

Towards reconfiguration in European agriculture: Analysing dynamics of change through the lens of the Donau Soja organization

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Funding information

This research article is part of the research project 'New directions in agri-environmental governance: Re-assembling food, knowledge and autonomy' funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (No: 157414)

Abstract

Recent explorations of agri-environmental governance which draw on the assemblage perspective highlight the relational aspects, the process dimension and the generative elements of certain sustainability endeavours. This article argues that the implications of this approach are little discussed especially what concerns the transformation potential of agri-environmental programmes. We focus on the notion of reconfiguration as a significant facet of transformation. We align with recent research in transition studies to claim the need for conceptualizing reconfiguration. We draw on empirical research pursued with the Donau Soja organization to refer to a number of unfolding reconfigurations, in respect to the spatial, the technological and the political dimensions. We focus on the political reconfiguration and discuss some of the spillover effects of scientific research projects and proposals, programmatic papers, policy positioning and lobby work which accompany the everyday work and governance of the Donau Soja organization. We argue that greater attention to the unmeasured and unmeasurable effects of the DS assemblage also implies giving greater attention to the long-term effects of such programmes. Moreover, the numerous changes unleashed by the organization demand research to re-evaluate

what counts as failure and success in agri-environmental governance.

KEYWORDS

agri-environmental governance, assemblage, Donau Soja, reconfiguration, transition studies

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we explore processes of change mobilized by an organization which addresses sustainability issues in agri-food centred on the cultivation and circulation of one crop. The organization is called Donau Soja (from now on abbreviated as DS) and it was created with the primary focus of raising the cultivation and quality of soybeans in Europe.¹ However, the course of argumentation and action taken by this organization shows that plans for change are actually not confined to this one crop but in fact turn out to summon a much larger agenda pertaining to fundamental (and also foundational) aspects of European agri-environmental policies, practices and governance. In other words, the organization raises interconnected multi-level issues and comes to demonstrate that these require not a single and quick fix but a whole range of actions, solutions and perspectives. This variety of responses is necessary in order to enable the aspired transformation not just of the cultivation and circulation of one crop but of the food systems that the crop is part of. Furthermore, the organization does more than build and mobilize a complex set of actions and understandings, it equally raises very high stakes in respect to politics, environment and economy. The stakes are high because aims and actions involve changing policies for issues that have not been addressed over the past 40 years, because they respond to imperatives of change poised by the looming climate crisis, because they confront dominant markets and, last but not least, because they involve revisiting a set of engrained beliefs and understandings around this one crop. In sum, the stakes are high and the barriers are equally difficult to overcome.

With this introductory paragraph, our aim was to demonstrate that the organization has a rather atypical approach to change, which starts from a single focus on one crop yet which hopes and expects to have ripple effects on a much larger range of agricultural practices Europe-wide. Thus, we highlight that aims are for a thorough transformation that will result in an overhaul of structures and systems along with a shift in perceptions and values. For our research, the organizations' attempts to change have led us to analyse these in terms of reconfiguration processes. Hereby, we initiate a discussion that calls attention to differences between types and forms of change and the understanding that not any type of change brings about a deep transformation. By addressing the notion of reconfiguration, we aim to point out those game-changing phenomena and arrangements that signal, catalyze and create far reaching change. In this way, we claim more broadly that reconfiguration implies and necessitates debates concerning forms of change.

The first argument we bring is that conceptual analyses of reconfiguration are only just about to emerge in social sciences and in order to advance discussions on forms of change in sustainability, we need to start building the concept of reconfiguration. We draw particularly on two research fields and approaches in social science. One framework of reference represents the typology of change (Geels & Shot, 2007), and, especially the most recent elaboration thereof (Geels et al.,

2015) developed within transition studies,² and the other, the assemblage perspective in agri-environmental governance (Forney et al., 2018). By combining some key elements from the two research streams, we aim to contribute to the conceptualization of the notion of reconfiguration by favouring forms of transformative, to some extent disruptive understandings of change that exhibit non-linear and dynamic patterns. Building on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we claim that the strong emphasis on emergent properties and generative dynamics in the assemblage approach brings a stronger grasp of the agency in action in various configurations. We show that explorations of reconfiguration where the notion of agency is currently still underdeveloped benefits from assemblage understandings. In the assemblage approach, agency also means an attention to effects and outcomes that are unexpected, unintended and unmeasured, or, what we more generally call spillover. In this way, we build our second argument, namely that spillover elements (be they effects, outcomes or emergent properties) play a decisive role in shaping reconfiguration processes and point us to a better grasp of what is being reconfigured.

In this way, we seek to illuminate certain dimensions of contemporary agri-environmental governance practices of change as they are enacted by actions and aims of the multi-actor, public-private, non-profit, European organization DS. We are guided in our analytical and conceptual exploration by the following questions: What kind of transformation is DS proposing? What do current outcomes of the scheme tell us about the type and quality of transformation and what do they already prefigure in terms of long-term effects in view also of their reach-out to the larger food system?

In turning to these questions, we more generally call for a renewed focus on the ends of novel agri-environmental schemes and especially on the way reconfiguration elements, processes and effects illuminate these. DS governance mechanisms co-exist with similar schemes in the market of soy aimed to affect durable changes in respect to agricultural cultivation practices, value chains and elimination of environmental degradation. Such is, for instance, the roundtable governance model adopted by the Roundtable for Sustainable Soy initiative, a model which came to be used also for other high-demand commodities such as palm oil or biofuels. However, many such schemes came under critique for their limited impacts and results in instituting 'good practices', greater transparency and inclusiveness (Cheyns, 2011; Ponte, 2014) and also for their technocratic approaches that confined visions of sustainability into a depoliticized field (see Guthman, 2007). In the next section, we introduce some of the responses that the DS organization develops in light of the many competing visions for soy already operating globally, and some of the challenges that arise not only from a competitive field but also from contested understandings attached to soybeans.

