

**Workshop on social sciences addressing societal challenges
in food consumption in Europe**

**Stimulating health, environmental sustainability and social
inclusion in times of economic unrest**

11th of December 2015 in Brussels



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Workshop Organisation

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Introduction

Horizon 2020 – the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation 2014-2020 – has emphasized the idea that research funding should support solutions to societal challenges and problems, with around 40% of its budget allocated to challenge-driven topics. Horizon 2020 has also made a commitment to induce interdisciplinary cooperation and partnerships with multiple types of stakeholders. In particular social sciences and humanities should be integrated across challenges such as health and demographic change, bioeconomy and climate change. The aim of this integration is to produce socio-technical solutions taking into account issues such as policy-making, governance, economy and markets, social and cultural values, and ethical considerations. While recent work programmes show an increase in the integration of social sciences and humanities in the design of research topics, specific challenges tend to be addressed by projects that are defined from a medical, agricultural or natural sciences point of view.

The aim of this workshop was to explore examples of research collaborations where social sciences are imperative to induce social change processes, understanding the local contexts of action or policy-making. It's ambition was to show the close relationship between 'wicked' European problems of climate change, sustainability, health and social inclusion, which need to be tackled simultaneously across food production and food consumption. Food insecurity was showcased as one significant problem area of such interrelated issues, where social sciences offer significant potential to seek effective solutions.

Key points and recommendations

- Food insecurity is an (re-)emerging issue in Europe and should be addressed as a substantive topic in the Horizon 2020 programme. It is associated with social exclusion and adverse effects to wellbeing, pressure on food budgets in European households leads to new consumption patterns which impact on climate change, environmental sustainability, and is directly associated with growing health problems including obesity and diseases such as Type 2 diabetes. Growing inequality and income gaps in Europe, in particular driven by the economic crisis, adds to the problem of food insecurity, and therefore urgently requires systematic research and inclusion in the forthcoming EU food nutrition security research policy.
- Fresh perspectives that focus on food consumption are essential if progressive solutions to food-related grand challenges are to be found. Social sciences offer lenses for examining the inter-related food issues in an integrated way. They present unique perspectives on consumption and eating practices that simultaneously analyze the substantive challenges posed by climate change, health and wellbeing. Efficient solutions are rarely uniform across countries but must be embedded in local and national contexts of material and social infrastructures and practices. Therefore, real-life human practices, as opposed to ideal or recommended practices, should be the starting point for policy-making dealing with food insecurity and related problems. Social sciences generate the kind of knowledge that is needed for this. It is recommended that Horizon 2020, in its ambition to address societal challenges, opens up a perspective on social change which understands consumers as co-producers of such change and which requires solutions to embed knowledge about real-life practices in specific contexts.
- It is recommended that Horizon 2020 calls for research which seeks integrated solutions that can address several societal challenges simultaneously. Social change is a process that occurs through numerous inter-related actions involving multiple actors, including consumers, retailers, producers, civil society actors, and policy makers amongst others. Therefore, European funding to conduct research on social change processes regarding consumption, health, climate, sustainability and wellbeing would significantly support such actors, for example supermarket chains, that need to address challenges and problems in integrated ways.

Social sciences addresses societal challenges

The ambition of Horizon 2020 is that the social sciences and humanities (SSH) are fully integrated into each of the priorities and specific objectives of the research programme. While SSH research has increasingly been called for as integral parts of the expertise needed to address topics, a clear imbalance is evident in the SSH disciplines involved in funded research. This workshop explored the contributions that social sciences research, particularly those led through sociological perspectives, has made to major inter-disciplinary undertakings and the impacts they have had in policy and business. Looking beyond simple 'cause and effect' mechanisms to examine multi-causal processes of societal change, social science perspectives focus on sequences of actions, the significance of cultural conventions, social norms and personal relationships which form social practices, and how they depend on context specific infrastructures. It highlights the role and responsibility of multiple actors in relation to problems and identifies solutions over multiple temporal and geographical scales (e.g. short to long term change, local to international). This can clarify distributed responsibility for societal challenges, and help build multi-stakeholder coalitions with shared understandings and visions of possible trajectories of societal changes.

