



In the spirit of collaboration: Transforming Baltic diets

Participatory multi-stakeholder processes are an indispensable part of food system transformation. However, bringing diverse groups of people together is no easy task. During the "Towards healthy and sustainable food systems in the Baltic region" workshop held in Riga from 27 February to 1 March 2019, a group of determined and energetic stakeholders took stock of various perspectives and initiatives using a systems approach.

The workshop included a broad array of movers and shakers representing ministries of health, food/agriculture, environment and education; civil society; research organizations; intergovernmental organisations; Nordic embassies; and funding agencies. The workshop was the first time that the Nordic Council of Ministers Secretariat and Baltic offices, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Riga Stradins University had ever joined forces to discuss healthy and sustainable diets.

Prioritized areas for action

By the end of the workshop, the group agreed to prioritize the following three topics:

- Defining and developing criteria for sustainable and healthy Baltic diets in order to generate a tangible future roadmap
- Coordinating existing data across the region that reflects the current state of the Baltic food system and its components and harvesting useful data and analyses that can help policy-makers to develop better and more targeted solutions
- Creating an independent Baltic future food "lab" to put new and innovative ideas to the test, and to scale up what already works in order to create more buy-in within the region



Movers and shakers of the "Towards Healthy and Sustainable Baltic Food Systems" workshop in Riga. *Photo: Riga Stradins University*

The participatory system mapping process

This brief describes the different methods that were used during the workshop to draw out some of the most significant issues influencing the Baltic food system as well as the areas where there is agency to influence change. The various methods were:

1. Multi-level perspective - how does change happen on different levels?
2. Voting with your feet - where are the most significant leverage points? Where does the group have agency?
3. Iceberg model - why have we not yet achieved sustainable and healthy diets?

Future steps towards shifting from dialogue to actionable initiatives will be outlined at the end of the document.

Health and sustainability are often treated as separate, non-converging issues. By using a systems approach, it is possible to create new mindsets and change paradigms about how to successfully merge these topics.

Why a systems approach to sustainable and healthy Baltic diets?

Health and sustainability are often treated as separate, non-converging issues. By using a systems approach, it is possible to create new mindsets and change paradigms about how to successfully merge these topics. This approach also helps to facilitate a shift towards a complex system, while avoiding unintended consequences.

Currently, there is little collective knowledge about the Baltic food system and the tremendous change experienced over past 30 years. The workshop, therefore, served as a pilot to learn about what constitutes the Baltic food system from today's perspective.

A systems approach is important because it:

- encompasses the big picture
- highlights the broader context that issues of concern are embedded in
- considers interactions among multiple levels
- recognizes the dynamic shifts that occur over time
- encourages cross-disciplinary collaboration
- exposes workshop participants to other points of view
- builds ownership in the outcomes of the workshop

Method #1: Multi-level perspectives

During the workshop, we used the Multi-level Perspectives framework to reflect what was happening in the Baltic Food system. We first asked what the barriers and opportunities were to deliver a sustainable food system (combining good nutrition and environmental outcomes). We then used the framework to explore what was happening in more detail. Groups brainstormed the trends that are shaping the landscape; how the day to day food system is working in terms of infrastructure, policy, research and information and consumers; and what innovations participants are seeing that are good examples of a sustainable food system.

Several themes emerged such as use of research and data in nutrition policy, opportunities in schools and from a changing food culture and the dominance of large industry players (See Appendix A). These are captured on the second map in purple. The barriers and opportunities were then added to the map, often mapping to themes. This was then translated into areas for action for the combined group. These opportunities were reflected in the final map and prioritized according to level of change they could deliver (impact) and the ability of the group to act on them (agency).

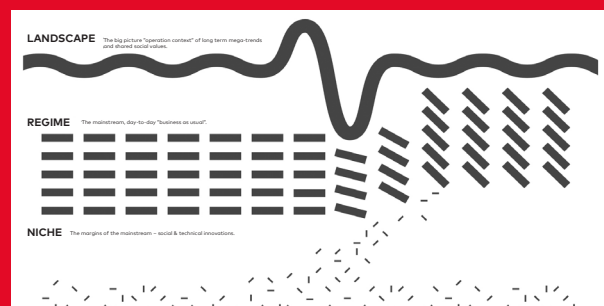
Why is a multi-level perspective important?

When making a change, the first thing that you need to do is to understand the system and how it works. One useful overarching framework to do this is called the 'multi-level perspective' (MLP). The MLP describes a system as being made up of three levels – landscape, regime and niche.