DONAU SOJA

The organization Donau Soja was created in Vienna in 2012 in order to certify the origin and non-genetically modified organisms quality of soybeans grown in Europe. These specific and pragmatic plans are driven by a larger vision for more sustainable and qualitatively superior agricultural practices and goods. It is a vision that is not totally new for Europe. It is deeply anchored in traditions pursued especially in the Danube River basin, where soy had been grown since the late nineteenth century. Its founder, Matthias Kroen, launched the idea and plan with the claim that with the discontinuation of several soy practices and traditions over the past seven decades, Europe lost much of its autonomy in feeding livestock, managing a more circular economy, more stable and shorter value chains and the ecology of soils. He liaised with a handful of like-minded

friends (including farmers, businesses and scientists) to state that raising the cultivation of soybeans in Europe, reducing phytosanitary inputs, resuming crop rotation and strengthening social and economic relations between Eastern, largely producing, regions and Western, largely consuming, regions, represent solid and crucial measures for transforming agricultural practices, policies and consumption patterns. All these aims serve the overarching purpose of reducing the exceptionally high dependency on soy of other continents, where soy is largely genetically modified, based on a monoculture pattern of production, and linked to severe environmental destruction. At the time the organization was created, there was an intensification of the productivist method for soy globally. At the same time in Europe, a timid uptake of soy in the policies of the European Union for supporting ecosystem services (in the Common Agricultural Policy Reform) was noted. The core founders of DS perceived the timeliness of intervening with their agenda in the European space. This agenda does not concern soybeans unequivocally, but the protein supplies for Europe, and therefore include considerations of many other legumes, feed for livestock, alternative sources of protein and the multiple practices that accompany their management individually and in their relation with one another.

Thus, the scope of DS actions grows well beyond raising production of soy for a more local (i.e. European) market. As goals and measures were developed in close attendance to the multiple socio-material specificities of soybeans that include its biology, and its processing mechanisms and stages before it can be used for consumption, the organization came to assemble a multitude of public and private stakeholders along and beyond the supply chain. The resulting roadmap for soy was one that showed that its durability and relevance for European agriculture would in fact involve and also depend upon supporting seed breeding research, adjusting a set of cultivation practices, aligning infrastructures and, highly important, creating new policies favourable for a protein transition. In sum, soy came to be ultimately conceived of as a tool rather than a confined target, that bears substantial implications for human and animal nutrition and, consequently, one whereby wider-reaching transformations in European agri-environmental practices and policies are envisioned and prefigured. The programmatic agenda of the organization aims to concisely lay out the multi-layered vision for change derived from soybeans as described next.

The DS vision drew upon the so called ‘theory of change’ in economics to design a sustainable soy architecture for Europe with a long-term vision in mind. This is ‘The European Protein Transition’.² This programmatic document was finalized in 2018. It lays down five core lines of action that need pursuing in order to address the protein challenge and which are required for a European protein transition to take hold: (1) sustainable and responsible imports – whereby the global dimension of the protein challenge is signalled; (2) increased production of grain legumes in Europe – underlined are here not just benefits to ecosystems, but also far-reaching benefits to other crops used in rotation, as well as spatial changes in the flows of soy from east-to-west in Europe; (3) improved use of existing and new protein sources – this underscores the role of plants as the most important primary sources of protein; (4) increased efficiency of protein use – feed management being the target here; and (5) healthier diets – this last pillar directs attention to the disconnect between official meat consumption recommendation and the actual overconsumption of meat.

What DS did was to come up with a ‘summary of the future’ as one of the main mastermind contributors to DS ingeniously put it. In this sense, once the long-term visions were set, the architecture itself came to be built ‘backwards’ by searching for the preconditions that would be necessary for the achievements of long-term goals. For the short term (1–5 years), the aims are to raise production standards and switch to 100% certification, stimulate alternative value chains and incentivize more precise protein feeding. For the medium term (1–10 years) what is required

is ‘bottom-up’ innovation tailored to local circumstances, more research and systematic translation at European, national and local levels and, most importantly, policy measures to drive diversity of cropping and improve on-farm biodiversity. For the long-term (1–20 years) improvement of plant breeding along with public support for breeding and the development of new value chain infrastructures, such as east-west trading within Europe.

This document firmly consolidates the creation of DS as a ‘change organization’, in the words of Mathias Kroen, its founder. This action plan represents the most recent document that crowns a whole series of previous steps, research projects, thinking processes, consultations, market research, networking with hundreds of regional and national actor groups, etc. Between 2012 and 2017, within the short period of 5 years, a substantial amount of research was compiled together under many formats, such as books, articles, research proposals, reports and public talks. Many revolve around agronomic knowledges regarding the environmental benefits of legumes, but many others speak to the policy community and thus also articulate much broader interrelations that can be drawn from such research.

