergne & Lister, 2012). At the same time, a “discount” trend is (re-) occurring in large scale food provision, which could suggest a growing differentiation based on income, in food provision within societies.

Sustainable food as a trending topic has been taken up by different kinds of food retailers in distinctive ways, including the forging of (new) coalitions where competitors become allies, and societal organizations and sustainability consultants become partners in defining new sustainable provisions. Retailers and their partners are however challenged by regional, national and socio-economic differences in consumers’ food shopping practices on the one hand, and in existing (sustainable) food supply relations on the other. In Latin America, for example, and in the case of Brazil, large multinational supermarkets compete with rapidly professionalizing (local/regional) retailers who are linked to long- and well-established fresh markets and food centres. In Europe, Australia, and North America, large supermarket chains are generally the most powerful (but also criticized) players, who increasingly turn to labelling schemes (Fair Trade, Organic, retailer-owned schemes) to prove their sustainability profile. While in these regions new practices are competing with existing supermarket practices, Asian countries show other trends. In Asia, wet markets and food courts are the common provision sites, and food shopping in supermarkets is emerging as new (yet not very dominant) practice. Another distinctive characteristic is that especially food safety is high on the sustainability

agenda. On the African continent, the picture is highly fragmented, though a common denominator is that food provision is mostly informally organized, and defining a (common) sustainability agenda for food production and consumption is complicated especially beyond the micro-level or development aid programmes.

Topics of sustainable production and consumption are intensively studied within the Global Research Forum on Sustainable Production and Consumption (GRF-SPaC) and in growing numbers of academic research groups around the world. As part of the global research- and policy-agenda, transitions in food production and consumption have become recognized as being among the key factors determining the future of sustainable development.

Social scientists of many disciplinary backgrounds analyze transitions at different levels of scale, from the micro or 'niche-level' up to the meso or 'regime-level' on to the macro or 'landscape level' (Geels & Schot, 2010). When applied to food systems around the world, the micro-macro linkages involved in transitions toward sustainable food consumption and production turn out to be particularly complex. This complexity originates from the fact that a huge diversity of well-established local food systems with long term historical and cultural roots is increasingly affected by an ever more consequential process of the globalization of food production and consumption. In food transitions, 'the local meets the global' and 'the global connects to the local' in ways that are not sufficiently researched so far (Oosterveer, Guivant & Spaargaren, 2007).

In our global research network, we will combine different disciplinary and methodological perspectives and consult and include stakeholders in different phases of the research. We will develop an innovative theoretical framing of the central object of research: the practice of shopping for sustainable food in retail outlets around the world. The object is the food shopping practice, and the framework for studying sustainability transitions within these practices results from combining practice theories with transition and new institutional theories. The approach is combining elements from ecological economics, political sciences, organizational studies, political ecology, philosophy and sociology in a non-eclectic manner.

In striving for global transformations towards more, and equally distributed sustainable food, we need to better understand how different ways of organizing food provision affect accessibility to sustainable food. More specifically, it is imperative to scrutinize the roles of retailers as they are powerful in bridging the production and consumption side of (sustainable) food chains (Dewick et al, 2007; Durieu, 2003; Fox et al, 2004; Hansen & Skytte, 1998; UNEP/Wuppertal, 2007; Guivant, Spaargaren & Rial, 2010).

This claim builds upon two key assumptions: firstly, it is recognized that the actual retail outlet (products, packages, brands, labels, technologies, infrastructures) is co-evolving and co-shaping food shopping practices (Kjaernes, Harvey, & Warde, 2007). Following practice theory, we frame food shopping practices as forms of shared, public-private, routinely enacted ways of doings and saying, bringing into play specific sets of rules and resources, at particular place of interaction (see box 1). Studying these food shopping practices allows for an understanding of culturally specific drivers and barriers for sustainable transformation, and for finding and designing appropriate sites to implement innovations. The second premise is that retailers can act as agents of change by mobilizing resources and allies to help the diffusion of sustainability ideas and efforts within and beyond the food supply chain. This perspective supports a more system-oriented analysis of power relations in sustainable food provision, and is in line with new institutional theories. The concept of institutional entrepreneurship is particularly of interest, as initiators of institutional change are framed as entrepreneurs who are actively pushing for institutionalization of transitions.

