

Sociological Reflections on the Future of Agri-food Systems: Confronting ‘models’

28 January 2015, 10h00 – 13h00

Salle Delage | AgroParisTech | 16 rue Claude Bernard 75005 | Paris

The last quarter of 2014 saw a number of high-level international meetings focused on elaborating important approaches that will contribute to what the future of agriculture will look like. In September, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with support from the French government, organized the largest ever scientific symposium on Agroecology. The purpose was to promote dialogue at the intergovernmental level about the role that agro-ecological techniques can play in achieving sustainable agri-food systems. In October, the Committee on World Food Security approved the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, which provide guidelines on the ways in which investors should operate at national levels. In November, twenty-two years after the first conference, the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) elicited generic commitments from governments, private sector and civil society representatives to “transform food systems towards providing more nutritious diets for all citizens”.

These high-level discussions reflect changes in public debates around agri-food systems that have begun to take into consideration the positions long promoted by grassroots and international social movements. At the same time, the types of commitments and the terms of debate at these high-level discussions also reflect the fact that the politics of agri-food systems are entrenched in these technical discussions. For example, FAO’s Director General José Graziano da Silva stated in his address to the UN Secretary General Climate Summit that: “Climate-smart agriculture and Agro-ecology as well as the Genetic Modified Organisms could be complementary options and need to be considered under a real scientific approach – not in passionate ideological discussions.” As a result, the issues at stake – such as what will be considered sustainable agriculture? Who will be able to access the land to produce food, feed and fuel? Who will have access to nutritious food? (however it may be defined) – are often left to be debated among experts. These expert debates often coalesce in the promotion of specific models that work to both forecast possible futures and to propose policy solutions to achieve them (e.g., the Montpellier Panel proposal for Sustainable Intensification). Across the world we can see a variety of approaches used in proposals of how to shape the future of agri-food systems.

The purpose of this morning dialogue will be to reflect on a number of different experiences from around the world and to ask questions about what is being done to anticipate change and create a cohesive approach to the challenges those changes are likely to present. Different approaches to policy and institutionalization of different ‘models’ provide fertile ground for understanding how change is forecasted and what ‘modeled’ policy and institutional responses mean for the future of agri-food systems.

Allison Loconto, Researcher at INRA, will moderate a discussion between invited researchers who have been looking at these questions in different parts of the world:

- **Eve Fouilleux**, Director of Research at CNRS and CIRAD, will discuss the linkages between agricultural ‘models’ and public policy.
- **Stewart Lockie**, Director of The Cairns Institute and Professor at James Cook University in Australia, will reflect upon the future of Australian Agriculture as part of a report to the Australian Council of Learned Academies.
- **Fanny Pellissier**, Doctoral Researcher at INRA, will explore the implementation of the Plan Ecophyto 2018 in France and its linkages with EU ‘pesticides’ policies.
- **Laura Silva**, Post-doctoral Researcher at IFRIS/INRA, will discuss the metrics used in developing global frameworks for land tenure.