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FOCUS GROUPS

INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCES ON SYSTEMS APPROACH
IMPLEMENTATION AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARITY

Federica Striglio, Katherine Flynn, Line Lindner, Niels Halberg, **Sofia F. Reis**

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www.foodpaths.eu

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BACKGROUND

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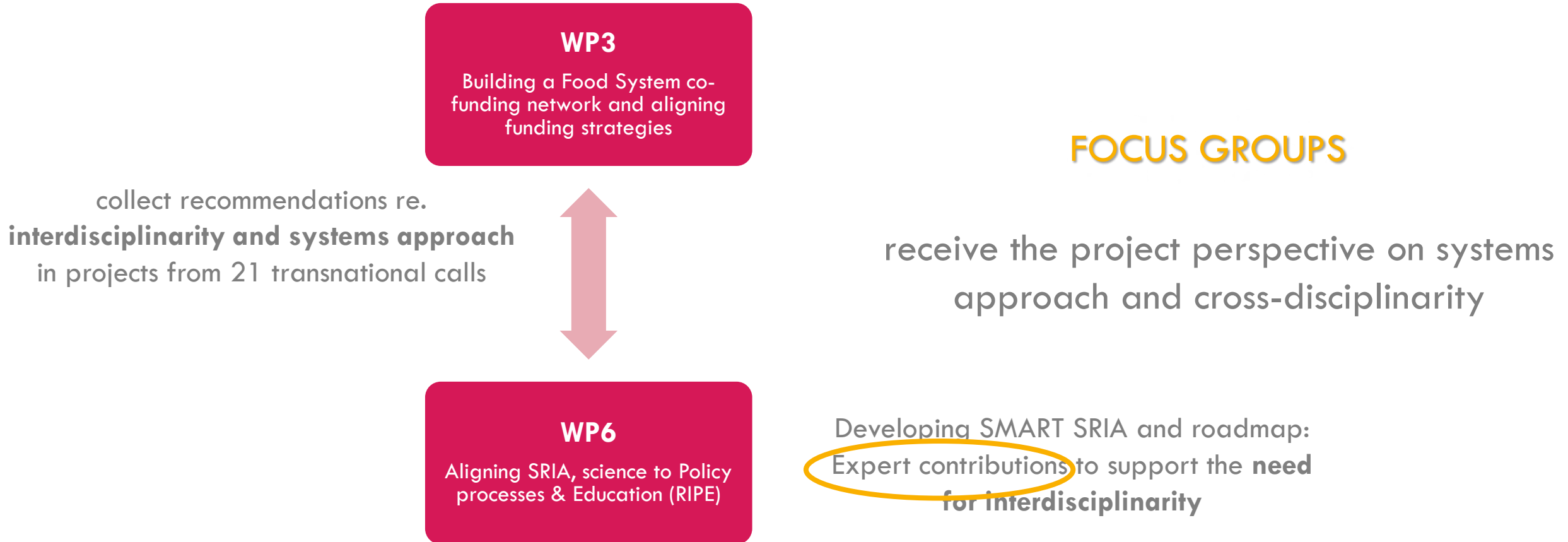
The starting point



- Systematic Analysis of 21 transnational calls representing diversity of programmes to learn from (**SESSION 3 yesterday**)
- Missing links:
 - how to follow-up on whether these calls achieved their goal > design and implementation of impactful R&I projects?
 - How to receive the project perspective to validate findings?
- Collaboration with WP6...



WP6 and WP3 collaboration



Reaching out to projects

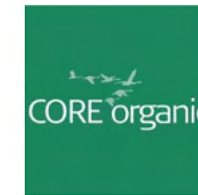


Starting with 21 calls

(based on their systems approach highlight and availability of contacts)



- ERA-NET CORE Organic call 2021
- ERA-NET SUSFOOD-CORE Organic call 2019
- ERA-NET SUSFOOD-FOSC call 2021
- ERA-NET HDHL Knowledge Hub 2019
- ERA-NET Circularity Call (Suscrop+SuSan+ERAGas+ICT Agrifood)
- PS SBEP call 2023
- Foody Zero Sprechi 2021 (Cariplo Foundation)



Reached out to >40 project coordinators

(27 responses; high interest from researchers but also short notice)





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GOAL, EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND PROCESS

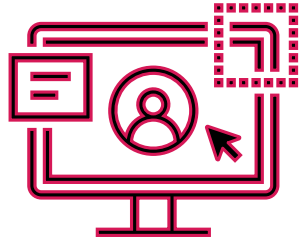


GOAL OF FOCUS GROUPS

What do leaders of food projects think about food research that is interdisciplinary and systems oriented?



