

H: Saturday, July 8, 9.30-10.45

H01: Inclusive futures: transforming the ordinary

Session Chair: Jonas House

Room: B: Omnia, R: Quantum 4 (max. 30)

Experimenting with futures of consumption

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Recent years have seen burgeoning social-scientific debates on the future. As well being a source of significant theoretical development, the field has generated a range of methodological tools for understanding anticipated futures and their effect on the present. These methodological approaches generally fall into three broad (non-exclusive) categories.

First, the collective generation of possible, plausible and desirable futures: for example, in 'visioning', 'backcasting' or scenario development methods. Second, the exploration of existing visions of the future and how these may bear upon present human activity: for example, in elucidating the future orientation(s) of current domestic practices. Third, the testing of visions of the future or anticipated future scenarios: for example, through war gaming, speculative design, or 'prehearsals'. A key aspect of this latter approach is experiencing the future: "to bring the worlds of tomorrow into the present in a way that can be experienced directly", using methods such as interventions, installations or speculative artefacts to generate insight into potential futures "[i]n the absence of functional time-travel" (Kuzmanovic & Gaffney 2017: 110).

Our central argument in this paper is that methodologies for testing or experiencing the future represent a valuable resource for social scientific research on (future) sustainable food consumption, and merit further attention. We begin by bringing three social-scientific research literatures into dialogue: on consumption, on the future, and on experimentation. Then, drawing on our recent qualitative research projects – which investigated alternative proteins and sustainable food futures in the Netherlands and Norway – we reflect on fruitful ways that experimental approaches can complement other methodological tools, such as in-depth interviews, participant diaries, and auto-photography. We set out a case for experimentation, broadly conceived, as a promising addition to the methodological repertoire of consumption research.

References

Kuzmanovic, M., & Gaffney, N. (2017). Enacting futures in postnormal times. *Futures*, 86, 107–117.