

# At the heart of controversies

## Hybrid forums as an experimental multi-actor tool to enhance sustainable practices in localized agro-food systems

Hybrid forums as an experimental multi-actor tool

Virginie Amilien

*Consumption Research Norway SIFO, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway*

Barbara Tocco

*Newcastle University Business School, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and*

Paal Strandbakken

*Consumption Research Norway SIFO, Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway*

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to discuss and evaluate the role of hybrid forums as tools to address specific controversies related to sustainable practices in localized agro-food systems (LAFS).

**Design/methodology/approach** – In contrast with other conventional public engagement methods, such as citizen juries, consensus conferences, focus groups or deliberative processes, hybrid forums entail a more dynamic and democratic mechanism to reflect and act together, with the aim of constructing a common project around a defined challenge (Callon *et al.*, 2001, 2009). They can offer an enriching and challenging methodological approach in the context of LAFS, especially in the discussion of controversial issues around food chain sustainability. The authors present here a new generation of hybrid forums: HF 2.0.

**Findings** – HF 2.0. represent both a methodological tool and a real experience of dialogic democracy, two interactive aspects which are closely interlinked and rest upon each other. The authors argue that the attractiveness of HF 2.0. is notable in at least two ways: first, they provide a solid democratic and reflective mechanism to stimulate effective dialogue and knowledge-exchange among different stakeholders; second, they contribute as an important methodological evidence-based tool, which can be used as a launching pad for shaping local action groups and community partnerships' strategies aimed at fostering local development.

**Originality/value** – This paper attempts to provide a methodological discussion over the experimental use of HF 2.0. in the context of LAFS and assesses their effectiveness in the co-construction of knowledge. The authors explore their pragmatic validity in addressing controversies over local and sustainable seafood via empirical applications in Norway and the UK.

**Keywords** Local development, Food sustainability, Hybrid forum, Multi-actor approach, Localized agro-food systems, Democratic dialogue

**Paper type** Research paper

Experts can argue over whether organics are slightly or substantially less productive, but they are clearly better for soil and the environment. Marion Nestle Feb 21, 2012 (Nestle, 2012)

### 1. Introduction

Disputes among experts and consumer uncertainties are common pillars of local and organic food discussions, as emphasized by the above quotation from the renowned nutritionist Marion Nestle. To a large extent, research on Localized Agro-Food Systems (LAFS)[1] offers an extensive debate field, whereby specific economic, social and environmental aspects of

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sustainability, and their trade-offs, are typically challenged by experts and relevant actors – i.e., from a general perspective (Sanz-Cañada, 2016), in relation to the local vs global sustainability of food (Brunori *et al.*, 2016), or the environmental land use and watersheds management (Kim and Arnhold, 2018). LAFS are therefore complex networks of actants[2] (Latour, 2005) which interact in their localized socio-technical and cultural realities. While LAFS have been a central part of the European Common Agricultural Policy in the last 30 years, several studies emphasize the importance of controversies which emerge in the process of definition of the food products (Sylvander, 1995; Barham and Sylvander, 2011; Réviron and Chappuis, 2011; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Mariani, 2018; Hegnes, 2012). In those complex networks of actants where scientific experts, policy makers, producers, consumers, intervene and interact with each other, dialogic communication is essential. Adjustment and cultural adaptation work also play a central role in the dynamic construction of LAFS (Mariani, 2018; Hegnes, 2012).

However, discussions with local actants and consumers are hardly taken into consideration. This is despite the consensus on the necessity of open dialogues and the importance of mobilizing local expertise to identify best practices. The urgency to support, and emphasize, sustainable practices in LAFS creates a growing need for tools that promote effective dialogue and consider critical points and governance limitations. In the context of this special issue, this paper explores the use of a dialogic methodology to shed light on the dynamic and multiple sources of controversies for LAFS and sustainable practices, in order to stimulate local, and European, development strategies in that field.

In the collaborative framework of the EU H2020 Strength2Food (S2F) project[3] we recognized the novel dialogic democracy perspectives of Callon *et al.* (2001, 2009), in “Acting in an uncertain world,” a book whereby “hybrid forums” were originally proposed as spaces to address specific controversies. This provided us with an opportunity to put into practice an experimental public engagement method, which we will refer to as Hybrid Forum 2.0. (HF 2.0.). This innovative method aimed to serve as evidence base to inform local/European stakeholders on food sustainability and best practices. First introduced by Callon *et al.* (2001), as a democratic and dynamic way to think and act together, hybrid forums can be described as public discussion spaces, with the aim of constructing a common project around a defined challenge, or “controversy.” Both etymologically and in common language, a controversy is a dispute which includes a confrontation. According to the constructivist approach within social sciences, controversies are emerging when scientific uncertainties meet social practices (such as everyday life, the food market or a new technological device), and can be defined as a process, or the process through which (scientific) knowledge is created[4]. The objective of hybrid forums is to propose a dialogue, create awareness, facilitate collective exploration and learning, cooperation and integration of a plurality of points of view – on a given controversy. In other words, hybrid forums aim at “democratizing democracy” (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 11) by using effective collective discussion as an active tool to develop a fair and better democratic world.

