

Social cohesion, food and health: Inclusive food system transitions

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Abstract of project proposal

Social cohesion (SC) issues are inextricably linked to disparities and vulnerabilities in food systems and food-related health, as cause and effect. Mutually reinforcing links include: un/even access to safe, healthy and sustainable food as a dimension of social in/equality from local to global scale, un/fair labour conditions in food value chains, un/even ability to adopt health-enhancing diets, and the experience of shared/distinct social identities through food. Unsustainable diets and food production contribute to resource depletion, biodiversity loss and climate change, thus exacerbating socio-economic disparities across scales. Manifold social and technological innovations aim to address these issues. But a systematic integration of the SC-food-health-nexus is missing in research and practice.

To address this gap, we develop and test a conceptual framework of the SC-food-health-nexus and methods to assess and improve the SC dynamics of food systems, integrating perspectives from social and political sciences, food and innovation system analysis, food technology, health and nutrition sciences. We develop a multi-scale concept of SC and guidance with indicators for process-tracing of SC dynamics, adopting a multi-level perspective. We then analyse how broader context developments (macro-landscape), as well as incumbent and emerging social and technological innovation systems (meso-level) interact with the SC-food-health nexus. 6 case studies (network and individual level) explore SC-food-health dynamics in bottom-up social innovations, interventions in daily practices, food technology and transnational value chains innovations. 3 living labs, complemented by behavioural experiments, develop and test solutions to strengthen positive SC-food-health links. Practitioners from different sectors and levels contribute to generate system, target and transformation knowledge. Project results form the basis of a Berlin Centre for Social Cohesion in Food System Transitions.