

Power and politics in food systems: a quick scan

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Co-creators: Boelie Elzen, Jonne Bosselaar, Herman Brouwer, Ellen Bulten, Marloes Kraan, Bart de Steenhuijsen Pipers, Nina de Roo, Adriaan Vernooij (WUR)



Outline

- A bit of background
- Conceptual notions on power in food systems
- The (draft) power scan
 - Purpose
 - Intended users
 - Steps and illustrations
- Questions & feedback

Why power in food systems?

To answer global protests, tackle new inequalities.

Relevant to climate talks and [#humanrightsday](#) too.

[#inequalities](#) [#peoplepower](#) [#nobusinessasusual](#) [#agoodtimeforchange](#)
[#socialjustice](#) [#inclusion](#) [#climatejustice](#) [#humanrights](#) [#equity](#)



To answer global protests, tackle new inequalities: 2019 Human Development Report | UNDP

Background

- WUR : Knowledge Base Programme Food Security and Valuing Water (taking a food systems approach)
 - Limited attention for power and politics
- WUR/KIT : Ex-ante Food Systems Decision Support tool for policy makers
 - Limited commitment to include PEA and gender
- In September 2019 a small interdisciplinary project team was established
- Develop an approach to make visible how power and politics dynamics play a role in food systems transitions and what could be done to address (unequal) power relations to achieve sustainability outcomes (People, Planet, Profit)

Power lens

In attempting to overcome shortcomings of:

- ✓ Dominant approaches (production paradigm, food systems approach) which ignore agency of actors
- ✓ Classical power theory which has a static view on power (haves and have nots)

We define power as

- The (in)capacity of actors to mobilise resources and institutions to achieve a certain goal (Avelino, 2017)
 - Power and institutions are dynamic, not static
 - Agency of actors to reinforce, innovate or transform power relations (Avelino, 2017)
 - Power to, power with, power over (Partsch, 2017)
 - Visible, hidden, invisible and unconscious faces of power (Gaventa, 2006, Grin, 2010)

The power scan

- Purpose:
 - To identify power structures and actors who must be engaged to achieve a system transition to more sustainable food systems outcomes (in terms of people, planet and profit)? (two ways of use)
- Use as:
 - As **ex-ante** analysis of the dimensions of power and politics in future transitions
 - As **ex-post** analysis to explain why certain dimensions of power and politics happened in a given transition, and what were their effects

Intended users and unit of analysis

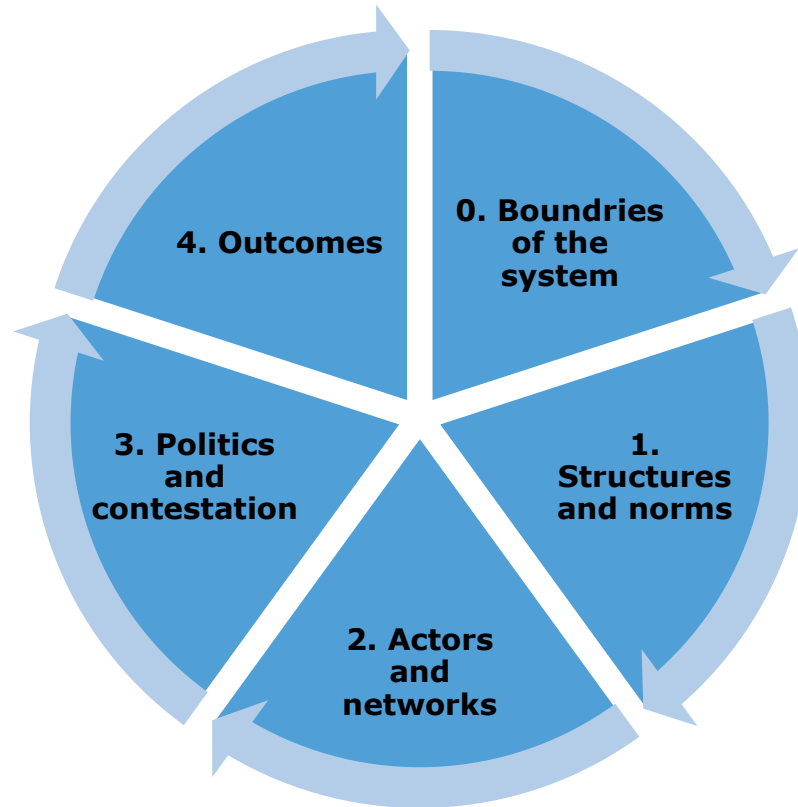
■ Intended users

- Ex-ante: policy makers, impact investors, or practitioners who are at the start of a new programme, policy process, or intervention and want to have a clear idea of underlying power dimensions and how to possibly address these in an intervention.
- Ex-post: researchers or evaluators who are interested to understand the role of power and politics in food systems transitions and what mechanisms contribute to change in power relations

