

UiO : **Centre for Development and the Environment**
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Can Power Analysis Change the World?

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Power and food equity

- Equality is about final distribution.
- Equity is about how that distribution is undertaken, so is focused on process.
- Unequal outcomes are – largely - a result of unjust processes.

The Social Determinants of Health

- “*[t]his unequal distribution ... is not in any sense a natural phenomenon but is the result of a combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements and bad politics.*”
- (Marmot et al 2008, p.1661)



«The political origins of health inequity: prospects for change»

- Ottersen et. al. Lancet 2014.
- “... in the contemporary global governance landscape, power asymmetries between actors with conflicting interests shape political determinants of health.”

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food)

“.... a mission to promote
transition to sustainable food
systems around the world.”

IPES-food: knowledge for change

“(T)he panel has provided authoritative analysis on what reforms are required to build sustainable food systems, and *how* these changes might occur *in a context of major power imbalances.*”

(Overview of activities and achievements 2015-2017).

27 members

- Olivier de Schutter
- Olivia Yambi,
- Bina Agarwal,
- Frison, Emile,
- Hans Herren,
- Melissa Leach,
- Pat Mooney
- Raj Patel
-

“10. All reports apply a holistic food systems and ‘political economy’ lens,.... Reports are policy-relevant but not policy prescriptive”.

(Report protocol 2018)

What we (IPES-food) have been doing so far:

- Setting out the issues
- Understanding causal links between food and health
- Demonstrating the concentration of power of big food
- and more

EU Food Policy

- Following 5 policy labs in Brussels, 4 local labs around Europe, and the [EU Food and Farming Forum](#) (EU3F) in May 2018, the process culminated in the publication of IPES-Food's final report '[Towards a Common Food Policy for the EU](#)' (February 2019).

West Africa

- IPES-Food conducted interviews with farmers, researchers, CSOs and donors, and co-organized a multi-stakeholder meeting with ROPPA in Dakar (April 2018) where a new collaborative platform, the Alliance for Agroecology in West Africa ('3AO'), was born.

