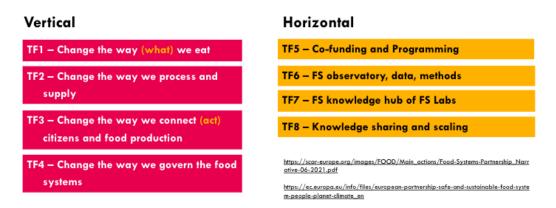# European Mirror Group Notes

Tuesday, May 7 · 9:30 – 12:00 (GMT+1)

About FoodPaths

FOODPathS, a project funded by the European Commission under the coordination of INRAE and in collaboration with 17 organisations and their networks. The project aims to prepare the ground for the future Partnership on Sustainable Food Systems (SFS). Together, these very different actors are trying to:

Vertical

TF1 – Change the way (what) we eat
TF2 – Change the way we process and supply
TF3 – Change the way we connect (act) citizens and food production
TF4 – Change the way we govern the food systems

Horizontal

TF5 – Co-funding and Programming
TF6 – FS observatory, data, methods
TF7 – FS knowledge hub of FS Labs
TF8 – Knowledge sharing and scaling

https://scar-europe.org/images/FOOD/Main_actions/Food-Systems-Partnership_Narrative-06-2021.pdf

https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/european-partnership-safe-and-sustainable-food-system-people-planet-climate_en

This Partnership (with an estimated co-funding by the European Commission of ~175 Mio Euro) will play a crucial role in reaching the sustainability ambitions stated in the Farm-to-Fork Strategy and the Green Deal. It is foreseen to unite many different actors to jointly make the transition towards SFS a success.

More concretely, FOODPathS is building a prototype of how an ideal and effective Partnership on sustainability of the food systems should look like, including the co-design of a Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda – SRIA (which will inspire future calls for funding and innovative projects), funding strategies, a governance model, modus operandi, research-innovation-policy-education topics and case studies, locally and globally.

Mirror Groups

The Mirror Group meetings are a response to recognizing that there are European and Global voices missing from the FoodPathS consortium. Mirror group participants are people who set the tone, guide the way, and say stop, when things are not moving in the right direction. Since participants, just as food systems stakeholders, come from different organizational backgrounds with different agendas, mirror groups also allow us to find out more about how we can work together, how we share ideas, which language we use, and how we can agree on a common basis to advance a systems approach to sustainable food system transformation.

The goal of the meetings is to gain feedback about key components of an ideal partnership, especially on:

- **Elements of a Partnerships** (how to make funding cycles inclusive, foster collaborative public-private partnerships, local to global governance, the role of educational networks and universities, and information and data monitoring)
- **Governance** (Decision-making and power distributions) and **Modus Operandi** (how the partnership executes tasks and manages interaction to achieve project outcomes efficiently; communication, including communication and feedback mechanisms)

Participants were organized into small groups and assigned puzzle pieces representing different facets of the partnership with different associated questions. The overarching objective is to integrate these puzzle pieces, thereby fostering cohesion within the partnership framework. Guided discussions facilitated by a moderator and note-taker were conducted to capture key insights:

Session 1: Elements of a Partnership

Funding Cycle

How can the funding cycle be inclusive from call design to proposal writing to projects selected?

- Facilitating collaboration between diverse actors within the food system is of essence, as there are power imbalances. High administrative burdens make it difficult for organizations with limited resources to apply to funding or coordinate projects, and as such, finding ways to foster collaboration to be able to include their voices and concerns is helpful.

- We need targeted offers and possible incentives based on varying needs of different actors. For example, fiscal benefits for private stakeholders. In general, more private funding is of essence, and it would be interesting to explore how private funds can join schemes for public funding.

- Reporting requirements should be in line with the grant amount, and differences in size/capacity of stakeholder should be taken into consideration (different packages for different actors). User-friendly reporting tools, such as an approachable "help desk", could also ease such processes.

Local to Global

How can governance of the partnership reduce trade-offs and facilitate co-benefits?

- Supporting SFS research and key players through financing;

- Identifying and collaborating with relevant stakeholders (key players and decision makers) at multiple levels (local /national/global). Some examples of key stakeholders that were mentioned: civil society organizations, global social movements, food system᾿s influencers;

- Establishing a clear regulatory framework;

- Interacting with other partnerships/initiatives at different levels;

- Facilitating knowledge exchange between different regions and nations;

- Creating a participatory infrastructure; collaboration with all stakeholders and implementation of a consultation mechanisms;

- Working together with influencers from the food sector;

- Developing a representation at governance level (not only thematic/sectorial area but also geographical scope);

- Cooperating with organizations involved in the implementation of the due diligence law (EU law on CSR and Due Diligence);

Public-Private Partnerships

What is the appropriate way to engage private and public organizations in the future partnership operating at global, EU, and local scales? (Is the future partnership a partnership of partnerships?)

- Going from local public-private partnerships to global ones (PPP on local level collaborate with PPP on EU or even global level)

- Evaluate whether using an inside track or outside track approach when engaging with private partnerships.

Educational Networks

What is the role of universities at the local, regional, national, EU levels to support food system transformation in the partnership?

- We need mapping to see which universities are active in which spaces, and especially take a look at those that have sustainability at their core.

- There is a need to balance between theory and practice.

- Governmental challenge: it is sometimes difficult to understand the roles and responsibilities. More work is needed to understand the governmental competence around food systems.

Observatory

What information and/or data monitoring is needed to remove barriers to transformation and enable levers of change?