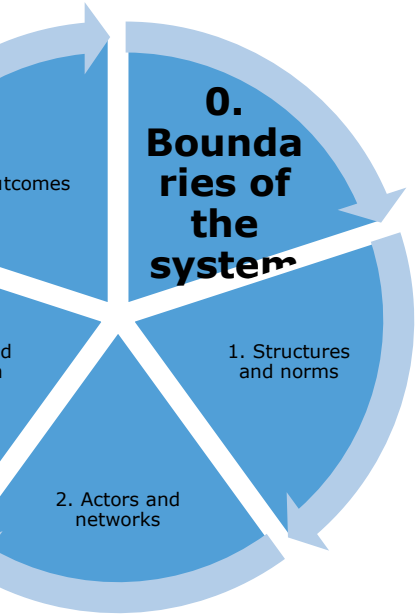
■ Unit of analysis

- A past or future food system transition (e.g. modernisation in agriculture in country x, sector transformation in region y, radical shift in production and consumption patterns in sub-region z)

Overview of the power scan

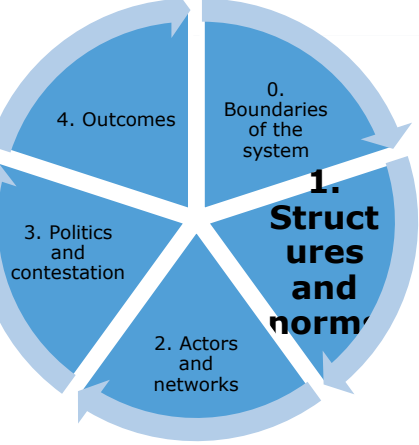


Boundaries of the system



First we further define the system and its boundaries:

- What is the transition that is intended/ expected/ taken place? (ex-ante or ex-post?)
- What is the unit of analysis? On which level is the transition playing out?
- The role, perceptions and potential biases of the person/actor conducting the power scan in relation to power and change?
- What are the discourses related to the transition?
- What is the timeframe / timing of the transition?

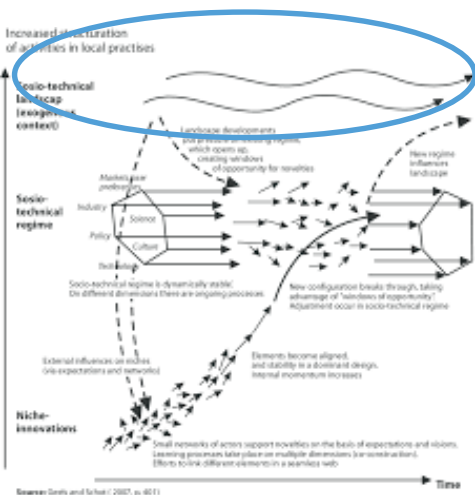


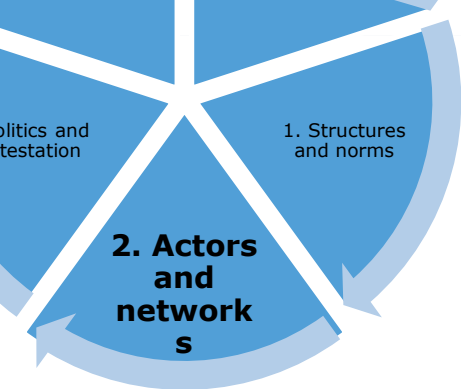
Structures and norms

- Structures, institutions, and path-dependencies in the current situation may hamper or facilitate (change in) power relations
- Issues such as (structural) inequalities, gender, cultural beliefs, socio-cultural identities and perceptions of power will be identified

Questions:

- How is power defined within the system by different actors?
- How do socio-cultural identities influence power dynamics?
- How are dominant ideas around power and norms reinforced?
- What are socio-cultural entry points for the desired transition and for changing power relations?



