

Envisioning sustainable food consumption in practices of everyday life

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The BRIGADE project (2006–2009)

- “Bridging the value-action gap – combining producer, consumer and expert perspectives for sustainable food consumption”
- aims to bring different actors’ points of view into the discourse on the ecological, ethical and social responsibilities of sustainable food consumption
- University of Jyväskylä, Finland Futures Research Centre and NCRC
- the objectives of the project
 - to examine the possible futures of food consumption patterns based on trend analysis
 - to analyse the conditions and institutional constraints of sustainable food consumption as perceived by experts, producers and consumers
- funded by the Academy of Finland
- the project is carried out in co-operation with MIRHAMI 2030 (The Future of the Finnish Food Consumption Structure and the Change Agents Guiding It)



The background

- going beyond the value-action gap (theory of learned/planned behaviour)
- consumer/user-oriented approach (CTA) anchored in everyday practices (theory of practice)
- the ongoing theoretical and political discourse around
 - CSR and responsibility in consumption
 - sustainability of food production and consumption
 - ethical (food) consumption
- aim is to address the everyday encounters between consumption practices and the different dimensions of sustainability



Many sources of data

- a web-based questionnaire in November 2006 for members of the consumer panel maintained by NCRC (N = 601)
 - the aim was to map consumers' views on CSR and ethical consumption, especially in relation to food production and consumption
 - NB! the panel is not a representative sample of the Finnish population → the results cannot be generalised but should be viewed as indicative
- a Delphi questionnaire for experts and consumers (N = 177)
 - views on the desirable future and the probable future
 - the questionnaire was executed by the Finland Futures Research Centre
- in autumn 2007 six focus group discussions in four cities (Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Jyväskylä)
 - 6–11 participants in each discussion, in total 53 consumers from the NCRC panel
 - the aim was to identify consumers' images of Finnish food consumption in 2030
 - collaboration with the Finland Futures Research Centre



Objectives of the focus groups 1

- consumers as “lay experts” of everyday life
- focus on possible future food consumption patterns
 - seeing (not forecasting) and constructing future
 - “bridging” the value-action gap
 - how and by whom is change created?
 - identifying “doings”
 - understanding the conditions (structures, stuff, skills, competence) for making sustainable food choices
 - analysing consumers’ ideas and notions on future food consumption from the perspective of practices understood as doings, sayings and materials as changing in time
 - who is responsible?



Objectives for the focus groups 2

- discussion themes (partly emerged from the Delphi)
 - ready meals and convenience foods in 2030
 - origin of food and processing of food
 - possibilities for consumers to make a change
- everyday life and food consumption in 2030
 - what has changed, what has not?
 - in what ways could things be different?
 - ideas, depictions, concrete examples of everyday life in 2030



Introducing the "future" to the discussants

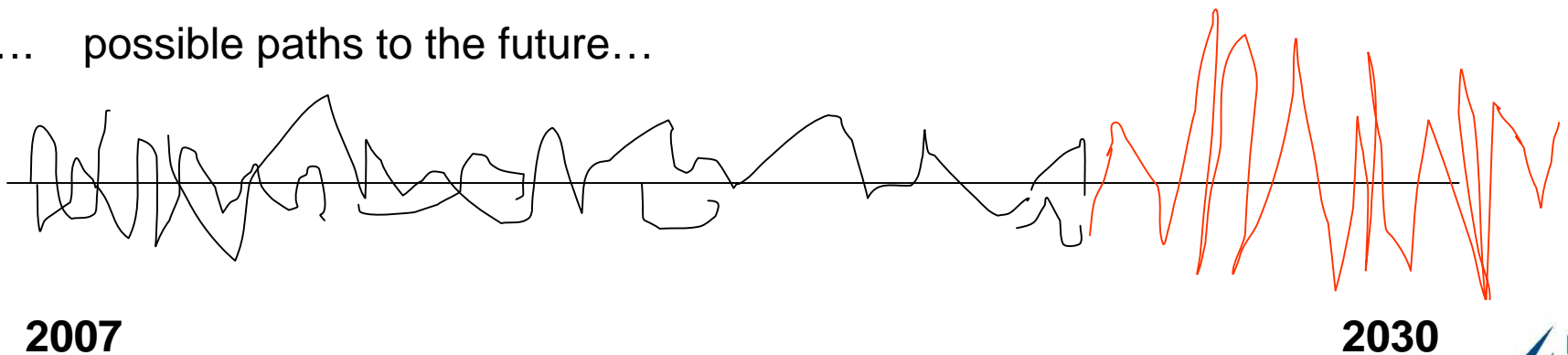
- reflection of past ideas about the future: there are no "right" answers, only more or less educated guesses
- the participants were advised to
 - bring out all diverse ideas
 - "jump" into the future
 - think about future paths
 - think about continuations, alterations, transformations, making opposite
- the general idea was to keep the discussion in the future, not in present



Future paths

- factors that facilitate changes
- trends and continuums
- breaks and breaches

.... possible paths to the future...