The aim of this paper is thus twofold and encompasses both methodological and empirical perspectives. It provides a methodological discussion over the use of hybrid forums in the context of LAFS. This includes an evaluation and comparison from other public engagement methods more commonly used. From a more pragmatic perspective, we discuss their effectiveness and limitations in the co-construction of knowledge based on experimental applications from Norway and the UK, in addressing controversies on local and sustainable seafood. Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following questions:

*RQ1.* What is the attractiveness of HF 2.0. as public engagement methods, compared to other deliberative processes?

RQ2. How can we adopt and benefit from HF 2.0. in a real context?

RQ3. What lessons can we learn to enhance more sustainable practices in LAFS?

The article concludes with a discussion on how HF 2.0. can be useful tools for addressing specific controversies via the promotion of multi-actor engagement and democratic dialogue, toward a co-construction of knowledge, which ultimately can be used as launching pad for shaping community-led local development or local action groups.

## **2. The use of controversies in dialogic democracy – the pathway to HF 2.0.**

The role of controversy, or conflict, is one of the major threads in public engagement methods, as it represents a stimulating point for common reflection, as well as a potential outcome in a complex and uncertain environment. In a Western-European context, where issues of uncertainty and potential danger might be eliminated from public debate through the principle of precaution[5], controversies are particularly worth in a democratic approach- and perhaps even more for social scientists who should consider all actants, including perspectives, controversies or hesitations[6] to be able to “reassemble” the fieldwork (Latour, 2004, p. 246).

In the same vein and according to Callon *et al.* (2009), the existence of controversies contribute in enriching democracy. Controversies and confrontations are thus central elements to all public engagement methods, provided they can be used in a dynamic and positive way to reach a mutual discovery and comprehension. It is a question of enabling different groups to partake the dialogue process and share the public space, so that all voices and identities can be heard. Everyone, from experts to laypersons, can contribute with information and knowledge that will enrich the discussions, by expanding and improving current understanding and points of view, by revealing uncertainties and exploring constraints, by suggesting innovative solutions and regenerating the dialogue.

Hybrid forums is the concept that Callon *et al.* (2009) introduced to define and cover different types of existing procedures for dialogic democracy (including focus groups, public inquiries, consensus conferences and other types of deliberative processes) where controversies are at core. Participants in hybrid forums are both speaking and listening, while learning (by doing and from each other), acting together and, thus, constructing the local community together. This last point is perhaps the key specificity of hybrid forum as an engagement method, as participants are not discussing “a world which is already made,” but “a world in the making[7]” (Callon, 2006, p. 3). Although this may sound quite idealist, it is worth keeping in mind that hybrid forums are defined as spaces where controversies not only take place but also evolve: “they are powerful apparatuses for exploring and learning about possible worlds” (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 28).

In the context of LAFS, various studies underline the importance of controversies, interactivity and dialogue in the construction, and in the constant adaptation, of LAFS (Stassart and Jamar, 2008; Barham and Sylvander, 2011; Mariani, 2018; Hegnes, 2012; Allaire *et al.*, 2011). LAFS are situated at the crossroad of several logics, or visions of the world – with market, efficiency, environment or tradition as central references – also defined as negotiated orders (Compagnone, 2012) which often make the networks quite unstable. Following Boltanski and Thévenot’s (2006) work on justification and then referring to orders of worth, we mean that dialogue between actors bringing up values from different orders of worth can open for finding solution, adjust and dynamically construct LAFS together. The purpose of this experimental HF 2.0., discussed in this study, consists in addressing local controversies by stimulating mutual reflections, better understanding and, ideally, an open dialogue on technical, political, and/or socio-cultural issues linked to the local territory and related food systems. While creating a dynamic and interactive meeting place, HF 2.0. brings together the different worlds, via a web of local

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“actants,” aimed at a collective co-construction process of knowledge around given controversies in a predefined LAFS. In the context of the S2F project where sustainability and LAFS are central concepts, we first envisioned HF 2.0. as communication and information tools, while providing a multi-actor research tool for data collection. Their role for deliberative democracy builds upon different “third generation” deliberative processes, which will be discussed in the following section, alongside other public engagement methods.

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### 3. State of the art on public engagement and participatory democracy methods

There are a number of different approaches to participatory democracy currently in use in Europe and in the USA since the last 15 years. Many of these have been developed in order to ensure citizen and/or stakeholder involvement in political discussions, research and innovation, and the introduction of new technologies (i.e. nano technologies, healthcare and genetically modified organisms).

One problem with hybrid forum is the ambivalence of this concept, which has appeared in recent research as a generic term, sometimes synonymous to deliberative processes (Treyer, 2009), but not necessarily used within the same context of equality and democracy (Giami *et al.*, 2015). This provides the main justification why in this study, we take distance from the general and ambivalent concept of hybrid forum, and present a new generation of hybrid forum through the experimental method of HF 2.0.

The inexistence of literature on HF 2.0. is therefore understandable, despite the already limited literature concerning hybrid forums. Nevertheless, Farias (2016) provides an excellent overview of these methods, and their role as participatory devices, organized in a Chilean city in 2010 (based on Callon *et al.*'s, 2001 book). Studying and evaluating concrete hybrid forums, the author emphasizes the issue of equality participation as well as challenges when issues like power of economy or political decisions took over dialogic democracy – for example if hybrid forum did not have a collective dynamic approach to controversies (Farias, 2016).

