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**Author(s):** Raippalinna, Liia-Maria; Aro, Riikka; Mäki, Maija; Sonck-Rautio, Kirsi

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## Editorial

# Towards Sustainable Foodways and Research

**Liia-Maria Raippalinna, Riikka Aro, Maija Mäki & Kirsi Sonck-Rautio**

The current food system is the major driver in breaking our planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2020). Transforming the food systems requires that we break some of our old food-related rules, norms and practices and make new ones – or even turn to some old ways. Whereas changing foodways – here understood as the social, cultural and economic practices, traditions and conventions of food – is difficult, major transformations can take still place relatively quickly, as evidenced by, for instance, the past (half a) century of Finnish food history: while meat shifted from being a rarity item to a matter of daily choice, vegetables and fruits have also become year-round nutritional options. We as researchers cannot causally direct change, but we can use our tools to make the various paths more understandable and – recognising a golden opportunity – to take a stance on a desired future. With four empirical articles and two commentary texts, this special issue of *Ethnologia Fennica*, edited by the visiting editors **Riikka Aro** and **Liia-Maria Raippalinna**, explores sustainability-related transgressions and contestations in various parts of the food system, looking for more sustainable foodways and offering guidelines for future research. In addition to these thematic articles and commentaries, this issue also includes two articles outside the theme, three book reviews and two conference reports.

Ethnological food research has a role to play in understanding, challenging and changing the multiple dynamics of (un)sustainability. Bruno Latour (2017) describes the recent notion of the Anthropocene as an unexpected gift to anthropology: denoting the geological scale of the impact the human species has had on this planet, the concept places culture and power relations – the core subject of the discipline – at the centre of transdisciplinary concerns. The stage has been opened for cultural scholars, and it is up to us to decide whether or not we step up and engage. The situation is particularly exiting for food researchers: if ethnologists of food used to work in the margins of their own discipline (see Jönsson, this volume), their research has now un-

foreseen collaborative potential. What we need to do is to engage, to put our viewpoints, methodologies and concepts at work in the larger world. This is not easy in our currently overheated (Eriksen 2016) academic environment. Nevertheless, with this issue, we encourage ethnologists, among other cultural scholars, to take up the transdisciplinary discussion on sustainability and participate in the making of sustainable foodways.

This thematic issue draws inspiration from the panel and from the roundtable ‘Braking norms and traditions in pursuit of sustainable food ways’ discussion held at the SIEF 2021 congress: *Breaking the rules? Power, Participation and Transgression*. The panel discussed the pursuit of sustainable foodways and related norm-making and norm-breaking practices, asking the following question: ‘What kinds of transgressions are, and are not, made when seeking more sustainable foodways?’ The panel and roundtable discussion built on the idea that the pursuit of a sustainable future involves the breaking of old food-related rules, the making of new ones and the bending of both. The aim of the roundtable was to encourage further discussion on whether and how ethnologists can participate in the pursuit of sustainable foodways. By mapping the past, present and future state of the ethnological study of food and sustainability, this issue continues these discussions.<sup>1</sup>

The four thematic empirical research articles in this volume discuss organic food markets, food companies, agricultural modes of production and local debates on aquatic production, representing a general shift in food studies from consumers and consumer identities to food production and markets. If the ethnological study of food and sustainability has previously been biased towards the marginal, small-scale and alternative, the articles here expand on a context that can now be characterised as mainstream and conventional. By contrasting sustainability and a scientific emphasis on measurability, they highlight the situatedness of sustainability negotiations and the role of emotions and senses in framing, arguing, imagining and enacting sustainability.

The first two articles discuss sustainability in mainstream business contexts. Anthropologist **Alexandra Hammer** investigates how sustainability is framed and negotiated by actors in the German organic food market based on ethnographic data from several workshops. Drawing on more-than-human anthropology and anthropology of time, she illustrates how actors in the organic food chain (re)imagine sustainability in the context of capitalist markets. She

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1 The event was convened by Matilda Marshall, Andreas Backa and Liia-Maria Raippalinn. Riikka Aro participated as a roundtable discussant. We are sincerely grateful to Matilda Marshall and Andreas Backa for their invaluable contribution. Without them, this special issue would not have been possible.

notes that while some of the actors envision profound structural transformations, they must also navigate a complex web of constraints, for instance retail practices, to realise more sustainable foodways. **Jessica Jungell-Michelson and Minna Autio** (ecological economics and sustainability sciences) investigate how Finnish food companies make and give sense to sustainability based on interviews with company representatives. They stress that while businesses are operated by people, they also have their own cultures, practices and meaning-making processes. Further, their transformation potential is framed by their operative context, especially capitalist markets: while food companies actively create, change and spread sustainability narratives, their transformative potential is limited since social and ecological aims are always subordinate to profit-making objectives.

Anthropologist **Will LaFleur** investigates alternative modes of production at a biodynamic farm and Ecovillage in Italy, discussing recent attempts to detach production from the techno-industrial modes of production characteristic of the mainstream food chain. As a frame for his sensory ethnographic investigation, LaFleur describes the 'alternative' as a web of multiplicity often involving, for instance, crops and modes of operation with community and sustainability values as opposed to a food chain characterised by monocrops and a corporative business mode aiming at maximum yields. He suggests that 'storying the sensuous atmospheres' of different agricultural formations makes it possible to expand our thinking about sustainability and imagine new horizons of possibility.