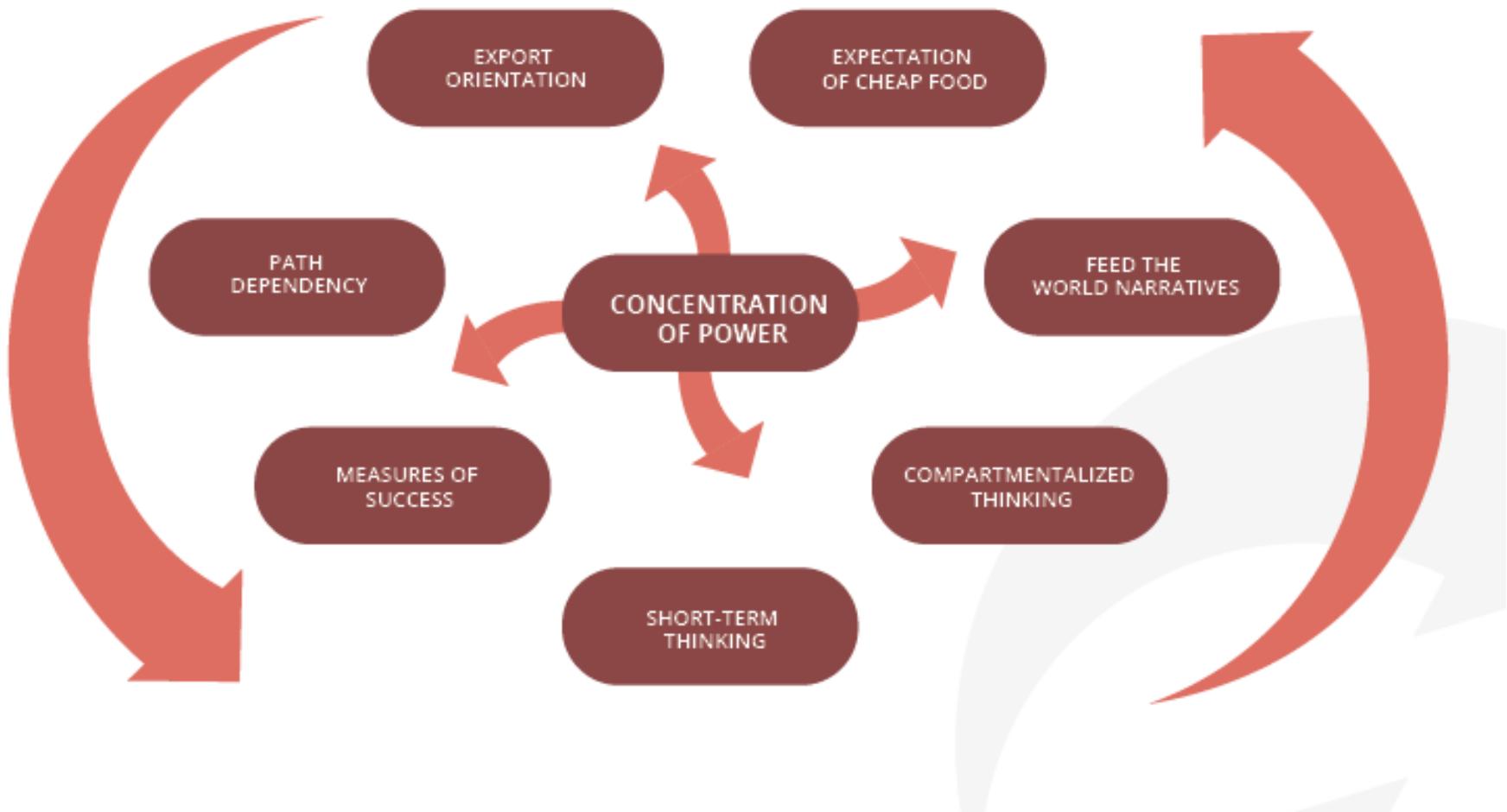
Five reports so far

- What do they say about power?

THEMATIC REPORT 1 (2016)

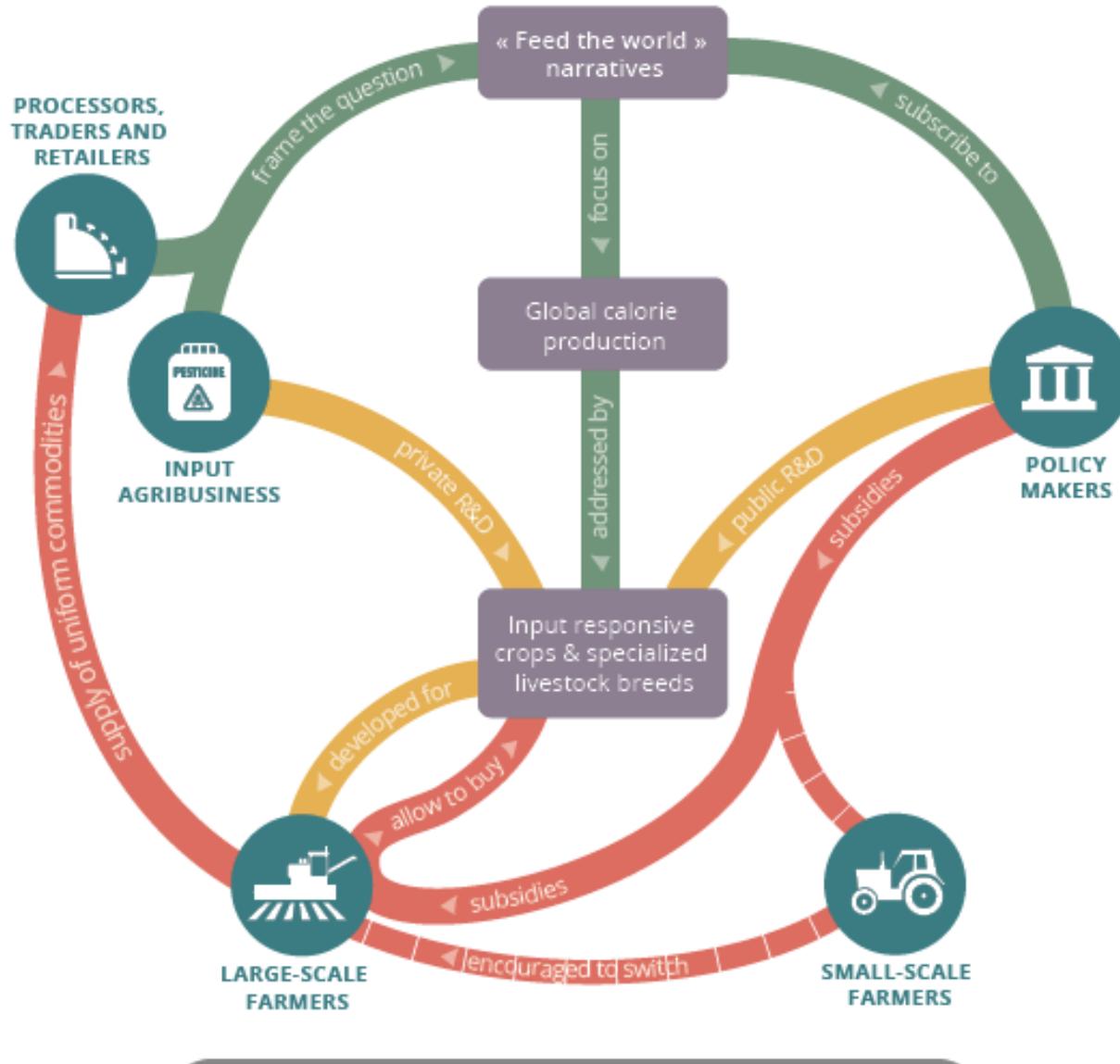
- *From Uniformity to Diversity: A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems'.*

FIGURE 12 - THE EIGHT KEY LOCK-INS OF INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE



- Here, the power analysis is focused largely on business and the productionist narrative (discursive power)
- ... also in subsequent reports.

