

# Final Report Transforum

## Sustainability and dynamics of food consumption patterns

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# **1. Project focus and approach**

Food consumption, in particular the consumption of meat and other animal-based protein, is highly relevant to global sustainability issues. Reducing meat consumption would alleviate societal pressures on important resources like water, health, energy, biodiversity and animal welfare. However, there is no shared vision of what a sustainable future should look like and in a pluralistic society values can come into conflict in various food-related areas. Policy makers have to take into account this pluralistic character of society and they need to adapt measures to address this challenge. Most likely, there will be no ‘one-fits-all’ solution. Food consumption follows culturally engrained patterns, which vary widely across different sub-cultures. It is part of people’s worldviews, personal identity and social standing. The tremendous importance of meat in food consumption patterns, is a transcultural phenomenon and it may therefore also be the most difficult to address. Policies aimed at changing food consumption patterns need to take into account underlying values and adapt their measures to people’s daily practices. Changing food culture is the key issue to address if a transition towards more sustainable food consumption patterns is to be achieved.

## **1.1. Scientific approach – From models to real consumer motivations and practices**

Scientific work that has addressed the relationship between values and food consumption has found that consumers vary with regards to their mindfulness in food consumption, and that they therefore vary in the extent to which values inform their food consumption choices. Schösler builds on a model by De Boer et al (2006) that distinguished four different value orientations of consumers with regard to their food choices. She aims at collecting qualitative data that can further underpin these orientations and can match these orientations with consumers’ everyday practices.

In order to literally bridge the gap between theory and practice, this research put consumer practices central and aimed to approach the issue top-down as well as bottom-up, employing the grounded theory approach. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the research explores how food practices can be grouped together and linked to more sustainable choices, especially reduced meat consumption. The work delivers crucial information for policy makers to understand consumer choices in a culturally embedded framework and it should aid them in developing potentially more successful strategies to address reduced meat consumption in society.

## **1.2. Set-up**

Interviews were carried out with Dutch citizens between the summer of 2009 and 2010. Participants were selected varying in age, gender and place of residence and they were recruited at organic shops, regular supermarkets, and via snowballing in the Slow Food organization, the NVVL, a network for experts working in the food industry in the Netherlands, and the Cuisine Culinaire Amsterdam (CCA), a hobby cooking club. The participants were not selected for being representative but rather for the innovative or particularly illustrative character of their food practices. It was expected that these particular groups would demonstrate contrasting views and practices.

In order to complement the qualitative data, a survey was developed. It aims to collect more relevant information on the socio-cultural embedding of consumer practices and to test various

strategies that could be employed by government, companies or NGO's to promote reducing meat consumption. Attitudes towards various concepts of meat replacement were tested, for example the use of conventional meat substitutes, consumption of insects or the use of hybrid products. The different value orientations are expected to give rise to varying strategies regarding how consumers could be stimulated to reduce their meat consumption.

The questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of the Dutch society, of minimum age 18. This part of the research is still in progress and will be finalized Q1 2011.

## 2. Scientific results and recommendations

Consumers have different orientations towards food, which have changed over time, and are culturally embedded. The most important difference is that some consumers have incorporated food consumption into their value patterns and others have not. Thus, for the highly involved groups, we can conclude that food consumption mirrors their value orientations, while the groups with low involvement show no such integration.

Taking into account the insights of cultural studies, Dutch culture is traditionally characterized by a utilitarian attitude towards food. The influence of culinary values on food choice is weak. The Protestant ethic repudiates sensual pleasures and facilitates a view of food as fuel rather than providing people with pleasure and delight. This low importance that is granted to food is a crucial determinant of how well people's moral values are incorporated and reflected in their food choices. The conventional and functional eaters, which can be expected to make up the bulk of Dutch society, maintain a more functional attitude towards food where culinary values are mostly subordinated to more concrete and practical considerations such as price or availability.

In contrast, the cultural innovators, who were represented in this study by more spiritually oriented eaters and members of Slow Food, demonstrate a better integration of their moral values into their food choices. They view food and eating as something providing them with pleasure, happiness and essential quality of life. With this less functional view of food corresponds a heightened sensitivity towards various issues pertaining to food production and consumption. This awareness creates a more responsible attitude and a fundamental view of food being intrinsically valuable.