This work informed the design of the instruments and practices of governance of the organization shaped the ethos of DS and the narratives of change mobilized by the DS and also drove actions for political change at the national and supranational level. These two streams of actions of building the organization and building scope for larger political change are held in tension by efforts to demonstrate the business opportunities in respect to the growth momentum that soy presents in Europe and sustained by hundreds of members and industries as well as by efforts to flag momentum for wide-reaching change for European agriculture held by members of the civil society, farmers and scientists. Such a tension is further amplified by the facts that: first, a radical solution in the form of banning soy is not an option due to the stark dependency of soy in the animal production in Europe that has seen exponential growth especially over the past 10–20 years; second, readymade models existing in the global networks of soy cannot be replicated in Europe; third, a simple focus on replacing soy with alternative plants would have a limited impact while also placing responsibility extensively on farmers and consumers. Yet, the piecing together of distinctive possibilities coming from research and practice led to the development of instruments such as standards and certifications that include GMO-free soy, a ban on using certain herbicides, the enrolment of mid-chain actors and the development of infrastructures. In the short period of 5 years, results became visible with the doubling the amount of soy cultivated in Europe, the gradual increase of certified soy and in projecting the potential for soy from Europe to cover 50% of Europe’s needs for soy within 25 years. Meeting this longer-term goal is conditioned on whether or not legislative changes are created which include soy into a protein action plan and cannot remain subsumed to a technological and economic exercise.

The theoretical framings that we draw upon in the following inspired our probe into the logics of change transpiring from the co-constitutive knowledges and practices that drive governance in particularly transformative ways and think further about the ways in which social sciences conceptualize actual and emergent transformation processes.

DYNAMICS OF RECONFIGURATION

Conceptual discussions on reconfiguration emerged in particular from research that explored systemic processes of technological change.³ The early perspective that was adopted was one where design and innovation shape a whole socio-technical arrangement, bring about substantial changes in the regime’s basic architecture and function through the interplay of multiple

technologies (Geels & Schot, 2007, p. 411). Transition approaches registered an enthusiastic adoption since the early 2000s because of the way these explain how radical structural long-term change happens as for instance, in the multi-level perspective (see Geels 2002). But to some degree, enthusiasm was tamed once research showed that the transition management involved in building and pushing socio-technical change remained limited in achieving transformation due to a dominant devotion given to technological capacities and how this came at the expense of rendering invisible many of the socio-political struggles, contestations and negotiations underpinning sustainability endeavours (see Loorbach & Rotmans, 2010; Schawanen, 2018). But we signalled earlier that DS intrigues precisely by the way it raises multiple claims in respect to soy and adjacent fields and this aspect pointed us strongly towards exploring the political and therefore, potentially transformative, processes taking shape through specific configurations of actions and arguments carried out by the DS organization.

More recent elaborations in transitions research place a larger and deeper scope to the complexities emerging from interactions than those stemming from niche innovations, socio-technical regimes and landscapes in the MLP model of change. In this way, they offer a more flexible space for understanding reconfiguration in a variety of arrangements that surpass the technological focus as such and thus support an assessment of how DS renders political the soy assemblage.

And indeed, we are writing this article at a time when interest in reconfiguration has spread from its original field of innovation studies into a multitude of other areas, such as sustainable consumption and production (Geels et al., 2015), food practices (Spaargaren et al., 2012), urban transition studies (Hodson et al., 2017) and food systems research (Hinrichs, 2014; Maye & Duncan, 2017).⁴ Geels et al. draw to our attention the fact that the novelty within reconfiguration resides in the focus on a range of concrete concerns that contemporary societies are faced with today such as energy, mobility, or agri-food within a context of climate change, biodiversity, pollution and resource problems (2015, p. 2). This means not simply a broadening of areas of research, but equally a critical reorientation, namely one less fixated on technology and (bottom-up) drivers of innovation more on understanding the heterogeneity that stems from multiple intersections between different disciplines, actors or forms of action (see Köhler et al., 2019). In the case of DS, heterogeneity stems from the interactions that are set forth by relating soy to protein transition such that changes are demanded in the livestock sector, in policies pertaining to agricultural production methods, to then reach into environment and climate action, with deforestation, biotechnology and plant protection debates shaking up many of the existing boundaries between sectors.

There are especially two heuristic propositions which guide us towards an understanding of reconfiguration from a particularly dynamic perspective. Firstly, Geels and colleagues underline the importance of paying 'attention to adoption and adjustments in existing systems and the realignments between multiple new and old elements' in order to understand the ways in which system architectures are re-configured (2015, p. 7) rather than seeking in a more linear manner single drivers coming from niche innovation. This call offers the authors the possibility to acknowledge the way in which change from reconfiguration is distinct from other forms of change stemming from what they call a reformist logic bound to linear and gradual improvements that do not question the status quo, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, from a revolutionary logic which pursues radical wholesale changes in the organization of society through the replacement of old models with new ones. Reconfiguration, by contrast, entails cumulative changes across a range of practices and fields which through co-evolution and interaction lead to substantial changes in ways of living often gradually and over longer periods of time (see Geels et al., 2015, p. 6; Shove et al. 2012).

The proposition is important for our analysis because it embraces the plurality of voices and processes animating complex attempts for change targeting many levels, sectors and actors. In other words, what this means for our perspective on DS is to see that there are many logics of change, some delivering gradual improvement, others invoking more radical steps and yet others intervening less linearly. But because revolutionary reform and reconfiguration positions are stylized and do not imply clear-cut boundaries, Hodson and colleagues underline that dynamics marked by competing, co-existing and complementary processes are important to acknowledge (2017). What is needed is a conceptual lexicon to understand the relationship or lack thereof between them (Hodson et al., 2017, p. 14). We agree on focusing on the nature of relations established but suggest instead that a richer vocabulary is not needed (as this is already the case in transition studies) but a greater attention to and inclusion of the effects of such intersection. Reconfiguration, after all, suggests not only a process of change but also the results of relations and interactions in processes. This implies further discussion of the power and agency of processes and of results.