FIGURE 13 - POWER IMBALANCES IN FOOD SYSTEMS: FRAMING THE QUESTIONS AND PROVIDING THE SOLUTIONS



This diagram does specify several different actors:

- processors, traders and retailers;
- policy-makers;
- input agribusiness;
- large-scale farmers;
- small-scale farmers

- and it includes some sources of power other than discursive
- e.g. subsidies to farmers,
- But the text that follows refers primarily to discursive power (including the power to influence policy);
- and the focus is almost entirely on agribusiness.

- “... input agribusinesses are able to take centre-stage in **framing the problems** (all emphases in the original) (e.g. underlining the global productivity challenge) **and providing the solutions** (e.g. new ranges of input-responsive crops and breeds), thus securing demand for their products, while ensuring that power and influence continue to flow their way. “

THEMATIC REPORT 2 (2017a)

- *Unravelling the Food–Health Nexus:
Addressing practices, political economy, and
power relations to build healthier food
systems.*

The bulk of this report is concerned with tracing causal links to show what problems arise and how these can be traced back to industrial agriculture.

These so-called ‘channels of impact’ are:

- Occupational hazards:
- Environmental contamination:
- Contaminated, unsafe and altered foods:
- Unhealthy dietary patterns:
- Food insecurity:

- After analysing the negative effects of industrial agriculture, the report then turns to the issue of power; again focusing especially on the narrative.
- “Power - to achieve visibility, to frame narratives, to set the terms of debate, and to influence policy - is at the heart of this nexus”

The power of the productionist – “feed the world” - narrative

THEMATIC REPORT 3 (2017b):

- *Too big to feed: Exploring the impacts of mega-mergers, consolidation and concentration of power in the agri-food sector*

- Well-documented evidence of the huge degree of market concentration across the whole of agribusiness.

Dominance of a few companies

- 7 control almost 100% of fertiliser sales
- 5 share 68% of agrochemicals market
- 3 control 50% of commercial seed market
- 4 control up to 90% of global grain trade
- etc

- Again, the dominant narrative is in focus:
- “Knowledge and power are deeply interconnected. ... Indeed, as consolidation intensifies, data-driven and high-tech solutions are being promoted as the only pathways to sustainability, generating the same types of solutions at the expense of alternatives.”

CASE STUDIES 1 (2017c):

- *What makes urban food policy happen?
Insights from five case studies.*
- Concerned specifically with issues of food governance, at the level of the city.

- Belo Horizonte, Brazil
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Toronto (Golden Horseshoe), Canada
- Detroit, USA

- Shows how it has been possible to overcome the forces either of inertia or of actual resistance by self-interested parties.
- The stories are very varied, but in several cases change is attributed largely to the actions of a single person or small group.
- Political commitment, backed by funding, is crucial

CASE STUDIES 2 (2018):

- *Breaking away from industrial food and farming systems - Seven case studies of agroecological transition “*

- A variety of scales (single farmer, community level, regional and national)
- and locations (Europe, North America, Central America, Africa, Asia)

- a range of entry points (income diversification, climate adaptation, rural development),
- with different actors taking the lead (international NGOs, producer organizations, research bodies, governments)."

- Demonstrating the wide range of different pathways to agroecology.

What can one conclude about the
political economy approach of IPES-food?

Political economy

- Approaches range across a spectrum from ‘realist’ to ‘constructivist’.
- The former – emphasising the role of actors and agency - has some affinity with rational choice, individual-based approaches;
- The latter is concerned more with structures.

- I suggest, based on the reports to date, that the IPES-food approach is located firmly in the middle of the theoretical spectrum.
- Powerful actors, and especially big business, are accorded a central role, suggesting a realist approach.
- But emphasis is placed on the power of discourse – which is associated with constructivism.

- My own preferred approach (e.g. Bøås and McNeill 2003) is also eclectic, drawing in part on neo-Gramscian writers such as Robert Cox (1981).
- It is somewhat similar to that of John Gaventa, although he does not include ‘forms of power’ in his famous ‘power cube’. (Gaventa 2006)

How might one develop this further?

An eclectic (realist-constructivist) approach to political economy analysis

Actors

Interests

Sources of power

Levels/spaces

Interests

Actors/networks

- States
- International organisations
- Private firms
- Farmers
- NGOs
- Foundations
- Researchers
- Media
- Epistemic communities
- ...

Sources of power

Levels/spaces

Actors

Interests/identity

- Profit
- Security
- Wellbeing
- Fame
- ...

Sources of power

Levels/spaces

Actors

Interests

Levels/spaces

Sources of power - and resistance

- Economic resources
- Legal mandate
- Expertise
- Discursive power
- Moral authority
- ...

Actors

Interests

Sources of power

Levels/spaces

Global

National

Local

- Whether this is feasible remains to be seen!