Addressing integrated challenges: Food insecurity in Europe

Food consumption patterns are a focal point in social inclusion and cohesion, health and climate change. Meals and eating are cornerstones in social life and food plays a significant role in the social life and wellbeing of individuals, families and populations. Food consumption is also central to environmental sustainability and climate change. Consumption patterns change as a reaction to economic pressure and food insecurity and this can lead to social exclusion, poor health and reduced wellbeing and to negative impacts on the environment and climate. And all have severe effects on food production. Addressing food insecurity and change in food consumption patterns following restrained budgets in European households is therefore vital to addressing key societal challenges of health, climate change, environmental sustainability and social integration. Food insecurity and budget restraint offers a unique possibility to address these challenges in combination. Food security is defined as "*when all people, all of the time, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*".¹ The prevalence of food insecurity in Europe is not monitored systematically, but recent studies suggest that even in high income countries such as Germany, UK, Netherlands and Denmark levels of food insecurity are relatively high.² More than 120 million EU citizens are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and inequality is increasing during the economic crisis. The prevalence of food insecurity in the EU is likely to be significant and it is to be expected that a growing number of households will change their food consumption patterns in response to economic pressure. It is clear that new solutions to address food insecurity in Europe are needed. An in-depth and robust evidence-base to assess the scale and geographical distribution of the problem is a prerequisite to develop effective solutions. The development of solutions and policies addressing the problem should be based on the everyday practices that families already apply in different cultural, social and economic contexts to cope with situations of economic pressure. They should also take into account the strategies and policies developed by other relevant actors addressing this problem so that coordinated responses are, at least, possible. It is imperative that solutions, policies and actions take an integrated approach to the closely related problems of food consumption, social exclusion, poor health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and climate change.

¹ [The Role of Research in Global Food and Nutrition Security, EXPO 2015 EU Scientific Steering Committee](#), page 5

² **Germany:** S. Pfeiffer, T. Ritter and E. Oestreicher (2015). Food Insecurity in German households: Qualitative and Quantitative Data on Coping, Poverty Consumerism and Alimentary Participation. *Social Policy and Society*, 14, pp 483-495 doi:10.1017/S147474641500010X, **The Netherlands:** Neter JE, Dijkstra SC, Visser M, et al. (2014). Food insecurity among Dutch food bank recipients: a cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open*;4:e004657. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2013-004657, **England:** Cooper, N., Purcell, S. and Jackson, R. (2014). *Below the Breadline: The Relentless Rise of Food Poverty in Britain*, Manchester, Oxford, Salisbury: Church Action on Poverty, Oxfam, TrusselTrust; **Denmark:** A. Nielsen, T. Bøker Lund and L. Holm (2015). *The Taste of 'the End of the Month', and How to Avoid It: Coping with Restrained Food Budgets in a Scandinavian Welfare State Context*. *Social Policy and Society*, 14, pp 429-442. doi:10.1017/S1474746415000056.

Annex 1 - Summary of presentations

Professor Dale Southerton, University of Manchester, UK welcomed the participants and briefly introduced the aim of the workshop to explore examples of social science research collaboration with different stakeholders in order to address the wicked societal challenges that exist across health, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. Such problems are related to the way food is produced and consumed. Professor Southerton touched upon the urgency of tackling these issues simultaneously. Social inequality is increasing in Europe. At the same time the United Nations just launched the global development goal of reducing social inequality. Food is central to social inclusion. History shows that social revolt has often set out from shortages of food or increasing food prices. Social sciences and humanities offer lenses for examining the inter-connected problems of food in an integrated way from the perspective of eating.

Policy Officer Tobias Ström, European Commission, DG Research and Innovation introduced the policy of integrating social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020. The aim of integrating social sciences and humanities is to develop socio-technical approaches taking into account economy and markets, policy-making and governance, legal and institutional frameworks, human behavior, gender, social and cultural values, beliefs demographic realities, trends and ethical considerations. [The monitoring report on SSH-flagged projects funded in 2014 published by the European Commission](#) was briefly presented as well as the conditions for flagging a topic as SSH in the Horizon 2020 work programme 2016-2017. The report shows a need for further and better integration of SSH into Horizon 2020 calls. It also shows a need to level out the bias between the SSH disciplines being funded through the programme. E.g. economics and business sciences are involved in more than 59% of the projects funded under SSH flagged topics whereas e.g. sociology is included in only 17% of those projects.

Four cases of social science research addressing societal challenges in food, environment and health were presented. *The idea of the case presentations was to present specific projects that have been undertaken as a joint effort by academia and a particular type of stakeholder. The emphasis is on the impact that research collaborations have generated seen from the stakeholder perspective. The cases represent stakeholders from the private sector, non-governmental organisations and policy-making.*

Professor Dale Southerton, University of Manchester, UK presented a case on businesses and the social sciences: experiences of collaborations and engagement with Fast-moving consumer goods and retail firms. It focused on experiences from contributing with social science-based research to understand social change and inspire strategic thinking among businesses by reframing understandings and presenting new visions, narratives and approaches for change. Examples of businesses included TESCO, Unilever and Marks & Spencer. On the basis of analyzing consumption in its complex integration with other social practices, sociology can challenge more dominant understandings of drivers behind consumer behavior deriving from economics and psychology, and it can help frame new avenues of enquiry by asking radically new questions rather than repeating existing or familiar ones. Businesses that invest in such research undertakings are enabled to adapt their business models and strategy to social change, and thereby avoid major mistakes in strategic investments and move into new market opportunities in advance of their competitors.