If we expand from the strict concept of hybrid forum to the broader umbrella of similar types of engagement methods' key issues emerging from the literature concern the complexity of working with public participation methods (Joly, 2007), the role of consumers and/or citizens (Doubleday, 2004), the potential efficiency of engagement methods for regulating the food market, for instance in relation to public health (Moretto *et al.*, 2014), and the role of devices (Marres and Lezaun, 2011) in dialogic procedures. A detailed inventory on the variety of existing methods has also been provided by few studies (Abelson *et al.*, 2003; Treyer, 2009; Rowe and Frewer, 2000). Notably, Rowe and Frewer (2000) discuss strengths and caveats of different types of public participation procedures, and provide an evaluation framework for their categorization. In doing so, they emphasize the lack of appropriate benchmarks, including standardized instruments, to assess different participation methods and propose an evaluation system based on acceptance criteria and process criteria. In a later study, the same authors develop a further typology, disentangling the three dimensions of public engagement into communication, consultation and participation (Rowe and Frewer, 2005). Along this framework, the Engage 2020 project systematically categorize 57 engagement methods against a set of criteria. For instance, the authors distinguished the level of public involvement, objectives such as dialogue, consulting, involving, collaborating, empowering, etc., the level of application of the method and the societal groups involved, and created a comprehensive databank, with 45 detailed factsheets on different available tools (Engage 2020, 2014).

Drawing on previous literature and different categorization criteria, Table I provides a schematic view of different public engagement methods and key evaluation criteria. For our study purpose, this concentrates on the most familiar public engagement methods, or those

Participation method	Purpose and mechanism	Public representativeness	Degree of democratization and independence of participants	Transparency and equality of access to wider public	Overarching considerations
Citizen/public advisory committee	To obtain a consensus Used in market development. Interaction with industry representatives to examine a particular issue	Low to moderate Small group to represent views of various groups, albeit may not comprise members of true public. Selected by sponsor	Moderate Often relation to sponsor and interested groups	Variable but often low Sponsor: independence required to ensure transparency	It allows for in-depth understanding of issues among stakeholders Potentially isolated or un-represented groups A clear consensus may not be achieved Direct citizen involvement with impartial/objective consensus reached on controversial issues Top-down framing of the question and pre-emptive evaluative framework
Citizens' jury/panel	To shed light on a controversial issue Closed meetings with citizens, over few days period, to deliberate on a particular issue	Moderate Panel of citizens, typically 12–24 people, selected as representative sample of local population	High Independent facilitator and equal influence of participants	Moderate Final conclusions via report or press conference	Flexible mechanism to suit local contexts and situations Consensus to be reached
Civic dialogue a range of methods	To create mutual understanding and facilitate creation of common ground towards proposed action Public conversation around complex and controversial issues	Moderate Different members of society, to represent diversity of opinions and knowledge	High Professional facilitator and equal influence of participants	High Public meeting	Open and transparent process with potential good public outreach Only useful on controversial topics of general societal order
Consensus conference	To inform and consult, with need to reach consensus over a particular issue Preparatory events and material to inform panelists about topic, followed by three-day conference	Moderate Panel of citizens (no prior knowledge on topic), typically 10–20 people, selected as representative sample of general public	Moderate to high Independent facilitator and equal influence of participants	High Meetings open to wider public Conclusions and key remarks via final report or press conference	

(continued)

## Hybrid forums as an experimental multi-actor tool

**Table I.**  
Comparison of public engagement methods and key evaluation principles

Table I.

Participation method	Purpose and mechanism	Public representativeness	Degree of democratization and independence of participants	Transparency and equality of access to wider public	Overarching considerations
Focus group	To discuss on selected topic to assess opinions and attitudes Individual meeting, usually up to two hours Commonly used in research or product development	Moderate One or several groups, typically 6-12 participants per group, which are selected according to specific population segment criteria	High Free discussion with little direction from facilitator Equal influence of participants	Low	Facilitation is essential to ensure that all participants are able to contribute Not effective for addressing conflicting interests One-way information flow from public to government Potential for developing perspectives that are not obvious prior to the event
Third generation deliberative process (3GDP)	To involve citizens or stakeholders in participatory democratic hearings or policy input sessions To simulate processes that do not occur in society/regular democratic processes	Moderate A broad set of perspectives to be filled into the regular politics should look at gender, education, income etc., but it is never "representative" in any real sense	High Should contribute to democratization Most interesting when participants are truly independent	Potentially highly transparent for participants as it unfolds, and to the general public through reports	
Hybrid forum 2.0 <sup>a</sup>	The purpose is to have a dialogue aiming at constructing a common project to improve the local community on a defined "controversy" Dialogic interaction with different stakeholders and lay people	Moderate Both small panel of participants, to represent views of various groups of population and public dialogue	High Free discussion with little direction from facilitator. Equal influence of participants	Potentially high Full transparency as public dialogue open to wider public Conclusions and key remarks via final report or press conference	Dynamic and democratic mechanism Promote citizen-stakeholder knowledge exchange No final consensus or pre-defined result is required May generate political rather than technical outcomes, as idealist in nature

similar tools to be compared with HF 2.0. (we do, however, acknowledge several other methods such as charrette, deep democracy, citizen assembly, etc., identified by Engage 2020, 2014). The table also includes the third generation Deliberative Process (3GDP), a type of public participation method which provides a combination of classical bottom-up deliberative processes with stakeholder or citizen/consumer involvement through hearing systems (Strandbakken and Borch, 2015), which played a central role in the development of HF 2.0.