Yet, Hodson and colleagues do not comment on the relation between complementarity and realignments across domains and what would in fact assign power and agency to intersections and interactions across domains. This omission creates questions about the place of competing and coexisting processes and the degree to which these are passively rendered or solely ascribed to technologies. However, Hodson and colleagues suggest, bringing us to the second proposition of interest for our analysis, to grasp the dynamics of sustainability endeavours along three layers of inquiry, namely 'socio-technical arrangements, forms of governance, and understandings of sustainability' (2017). In this way, they open their analytical pursuit to the complexity and multiplicity that arises out of intersections of different forms of governance and conceptions of sustainability, that in the case they discuss, arise out of particular spatial configurations, and which also embrace the tensions that accompany these intersections. In our case study, we will show that forms of governance are essential, on the one hand, not only to form but also to change conceptions of sustainability and, on the other hand, to the constitution of the socio-technical arrangement of soy.

But this leads us to the agency of such intersections which, as we argue in the following, expands the pathway of analysis suggested by Hodson and colleagues in respect to the complementarity of alignments. In this way, we suggest a need to place under scrutiny and integrate the effects of interactions and the role of complementarity in bringing about reconfiguration. The assemblage approach holds some striking resonance with the streams of thinking developed in transition research and the interdisciplinary research that resulted thereof. Common to both approaches is an interest in heterogeneity and how this produces dynamics of change, or in the vocabulary of assemblage, multiplicity. In assemblage, multiplicity derives from the observation that agency is distributed among human and non-human elements. In this way, assemblage thinking emphasizes the socio-materialities that shape various configurations of actors, instruments and places, much more than do transition approaches. It has been shown, for instance, that the materialities of soy significantly shape the aims and actions of the DS organization and mark unequivocally the formation and development of the socio-technical arrangement for protein plants and of the organization DS into an assemblage (Bentia & Forney, 2018).

As human and non-human elements intersect, they produce different configurations which act either towards driving transformation or towards lending a (temporary) durability to an assembled order. Anderson and colleagues comment that assemblage thinking 'traces processes of composition, accounts for durabilities and diagnoses possibilities for things to become otherwise' (2012, p. 212). But this is not just a view that simply says agency is everywhere and it is more than the sum of its parts. Dittmer underlines that assemblages are composed of more than just the material;

however, he adds that the dynamism of assemblages means that a range of contingent futures is always possible (2013, p. 388). These 'lines of flight' (as Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, refer to them) are potentials inherent to any moment. However, just because lines of flight are unactualized does not mean that they are not real, nor incapable of impacting on the present (Dittmer, 2013, p. 389). This draws out a view of the effects of assemblages as emergent as well as open to a wide range of possibilities, thus creating room not only for the expected, purposive and often short term results but also the unintended consequences of action (i.e. overflows in Callon's analysis of markets) and its long-term results, and also the unexpected effects, as the focus in this article.

METHODOLOGY

The two approaches are not only valuable from the theoretical arguments presented in favour of dynamics of change but also hold interesting methodological possibilities. The heuristic propositions for grasping reconfiguration that we presented above call for an identification of alignments stemming from intersection across scales and domains. This position invokes similarities with the analytics of assemblage presented by Li (2007) where building alignments is one out of six generic processes characterizing assemblages.

Nevertheless, the assemblage approach, and the way it was adopted in several research directions in the social sciences, also holds distinct differences to transition approaches. One such difference comes from the devoted orientation it places on micro-politics (see Latour, 2005). Micro-politics is derived from the inclusion of the non-human as agent in the assemblage, and this includes not only foods, as in our case soybeans and legumes, but also documents, such as research proposals and reports, press releases, etc., as well as events, such as a conference or a network meeting, including the affective flows participating in the way they mingle and come together to constitute practices. We want to underline further that micro-politics does not mean a focus on the micro-level. Rather, given that assemblages embrace a non-scalar and rhizomatic understanding of heterogeneity, lets us understand micro-politics as affecting also meso- and macro-level, thus supporting the more transversal enquiries in social science (see Fox & Alldred, 2015, 2017) and the more pragmatic perspective advocated in the social sciences (Overdeest, 2011).

Thus, our analysis focuses on two research documents from 2014 and 2016 that reflect the work carried out by DS jointly with other partners over approximately 5 years. This work played an important role in demonstrating the merits of soy and legumes for European agricultural practices and arguing for some key sites of intervention that would push their stronger adoption in Europe. These two documents fed into the way DS constituted its aims and actions and deployment of its theory of change and also fed into the political claims and demands of DS towards the European Commission for creating appropriate policies. DS is motivated in this advocacy pursuit because policies could further accelerate their vision and practical steps undertaken thus far and would also curb a largely unfavourable political climate in Europe towards more self-sufficiency in protein crops. This happens in a context where protein policies have not been on the agendas of state and supra-state governments for the past 40 years. The two research documents or the work of DS have not led to the formulation of specific policies yet. However, this does not mean that they did not have effects. Two further documents that followed in 2018, one representing the start of a new project for DS and the other accompanying an event of the European Commission, provide insights into the kind of ripples and resonance produced by DS.

We are thus focusing on an interface opening up between policy-making and the work of DS where science and practice is made to speak to audiences beyond those comprising experts and

the boundaries of specific fields. In this way, we follow some of the ways in which DS seeks to build a political alignment with the political supra-state bodies of the European Union.

