Publication date: January 2017
Source: Technological Forecasting and Social Change, Volume 114
Author(s): Tuomas Kuhmonen
This study aims at exposing the potential of futures images in anticipating and informing transitions of complex adaptive systems toward sustainability. Our case concerns the food system. The inherent properties of complex adaptive systems make the exact trajectories of these systems unforeseeable. However, since the systems unfold into a common direction, we can say something about the qualities of the milestones toward which these systems navigate. Attractors configure the evolution of complex adaptive systems. Since attractors are the most stable and robust elements in these systems, they are more feasible targets for foresight than the several variants that they configure and effectuate. We have depicted attractors of sustainable local food systems by futures images: through working with an appropriate level of abstraction, by leaning on a multi-perspective approach and by breaking the linear relationship between the present and the future. In this context they were sustainability-oriented trading and delivery systems, food cultures, product development projects, food brands and transparent food systems. We also located hot spots of structural change and agency within the food system. These insights may inform transition management efforts, but they must be updated frequently, since sustainable development is a journey.

Read Full Article