Compared to other public engagement tools, HF 2.0. appear to be effective in terms of democratization and their structured decision-making approach, whereby participants play a key role in the co-production and co-interpretation of knowledge. Key strengths worth mentioning also include their dynamic and democratic mechanism, with large potential to build strong stakeholder–citizen relationships.

#### **4. Toward a democratic dialogic process: hybrid forums 2.0. – experimental methodology and practical applications**

It may be plausible to question why, in the context of a European project, we should not rely on more classical focus discussion groups or a consensus conference for example (refer to Table I regarding their scope and mechanism). The attractiveness of HF 2.0. comprises their practical use (as communication tool), their theoretical perspective (dialogic discussion not aiming to make compromises by mutual discovering, learning and co-constructing knowledge), and methodological application (data gathering). An HF 2.0. approach offers to map human resources within a local community to address specific controversies and identify the mechanisms and drivers that can stimulate innovations and co-construct knowledge together.

As previously mentioned, using HF 2.0. in this European project was strongly influenced by Callon *et al.*'s (2001) description of good practices for dialogic democracy. However, there is sometimes a long way from plan to action. To put HF 2.0. into practice adjust to our local contexts, and create a common fieldwork procedure to be applied across countries and different territorial dimensions, we have also been inspired by the 3GDP. The authors developing the 3GDP (Heidenstrøm and Strandbakken, 2012; Stø *et al.*, 2013; Strandbakken and Borch, 2015) have a long experience with adjusting engagement methods to the field and, as such, suggest three specific elements for a better deliberative process: first, to present specific themes and questions, and avoid a general debate; second, to raise the ambitions for the organization of the event by having high quality presentations, material, posters, etc., and give sufficient time and space for debates; and third, to introduce workshop democracy by letting participants define (sub) themes, let them choose between speakers, experts, etc. To some extent, 3GDP may have been used for the purpose of the Strength2FoodEU H2020 project but given the importance of communicating to the wider public and the key priorities of strengthening stakeholder participation and achieving a democratic dialogue, we decided to merge 3GDP within the hybrid forum concept, to obtain a more process- and practice-oriented mechanism.

It is thus clear, how the aim of HF 2.0. is not to solve a problem, but to create a dynamic room where secluded research and research in the wild (Callon *et al.*, 2009) can meet by creating new uncertainties or emphasizing a local controversy to be discussed by local actants.

##### *4.1 HF 2.0.: from theory to experimental learning*

As previously illustrated, developing HF 2.0. in the context of our S2F project aimed at providing a deeper understanding of current practices and controversies on the sustainability of LAFS, with the twofold objective of promoting citizen–stakeholder

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knowledge-exchange activity, while collecting multi-actor evidence-base for informing and, ultimately, shaping local development strategies or cultural adaptation on related issues. In this sense, we rely on HF 2.0. as a dynamic mechanism for democratic dialogue, communication to the public, and as a means to achieving more concrete results within a research project[8].

From a communication perspective, HF 2.0. can stimulate effective dialogue amongst all actors in the value chain, which are vertically integrated. They permit communication with the general public (e.g. food consumers and citizens) and relevant agro-food stakeholders (food producers and processors, farmers' associations, consumer associations, SMEs, food authentication firms, civil society, scientific society, media, etc.). Besides their scope as communication and research methodology, HF 2.0. can result in a potential improvement of the local community. Specifically, HF 2.0. may concretize the democratic dialogue by directly involving the local actors in a collective project, with the goal of constructing a better world together. A step further, such mechanisms may even give rise to local action groups to put forward community-driven projects and/or shape local development strategies. In other words, HF 2.0. build on several, but complementary, research pillars that are reflected in the methodological procedure developed as an experiment.

#### *4.2 The methodological procedure*

We proposed then a methodological protocol – based on hybrid forum and the 3GDP – to support the application of HF 2.0. in a more systematic manner across the seven European countries as part of the S2F project. The methodology was discussed together with all involved partners and further adaptations were made to adapt to different institutional contexts and local communities.

The protocol builds on three steps (that will be further described in next section): finding a controversy which is relevant for the local community, conducting fieldwork data collection while fostering collective dialogue and analyses, evaluation and reorganization for the next HF 2.0. as we plan one HF 2.0. per year during three years period.

*Step 1 – Before the hybrid forum: finding a controversy.* Finding a valid and locally anchored controversy is at the heart of HF 2.0. As previously mentioned, issues of uncertainty or potential dangers are often eliminated from public debate through the European precaution principle. Instead, controversies and confrontations are essential: “Hybrid forum are the cubicles in which existing facts and values are mixed in order to be recomposed and reconfigured” (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 233). In the common methodological framework with project partners, it was agreed that the respective controversy in each country should be related to one of the topics empirically studied within the H2020 project, e.g., food quality schemes and geographical indications (GIs), short food supply chains, public food procurement, etc. Furthermore, HF 2.0. should aim at engaging different local stakeholders and laypersons within the supply chain, to foster dialogue and disseminate about the project, as well as collect useful data to inform and potentially drive local pilot action initiatives.