Our approach is informed by a dialogical and performative pursuit to analysis. This is based on the view of assemblage as a constantly moving and moulding composition of heterogeneous human and non-human actors, and further on characterizations of heterogeneity as manifested and materialized by ordering devices (Suchman, 2012). Suchman argued that a plan reveals relations between ordering devices and the contingent labours through which it is produced and made reflexively accountable to ongoing activity (2012, p. 187). She further stresses that such an approach goes against naturalizing plans as representations existing prior to and determining action. Henceforth, we use documents as devices that constitute multiple actions which participate in the creation of the architectural design for soy in Europe. Constitutive and participative is the way they have agency in enacting more than the economic and environmental demonstration for supporting claims and goals by configuring the social and political constellations of soy inclusive of the array of problems and possibilities.

Thus documents are more than a discursive exercise. Documents have their own temporality, they are circulated and used in more than one context, they are interrelated with other documents, and they have effects irrespective of their original primary goal and irrespective of whether such goal succeeds or fails. The research presented in this article is based on two and a half years of intermittent empirical fieldwork conducted through interviews with DS members (24), participation in general assemblies (4), congresses (2) and networking events (4) organized by DS and targeting economic, policy, non-governmental, wider public audiences and the High-level Meeting for Protein Plants organized by the European Union. 'Following documents' (Bueger,) to its multiple sites of enactment (Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 1995) included trips to Vienna (Austria), Budapest (Hungary), Bern (Switzerland) and Schwäbisch Hall (Germany). Interviews (24) with key actors in the organization as well as DS events (10) revealed the (undercurrent) tensions that flow into the DS soy assemblage: constructing the economic viability of soy, incorporating the environmental benefits of soy, using and developing infrastructures and technologies of governance (i.e. instruments such as standards, certifications and written documents for practitioners, legislators and administrators) and mobilizing partners and members from the industries, sciences and civil society, while at the same time highlighting the limitations hidden behind seeing the increase in the cultivation of soy in Europe as the ultimate and single purpose of the DS work. Documents provide DS with windows of opportunity for framing some such tensions. The documents we refer to articulate some of the actual and potential reconfiguration elements of the DS work by constituting interrelations between the organization, the policy community and the complexities of soy. Reading these documents and approaching them from their positionality in the design of actors, events and the onto-epistemologies of soy allows us to dive into the nature of political alignment sought by DS.

ALIGNING THE AIMS AND ACTIONS OF DS WITH THE POLICY COMMUNITY

In the following, we refer to two documents which have been instrumental in creating visibility at the level of the European Union: 'Legume Futures', a research report finalized in 2014,⁵ and 'Legume Transitions', a research proposal submitted in 2016.⁶ We highlight some aspects shared by the two documents as well as show the distinct approach adopted by the latter as opposed to the former. Common to both is that they not only provide economic and agronomic data and analyses

based on a variety of tools and methods, they also speak out some of the limitations of the current policy environment that are not conducive to change. The reports advocate for currently marginal practices in agriculture, propose the seeds of several actions (some of which DS came to embrace) and, last but not least, respond to the topic *du jour* in European agricultural discourses. There are thus multiple intersecting fields of meaning that are used to transform the ‘treadmill politics’ (Overdevest, 2005) of agriculture.

In an agri-political context in Europe turned towards improving for the environment, the ‘Legume Futures’ project set out to put upfront the environmental benefits of legumes and demonstrate through various measurements and models that the use of legumes within farming systems can significantly reduce nitrous oxide emissions and emission intensities, thus contributing to the importance of nitrogen fixation as an input to the European nitrogen cycle (2014, p. 8). Situating their research within the dominant farming systems framework, they further extoll the contribution of legumes beyond that of the harvest part fixing atmospheric nitrogen into forms available for plant metabolism, they also break the cycles of diseases that attack the major cereal crops. Despite such unequivocal benefits, most European cropping systems are practically ‘legume-free’ (see Magrini et al. 2016) and grain legumes are now grown on only 1.8% of arable land in Europe compared with to 4.6% 50 years ago (2014, p. 7). In this sense, the report identifies the marginal and neglected current role of legumes and at the same time indirectly points to a largely discarded and forgotten agricultural practice, namely crop rotation. The report thus initiates a critique of previous policy measures and implemented practices which resulted in insufficient diversity of crops and an almost total abandonment of crop rotation.

Thus, the report advances the need for a substantial change of agricultural practices – by way of crop rotation – by demonstrating both the immediate and the wider reaching contributions of legumes for cropping systems. Soybeans are part of the larger family of grain legumes and are placed alongside other legumes. Therefore, the innovative and provocative attribute is less the plea for a marginal practice, that is, crop rotation, and more the way it draws attention to the complementarity between practice, scales and different fields of action:

[...] our research shows that legume crops have multiple positive environmental and resource-conserving effects operating at field, farm, regional and global levels. These effects point to the need to recognise the potential of complementary policy measures and to foster efforts to enhance this complementarity. Such an integrated policy approach can be particularly robust if it focuses on the positive outcomes that legume crops can bring about for society. To make them complementary to one another, measures should be rooted in an understanding of the agroecological processes governing the benefits. (2014, p. 87)

Thus they point to elements that are hard to quantify and not included in any assessment tools. It further introduces new variables, namely private-sector investment and closing the yield gap between protein crops and cereals:

Private investment in technical change is important because the current minority status of protein crops in Europe is determined largely by the yield advantage of carbohydrate-rich cereals. This means that in the long term, a closing of the yield gap between protein crops and cereals, particularly in terms of protein yield, is an important strategic goal. (2014, p. 87)

The proposal that followed, 'Legume Transitions' (2016), builds upon and expands the relational perspectives unfolded in 'Legume Futures' (2014) to include additional framings and layers of complexity. The particular vantage point taken in 'Legume Transitions' is that of plant proteins and their relation to the protein supply in Europe. The report states, 'Europe also has much higher levels of plant protein self-sufficiency than is commonly suggested with an estimated total of 42 Mil T for food and feed' and then argues, 'This means that the protein deficit itself is a tractable challenge from an agricultural resources viewpoint'. Legumes are thus contextualized within a consideration of protein supply in Europe. This is an important step and strategy that diminishes a possible tension between legumes and cereals and slightly diverts attention from the comparative advantage of the latter.