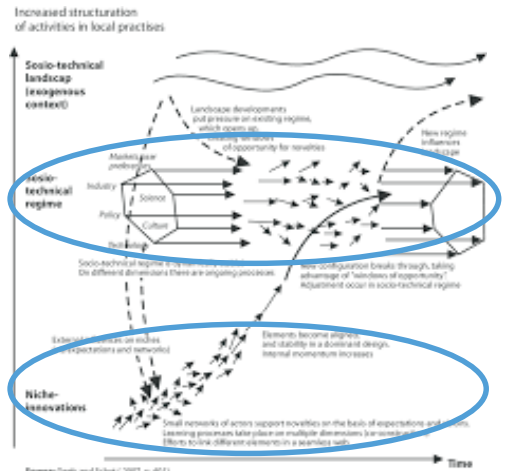


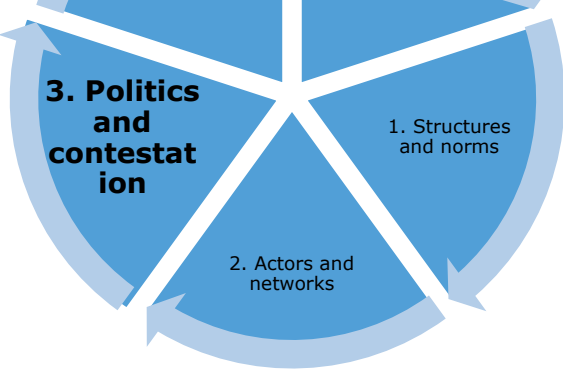
Actors and networks

- Topics: mobilising resources, institutions and strategies, drivers and motivations of actors, entry-points for change.

Exemplary questions:

- What are the goals, motivations of each actor related to the transition?
- What resources, institutions and strategies are being mobilised (to reinforce, innovate, transform)?
- How do actors relate to each other; what kind of power do they use?
- How do different actors legitimise their power in relation to others?
- Which actors and visions are excluded in the system?



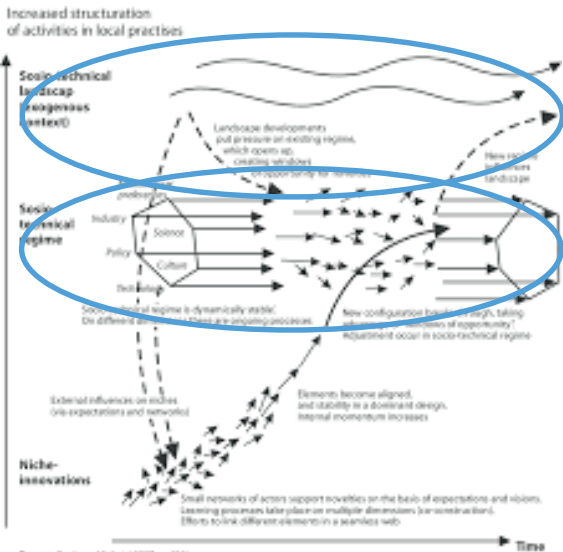


Politics and contestation

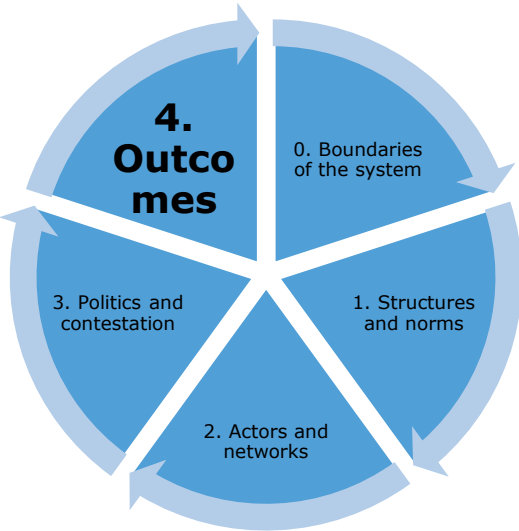
- Analysis of how do actors try to increase their influence on (elements of) food systems by looking at strategies and resources used for contestation

Exemplary questions:

- (how) are power dynamics legitimised in political context?
- How are actors represented in the food system? (Are certain actors under-represented or not represented at all?)
- How are actors accountable to others?
- How do actors deal with conflict?



Outcomes



- Synthesize the insights from the three other elements (structures, actors and politics)
- Depending on whether the analysis is ex-ante or ex-post,
 - identify barriers and entry-points for the desired transition and opportunities to engage key actors in the process of transition (ex-ante)
 - or try to explain the outcomes of the transition by looking at the dimension of power and politics (ex-post)

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Questions & feedback?

- For more information please contact
- Nina.deroo@wur.nl
- Boelie.elzen@wur.nl
- Jonne.bosselaar@wur.nl