Professor Peter Oosterveer, University of Wageningen and Senior Program Adviser Henk Renting, Resource Centre for Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAf) in the Netherlands presented their joint work for accessing sustainable, safe and healthy food in Europe. Consumption is part of many different social practices. It implies that active construction and reconstruction of multiple practices of access to food is necessary for the promotion of sustainable and healthy food production and consumption. Social sciences contribute with the understanding of the interplay between individuals, practices relating to accessing food and the social structures that individuals and practices are embedded in. RUAf works to reinforce urban-rural linkages for more inclusive,

efficient and resilient local food systems and to promote urban farming. To realize the potential of urban farming RUAF works with a multi-actor approach, including public administrations, private sector and civil society. RUAF depends on knowledge generated by the social sciences to understand social and economic networks that are important for the development and scaling up of new types of systems for food provisioning, and the factors underlying consumer behaviour in relation to healthy and sustainable diets including the motivations of citizens to engage in urban farming. Social sciences contribute to designing new forms of food governance and engagement from civil society and the private sector.

Senior Research Fellow Mónica Truninger, University of Lisbon and Executive Director João José Fernandes, Oikos in Portugal presented their collaboration to understand consumer perspectives in relation to food insecurity and poverty in Portugal. Food consumption of families with school-aged children is affected by economic austerity in mainland Portugal, where almost 12% of the population experiences food insecurity. Food insecure families cope by seeking support among immediate social networks and by producing food themselves. Such families eat less meat and fish and more canned and frozen food. Additionally, they react by saving energy, reuse meals and tend to produce less waste. Oikos mobilizes active citizenship to fight poverty, exclusion and social inequality. Together with the University of Lisbon and other stakeholders Oikos has worked to encourage a national integrated food public policy to influence the quality, fairness, security and sustainability of food consumption in Portugal. The presented research has contributed to this process by building evidence about the local situation for food insecurity to convince public bodies about the need for a strategy to support food insecure families in their coping strategies.

Research Professor Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier, CNRS and Solange Martin from the French Environment and Energy Management Agency (ADEME) in France presented a project on the practice approach to study sustainable consumption. The research objectives were to analyze how food practices were structured and how they could change in order to inform transition policies towards more sustainable food consumption. The main findings were that household coordination and organization, mobility and access to commercial infrastructures, norms and symbolic rewards were determining factors structuring food practices. Changes occurred at biographical turning points but strong specificities were identified for different social groups. The research results contributed to designing technologies, products and policies based on evidence on real-life practices as opposed to conceptions of people's practices or ideal practices. Such strategic knowledge on national and cultural contexts for policy-development provided insights into the conditions of success and limits to what can be done. Having the big picture in mind helps to decide on policy priorities.

The following part of the workshop looked at European funded research on the impact of the economic crisis in particular focusing on vulnerable households. It aimed to build on this research to link the existing knowledge on households' reactions to the crisis with food insecurity and its effects on health, climate change and social cohesion.

Dr. Markus Promberger, Institute for Employment Research in Germany presented the FP7-funded project Patterns of Resilience during Socioeconomic Crises among Households in Europe (RESCuE). RESCuE (2014-17) addresses the problem of persistent poverty in Europe despite policy efforts to the contrary. Little is known about how people cope with, and escape from, poverty and how people at risk of poverty avoid it. What can social policy learn from poor citizens? The research uses 'resilience' as a concept and research cases who manage to beat the odds. It shows that resilience is not necessarily 'good' as resilient families still experience considerable hardships. Resilience is not an individual trait but involves socially generated resources and abilities, as well as enabling and restricting social structures. Resilient low-income households practice mixtures of economic and social strategies, which correspond with specific cultural patterns and are often multi-purposed.

Resilience cannot replace welfare state activities. Rather, welfare state provisions play a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of resilience of vulnerable households. The research involves stakeholders in dialogue and fieldwork and in relation to dissemination of results.