*Step 2 – the set-up of the hybrid forum.* The HF 2.0. itself is based on two interconnected and complementary parts, inspired by the 3GDP, to ensure a fruitful debate in the public meeting. These two parts are planned to be organized on the same day, following each other. Part one consists of a preparatory workshop which aims at reaching a common level of knowledge, accrued via shared information on the subject, brief outline of the HF 2.0. structure, and awareness about each other's ideas and perspectives. Part one is limited to the organizing research team, invited panelists (a group of local stakeholders, including entrepreneurs and consumers), and two invited scientific experts, who ought to deliver a short presentation aimed at stimulating, or even provoking, the panelists, by putting

forward original ideas or new information. Part one lasts a few hours and is followed by a social gathering around food, bringing together the panelists, experts and researchers. This is followed by part two, which consists of an open public dialogue of about one hour, with a much larger audience, where everybody can contribute to the discussion.

In this framework, the panelists are asked to focus on the “common good” and keep aside their personal or business interests. Ideally, they should take a “veil of personal disinterest” (referring to Rawls’ veil of ignorance) on them while sharing their experience, knowledge and expertise with the group (part one) and later together with the wider public (part two). They are advised that the purpose of the forum is not to defend a personal agenda but to understand, preserve and improve the collective interests, to create a better local environment. In this sense, ready-made ideas or social roles must be abandoned, in order to be able to listen, talk to each other, discuss, converse and question things. Taking part in a HF 2.0. entails accepting to have an open mind, almost a “beginner’s mind” without any particular preconception or pre-defined expectations, toward the utopian ultimate goal of “shaping together a better world,” in line with Callon *et al.* (2009). This is perhaps the most challenging aspect to reach in HF 2.0, and it is for this reason that the workshop of part one and the repetition of HF 2.0. during a long-term perspective are envisioned.

It is worth highlighting how the transformation of perceptions and standpoints of local actors can be observed within the same HF 2.0. (from part one to part two), and in the long-time perspective, via the organization of the second and third HF 2.0. throughout the course of the project. All potentially interested people are invited, including consumers, practitioners but also private initiatives/small-scale entrepreneurs who may piloting market development strategies on their businesses. By the same token, local adaptation and transformation of the common methodological protocol could take place, to improve and better adapt to the field and scope of the event.

*Step 3 – evaluating, discussing, adjusting.* The HF 2.0. has a quite idealist outcome with no predefined result or concrete political impact. The participants (and not the researchers) lead the discussion and the content of the forum. The HF 2.0. is open to the unexpected and aims at provoking and nudging for a collective cooperation aimed at a better local system. The dialogue *per se* is both a result and a mechanism of this democratic process.

In the context of its experimental application, it is important to reflect on the effectiveness of the public engagement mechanism and conduct a post-evaluation regarding the structure and usefulness of the HF 2.0. For this purpose, we rely on Callon *et al.* (2009)’s grids on:

- (1) their degree of democratization, measured on three basic criteria, including the intensity or deepness, the openness and the quality of the dialogue (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 159);
- (2) the extent to which their structure has facilitated the dialogue, based on the equality of conditions of access, transparency and traceability, as well as the clarity of rules organizing the dialogues (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 163).

The next section provides an outline description (concretizing the protocol previously presented) and a results discussion based on two experimental empirical applications addressing controversies over local and sustainable seafood, conducted in Norway and the UK, respectively, which illustrate the mechanism and pragmatic validity of experiences with HF 2.0.

#### *4.3 Case study 1: the value of local fish and dialogues about a more sustainable fish culture – The city of Sandefjord, Norway*

The first HF 2.0. was conducted in the city of Sandefjord, in Norway on August 30, 2016 ([www.strength2food.eu/2016/08/23/how-is-local-fish-valued-by-the-people-of-sandefjord/](http://www.strength2food.eu/2016/08/23/how-is-local-fish-valued-by-the-people-of-sandefjord/)).

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This event aimed at discussing “the value of local fish” in the city of Sandefjord[9] as quality, price and culture appeared all together to be controversial. The date and place were decided together with the panelists, which were recruited two months in advance. The event was then promoted via flyers, posters, social media (e.g. Facebook), articles in the local newspaper and interviews at the local radio.

The first part of the discussion involved five researchers (including a master student) and four panelists: a consumer, a representative from the local County Governor, a fresh food manager from the local grocery store and a local fishmonger. After an introduction on “what is a HF 2.0.” and two presentations by experts – respectively on the regulation of local fishing and Norwegian fish consumption, the panelists shared their opinions on strategies and opportunities to appreciate local fish. This session, which lasted about three hours, concluded with a concrete proposition to arrange a crab festival on the docks to promote local seafood. The second part, consisting of the open forum, lasted for about an hour and was attended by about 15 people in total, including the panelists and researchers. Although the public audience was limited to five people, everybody contributed in an active manner, including disagreements, discussions about uncertainties, and dialogues about making the local economy a better world. The main topics discussed included reasons for changes in the local fish stock, criticism of national fisheries regulation and strategies to better utilize and manage the existing resources in the fjord. Following the discussion in this second part, the crab festival idea was put on the side and a new “bigger” idea was put forward: the establishment of a maritime museum so that local people and tourists can learn about life in the fjord.

In the months following the event, we kept regular contact with the panelists to agree about the next HF 2.0., including the topic they wanted to discuss, the type of experts they wished to invite, and a suitable date and place. For the second HF 2.0. we thus recruited two new panelists.

