

Exploring the producer-consumer nexus for eco-sufficiency

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Owing to the heavy ecological impact of the current food system, the organization of food production and consumption continues to be a focal issue in the sustainability debate. It is rather commonly accepted that the food system needs to change radically in terms of what kind of edibles, as well as how much of them, can be produced and consumed. While the mainstream solutions to the challenge of prevailing unsustainability center around “eco-efficiency measures”, another stream of sustainability scholarship is emphasizing the need to complement these efforts with direct means to lessen the absolute amount of consumption and production, i.e., with “eco-sufficiency measures” (Daly, 1996; Ayres et al., 2011; Bonnedahl and Heikkurinen, 2019).

The food system consists of a web of interlinked actors, practices, and structures, which—according to microeconomic theory—culminates in the relationship between “the consumer” and “the producer”, or “the firm” and “the household”. The dynamics of food production and consumption has also gained widespread attention among sustainability scholars, but so far production and consumption have predominantly been discussed as two separate domains. Previous research lacks a systematic study on the significance of different kinds of interactions between the consumers and producers, that is, integrating the demand and supply perspectives for a more holistic understanding.

The aim of the study is to explore different producer-consumer relationships from the perspective of eco-sufficiency. More particularly, the study asks: How does the idea of eco-sufficiency manifest in the processes of households and business organizations keen on developing food system sustainability? What is the role of producer-consumer relationships for sustainable change? The study aims for a better understanding of these questions through qualitative interviews with actors from the Finnish food sector, representing incumbent food companies, mid-sized and smaller food industry actors as well as alternative food network actors. The data will be analyzed from the perspective of eco-sufficiency, and the initial findings from the first interviews will be presented at the conference.

References

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