In this research, we distinguish between two kinds of institutional entrepreneurs: programmers and switchers. Programmers co-organize the network, look for new sustainable food solutions and propose strategies to deal with issues within the network (examples of programmers are food/agriculture scientists, NGOs, consultants, or retailers themselves). Switchers are institutional entrepreneurs who link and de-link networks, and link and de-link networks with practices. Switchers have also access to other than just food provision networks (such as education), to the different target groups (consumers) and to crucial resources. It should be noted that in some cases, programmers and switchers may be combined in one organisation.

## **Bibliography**

- Battilana, J.; Leca, B.; Boxenbaum, E. (2009): How Actors Change Institutions: Towards a Theory of Institutional Entrepreneurship. *The Academy of Management Annals*. In *Academy of Management Annals* 3 (1), pp. 65–107.
- Dauvergne, P., & Lister, J. (2012). Big brand sustainability: Governance prospects and environmental limits. *Global Environmental Change*, 22, 36-45.
- Dewick, P., Foster, C., & Green, K. (2007). Technological Change and the Environmental Impacts of Food Production and Consumption: The Case of the UK Yogurt Industry. *Journal of industrial ecology*, 11, 133-146.
- DiMaggio, P. (1988): Interest and Agency in Institutional Theory. In Lynne Zucker (Ed.): *Institutional Patterns and Organizations. Culture and Environment*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, pp. 3–21.
- Durieu, X. (2003 ). How Europe's retail sector helps promote sustainable production and consumption *UNEP Industry and environment*, 26, 7-9.
- Fox, Edward J., Montgomery, Alan L., & Lodish, Leonard M. (2004). Consumer Shopping and Spending across Retail Formats. *The Journal of Business*, 77, S25-S60.
- Geels, F. W., & Schot, J. (2010). The Dynamics of Transitions; A Socio-Technical Perspective. In J. Grin, J. Rotmans & J. Schot (Eds.), *Transitions to Sustainable Development. New Directions in the Study of Long Term Transformative Change* (pp. 9- 101). New York: Routledge.
- Guivant, J. S., Spaargaren, G., Rial, C. *Práticas alimentares no mercado global*. Florianópolis : Editora da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2010
- Hansen, T. H., & Skytte, H. (1998). Retailer buying behaviour: a review. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 8, 277-301.
- Ingram, J., Ericksen, P., & Liverman, D. (2010). *Food Security and Global Environmental Change*. In London and Washington: Earthscan.
- Kjaernes, U., Harvey, M., & Warde, A. (2007). *Trust in Food; A Comparative and Institutional Analysis*. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Shove, E., Pantzar, M., & Watson, M. (2012). *The Dynamics of Social Practice. Everyday Life and How It Changes*. London: Sage.
- Spaargaren, G., Guivant, J. S., Oosterveer, P. *Shopping for Green Food in Globalizing Supermarkets: Sustainability at the Consumption Junction* In: *The Sage Handbook on Environment and Society* ed.London : Sage, 2007, p. 411-428.
- Spaargaren, G., Oosterveer, P., & Loeber, A. (2012). *Food Practices in Transition. Changing Food Consumption, Retail and Production in the Age of Reflexive Modernity*. In J. Grin, J. Rotmans & J. Schot (Eds.), *Routledge Studies in Sustainability Transitions*. New York and London: Routledge.
- UNEP/Wuppertal. (2007). *Creating Solutions for Sustainable Consumption and Production*. In Wuppertal: UNEP Production and Consumption Branch, UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaborating Centre on SCP.
- van Wijk, J. C. A. C., Danse, M., & van Tulder, R. J. M. (2008). *Making Retail Supply Chains*

Sustainable: Upgrading Opportunities for Developing Country Suppliers under Voluntary Quality Standards. In ERIM report series research in management Erasmus Research Institute of Management. Rotterdam: Erasmus Research Institute of Management (ERIM).

