

Food systems transformation: a value chain perspective

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Abstract

Research on the transformation of agri-food systems towards sustainability has shifted over the recent years, from emphasizing the central role of governance towards a narrower focus on value chain organization. Value chain organization focuses specifically on the micro- to meso-level coordination of actors aiming at value creation and distribution. The shift to transformative value chain coordination induces the need to recognize that value chains foster a multiplicity of values, beyond economic profitability alone. The ensuing question is under which framework conditions value chains may foster this multiplicity of values and therefore promote pathways towards food systems transformation. This paper aims at replacing value chains within a transformative agenda towards sustainability. To this end, firstly, the paper aims at framing value chains as both intervention points and internal coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. The paper then explores how research scopes and (inter)disciplinary perspectives align with these epistemological boundaries. Subsequently we articulate this renewed epistemological perspective with analytical frameworks, ranging from transaction costs economics to food system and territorial approaches and from research on collective action to polycentric governance. By fostering an interdisciplinary dialogue across these interlocking strands of thoughts, the paper intends to outline a research agenda to successfully accompany food system transformation and policy intervention.