

MSc Thesis Opportunity
How to transform food systems toward sustainability?
A mixed-methods survey analysis

Background. The Department of Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (430c) is looking for a Masters thesis student (m/f/x) to work on the [Bright Spots of Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems](#) project. The Bright Spots project is both transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary in scope and aims to identify positive examples of sustainable food systems in case study regions in Mexico (Oaxaca, Puebla) and India (Kerala, Punjab), as well as national level patterns.

In the first step of the project, we asked experts from organizations across Mexican and Indian food systems what ‘sustainability’ means to them, and what they see as most important when envisioning a more desirable future. However, a key challenge in fostering food system transformation is that organizations do not always agree on what the future should look like. Different visions for the future can lead to lock-in and stall progress toward change that we know is needed. One proposed solution to this problem is to bring diverse perspectives together to find common ground by discussing shared values (i.e., what matters and is a priority to all), which can then foster concerted actions toward a shared goal. This approach to “mobilizing values” through deliberation has been hypothesized to be a deep leverage point for transformative change. The Bright Spots project collected data to test this hypothesis, through an online survey of individual organizations’ visions for the future, which will be contrasted with group visioning workshops we held in each case study region.

Thesis question. This thesis intends to analyze survey data collected from Mexican and Indian organizations to understand the diverse visions that different types of organizations are working towards, as well as the role of shared values as a leverage point for transformative change in food systems. By harmonizing, cleaning, and analyzing combined qualitative and quantitative survey data, the student will 1) develop a typology of organizations’ visions for food system transformation, and 2) compare this typology to the collective visions from the group visioning workshops. Specific research questions and methods can be adapted to the interests of the student, but the project is expected to involve both qualitative (e.g., thematic analysis, content analysis) and quantitative (e.g., archetype analysis, statistics) data analysis.

Thesis requirements: The student should be interested in sustainability topics in global agriculture and food systems as well as in interdisciplinary and mixed-methods analytical approaches. The student is expected to carry out both qualitative (e.g., in MAXQDA) as well as quantitative data analysis (e.g., using R software) and should thus feel comfortable with or be interested in learning how to use these software tools, in addition to Microsoft Excel. Knowledge of the Mexico and/or India context would be an asset but is not required.

How to apply. Please send a short letter of motivation in English (~1 page), curriculum vitae (CV) or resume, and your MSc transcripts to Dr. Anne Elise Stratton at ae.stratton@uni-hohenheim.de

Further reading:

- Oberlack, C., Sietz, D., Bonanomi, E. B., De Bremond, A., Dell'Angelo, J., Eisenack, K., ... & Villamayor-Tomas, S. (2019). Archetype analysis in sustainability research. *Ecology and Society*, 24(2). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26796959>
- Chan, K. M., Boyd, D. R., Gould, R. K., Jetzkowitz, J., Liu, J., Muraca, B., ... & Brondízio, E. S. (2020). Levers and leverage points for pathways to sustainability. *People and Nature*, 2(3), 693-717. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10124>
- Horcea-Milcu, A. I., Koessler, A. K., Martin, A., Rode, J., & Soares, T. M. (2023). Modes of mobilizing values for sustainability transformation. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 64, 101357. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101357>
- Anderson, M (2019). The importance of vision in food system transformation. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 9(Suppl. 1), 55–60. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2019.09A.001>

More about the department: <https://sustainability.uni-hohenheim.de>