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Title:

A sense for sustainability? – How sensory consumer science can contribute to sustainable development of the food sector

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Humanities current use of resources is not in line with the goal of sustainable development, and the impact scenarios of climate change appear worryingly pessimistic. The agricultural and food sector accounts for a particularly high share of the impact, as does the consumption side of the equation. Transforming food consumption thus plays a crucial role in tackling the challenges, and sensory consumer science can contribute to this process.

The presentation examines what is required of the food sector in order to sustainably transform, outlines the current research streams in sensory consumer science from a sustainability perspective, and, based on comparing the first with the latter, discusses and suggests a categorization of the contributions that sensory consumer science can make to sustainable development, highlighting also where there are trade-offs between sustainability targets and thoughts needed for the pessimistic scenario (e.g. using crops for fuel or food? When is consumer preference for natural and local not favourable to sustainability? Which foods does life under climate change require?).

Current sensory consumer science studies foods regarded as sustainable (e.g. organic, sustainably claimed, insects and meat alternatives) as well as issues that contribute to sustainability (e.g. shelf-life, fruit and vegetable consumption, tackling food neophobia). Necessary transformations towards sustainable food systems are derived and outlined, which are 1) promoting consumer dietary shift to more sustainable foods and diets, 2) increasing food diversity, 3) reduction of food waste, 4) improving the circularity of the food system, 5) heightening and prioritising food-related well-being, and 6) coping with the effects of climate change. Current research explicitly focuses on the first and second, but less on the remaining points. It is concluded that designing future sensory consumer science research to explicitly target these transformations can improve effectiveness and increase the disciplines contribution to meeting the goal of sustainable development.