2007

2030



Tasks for the discussants

- how have your favourite dishes changed from the past to the present?
- the participants were invited to construct images of future food consumption by thinking about activities relating to cookbooks, kitchens, grocery shopping, food packaging and meals
 - in pairs, think, write and/or draw suggestions, ideas and views about the following:
 - shopping trips and the contents of shopping baskets in 2030
 - cookbooks in 2030
 - food packages in 2030
 - meals at home in 2030
 - kitchens in 2030



Results

”[In 2030,] will we really get all those foods and the great variety of fruit and all that [from other countries] like we do now?”



Favourite dishes

- the discussion of favourite dishes produced ideas about both change and stability
 - basic/staple dishes
 - "lightening" of diets and increasing variety within diets
 - mixing of seasons
 - comfort foods
 - searching for taste sensations
 - on weekdays more convenience foods and ready meals
 - individualisation and fragmentation of diets



”Well maybe not in 2030, but I’d say that at some point people will think that it’s awfully brutal and primitive that we have been eating meat and all these other animal foods. And there’s going to be some other system providing protein to people. That’s one option.”



Consumers' ideas about future practices (1)

- the food prepares itself when opening the package
- in the shop there's a machine you use to indicate the amount of food you want
- are shops needed any longer?
- diverse combinations of ways to acquire and buy food
- drying: there's no point in transporting water all over
- real "savings packages": food is bought from big tanks in shops



Consumers' ideas about future practices (2)

- "pills", also tailored to individual dietary needs
- no need for paper cookbooks: a 3D cook that appears in the kitchen
- kitchen machines communicate with each other, intelligent machines
- the kitchen individualises, becomes automatic and bigger
- the kitchen becomes unnecessary
- the fragmentation, diversification and "hybridisation" of consumption, consumers and food cultures



Q: Who decides in 2030 what people eat?

A1: The industry

A2: The EU

A3: "Well, consumers, too, at least a little bit..."



Future images of consumers' opportunities to influence (1)

- Wikipedia pages for products and producers
- consumers' feedback should inform legislation (a big gap here)
- a powerful consumer movement will rise
- fast diffusion of information among consumers
- belief in buying decisions and boycotts
- authorities will consult consumer enthusiasts – consumers' expertise will be widely recognised and made use of



Future images of consumers' opportunities to influence (2)

- consumers want to take part in product development
- consumers' own discussion fora and networks for passing information
- product labels and trade descriptions will be better and influence consumption patterns
- empowerment of consumers: consumers will be educated and require that the industry will produce and shops will sell foods that consumers want
- in the future, companies that will listen to consumers will prosper



Reflecting the discussions

- the discussants brought out also positive images:
”it doesn’t have to be threat – what if they invent a new source of energy, then we’ll have enormous amounts of energy available and suddenly there are no problems ... you never know”
- lots of discussion, bridges between the themes, and what if? questions and ideas
- many diverse ideas of the future
- staying in the future



Discussion (1)

- responsible consumption patterns are embedded in everyday practices that are at the same time changing and stable
- consumers' ideas about changes in practices are linked with the technological and material transformations envisioned for the future
- how is responsibility/sustainability embedded in the products and, furthermore, in the consumption of the specific products?



Discussion (2)

- how do consumers pimp their food
- developments into various directions?
 - sustainability (in various dimensions), naturalness, technology, convenience, healthiness, pleasure → what kind of matrix do these form in the future?
- parallel existence and use of many diverse options



Discussion (3)

- consumers recognise their various roles as users, consumers and citizens in constructing future
- in discussions on sustainability these (sometimes contrasting) roles of people need to be acknowledged
- everyman/citizen/consumer's opportunities for responsible and reflexive choices?
- the consumer 2.0



Discussion (4)

- have policy makers understood the multifaceted nature of consumer views and practices?
- consumer orientation?
 - from farm to fork or from fork to farm? → the dialogue between production and consumption
- dialogue with societal expectations
- what happens when corporate-citizens and consumer-citizens meet on the (food) market?
- what is the role of research?
- how to measure
 - political/ethical/responsible/sustainable consumption?
 - CSR?



”[In 2030,] there’s a vegetarian, a
vegan and then there’s one crazy
beef-person.”