The research proposal emphasizes that 'the main challenge therefore is the lack of diversity in cropping systems, the forfeiting of the ESS (Ecosystem services) legumes provide, and the heavy reliance of some sectors of agriculture on imported soy'. Their approach is 'to address this challenge from several complementary angles: promoting existing efforts in developing production of pulses; enhancing the competitiveness of soy production in Europe; developing new integrated cropping and feeding systems; fostering improved use of forage; exploring new legume-based food uses' (2016, p. 6).

This proposal does not only take the previous report to a new level of complexity in terms of scale, framing, methodology and theoretical underpinning but also fosters the pathways taken by the DS organization since 2012. It casts a new emphasis on soybeans and brings together some vital interconnected and interdependent fields soybeans are entangled in, namely feed systems (representing thus the domain of indirect consumption) and legume-based food uses (representing the field of direct end consumption). 'Legume Transitions' states that 'We will use a value chain approach to harness and complement existing and on-going investigations to develop farming systems (not just cropping systems) and value chains using legumes and build on complementarities and synergies between different cropping systems: for food, feed and forage (grassland)' (2016, p. 5). The proposal claims the need for a much stronger connection between agricultural practices and value chains and then argues that market measures require solid state support (via appropriate policy measures). As Donal Murphy-Bokern, the general project manager of the research and one of the leaders of the research, portended in 2016 at the DS Congress 'we overestimate the ability of markets to solve problems' and then underlined 'we need influencing policy'.

We have presented some of the intersections between a series of documents that draw to the surface two distinctive movements, one which builds the DS ethos and the other which creates spaces and framings for policy advocacy. These two movements are co-constitutive. The research carried out in 'Legume Futures' and 'Legumes Transition' shaped the formulation of European Protein Transition programmatic document² and the composition of the Donau Soja Declaration,⁷ while the latter two shaped some of the processes of translation and framing that went into the former.

Some of the effects and indirect outcomes of the two projects we described above became visible in 2018. That year proved to be auspicious in respect to two milestone developments: a new EU project awarded to DS called 'Legumes Translated' in October 2018,⁸ and an event organized by the Digi-Agri Directorate of the EU Commission, namely, the EU High-level Meeting on Protein Plants organized on November 2018 in Vienna.⁹

Firstly, with Donal Murphy-Bokern, DS took on the leading role in conducting a new project, 'Legumes Translated', whose main purpose is the coordination of a plethora of other like-minded projects in Europe but which is also meant to further advance the targets of the proposal made in 2016. In many ways, the project undergirds key activities and skills that DS has been developing

since its creation: bringing together different actors and groups, facilitating the communication and exchange between them and, above all, actively articulating the multi-faceted aspects of the soy–legume–protein field. The document states:

Legumes Translated will for the first time bring together developers of grain and legume crops (protein crops) and related value chains in an EU Framework Programme Thematic Network [...] It is ground-breaking in several respects: there is emphasis on East-West development interaction; it will be the first Framework Programme project of any type to make a substantial investment in the development of soybean production in Europe; and Legume Translations is about developing cropping systems and value chains together. It supports innovation in all major grain legume-supported cropping systems and related agricultural activities by lining sources and users of quality-assured knowledge. [...] The time is now right for this Thematic Network. With a multi-actor approach and a strict focus on legume-related innovations, it addresses both an urgent need and a cross-sector challenge.

So, we can see many topics from previous projects being adopted and firmly integrated in this new one. This shows that one of the crucial processes that DS catalyzed is that of intermediation of knowledge which for them implied pushing for the recognition of soybeans and legumes as strategic elements in an overall transformation of European agricultural practices with the ultimate goal of also transforming consumption practices along the value chain and at the point of end-consumption. With this aim, DS came to assemble a much wider stream of actors than would have been necessary for a straight and linear raise of production of soybeans. They grew into the task of uniting together and coordinating actors with different and often divergent views. And it is this the project that acknowledges the fundamental steps taken in this direction and supports further their skills.

And secondly, equally auspicious was the EU high-level meeting for ‘The Development of Plant Proteins in the European Union’. It brought together 200 major stakeholders for whom the question of protein supply in Europe proved to be not only relevant but also pressing. DS representatives were also invited to be part of this significant community of practice and debate. The EU high-level meeting and the comprehensive report (2018) the DIGI Agri produced and introduced with this occasion was welcomed and seen as a precursor step to the formulation of adequate policies and at the same time a commitment from the Commission to produce such policies. This report presents a comprehensive summary of all research carried out by European institutions over the latest few years. Unlike the projects and proposals, we presented which have a specific framework and emphasize and also strategically position particular aspects in need of attention, the EU report serves as a compendium of knowledge that can be consulted by varied actors. But this report was not exactly the outcome that DS and other invited members were expecting. In the following concluding section, we explain why.

