

What is food system transformation?

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Synergy Project: Food System Transformation: Concepts, theories of change and operationalisation

Project goal: Examining the framings, theories of change, links to systems thinking and operationalisation of the concept in the TUKFS programme.

What is transformation?

Not change to a fatter, fitter, faster caterpillar...



...but transformation to a butterfly with a different function, ability, purpose



Fazey, I., and G. Leicester. 2022. Archetypes of system transition and transformation: Six lessons for stewarding change. *Energy Research and Social Science* 91.

Transformation...

- Can be viewed as a fundamental change occurring over time.
- Is a qualitatively distinct form of change compared to adjustments or reforms that support change that sustains the status quo.
- Can be subjective: what is considered to be transformation to one person may be different to another.
- Is normative: not all transformations may be considered 'good' and some may be 'bad'.
- Inner transformations are usually necessary for outer transformations to occur.
- Can occur at different social, geographical or temporal scales, with transformation at one scale often being dependent on change at other scales.
- Systemic change is a key dimension of transformation, which includes changes in the fundamental dynamics and goals of a system.
- In terms of food system change, time and scale are of the essence: we need changes across food systems and rapidly to be able to address the major social, economic and environmental issues that the current food system creates.

Transformation: An introductory guide to fundamental change for researchers and change makers in a world of crises.
 Prof Ioan Fazey and Dr John Colvin

Transformation is a distinct form of change

Transformation can be defined as a fundamental change occurring over time (Fazey and Leicester 2022). Transformation is considered by many scholars and practitioners to be a qualitatively distinct form of change to that of, for example, adjustments or reforms, which generally involve change to sustain or improve a status quo (Waddell 2011). Instead, transformational change involves deeper and more fundamental change, with a focus on different questions, and having a different purpose or action logic (see table).

	ADJUST	REFORM	TRANSFORM
Core Questions	Are we doing things right?	What are the right things to be doing?	What is right?
Purpose	Improve performance	Change the system & its parts	Create previously unimagined possibilities
Power & relationship	Confirms existing rules	Opens rules to revision	Enable new ways of thinking about power
Action logic	Project implementation	Piloting	Experimenting
Typical actions	Copying, duplicating, mimicking	Changing policy, adapting	Visioning, experimenting, inventing
Tools logic	Negotiation logic	Mediation logic	Envisioning logic

Different kinds of change (modified from Waddell 2011).



Aims of the Synergy Project

- Catalogue the experiences of food system transformation processes across the TUKFS projects.
- Evaluate different approaches to support food system transformation.
- Propose a theory of food system transformation with implications for practice (using examples from the projects).
- To feed back to the projects.
- To inform longer-term food system transformation in the UK.
- Write a joint journal article capturing the developed theory and project experiences.

When is innovation systemic?

The term systemic innovation is used with various interpretations (summarised from "A systems perspective on systemic innovation" by G.R. Midgley and E. Lindhult, doi: 10.1002/sres.2819).

A comprehensive use of the term 'systemic innovation' concerns how people engage in a process to support systemic thinking and action. It is primarily this process, and the thinking and action it gives rise to, that is seen as systemic, rather than the innovation system that they exist within or are trying to create.

Find out more

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Download the report: Transformation: A Guide to Fundamental Change in a World of Crisis