Finally, folklorist **Karin Sandell** analyses local newspaper debates on in-sea fish farming in Finnish Ostrobothnia, spotlighting local contestations over sustainability. Using affect theory as a starting point, Sandell investigates how sustainability is expressed by those arguing for or against fish farming. She shows that the two sides not only have different views on what can be considered sustainable; they also frame sustainability in different ways. Sandell notes that the challenges facing the global system of production and consumption remain rather invisible in the debate, being less about sustainable food and more about cultural sustainability, understood as the durability of local livelihoods and ways of life. This reminds us of the complexity of sustainability issues and leads us to ask: Who should be heard when making sustainability decisions, those consuming, those producing or those who are in various ways affected by the processes of production and consumption?

Another source of inspiration for this volume was provided by the SIEF 2021 congress closing plenary event, entitled 'Baking the Rules', where four discussants focused on food and rules, elaborating on eating and food 'as a

way to consider the dynamics of how to break the rules through collaborative action both inside and outside the academy'. The two commentary texts in this volume continue this discussion: in the plenary, environmental anthropologist **Eva Berglund** associated herself with activists and counter-movement actors challenging the current food system, while food ethnologist **Håkan Jönsson** described himself as taking an anti-activist stance, mostly collaborating with food producers and businesses. In their commentaries, written for this volume, they further elaborate on their ideas about the roles of cultural scholars and research in the past, present and future. The commentaries provide two different perspectives on the recent history of food and sustainability studies and challenge researchers to seek and find their own ways to engage, conduct research and collaborate with both the research community and with the wider society.

Like the commentaries, the thematic articles in this volume also present different strategies for framing and defining sustainability. While researchers can certainly conduct research in a context where sustainability is not used as an emic concept, all four articles here focus on the ways in which people conceive of or enact sustainability. The focus makes visible the different views and experiences of people and sheds light on the related contestations, frictions and power struggles. Researchers themselves may or may not take a stance on just what is sustainability or sustainable, with the latter enabling dialogue between different positions instead of only researchers themselves engaging in the debate. Whichever approach is chosen, however, it is important to acknowledge, explicate and justify one's own framings and assumptions and to avoid mixing emic and etic understandings of the phenomenon, whether we take a normative stance or not. In addition, the foodways under investigation may contribute to reproducing structural domination and injustice – sustainability has become a buzzword often merely covering up destructive practices (Tsing 2017; Heikkurinen 2014), and the sustainability discourse often imposes dominant understandings on less powerful others (see Berglund, this volume). When investigating something labelled as sustainable or promoted in the name of sustainability, can we afford not to ask the question: Is this sustainable and a solid basis for pursuing a transformation?

Finally, in being concerned with sustainability, one might wonder how we can justify our own research in a world suffering the effects of climate change. Our research practices and academic careers inevitably contribute to environmental deterioration. Even when we sincerely plan and report sustainability measures and strategies in our research plans and funding applications, we cannot, for instance, avoid producing climate emissions via

the same research practices. Often, we cannot but hope that our research somehow compensates for it, contributing to the many small steps back and forth that will ultimately lead to a more sustainable future. Our key directions are truthful self-reflection and tolerating uncertainty. 'Breaking the fishbowl' (see Katajavuori 2022) requires a subtle consideration of when we should dare to speak out and when we should reserve our own judgments to make other voices heard.

The two research articles outside the theme of this volume concentrate on the lives and experiences of two different groups of young people. **Inés Matres's** article focuses on adolescents' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Finland. Matres studied 75 diaries collected by museums and archives and utilised oral history and media ethnographic methods to examine the emotional resilience of the narrators and how the adolescents were invited in and responded to making the stuff of history. The second article outside the theme, authored by **Päivi Granö, Teija Koskela** and **Brita Somerkoski**, analyses the relationships between international university students from Africa and local Finnish communities from the perspective of their local friendship families. The friendship families were appointed as part of a newly established programme designed to help foreign students better adjust to their new environment. In their article, the authors also reflect on these experiences in order to further develop this programme, and as such, to improve the help offered to foreign students as they adjust to life in Finland.

The volume also includes three book reviews. Two of the new books reviewed concentrate on the current discussion about ethnographical methodologies and field work practices. *Etnologiskt fältarbete. Nya fält och former* (2022) and *Challenges and Solutions in Ethnographical Research: Ethnography with a Twist* (2020) both call attention to an active, reflexive and innovative field of ethnological research in the Nordic countries. The engaging reviews of the books were written by **Jenni Rinne** and **Ida Tolgensbakk**. One book review is about protecting cultural property and heritage in times of war and uncertainty. Mattias Legné's ambitious work, *Värden Att Värna: Kulturminnesvård som statsintresse in Norden vid tiden för Andra världskriget* (2022), is reviewed by **Niklas Huldén**. The war in Ukraine creates new meanings and significance for the book, which offers readers a serious message from the destructiveness of the war. This volume also includes two conference reports from events held in 2022 – finally, after so many remote conferences and seminars during the last couple of years. **Helena Laukkoski** reports on Ethnology Days, held in March 2022, in Jyväskylä, with the theme *Cultural Knowledge in a Changing world*. **Inés Matres** and **Shikoh Shiraiwa** report

on the 35th Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference, held in June 2022, Reykjavik, with the theme *Re:22*.

This issue is dedicated to our beloved and respected colleague Andreas Backa (1978–2022) and the work he did for sustainability, both inside and outside academia.

## **AUTHORS**

Riikka Aro DSocSci, MA, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Jyväskylä

Liia-Maria Raippalinna MA, Doctoral researcher, University of Jyväskylä.

Maija Mäki, PhD, University Teacher, University of Turku, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Ethnologia Fennica*

Kirsi Sonck-Rautio, PhD, University Teacher, University of Turku, Responsible Editor-in-Chief of *Ethnologia Fennica*

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