FUTURES4FOOD

Connecting futures and stakeholders of food systems by designing effective transition

DURATION
15/12/2020-15/03/2025

BUDGET
1.140.806€

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The European Green Deal aims to accelerate the transition to become a climate-neutral continent by 2050. Such a transition to a carbon-neutral society is one of the biggest challenges for society and governments because it implies changing many mechanisms established over the last 50 years. Food production and consumption play an essential role in such a transition since food production is responsible for environmental impacts affecting the planetary boundaries. Therefore, the agri-food system is challenged to reduce its environmental and climate footprint while producing healthy, high-quality and accessible food for all as it is established in the farm to fork strategy of the European Green Deal.
Sustainable food is a transversal and key topic for the federal government in Belgium because it has to deal with economic, legal, environmental, social, and health issues that require the alignment of policies at the federal and regional levels. Two of the major sustainability challenges of the agri-food sector are related to the future of the cereal sector and the protein shift in the human diet. The cereal sector needs to shift to more sustainable production, aiming to reduce the impact on environment, energy demand, water, soil erosion, pesticide use, changing agricultural practices, and developing a vision beyond the cereal sector. The human diet is expected to shift towards an increased share on non-animal protein. These challenges cannot be addressed by using top-down approaches, they require the involvement of government, industries, universities, and societies using a holistic approach.

FUTURES4FOOD has been conceived as a project that aims to develop and test a methodology based on the Designing Feasible Futures Framework for the co-creation of sustainable and resilient futures for the cereal sector and the agri-food protein sector in Belgium by using transdisciplinary approaches.

The research objectives are 4-fold:
(1) To co-develop and test a robust methodology together with the stakeholders.
(2) To develop training modules to support learning communities in the Belgian agri-food system that can co-create inclusive transition roadmaps with and for the cereal and protein sectors.
(3) To expand the network capital by delivering learning communities and alliances to accelerate futures for the cereal sector with less pesticides use and smarter crop rotation; and,
(4) the transition of the agri-food protein sector to more non-animal protein: both in the perspective of an inclusive, integrated ecological transition by implementing the robust methodology developed in this project in both sectors.

FUTURES4FOOD is based on principles of Transdisciplinary Research combining epistemological approaches, qualitative and quantitative methods on framing, complexity, stakeholder management, and futures in a co-creative manner with stakeholders.

KU Leuven Institute for the Future framed a new methodology for *Designing Feasible Futures Framework* of four types of activities organized as modules (1) **Framing**: The problem is outlined and aims are made explicit. (2) **Complexity**: Deepening of understanding the system related to the problem through complexity. (3) **Multilevel**: Identification, mapping their complex interactions, and involving stakeholders and disciplines required for solving societal demands with scientific support. (4) **Futures**: Stakeholders co-create a vision for the future based on qualitative and quantitative approaches drafting possible scenarios and roadmaps that provide insights to actions for achieving the targets for the common good. These activities are roughly sequentially worked through and iterated within progressively broader learning communities.

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FUTURES4FOOD aims to develop future scenarios and transition pathways for the Belgian cereal and protein transition-related sectors to become more sustainable. Therefore, the research contributes to the implementation of a holistic food policy at regional, federal and European levels.
FUTURES4FOOD will support key stakeholders and actors in developing skills to address the complexity of the food system. Entrepreneurs, civil society actors, and policymakers increasingly need to consider transitioning skills as part of their standard strategic toolbox.
The transdisciplinary methodology helps actors to expand their strategic logic in guiding them to iteratively frame the shared challenges, search for leverage points through complexity analysis, and to co-design new opportunities of value creation. The novelty of the approach also rests on establishing autonomous and self-sustaining learning communities geared at making the Belgian cereal and protein transition-related sectors more sustainable.

As FUTURES4FOOD envisages to develop knowledge together with all stakeholders involved, the first valorization objective is straightforward: the co-development of systemic, inclusive roadmaps (including the delineation of novel value chains and networks as well as transition trajectories) that will become guiding and inspiring – for all stakeholders involved – during the next decade.

We envisage to develop a set of publications (methodological notes and domain specific publications) which we will actively promote towards scientific communities (conferences and journals) and towards practitioners and policy makers. In parallel, we will develop a training program which will allow participants to master the learning process.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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LINKS

https://rega.kuleuven.be/if/f4f