For the promotion of more sustainable consumption patterns, an understanding of the cultural underpinnings is crucial. From the data, we can conclude that innovative food consumers move towards a more meaningful and more holistic understanding of food. The potential of these groups to challenge the cultural norm can be utilized more thoroughly by policy makers.

However, changing culture is a long-term endeavor and therefore it is important to realize that the mainstream consumer culture is still oriented towards low moral involvement. More practical incentives are needed *beyond* trying to create consumer awareness. Therefore a good insight into varying consumer practices is necessary.

### 2.1. Practices and meat substitution

Feasible transitions in meat consumption patterns vary in the different consumer orientations that were identified in the model. It differentiates conventional eaters, to whom food consumption is generally rather unimportant. People act out of habit and their choices are strongly determined by outer circumstances, their consumption patterns are quite conservative and meat is a self-evident

part of it. This group is most difficult to tackle because with relatively little interest for food and eating comes little awareness for food related health or environmental issues. There is no obvious solution how they can be encouraged to actively make more sustainable choices. They require a greening of conventional products and structural changes that make more sustainable choices the obvious alternative.

The functional eaters are in principle open to meat substitutes if they are offered in a convenient form. It seems they are least bothered by the somewhat artificial flair of innovative meat substitutes. This group is enthusiastic about innovation and about novelties that supermarkets have to offer. They do however operate out of a very concrete mindset, where practical concerns such as availability and convenience are of importance.

The reflective eaters are most open to a shift towards organic meat or a part-time vegetarian diet. They tend to new styles of vegetarian cooking rather than substitution of parts. Their value-set has much in common with the Cultural Creatives and LOHAS. In their practices they strive to keep foods as pure as possible, which can be achieved by using organic and seasonal products. Generally they prefer products that have undergone little processing and they revert to home cooking and assembling food mixes themselves. Autonomy, competence and mindfulness are key values for this group, which also makes them critical consumers.

The gourmet eaters have two strong points: the fact that they have a broad taste and like to eat many different foods, makes them receptive to accepting different cuts of meat from different animals. They also believe that every part of an animal should be used as food. Due to their adventurous attitude and fascination for food culture, they are potential candidates to accept insects in the future or other foods that are common to foreign food cultures. Secondly, the fact that food quality is of central value to them, makes a shift from quantity to higher quality meat feasible. The group has a strong attachment to culture and tradition and is therefore open to local and artisan production much rather than organic production, even though in reality the two often overlap. They are willing to pay a premium for better quality food, and more sustainable food can be framed as such as long as it indeed delivers the promised premium quality.

### 3. Lessons learned

This research points out the importance of taking into account socio-cultural orientations of consumers, as differences in practice are persistent. Practices of cultural innovators serve to identify new values, and strategies to change behaviour can be modelled along these lines. Behaviour change needs to be facilitated by a broad palette of instruments. Structural factors such as pricing and availability have to be taken into account but over these concrete facts more invisible and often implicit influences on people's behaviour need not be forgotten.

The varying orientations of the groups illustrate that an appeal to people's moral decision making which is the main target of supplying more information and transparency, will not suffice to change consumption patterns of a substantial part of Dutch society.

Schösler indicates an alternative option, by taking into account consumer practices and the implied value orientations. That way it may become easier for consumers to make more sustainable choices that fit with their daily practices, without the necessity of this being a *conscious value-driven* choice. Next to this, there is a broad range of values that innovative, more sustainable initiatives can appeal to in order to attract consumer attention.

As far as methodology is concerned, much of the discussion concerning consumers and more sustainable consumption patterns revolves around the so-called ‘attitude-behaviour’ gap that people don’t do as they say. Working with qualitative interviews and aiming to interpret people’s values based on their practices, seems a very promising route to bridge this gap. Much of the attitude-behaviour inconsistencies seem to result from insufficient methods and models that fail to capture the complexity of people’s motivation.

## 4. Process evaluation

The approach taken in this research was mainly based on methods of participation. Different countries served as locations for fieldwork. In order to train the cultural eye that is often blind to the particularities and the practices that one is accustomed to due to one’s own cultural background, the researcher participated in fieldwork in China and other European countries. Eventually these experiences were all valuable material to support observations of Dutch food culture.