EXPECTED OUTCOMES



Collect experiences and lessons learned of how to implement a food systems approach in transnational research



Find ways to work towards high impact sustainable outcomes



Identify challenges and barriers in a food systems approach



Provide possibilities to realize inter- and trans- disciplinarity within a food systems approach



FOCUS GROUP PROCESS



- Online
- 27 Invitations
- 17 Participants
- 3 Sessions
- 2 Hours
- 1 Facilitator
- 1-2 Co-facilitator

PARTICIPANT EXPECTATION

Participants were expected to share their knowledge and opinions on:

- Food systems
- Transformation towards sustainable food systems
- Systems oriented Research and Innovation

Participants were encouraged to talk about:

- Any combination of disciplines which could best promote new knowledge and innovation
- The barriers faced when acting within the food system
- How relevant these topics are towards the overall goal of interdisciplinary and systems-oriented food research



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RECOMENDATIONS BASED ON OUR INTERPRETATION



FOOD SYSTEM APPROACH

Four-step procedure:



1. Depicting a food system from an overall perspective.
2. Defining the relevant sub-system, which the project will address in its activities.
3. Defining the scientific disciplines required to cover the R&I aspects of the sub-system and ensure they work in inter-disciplinary collaboration across the nodes of the sub-system – according to the aim of the call topic.
4. Identifying the stakeholder types relevant for the sub-system and ensure representation in consortium.



FOOD SYSTEM APPROACH

Recommendations:



1. Consider including a facilitator for inter- and trans-disciplinary working nodes (a professional knowledge broker).
2. Consider incentives to involve actors that are not researchers.
3. Consider long term projects.





FOCUS GROUPS

QUESTIONS



SYSTEMS APPROACH - QUESTIONS



What do you do in your project that you consider a food systems approach? Why?



What would you do to improve the systems approach in your project? How do you take important interactions into consideration? Could you describe an ideal systems approach?



Which disciplines do you find most relevant to produce the knowledge required for transforming the food systems?



SYSTEMS APPROACH KEY POINTS



Food systems approach: selected participant quotes

“The balance between sustainable production and consumption, **the link from field to fork:** focusing on institutional catering to develop more sustainable agricultural production practices”

“considering circularity of the system **from soil to blends, to animals and back to soil** with waste valorisation”

“dealing with **resources to production**, thinking about **nutritional content** and **consumer preference**”



SYSTEMS APPROACH KEY POINTS



Methods for improving the systems approach

Include additional stakeholders and actors such as policy makers, consumers, retailers and distributors

Tools able to find expertise to deal with consumers and on legal requirements, especially covering the complexity of legal difference between countries

Understand how data can be translated across the different disciplines and actors and improve communication across disciplines

SYSTEMS APPROACH KEY POINTS



The ideal systems approach

Quantitative modeling to address interactions and trade-offs, participatory approaches

Research projects in which we consider the impact of any potential change on different aspects of sustainability

Where different knowledge can be combined trying to find a real solution

INTER/TRANS - DISCIPLINARITY QUESTIONS



Is there a benefit to working with diverse teams of people? What are the benefits?



Are they worth the challenges of this approach? Do you work more with interdisciplinary teams or with multiple actors?



Which combination of research disciplines/actors would you expect have the highest potential to provide new knowledge and innovation for transforming Food Systems?



What are the barriers/challenges for implementing inter-disciplinary and systems-oriented R&I? How do you overcome these?

INTER/TRANS - DISCIPLINARITY

KEY POINTS

The benefit of inter/trans-disciplinary interaction:

- ensure goals are aligned and facilitate quality research

The same problem is discussed in different perspectives

Ensure that innovation does not generate new constraints

Solve food systems issues

The only way for relevant changes, improvements, impact

INTER/TRANS - DISCIPLINARITY

KEY POINTS

Combination of disciplines

- dependent on the topic

Social, economic, environmental sustainability indicators

Technology developers, innovators, food producers, packaging, marketing

Farmers, cooperatives, associations, academia, research institutions

Governments and policymakers, NGOs, food industry, start-ups, retailers, consumers

INTER/TRANS - DISCIPLINARITY

KEY POINTS

Challenges for implementing inter/trans - disciplinarity

- communication between disciplines and actors

Deciding which are the “unnecessary” disciplines

Working with a diversified team of actors

Different levels of innovation views in companies

Receiving reliable data from companies

INTER/TRANS - DISCIPLINARITY

KEY POINTS

Strategies for effective collaboration:

- intermediaries who can bridge diverse perspectives and languages

Identify disciplines and actors from the beginning

Find a starting point in communication

Disciplines interaction during design implementation

Offer compensation, incentives and more time to the actors

REQUIREMENT - QUESTIONS



Do or did you find it necessary to have a systems approach in your R&I applications in the partnership calls?



Do you find it realistic to require a systems approach in R&I applications in the partnership calls?



REQUIREMENT - KEY POINTS

“A real Food System approach is needed and requires a multi-actor approach”

“What would the solution be if a systems approach isn't taken?”

Difficult interactions between disciplines and actors

“Absolutely necessary”

Difficult to get industry together across the system

“Essential”

Include all possible interactions is over ambitious

Proven impacts require more time for projects

REQUIREMENT - KEY POINTS



Achieving balance in project consortiums:

- Defining fields in system approach.
- Living labs for on-the-ground testing and implementation.

Requiring a conceptual description of the system in project applications:

- Sharpening project ideas and stakeholder identification.
- Facilitating deeper analysis and connection between research ideas and subsystems.

Enhancing R&I applications:

- Requirement for a realistic system approach in project calls.
- Three-step process: depicting the system, identifying subsystems, and aligning with project goals.
- Importance of communication, subcontractors, and post-evaluation for sustained impact.



TAKE HOME MESSAGE

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Thank you for your attention.



sofia.reis@iseki-food.net

niels.halberg@dca.au.dk

lfl@dca.au.dk

katherine@iseki-food.net

federica.striglio@iseki-food.net