Professor Lotte Holm, University of Copenhagen in Denmark presented research on food insecurity and recommendations for Horizon 2020 to design interdisciplinary calls that address food consumption and eating and related problems across health, sustainability and social inclusion. The Danish "Food in Turbulent Time" research project focused on the consequences of restricted food budgets and the coping strategies employed by households faced with such restrictions. It analyzed the effects of coping strategies on diet quality, obesity, greenhouse gas emissions and psychological distress/quality of life. The results show that in Denmark 13 % of the population experiences substantial budget restrictions and 8 % are food insecure. Unhealthy diet, obesity, and declining life satisfaction are correlated with budget restrictions and food insecurity, whereas the coping strategies of these groups revealed a positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions related to food consumption. It was pointed out how coping strategies are interlinked in their production of such effects, and how they must also be understood in relation to the general food system set-up. There is a reason why Danish citizens do not - like the Portuguese - cope with food security by producing their own food.

A European research perspective should invite studies to focus on everyday practices among consumers, to build an understanding of consumers as co-producers of social change, to call for analysis of processes of change in which solutions must be distributed across multiple actors, and to compare experiences from different national contexts in order for countries to be inspired by each other. It was emphasized that initiating such research should contribute with solutions and changes that have an impact on several of the areas that structure Horizon 2020 investments addressing societal challenges, notably the bioeconomy, food and agriculture, health and wellbeing, climate change and inclusive Europe. It should be acknowledged that solutions cannot be uniform across Europe because the local context must be taken into account. Comparative research however can ensure that actors learn from practices and changes happening in other parts of Europe.

Annex 2 - Programme

Programme

11.30-11.45	Welcome and introduction to the workshop, by Professor Dale Southerton, University of Manchester, UK
11.45-12.15	Embedding social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020, by Tobias Ström, Policy Officer, European Commission, DG Research and Innovation
12.15-13.40	<p>4 cases on social sciences and stakeholders addressing societal challenge</p> <p>Businesses and the social sciences: experiences of collaborations and engagement with FMCG and retail firms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dale Southerton, Professor, University of Manchester, Director of Sustainable Consumption Institute, UK <p>Accessing sustainable, safe and healthy food in Europe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Peter Oosterveer, Associate Professor, Wageningen University, The Netherlands ○ Henk Renting, Senior Program Advisor, Resource Centre for Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF), The Netherlands <p>Food insecurity and poverty in Portugal: consumers' perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monica Truninger, Phd, University of Lisbon, Portugal ○ João José Fernandes, executive director, Oikos, Portugal <p>The practice approach to study sustainable consumption: Insights from the experience of projects funded by the French Agency for the Environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier, PhD, Research professor, CNRS, France. ○ Solange Martin, Economics and Foresight Unit/ Research and Foresight Direction of the French environment and energy Management Agency (ADEME), France. <p>Moderated by Lotte Holm, professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark</p>
13.40-13.55	Break
13.55-14.15	European research on the consequences of the economic crises: The RESCuE project funded under FP7 by Markus Promberger, Institute for Employment Research, Germany
14.15-14.35	Recommendations for Horizon 2020 to design interdisciplinary calls for social sciences to address societal and social challenges, by Lotte Holm, Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
14.35-15.05	Q & A moderated by Lotte Holm, Professor, University of Copenhagen, Denmark
15.05-15.10	Wrap up and concluding remarks, by Dale Southerton, Professor, University of Manchester, UK

Annex 3 – list of participants

Name	Organisation	Function
Annemette Ljungdahl Nielsen	University of Copenhagen, Department of Food and Resource Economics	Associate professor
Bogdan Birnbaum	European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, B6 - Reflective Societies	Programme Assistant - EU policies
Dale Southerton	University of Manchester, Sustainable Consumption Institute	Professor
Henk Renting	(RUAF) Resource Centre for Urban Agriculture and Food Security (RUAF).	MSc Rural Sociology, MSc Environmental Sciences, Senior Program Advisor
João José Fernandes	OIKOS (Cooperation and Development)	Executive director
Karen Fabbri	European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, F3-Agri-Food Chain, Bioeconomy Directorate	Policy Officer
Lotte Holm	University of Copenhagen, Department of Food and Resource Economics	Professor
Markus Promberger	Institute for Employment Research of the Federal Employment Agency	Professor
Mónica Truninger	Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon.	PhD, Senior Research Fellow
Peter Oosterveer	Wageningen University	Associate Professor,
Rosanna d'Amario	European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, E1 - Strategy, Health Directorate	Policy Officer
Solange Martin	Economics and Foresight Unit/ Research and Foresight Direction of the French environment and energy Management Agency (ADEME).	Sociologist
Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier	The National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), Deputy Director of the Centre of Sociology of organizations (Sciences Po-CSO).	PhD, Research professor
Thomas Roland	COOP	Head of Unit
Tobias Ström	European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, B6 - Reflective Societies	Policy officer
Wim Haentjens	European Commission, DG Research & Innovation, F3-Agri-Food Chain, Bioeconomy Directorate	Research programme officer