DISCUSSION

The two documents that we referred to present substantial scope of change for agricultural practices in Europe by setting out complex scientific and economic relations that explain the ways in which soybeans are of value for the agro-economic spaces in Europe. The document from 2014 was conceived within the framing of environmental contributions of soybeans, and the

document from 2016 adopted the transitions perspective to build the case for soy from the point of view of the game-changing role it could play in advancing the protein transition in Europe. More specifically, the socio-technical configuration of soy resurfaced in the first document from the point of view of how the larger family of legumes was positioned in relation with other crops (cereals) and other practices (crop rotation); and from how such relations revealed further connections that reach out beyond the farm and harvest level and also pointed to issues beyond environmental benefits alone. The second document further amplified the aims of the first one by placing soy within an architecture conducive to a protein plan for Europe. This would involve increased attention to feed sectors and to value chains.

These two documents caught our attention in a number of ways. Certainly, these documents represented, documented and testified to the research, development and sheer variety of arguments and approaches undertaken by public and private actors and the engagement of DS in such networks. At the same time, the repertoires of justification and evidence opened up therein reflected some of the strategies and practical knowledges that came to be mobilized in the tools and governance actions of the DS organization. The research carried out in the two documents shaped the formulation of the DS standard and the 'Best practice manual' on the one hand and on the other hand the formulation of the programmatic document 'European Protein Transition' and also the 'Donau Soja Declaration'. These documents came not only to constitute the organization and render some necessary stability for shaping markets, but kept being circulated in the political spheres of European states, the Digi-Agri division of the European Commission and the European Parliament with the scope of demanding regulatory integrated policies and new comprehensive measures to be included in the upcoming Common Agricultural Policy reform.

The theoretical paths we took by engaging first with the heuristic proposition made by Geels and colleagues in following realignments between new and old elements in a socio-technical configuration let us notice how soy configurations are assembled together: for instance, by claiming known, but forgotten, practices such as crop rotation and feed at the centre of attention. This demonstrates how apparently marginal elements in a configuration can contribute towards upscaling soy in Europe, but also how these practices could lead in a significant way towards the sustainability of protein plants. This enrolment of different facts into the framing of documents allowed for an integration of a plurality of voices to be exposed and disclosed in a number of framings and contexts. This plurality of facts seems to temporarily silence competing as well as coexisting processes, such as, for instance, those relating to the cheapness of imported soy and to the overuse of herbicides in respect to the former, or the legislative mechanisms, such as the Payments for Ecosystems schemes in support for legumes, in respect to the latter. Nevertheless, assembled configurations of different elements pull competing and co-existing elements towards complementarity by building up momentum for a Protein Plan for Europe and this in turn is searched for through political alignment.

But we argued that the search for a complementarity and a political alignment and its significance and effect can be understood not through the evidence of plurality, but through heterogeneity and hence multiplicity, dimensions central to the assemblage perspective. Such heterogeneity is derived not from simply allowing the plurality of facts to be staged but from drawing to the surface the interdependencies that come to constitute soy not into a matter of fact but into a matter of concern (Latour, 2004). The dynamics created through documents, public addresses, the building of the standard, the re-ordering of the spatial relations and therefore the interaction of human and non-human elements, create not just heterogeneity but also multiplicity as these enact the ontologies of soy. Away from the usual spotlight placed either on farmers or consumers, agencies

emerge from different configurations of legumes, protein plants, value chains, or feed, to in fact, create visibility for soy and ultimately, change what counts as sustainable soy. What social sciences traditionally evaluate as the slowest and most difficult things to change, namely understandings, meanings and perceptions, often taking generations, has been catalyzed in our case study in as little as 5 years.

The fact that the socio-technical arrangement of soy is turned into a matter of concern is crucial not only because it transforms the understandings of what counts as sustainable soy but also because this leads to new forms of governance practice that works to bring about a political alignment with supra-state governing bodies. This amounts to the proposition made by Hodson and colleagues in respect to fleshing out the intersections between socio-technical arrangements, forms of governance and understandings of sustainability. Our contribution to this discussion was to underline how the entanglement between these layers of inquiry come to render political the search for an alignment of aims and actions. This is a significant process that staves off the impulse of embracing either technological or knowledge fixes as a means of instantiating solutions to problems. Deleamarle and Larédo emphasize that governance of radical change stems from the alignments of various arenas which come to consolidate a 'governance arrangement' (2014, p. 160).

But we did not engage in the space of this article with the stability of such arrangement. Instead, we argued for the agency of the governance practice itself, and how it is pursued by DS by way of an alignment with the supra-state level and further, how such agency not only relies in creating a process but also in the unexpected and unintended effects of the process itself. However, the much awaited for protein policies were not voiced at the 2018 EU High-level meeting. Notwithstanding, the event made policies more likely to happen. Commissioner Phil Hogan asserted the commitment of the EU Commission to pursue many of the core paths activated already by DS and allied groups. Some are already pursued via the Legume Translated thematic network, which includes elements only recently included in the action areas of the Commission, for instance value chain development, in the project itself, specifically east-west development, and which DS had been pursuing ever since 2012.

Last but not least, the analysis presented here shows that the public-private multi-actor organization DS is not taking a single linear path. Agri-environmental governance in this case is not a means of pursuing economic goals and adding environmental qualifiers to economic pursuits. Nor is it simply a cry for reform addressed to the body politic to endorse justified action. After all, the assembled technologies, actors and locales directly contributed to the doubling of soy cultivation in the European Union and to a further significant increase of quantities through flows of soy from countries in Europe outside of the European Union within 5 years. Graphics presented at every DS assembly and conference and in research outputs testified without obscuring the long road lying ahead for covering half of Europe's needs for soy by 2025 as DS planned. Incremental change visible up until now bears no direct correlation to public regulation. DS became an important player in the European market of soy. But we argued that the locus of power, and hence of reconfiguration, resides not necessarily in the intensely illuminated sites but rather in the construction sites where architecture is made. The documents we engaged with in this article articulate and enact the interdependent dimensions of the soy architecture. The effect is that leverage points for soy sustainability are brought into the spotlight to acquire anchoring roles in the overall architecture. These leverage points are not just feed, crop rotation or east-to-west value chains but also, as we showed here, the change in perceptions and understandings of soy.