On a day-to-day basis, we operate within the regime – which includes the rules and regulations, technology, culture and economics that make our food (or any other) system work. These generally change and adjust incrementally over time within the boundaries of the existing system.

The regime is shaped by the landscape – the operating context that informs how things work in the regime. This includes long-term megatrends, physical limits and established cultural norms. It is also influenced by what is happening outside and on the fringes of the system – the niche. This is where new innovations often emerge.

Change happens when pressures from the landscape (such as political transformations or rapid changes in societal expectations) and/or the development of strong alternative solutions in the niche combine to disrupt business as usual. If supported by people willing and able to push things further, these isolated instances of pioneering practice can tip into mainstream practice, which eventually creates a sustainable 'new normal'.



Method #2: Voting with your feet

On Day 2, each of the MLP (multi-level perspective) diagrams were consolidated into one large common MLP. The group was split into two with one side of the room responsible for challenges and the other responsible for opportunities. In pairs, the participants chose themes/key words from the challenge and opportunity brainstorm from Day 1. A theme was placed on a sticky note and then stuck to an appropriate area of the MLP.

Participants were then asked to vote on the areas:

- 1) where they had agency and;
- 2) where there was a significant leverage point.

These groupings helped to determine future areas of prioritized action.

Method #3: Iceberg Model

Having reviewed and reprioritised the areas for future action, the group then explored the ones with most promise in more detail, using the iceberg model. The prioritised areas – the need for Baltic guidelines, the need for a combined research resource that was accessible to policy makers and the need to scale up sustainable innovation – were reworked into problem statements. These issues were then explored in depth, asking why they were not happening and aiming to get to the root causes of the problem.

At the heart of each of the iceberg mapping exercise emerged a common underlying problem: sustainability is not being prioritised by policy makers. This problem statement provided the focal point for reorienting and amalgamating the three 'iceberg' maps into a final map. The key barriers from across the maps were consolidated as part of this process, a number of which overlapped e.g. lack of analysis to support decision-making. The dynamics and patterns identified as part of the iceberg process were then drawn together to highlight the interactions between barriers, key feedback loops and the potential areas for intervention that were identified during the workshop (See Appendix B).

Events: What is happening?

Patterns/trends: What trends have there been over time?

Underlying structures: What has influenced the patterns?
What are the relationships between the parts?

Mental models: What assumptions beliefs and values do people hold about the system that keep the system in place?



Moving forward: the next steps towards facilitating a transition to healthy and sustainable Baltic diets

This workshop was successful in brokering new connections and initiating the beginnings of a common language between people across policy and research that otherwise don't interact. The workshop also provided exposure to systems thinking that can be used to inform current and future work. In order to ensure that the momentum generated during the workshop is not lost, the following actions are suggested:

- Form working groups to address one of the areas of action or the coordination between the three areas of action
- Disclose and review relevant funding opportunities for collective projects
- Establish a quarterly update between the group members and newcomers
- Develop case studies from the Baltic food systems that capture both the data and stories behind them

The following methods could be utilised to facilitate the above actions:

- A data mapping, quality audit and gap analysis of existing national and regional data sources related to food consumption, purchasing, production, agriculture spanning different parts of the food supply chain. This process would also be

supplemented by key stakeholder interviews that we would use to identify and build relationships with key stakeholders needed to understand the entire food system

- A group model building exercise can facilitate a common understand of the food system by key stakeholders and model the potential impacts of food system innovations to support policy maker decisions. This would include a set of workshops and qualitative interviews to articulate the problem from multiple perspectives, formulating dynamic hypotheses about how the system's behaviour is changing over time, formulating a systems dynamics model for testing scenarios of change and informing potential strategies for action and evaluation

These takeaways have been co-produced by

- *Afton Halloran, Nordic Food Policy Lab, Nordic Council of Ministers*
- *Marie Persson, Nordic Food Policy Lab, Nordic Council of Ministers*
- *Kremlin Wickramasinghe, World Health Organization*
- *Roberta Iley, Forum for the Future*
- *Maija Kale, Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Latvia*
- *Tarra Penney (University of Cambridge).*

ABOUT THE COLLABORATION

The "Towards healthy and sustainable food systems in the Baltic region" workshop held in Riga from 27 February to 1 March 2019 was co-organized by the Nordic Food Policy Lab, the Nordic Council of Ministers Baltic Offices, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and Riga Stradins University.