The second HF 2.0. took place in Sandefjord on October 24, 2017. The first part consisted of a two-hour discussion. Expert one stimulated the panelists with thoughts about the cultural power of fish which does not only represent a valuable source of income for fishermen, but also a social and cultural identity and usual food product for local people. The second expert presented a project aiming at raising awareness against the environmental (micro) plastics problem in the sea. Following the common dinner, the public debate took place and lasted about one hour. This consisted of a dynamic conversation between the audience and the panelists. The key emerging themes underlined the importance of seafood sustainability and the central role of the household and related behavioral changes required in order to achieve a more sustainable fish culture and consumption. Two controversies were central in this discussion: one about the importance, or not, of eating more fish, and the other about the necessity, or not, to protect the sea from contamination and the local fish stocks. Once again, the proposition of creating a maritime adventure center was put forward, envisaged as a tool to raise awareness to new/young generations of consumers, to help protect the environment and the marine life, as well as increase local and more sustainable fish consumption in the long term. Moreover, both panelists and audience pointed out that Sandefjord area represents a good example for preserving the local food culture associated with fish, and argued that the chefs from the Sandefjord area have significantly contributed to promote the local seafood culture.

*4.4 Case study 2: locally landed seafood and innovation initiatives in North-East England, UK*  
The UK first HF 2.0. was organized in the town of North Shields, on September 21, 2017 ([www.strength2food.eu/2017/09/21/fish-on-the-menu-but-is-it-local/](http://www.strength2food.eu/2017/09/21/fish-on-the-menu-but-is-it-local/)). This event aimed at identifying barriers and challenges for local fish supply chains, drawing on previous market research and private consultations with various stakeholders in the local fishing industry.

The forum was co-organized by a group of researchers from Newcastle University and Food Nation[10] and aimed at stimulating a short fish supply chain via research and innovation activities. As North Shields is particularly renowned for its fishing trade, being the busiest and most important fishing port of the East part of England, the choice of location was not coincidental. The choice of panelists was agreed between the organizers and the date of the event was based on the panelists' availability and communicated two months in advance. The event was mainly promoted via Food Nation dissemination channels (e.g. flyer, mailing list and various social media platforms).

The HF 2.0. was adapted to the local context and structured as follows: Part 1 – discussion with panelists (one hour); Break – buffet lunch with networking opportunities opened to all participants; Part 2 – discussion with wider public and debate (one/two hours). Part one consisted of three academic researchers from Newcastle University, three representatives from Food Nation (the two directors and one community engagement coordinator) and five invited panelists: the program officer for the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG); the managing director of a Seafood Company in North Shields; the Seafood Company manager from a nearby coastal town, also founder of a fish box scheme initiative; the Head Chef from a local restaurant; one passionate fish consumer. The public debate, in part two, brought together around 30 people, including representatives from the industry, civil society and general public.

The discussions in both part one and part two were particularly stimulating and rich in content. The debate with panelists highlighted a number of demand-side barriers to local fish supply chains: e.g., low consumer interest and poor sense of adventure in buying/cooking different types of fish; unawareness of local and seasonal seafood species; apathy regarding provenance and traceability of seafood, with some exceptions in the high-end consumer market; mixed consumer perceptions regarding the price and value of seafood. From the supply-side, it was suggested that local fishers are often unaware of the final destination and market price of their catch and, as they are predominantly small-scale, they are often reluctant to change the current status quo and engage in alternative types of market chains.

Whereas the above demand and supply-side limitations were indicated as main reasons for the lack of local short fish supply chains, some contradictory statements were also made, e.g., “the devaluation of some native species as the result of their abundance” and “the industry seeks to promote local fish with limited interest from consumers and fishers.” The panelists discussed ways to improve the current situation, via marketing strategies and educational campaigns to increase consumer awareness on provenance and sustainability of fish, and the need of strengthening networks within the supply chain (linking directly fishers, fishmongers, restaurateurs and consumers). The group agreed to invite a local fisher-entrepreneur and the Newcastle University procurement officer to the next HF 2.0.

The second part of the HF 2.0. started with quick introductions from the organizers and introduced the five panelists. The wider public debate mainly focused on the consumption side and recognized that there is a significant limited consumption of local seafood despite the close location by the coast. Consumers indicated how such consumption patterns mainly reflect the limited seafood availability from supermarkets and local fishmongers, exacerbating the confusion over what is local and in season. Therefore, in order to change current public perceptions and increase consumer awareness of fish, significant efforts from the LAFS are required, starting from the industry as a whole (including restaurants and local businesses), supported by early educational programs at school, sustainability campaigns by celebrity chefs, etc.

The second HF 2.0. was organized on April 29, 2019 by the same Food Nation team and Newcastle University researchers. The research team decided to adjust the structure of the HF 2.0. to improve the dialogue and better include the local actors. This HF 2.0. was held at a

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local restaurant in Newcastle upon Tyne, used as demonstration venue for Food Nation's cookery courses and pilot activities. The event consisted in a "fish supper conversation," whereby participants were invited to a three-course seafood themed meal, showcasing the cooking skills acquired by young trainees as part of the FLAG program. The discussion theme was closely linked to the first HF 2.0, as well as to the fieldwork evidence collected on local short food supply chains and consumer perceptions about local and sustainable (sea) food, which are central exploratory issues of the S2F project.