CONCLUSION

Our exploration of logics of change as articulated by the DS organization has led us to emphasize how interactions between heterogeneous elements unleash new understandings of sustainability and how these emerge through governance practices that pull away from the expectations that come with the development of socio-technical means via standards and certifications and into the political constellations formed by processes of reconfiguration. The methodological paths we embraced, led us to address how a micro-political analysis of documents as devices enables situating emerging properties and capacities of the assemblage, or what we referred to as unexpected and indirect outcomes, in a meso-level transversal inquiry of reconfiguration. The agency of the unexpected is to be found in those spaces where things do not develop as planned. Therefore, we argue for conceptualizations of reconfiguration attentive to the agency emerging from the unexpected and further of reconfiguration as both process and effect.

Such view of reconfiguration bears implications for how change is conceived in approaches to transitions and in policy making. Our analysis points to a view of reconfiguration as involving changes which can be accelerated or can happen quickly and not as understood so far in transitions terms, as involving decades and a generation, thus occurring over the long term. This view creates questions as to the scope of policies, and how these may come to strengthen and accelerate change that is already happening.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The DS organisation has a regularly updated website and contains a wide and rich range of documents and information concerning their activities and aims.
- ² The European Protein Transition 2018 – Is the summary of DS vision. It represents the programmatic plan for developing sustainable practices in Europe. It presents the immediate, mid-term and long-term goals of DS.
- ³ Transition studies is concerned with long-term processes of radical and structural change to sustainable patterns of production and consumption. It involves different conceptual approaches and adherents from a wide range of disciplines (Caletrio, 2015). Authors such as, Kowalski and Haberl, for instance, conceptualize socio-ecological transitions and state that ‘the notion of transition implies a major change – not incremental adjustments or improvements, but a qualitatively new state of the system’ (2007 , p. 1).
- ⁴ Often times, reconfiguration is not necessarily used explicitly but appears for instance as ‘change in transitions’ (Hinrichs, 2014) or as ‘radical change’ the governance of change (Borrás & Edler, 2014).
- ⁵ **Legume Futures 2014**, a 4-year project coordinated by independent scientific consultant, Donal Murphy-Bokern. It is a collaborative research project funded from the European Union’s Seventh Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant number 245216. It comprises 20 partner organizations from 13 countries. It demonstrates the agronomic, economic and environmental benefits of increasing the cultivation of legumes in Europe.
- ⁶ **Legume Transitions 2016** – Is a research proposal that frames soybeans and legumes within a transition perspective. It includes and integrates a range of interconnected aspects that require tackling, such as feed systems and value chains, should long-term sustainability goals for European agriculture be realized. It goes thus beyond the previous project which focused on the cultivation dimension of legumes.
- ⁷ **The Danube Soy Declaration 2017** – The declaration was signed by 17 states of the European Union. It was introduced by DS at the Green Week in January 2013. It enables governments in the wider Danube region to express their support for the development of soy production in Europe within a European Protein Strategy.

⁸ **Legumes Translated 2018** – the project gathers 15 actor groups through which it is able to work directly with 500 actors of all types. The project focuses on increasing the production and use of grain legume crops in Europe as part of an overall change in how protein is sourced and used in Europe.

⁹ **EU High-Level Meeting on the Development of Plant Proteins 2018** – the event brought 200 stakeholders from Europe to discuss the importance of plant proteins for the agri-food sector and announce plans of the European Union for developing strategies and policies. This meeting was accompanied by a comprehensive state of the art report regarding plant proteins in the European Union.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is part of the research project ‘New directions in agri-environmental governance: Re-assembling food, knowledge and autonomy’ funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (No: 157414). I want to thank Ellen Hertz and Jérémie Forney for commenting on previous versions of this paper and to the editors and the two reviewers for providing valuable advice.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

Documents

European Commission: Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the development of plant proteins in the European Union. Brussels 22.11.2018

Legumes Translated – Translating knowledge for legume-based farming for feed and food systems. H2020-RUR-15-2018 (Coordinating organization: Donau Soja GmbH (DS) represented by Mr Matthias Krön. Operational coordinator: Dr. Donal Murphy- Bokern)

Legume Transitions – Transitioning to legume-based farming for feed and food systems. H2020 SFS-26-2016 (Coordinating organization: The Danube Soya Association (DS). General project manager: Dr Donal Murphy-Bokern)

Legume Futures. 2014 – Legume-supported cropping systems for Europe. General report 2014 (published by the Legume Futures consortium, available on the website of the project at www.legumefutures.de)

The European Protein Transition 2018 – this document presents the programmatic agenda of the DS organization. It can be found on the website of the organization at <https://www.donausoja.org/en/about-us/news/ds-protein-strategy-for-europe/>, last accessed, 1 March 2020

The Danube Soy Declaration 2017 – the declaration attests the commitment of signatories to support the development of European strategies for legumes and protein. Available at <https://www.donausoja.org/en/about-us/the-association/donau-soja-declaration/>, last accessed, 1 March 2020

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How to cite this article: Bentia, D.C. (2021) Towards reconfiguration in European agriculture: Analysing dynamics of change through the lens of the Donau Soja organization. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12347>