ABOUT NORDIC FOOD POLICY LAB

Nordic Food Policy Lab is one of six flagship projects under the Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges Initiative by the five prime ministers of the Nordic countries.
www.norden.org/foodpolicylab

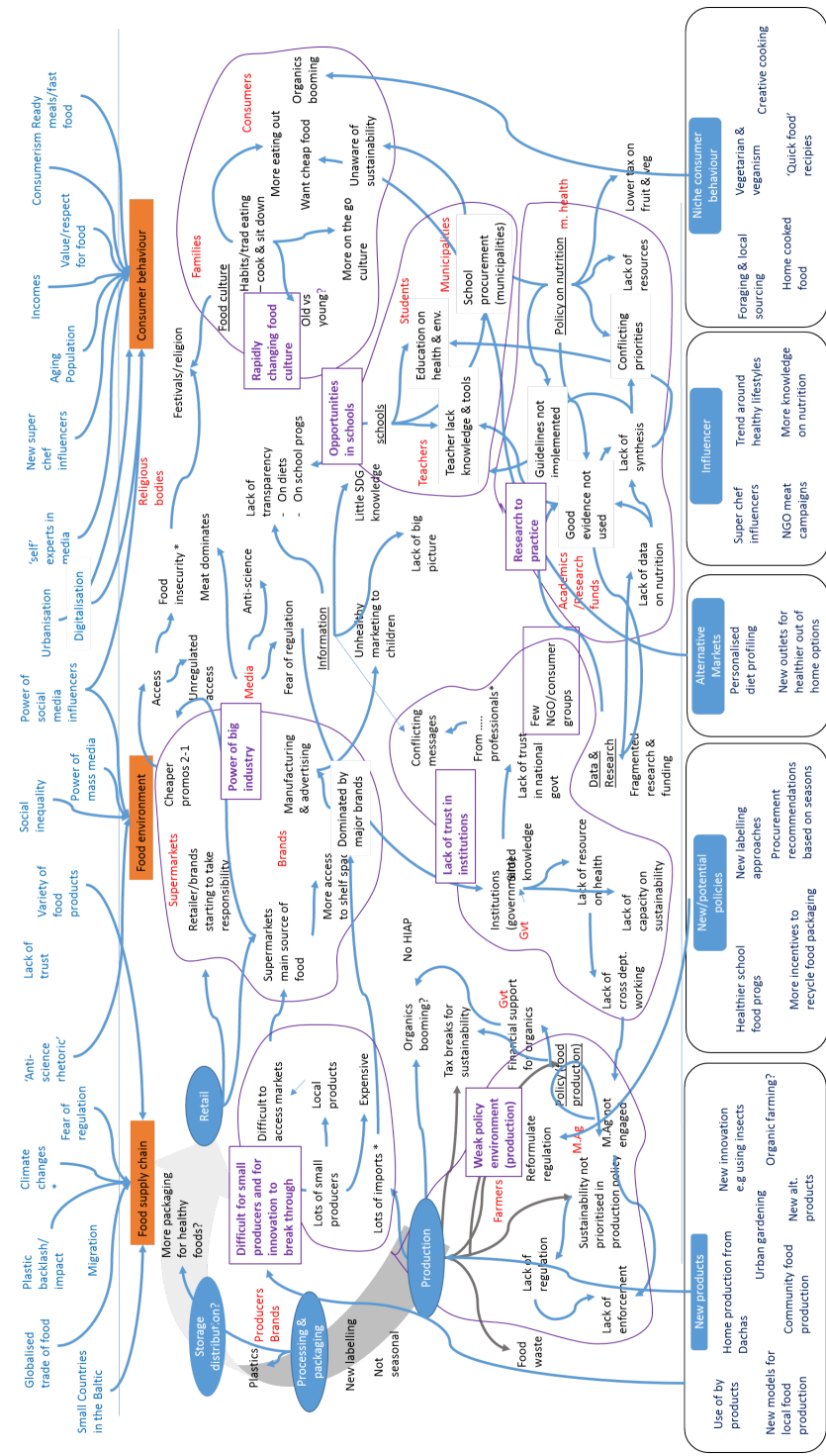
Follow us on TWITTER: @nordicfoodpol

**#nordicsolutions
to global challenges**

Appendix A

A Multi-level perspective of the Baltic food system

Co-produced by the workshop participants



Note 1: this map reflects the expertise of the people in the room and is a social process to deepen understand of what is happened and what needs to change.

Note 2: the map combines different sorts of things in the system – some are elements, and some are variables. It reflects the inter-relationships between these different things and the actors involved but is not a formal causal loop diagram.

Note 3: the group looked across the Countries in the Baltic region to get a general snapshot, whilst acknowledging that there are differences between countries.

Appendix B

The interactions between barriers, key feedback loops and the potential areas for intervention

Co-produced by the workshop participants

