



UNIVERSITY OF
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Centre for Resilience and
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A transition to healthier and more sustainable patterns of food consumption in Sweden



Case Study

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■ The challenge

Sustainable food production and consumption are crucial to achieving the UN Sustainability Goals, Agenda 2030. We need to change our eating habits, food production and reduce food waste. A sustainable food system enables food security and good nutrition for all without compromising the economic, social and environmental foundations of generating food security and nutrition for generations to come.

Dietary guidelines are important, but not enough to make us act sustainably. Psychological and physical factors such as norms and habits, knowledge, marketing, accessibility or price are highly relevant. Other important aspects are naturally the range of food products available and the actual food environments - the physical, digital and social environments where we make decisions about food. The actual conditions as well as the overarching norms of society need to be in place to make the sustainable option the selected choice.

Energy-rich products containing small amounts of food stuff and high amounts of additives are widely available and relatively inexpensive. These goods are marketed intensively but at the same time poor in nutrients. Their high energy content means they contribute to people being overweight.

A Swedish study in 2019 investigated outdoor advertising from a health perspective in two different districts of Stockholm. It showed that most marketing messages linked to food tend to highlight energy-intensive foods such as soft drinks, hamburgers, ice cream or sweets – in other words, food that is less healthy and can

lead to various lifestyle diseases. This was particularly the case in the district in the study with lower socioeconomic status. Similar results have been seen from studies in Mexico and the USA.

Another survey among adolescents in Sweden in 2016-17 showed that:

- the consumption of fruits and vegetables is too low, while the consumption of red and processed meat is too high in Swedish adolescents.
- one fifth of adolescents were overweight or obese.
- adolescents with parents with lower educational attainment and/or a lower income consume less vegetables and fish and more sugary drinks.
- the school meal was more nutritious than other meals during the day.

Swedish dietary guidelines have recommendations that are sustainable for both health and the environment:

- Eat more vegetables, fruit and berries, fish and shellfish, nuts and seeds.
- Switch to wholegrain, vegetable fats and oils, and low-fat dairy products
- Eat less red and processed meat, salt, sugar and alcohol.

The Swedish Marketing Practices Act covers all media and target audiences and regulate that advertising must not exploit children's inexperience and credulity, encourage them to

persuade others to buy the product, or contain any content which is potentially harmful or dangerous, and it should contain the information that children cannot enter into legally binding agreements and so cannot order goods or services without the consent of their guardians.

Sweden's Radio and Television Act (1996) forbids the right to air advertisements towards children under 12. The ban only covers the Swedish-aired television but not international channels or social media platforms.

In Sweden, the populations of its communities and cities are becoming more ethnically, culturally and demographically diverse. Not surprisingly, while the benefits of greater diversity are well documented, the public service system is under additional strain in order to resource increasing demand of basic human needs such as food, health, education and housing. This strain in the public service delivery system creates challenges and could – if not managed – lead to less efficient and less effective public engagement, especially in areas that are socio-economically challenged. Some of those areas in Sweden are also overcrowded and suffer from poorer public services, which includes public health response and food supply. The cumulative impact includes strain on the national health service, weaker transition nationally to healthier food habits, and in the longer run inefficient market responses.

In essence, the categorisation of sustainability and food consumption amongst a vulnerable group is an environmental, health and social issue which requires action from political, legal and ideological settings.

■ The solution

The Cambridge Policy Bootcamp is an agile approach to find new evidence to address three challenges:

1. Thematic challenge (e.g. complex multi-level governance of the food system and public food)
2. Technical challenge (e.g. expensive participatory research, taxation sugary food)

3. Outreach challenge (e.g. what % of people spells success)

As an innovative participatory research method, it combines engineering systems thinking methodology with theories drawn from multiple social science disciplines to quickly narrow down evidence to develop potential solutions for a complex policy problem. The aim is to integrate multiple perspectives, not into a single unified model, but an accommodating framework that can provide practical direction for complex.

This bootcamp focuses on adolescence, the period of life from 15 to 21 years of Swedish population. It looks at the decision-making in a food system context where vulnerable groups are at risk. The aim is to find opportunities for decision makers to make better decisions to influence the food system to connect today's adolescents with the food market as more well-informed consumers, and to guide the future food market with the taste to demand more vegetables and fruit in the food supply chain. The role of public policy here is to set all the dials within the food system pointed in the right direction.

On March 2nd, the Government of Sweden and EAT organised a Policy Boot Camp, facilitated by Cambridge University. Young people (aged 15-20) from 26 countries participated in the Boot Camp, alongside a range of prominent experts. The problem to be tackled was as follows:

How can Sweden transition to healthier and more sustainable patterns of food consumption among vulnerable adolescents (age 15-20)?

The goal of the Boot Camp was to develop policy solutions to tackle this problem, using systems thinking. The Cambridge Policy Boot Camp is a tried and tested methodology designed to strengthen the thinking capacity and reasoning of the participants through involvement in a short but intensive session. The focus is on driving policy and systems level change. Diverse groups of stakeholders can thus be brought together in the decision-making process.