In order to seek interaction with consumers and to trial a small intervention, Schösler developed a school project geared at intensifying people’s involvement with food and at the same time raising awareness for issues pertaining to food sustainability. Co-funding for this project was provided by the ‘Amsterdamse Fonds voor de Kunsten’. The project was carried out in two primary schools in Amsterdam, a Jewish orthodox school and a regular Montessori school. The theoretical content was combined with an artistic component provided by a primary school art teacher. A Dutch artist documented the entire project on film in order to share and discuss the results of the project with other children, schoolteachers and parents. Publicity via Dutch local television is now sought. The project was developed in a format that enables continuation in other primary schools.

## 5. Deliverables of the project

### 5.1 Conference participation and presentations

1. *Presentation at ISSRNC (2009) “Clarifying the influence of worldviews on food consumption”*
2. *de Boer, Joop (2009). Towards more sustainable food choices: value priorities and motivational orientations. Presentatie op Transforum Workshop praktijkprojecten wetenschappelijke projecten consument. Zoetermeer, 23 maart 2009.*
3. *Schösler, Hanna (2009). Translating values to Transforum business propositions. Presentatie op Transforum Workshop praktijkprojecten wetenschappelijke projecten consument. Zoetermeer, 23 maart 2009.*
4. *de Boer, J. (2010). Frames van consumenten: Een handelingsperspectief voor beleidmakers. Lezing op themabijeenkomst van Foodpolicy NL, Baarn, 5 Oktober 2010.*
5. *Participation in ‘Scenario Workshop’ of the Ministry of EL&I: “Transitions to more sustainable food system in 2050” Scenario’s and storylines. Zeist, September 2009.*

## 5.2 Publications

1. Schösler, Hanna (2010). *Consumptiepatronen kennen eigen grammatica*. Milieu 16 (7), 42-43.
2. Schösler, Hanna (2010). *Vragenlijst voor interacties met consumenten over kookstijlen en maaltijden, met toespitsing op vlees en vleesvervanging*. Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Instituut voor Milieuvaagstukken, werknota.
3. Schösler, Hanna (2010). *Interview guide voor interacties met consumenten over kookstijlen en maaltijden, met toespitsing op vlees en vleesvervanging*. Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Instituut voor Milieuvaagstukken, werknota.
4. Schösler, Hanna, de Boer, Joop, & Boersema, Jan J. (2010). *Towards more sustainable food choices in a pluralistic society*. Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Institute for Environmental Studies, working paper.
5. *Schriftelijke bijdrage aan het advies van de Vereniging van Milieuprofessionals (VVM) aan staatssecretaris Henk Bleker van het ministerie Economische Zaken, Landbouw en Innovatie (EL&I); Handelingsperspectieven voor duurzame voedselproductie en -consumptie*, Den Bosch, 30 november 2010.
6. *Final paper fieldwork China: “A culinary journey through Chinese culture”* (2008). Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit, Instituut voor Milieuvaagstukken, unpublished.
7. Schösler, Hanna (2009). *The landscape of pleasure. Consumer discourses on taste*. Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Instituut voor Milieuvaagstukken, werknota.

## 5.3 Practice Project

1. Projectvoorstel “Weet wat je eet!”
2. Project rapportage “Weet wat je eet!”
3. DVD “Weet wat je eet!” Montessorischool De Eilanden
4. DVD “Weet wat je eet!” Montessorischool De Eilanden

## 6. Overview original project proposal and matching with final deliverables

Original project proposal	Associated deliverable or otherwise
Adapted global scenarios to the level of food consumption patterns in the Netherlands. The adaptation is aimed at displaying relevant recognizable aspects of food consumption	See <i>Publications</i> (4)

Construct a typology of consumers who are sustainability oriented	See <b>Publications</b> (4)
Methodology aiming at recognizing the ways in which consumers with diverging levels of involvement in food express their philosophy of life in their food choices	See <b>Publications</b> (2), (3)
Feedback methodology that combines signals from consumer behaviour with existing storylines of the scenarios in order to create new convincing and appealing visions of sustainable consumption patterns	See <b>Publications</b> (2), (3)
Film on sustainable consumer behavior	See <b>Practice Project</b> (1), (2), (3), (4) The set-up of this practice project was adjusted. First, interviews with consumers were supposed to be filmed, however, after a few trials it turned out that people often felt intimidated by the camera. The practice project was then realized with two school classes, combining class filming with interviews of children about their food habits.
Journal articles in peer reviewed journals	See <b>Publications</b> (4) draft version
Popular scientific articles	See <b>Publications</b> (1)
Workshop - interactive workshops	A workshop has not been organized yet.