The event, which was attended by 20 people and lasted three hours in total, was promoted via an invitation flyer, distributed via the organizers' social media, selected mailing lists and word-of-mouth. Between three and six participants were sitting at each table, including a Newcastle University researcher, who could further encourage participation if necessary and simply probe participants with some key questions. These ranged from the importance of local vs sustainable seafood, seafood consumption preferences and habits, preparation skills and confidence in restaurants and at home. Restaurant paper placemats, designed specifically for the fish supper, were placed on the table for participants to note down ideas and opinions. Researchers were also asked to identify key themes and issues brought up during the discussions, in a separate notepad. While different seafood courses were being served to the tables, the two experts delivered their talks. The first presenter talked about the ambitions of the North Shields Fish Quay and ways to tackling some of the barriers to local fish purchasing for consumers. The second speaker introduced the launch of an application for food procurement, and highlighted some of the barriers to sourcing locally landed seafood and ways for restaurants to expand their fish display. Several topics were discussed throughout the dinner, the most important ones being the role of consumer perceptions in explaining consumption behavior, and the role of restaurants to promote a wider variety of seafood and lesser-known local species, with important implications for supporting strategic behavioral change.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

Beside the usefulness of HF 2.0. in shaping the development of the aforementioned S2F project actions, the experiences from Norway and the UK provided an open and democratic framework to share knowledge, develop potential synergies and build partnerships to improve current practices in the LAFS. Based on Callon's three criteria, the four HF 2.0. had an overall positive degree of democratization, as different types of actors equally participated in the discussions. There was also a high intensity and openness in the dialogue, and in terms of dialogue quality, the rules were clear and all participants could express openly. Transparency is also supported by filming and audio-recording the discussions. Moreover, it is clear that HFs 2.0. can provide an innovative tool for collecting data and building knowledge on local issues.

Following the protocol, facilitators would mostly work downstream (to shape the frame of the forum) and upstream (to report and analyze). In the four experiments the researchers were only there to create a framework conducive to dialogue and did not intervene directly in the discussions. However, in the Norwegian case, a few panelists expressed their wish to have stricter rules and less freedom. In this sense, too much flexibility was somehow perceived as a challenge. In the UK case, the protocol was adjusted to obtain better collective engagement.

For the Norwegian experiments, one particular issue concerned the limited number of people who attended both public parts of HF 2.0. In the hope of an even more democratic dialogue, we would have involved a much larger public. Although the choice of the "controversy" came from the fieldwork, it was interesting to note the transformative process of the two HFs 2.0., whereby the actors' choice of controversy evolved from a more general topic, such as the value of local fish, to more concrete strategies aimed at improving the

sustainability of the fish culture and consumption practices. Several uncertainties, linked to sustainability, pollution or obesity were critically discussed as collective issues. Albeit the aim of HF 2.0. is not necessarily to produce tangible results, the citizens felt the need to concretize societal actions aimed at preserving public goods and improving the sustainability in their LAFS. In this sense, HF 2.0. can afford a democratic self-governance mechanism without the external control of supra-national actors, whereby the role of the researcher limits to the construction of the discussion space and its boundaries.

Regarding the UK experiments, two key limitations were noted in the first HF 2.0. First, the debate in part one suffered from the absence of a fisher who could share perspectives from a different angle, especially since the mentioned supply barriers concerned fishers. As agreed with other panelists, the inclusion of a fisher-entrepreneur would have increased the representativeness of the local population. Second, despite the democratic framework and the explanation of what HF 2.0. are and seek to achieve, it was not always possible to transcend and go beyond private interests, as each local actor had some private interests to protect and pursue. To tackle this latter, the methodological structure of HF 2.0. was revised and further adapted, to improve the democratic mechanism and encourage even further the dialogic interaction among laypersons. Two adaptations were introduced. First, the distance between panelists and public audience was removed – this implied that there was no need to hold two separate parts to the event, but also that all participants held a truly “equal” influence from a social perspective. Second, the conversation flow was facilitated by removing the academic format of the event, with peer-to-peer social interactions realized by sitting around the same table, in an informal setting, over dinner.

In term of LAFS, the two experiments were radically different, but participants were deeply committed and social engaged, listening and learning from each other. However, the British case was concretely linked to a pilot project aiming at stimulating a short fish supply chain, while the Norwegian one built on a general research study on local food systems in the given area. It seems that having a defined local action connection and engaged actors from the local community may significantly help to gather participants and lay people on LAFS controversies – which can *a priori* be considered as a niche subject.

The HF 2.0. can be used as a communication tool (by invitation to discussion, debate and action), but it is mainly relevant to enhance sustainable practices as active research, by its investment of people, including consumer and citizen. As a methodology, HF 2.0. surely aims at gathering data and providing better insights from the local context field of study, regarding the social, economic and environmental characteristics of the territory, main actors involved, key controversies and local issues, potential development strategies and innovation opportunities. As a conceptual tool, our HF 2.0. provides a unique possibility to dialogic democracy (even if the democratic aspect could have been stronger with a larger public in our Norwegian experiment). One challenge is to create social engagement to keep the cooperative spirit of HF 2.0, promoting collective interests, discussing knowledge by actively using controversies. The second challenge is to keep the social engagement alive (not being a closed laboratory far from societal realities) and to enrich democratically the local environment by permitting all actants to contribute, without interacting in any restricted way.

## **6. As a matter of conclusion: enhancing sustainable practices in localized agro-food systems with HF 2.0: is dialogue compatible with the market world?**

The ambition to improve the effectiveness of the food system to make it more sustainable and fairer is at the heart of our S2F research project. We attempted to bring the traditionally separated fields of research on common sense and science together, under the hybrid forum umbrella of local representations and use of sustainable resources, to contribute to “the formation of networks of actors sharing a collective project” (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 34). This type of dialogic democracy involves not only the participation of chosen participants, from

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the planning to the dissemination of results, through exchanges and common experiments, but also the transformation of perceptions and standpoints of local actors in the long-time perspective through the repetition of several forums.