After brief introductions by the organisers, facilitators and experts, groups of youth – each led by an expert – applied systems thinking tools to come up with solutions to the problem at

hand. Brief training in systems thinking and a few specific tools were provided, including the asset-based approach and working back from a future vision where success has been achieved. Each group submitted and presented their top solution in the form of an elevator pitch (NABC tool) and received feedback and rating from the experts. The boot camp lasted for a total of four hours and the process was intensive.

▣ The conclusions

Ten groups presented their varied and innovative solutions, and these ranged from using social media for better communication about sustainability, urban farming so people can grow their own food, and home economics classes, through to introducing higher taxes on less healthy foodstuffs such as red meat and soft drinks.

A panel of experts from CRSD then rated the ideas and presented their favourite, Cool Meal Science, which is shown in full below.

Cool meal science: An interactive course during school lunchtime, building awareness among adolescents about how to buy healthy and sustainable foods and the benefits of doing so. Seamless education connected to all courses on healthy and sustainable eating habits. Teachers and engaged students could be the leaders. Could review recipes, the environmental footprint of a meal, etc. Students are already in school, and this is an easy way to raise awareness. Engaging students to lead these courses also makes them actors of change. It could happen during lunch to not interfere with other subjects. Students eating better also means students are more energised, focused, and learn more efficiently.

The group that developed this idea was nominated to meet Per Calleberg, State Secretary to the Minister for Rural Affairs Jennie Nilsson. All the proposed solutions were taken back to the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation following the event.

▣ The impact

Recommendations made to the Swedish Government were as follows.

Based on further discussion with the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, the following three options were proposed. Any of the steps can be applied by themselves or in combination with other strategies. The common and the core aspect of the three ideas is that the methods are co-created.

1. Ministerial Level: Embed policy systems thinking methods thoroughly:

Help introduce policy systems-based action research methods, e.g. policy boot camp in the Ministry more thoroughly. The purpose will be to apply various methodologies efficiently and effectively to draw, find policy solutions from the to finish.

As an action, we can run the Policy Simulation Lab, another method (linked) which would take one or multiple ideas from the Policy Boot Camp and figure out how to further design the deployment strategy and develop evaluation techniques to capture the impacts.

2. National Level - Empower youth to be part of the policy making process:

Develop policy systems informing the platform for the young people of Sweden along with the global youth.

The purpose will be to really enact the term 'future-proof policies' in Sweden, and improve youth understanding of the public system.

As an action, we help develop a food policy systems platform, e.g Policy Action Hub for the Government of Sweden on food policy in general (because we are in AT2, but the skills here are transferable as you can see). At the platform, while we could train some of Swedish academics and public officials on our methods, we can run multiple policy boot camps to churn out outputs. The platform will have an outline of the overall food policy systems and a database of networks to draw on for iterative exercises.

3. International Level - Enhance geopolitical partnership by championing policy systems thinking among less developed countries

Enhance the Swedish geopolitical development agenda by making food policy systems effectiveness an important area for support in developing countries (which can include any number of policy challenges ranging from trade to procurement to labelling).

The purpose will be to champion systems thinking approach in policy making and emphasize multi-disciplinary policy making across the platform. Global food policy system upgrading should not be expensive both in terms of time and money.

As an action, we collectively engage with a set of developing countries where they are struggling to have a good food system for their vulnerable population. The Ministry can Champion the effort of translating public food policy into other countries by helping in co-creating a ODA fund to draw from to deliver country level activities. This support can come as a seed fund with the endorsement of the Ministry to catalyse a multiyear capacity building effort for less developed countries.

References

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▣ Delegate comments

“Solutions are only good if they can be turned into action – need to generate real commitments to action, hope this will be the start of a new approach to problem-solving towards the Summit and for the future. Thank you for having pioneered this exciting bootcamp set up to help Sweden tackle this challenge. I am excited about the innovative design and young people having had the chance to co-create solutions.”

Mr Olav Kjørven, Chief Strategic Officer of EAT Foundation

Katarina Wahlgren, Deputy Director, Ministry for Enterprise and Innovation

“It was very interesting to hear the conversations, these were not easy conversations. We will bring the ideas back to the Ministry and discuss them further.”

“It was great to hear so much empathy and consideration for participation, inclusivity and recognition of different cultural traditions and diversity.”

Robbie Stamp, Snr. Fellow CRSD

Steve Evans, Snr. Fellow, CRSD

“[The groups] did a fantastic job in time-limited conditions, being creative, systemic, bringing empathy consistently for other cultures and food cultures. Many of the proposed solutions work from existing solutions, yet are different from existing systems. I was surprised by the desire to connect locally - potentially a very powerful force.”

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Disclaimer

The authors of this report have made every attempt to ensure that the information contained in this case study is accurate at the time of completion. This has included working in close collaboration with stakeholders. However, any errors that remain are with the authors.

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