- Data and Information that is needed:
  - Data that defines what sustainable food systems is
  - Behavior change, impact to date: have people changed their behaviors?
  - Impact of food systems, positive and negative externalities included
  - Information on data transfer - how much of research/EU project data is used in legislation creation
  - Success initiatives at local level that we need to leverage on
  - Hidden costs within food systems
  - Climate and resources accountability
  - How value within food systems are shared among stakeholders and how to shape this distribution
  - Research on the trade-offs between nutritional value, environmental impact and food safety
  - Long term impact value of collective actions, providing more collaboration
  - Safeguards and warnings in terms of use of natural resources and shared ecosystems services

- Accountability mechanisms are needed allowing citizens to hold states accountable for their decision in food systems transformation. We need to hold everyone accountable including the consumers. To do this, we need to define the objectives, so people can be responsible when objectives are not achieved.

- Indicators must reflect all the requirements of the right to food and the principles based on human rights (beyond technical indicators primarily based on environmental considerations).

- Monitoring processes need to be designed in a way that they align with participatory approaches.

Session 2: Governance and Modus Operandi

ENVISIONED ACHIEVEMENTS

Thought experiment 2029: What are the most significant goals the partnership has achieved?

- Equity, justice. Social and ecological justice objectives in sustainable food systems transformation.

- A common definition. There is no commonly agreed definition of a sustainable food system and the way SFS is addressed at EU level is very controversial: institutions often seem disconnected from reality. Need for institutions to be more grounded in reality and account for all the geopolitical and economic controversies of these days (e.g. farmers protest).

- All stakeholders are included and listened to; invisible/silenced actors are now heard. There are autonomous spaces for voicing the concerns, demands, and proposals of groups most affected by the social, environmental, and economic impacts of unsustainable food systems. Food Policy councils are good examples.

- Accountability and responsibility of use of natural resources by actors of FS, in addition to human rights fulfillment by state actors.

- Coalition building to stop far-right waves.

- Agro-ecological transition with fair prices for producers and consumers.

DECISION-MAKING

What are decision-making processes organized and implemented?

- The decision-making processes are co-designed, inclusive, and result of a participatory process.

- Decisions are taken via a bottom-up approach with the goal of preventing existing power imbalances.

  - We need to be inclusive of those voices that are most marginalized, and actively work on preventing power imbalances that are inherent to multi-stakeholder processes. Transparency on conflicts of interests and creating conditions and safeguards for the participation of the most marginalized groups is of essence.

○ Discussions around a topic could be first held first in small groups of stakeholders, and then brought to the broader/bigger group. This would allow SMEs, civil society to have their say in the decisions to be taken. Additionally, autonomous spaces for voicing the concerns, demands, and proposals of groups most affected by the social, environmental, and economic impacts of unsustainable food systems could also help.

● It is important to acknowledge different rules and timeframes that different stakeholders or/and different issues might require, and which phase of the decision-making process it is relevant and useful to involve the different stakeholders.

● Not all decisions may need a wide stakeholder vote; in such cases, it is important to have processes for accountability, transparency and communication in place.

● It would be beneficial to have some experts engaged in the facilitation of the whole process of collecting inputs from the variety of stakeholders involved: as most of the decisions are taken on the majority rule and are made to gain consensus, inputs collected are susceptible of interpretation. These experts should ensure that all voices are included and accounted for (this requires time and money).

FEEDBACK MECHANISMS

What are mechanisms in place to collect and integrate feedback within the partnership?

● Feedback loops are fundamental to deal with the current geopolitical and economic scenario, which is subject to abrupt and disruptive changes. We need to put in place channels that make easy spontaneous feedback, transparent, shared, and tracked over time.

● Rather than working on general topics, it might also help to collect feedback on specific issues.

● Surveys are a useful tool to collect feedback because they are bottom-up and have the potential to be widespread ,distributed and reach many people. Other tools to consider might be Face-to-face (or hybrid) meeting 1-2 per year.

● Nevertheless, such survey consultations might lack ownership as based on experience - people fill in forms without actual commitment. An alternative is to use focus groups and meetings, where we sit at the table together to jointly work on specific ideas and projects.

COMMUNICATION

What are specific tools and methods for communication?

● It is necessary to think through what effective communication is by looking at who is being addressed. Targeted approaches and communication here is key: who gets what information, and how do we get their feedback?

● Specific tools and methods for communication include: online public meetings and open round tables, webinars and workshops, weekly or monthly newsletters/bulletins, training sessions based on groups, match-making and digital b2b platforms, social media and LinkedIn.

○ For information gathering and sharing, it is useful to have a platform with all information in one place (documents, events calendar).

○ Dedicated events for knowledge exchange and sharing of good practices

to collect and connect players is of relevance.

- ○ Regular meetings between food systems actors and academic/governance bodies should also be planned for.

- Bringing together a diverse group of people, also in-person meetings is of relevance (and choosing interesting meeting places for these encounters): what inspires us moves us forward. In that sense, communicating beyond partners, but also externally to let food systems actors and citizens know what the partnership is doing, through a simple instrument such as a bulletin, is important.

- Terminology used at EU level is often not accessible from people outside the EU bubble (e.g. use of lots of acronyms). Need to simplify the language.

Contacts

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Stay updated about FOODPathS: follow the project on @SciFoodHealth channels on LinkedIn and X using the hashtag #FOODPathS, or join other >2.200 stakeholders that are discussing the food systems sustainability on the Sustainable Food Systems Netwok – SFSN!