Hybrid forum as a public engagement method is far from a dead end with opposite ideas and traditional debate: its specificity strength rests upon its openness and interactivity between all concerned actants, including researchers and different stakeholders. The specificity of HF 2.0. the way we experimented them in case of LAFS, was to offer a dialogic exchange and a longitudinal, self-reflection from actants about the sustainability of LAFS – including their need for adaptation and translation between production and consumption. Part of the HF 2.0.s' methodology focuses on the controversy (which may not be predefined) that emerged, or will develop, at the local level, as the result of the discussion with local participants. The scientific result of the HF 2.0. evolve around the process of the HF 2.0. itself – from the background information regarding the controversy, the engagement of participants, the content and the dynamism of the dialogue, but not necessarily the political, economic, sustainable or social consequences of it. In Norway for example, the first controversy about the value of local fish was replaced with more environmental and cultural dimensions during the open dialogue. In this sense, learning and thinking together constitute both outputs and results *per se*, not only for panelists and researchers but also for the general public participating to the open dialogue.

Both LAFS and GIs are two pillars of food market. Markets are at the heart of consumption issues, but they often work unsustainably or unfairly, as their framework is not necessarily adapted to externalities or changes in the society. In this context, dialogic democracy can play a key role in strengthening the operational efficiency of public entities and institutions, especially in the frame of LAFS and GIs, which constantly evolve and construct in a dynamic relationship and interactivity between production, distribution, consumption and regulation. Dialogic democracy can then play a central role in the development of fair markets. "Hybrid forums are [...] as useful to democracy as they are to the market economy. They organize the identification and exploration of externalities and exclusions" (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 237). Although there is a huge literature on market failures especially in term of LAFS (Barham and Sylvander, 2011; Vaz *et al.*, 2016), it would be appropriate to emphasize the tangible link between HF 2.0. and LAFS by quoting Callon and his co-authors: "Markets are tools whose efficiency in the production of wealth and well-being is unequaled to this day. But they must be organized for their social yield to be optimal, and their organization must be the object through reflection [...] The market is a high-precision machine that presupposes constant tuning, impeccable maintenance and attentive after-sale service" (Callon *et al.*, 2009, p. 234).

The utopian project shaping a common world together can obviously be concretized by HF 2.0., for example for assessing the possibility of innovation or the importance of tradition in GIs. LAFS and GIs are integrated in food market and can easily be "an object of reflection" in a local community. An HF 2.0. approach builds on a multidisciplinary and open-minded perspective which is not far from conceptual engineering: actants from the field are the ones who know and can have a dialogue. The open structure aims at overcoming the limitations of conventional approaches, as in European research where the project structure sometimes constrains and even pre-defines outcomes. The ambition is to further open up the quite classical research on GIs to the "unexpected." But to be able to consolidate the research on GIs and LAFS in the future, hybrid forums need to be dynamic, interactive, opened and constantly adapted and regenerated by new ideas, controversies and uncertainties. When HF 2.0. become outdated, a new generation of engagement methods will be required.

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## Notes

1. As developed in this special issue, a LAFS “is a form of production of local identity-based foods explicitly grounded in specific territorial dynamics of agriculture, food and consumption networks” (Sanz-Cañada, 2016, p. 1)
2. Actants denote both human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005).
3. Strength2Food is a European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program focusing on “Strengthening European Food Chain Sustainability by Quality and Procurement Policy.” More information at: [www.strength2food.eu/](http://www.strength2food.eu/)
4. This includes perspectives from sciences and technology studies, actor network theory and translation studies that we do not include directly here and remain only implicit in the short frame of this more methodological paper.
5. The principle of precaution is both a way to apprehend uncertainty – by not taking a decision as long as we cannot assure there is no harm or danger for users – and a pillar of EU food policy (see for example [www.ecologic.eu/1126](http://www.ecologic.eu/1126)). It is important to underline its European specificity in this frame of LAFS and European Food Quality Schemes and to note that an American approach to uncertainty would be different, as decisions can be taken as long as harm is not proved.
6. What Latour calls “participants” and “ingredients” including dimensions we do not know or imagine (Latour, 2004).
7. Our translation of “un monde déjà fait ‘et’ un monde en train de se faire.”
8. Throughout the duration of the five-year project, three HF 2.0. at three different seasons have been planned across seven European countries (France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland, Serbia and the UK), in order to ensure some longitudinal continuity and interaction among local actors, to observe the impact of time and seasons – fundamental in LAFS – and explore the potential evolution of local controversies.
9. The choice of the controversy is based on various local controversies about local fish which emerged during a fieldwork in June 2016 underlining controversies about fish quality – fresh/frozen and local shop/supermarket – price and tradition. Fumel M. (2016) Structure des controverses dans les procédures dialogiques: cas de la mise en place d’un forum hybride en Norvège. *ISTHIA – University of Toulouse*. University of Toulouse: University of Toulouse, 169. P. 43
10. A local Social Enterprise partner of the S2Fcollaborative pilot action: [www.foodnation.org/](http://www.foodnation.org/)

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### Corresponding author

Virginie Amilien can be contacted at: [viram@oslomet.no](mailto:viram@oslomet.no)

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