



From the Rice Grain to the Shop – Exploring Sustainable Food Practices in Japan

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Sustainable food organizing

Crucial for achieving a desirable societal future vision



STG #12: Responsible consumption and production



STGs# 1, 2: No poverty, zero hunger



STG #3: Improve overall health and well-being

Intertemporal tensions in food organizing

Conventional Approach

Empirical context: Food as a commodity, a passive object with no agency

Recent Approach

Food organizing: “the organizational efforts that leverage, shape, and transform food”
(Moser et al., 2021: 176)

Biomaterial agency: “as a living matter, food has biomaterial qualities that invite, demand, or resist certain forms of organizing” (Moser et al., 2021: 176)

Human Temporality

Artificial rhythms to align food’s rhythms with societal work schedules (Atkins, 2011)

**Intertemporal
Tensions**

Food Temporality

Natural rhythms and cycles of growth, ripening, harvest, and decay (Hernes et al., 2021)

Intertemporal tensions in organizations

- Literature has overlooked the critical issue of balancing human and natural temporalities
- Especially when it comes to addressing intertemporal tensions in a sustainable manner

Research Question:

How can actors, striving for more sustainable food organizing, address intertemporal tensions?

STUDY 1

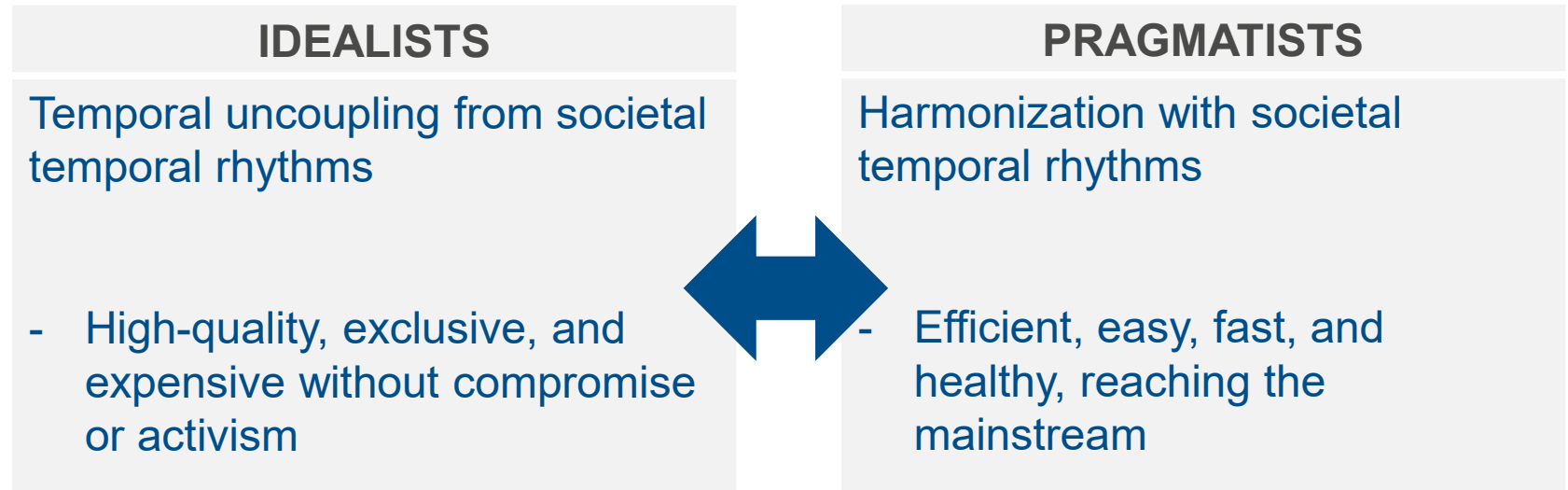
Social Food Entrepreneurs in Germany

- Selling organic foods online, stores, or restaurants
- Avoiding artificial ingredients
- Using certification labels
- Minimizing waste



Study 1: Food entrepreneurs in Germany

Exploring sustainable food startups in Germany



*“Japan’s approach to food timing inspired me to develop my own restaurant principles—prioritizing **slowness and freshness.**”*

(Restaurant owner)

*“When I visited Japan, I was struck by the **efficiency** of vending machines—but also by how the food is always **fresh.**”*

(Food delivery startup)

A black and white photograph of a bowl of ramen. The bowl is white and filled with dark broth, thin noodles, and a soft-boiled egg. Two wooden chopsticks are resting on the rim of the bowl. The background is dark and textured.

STUDY 2

Sustainable Food Organizing in Japan



La Paix



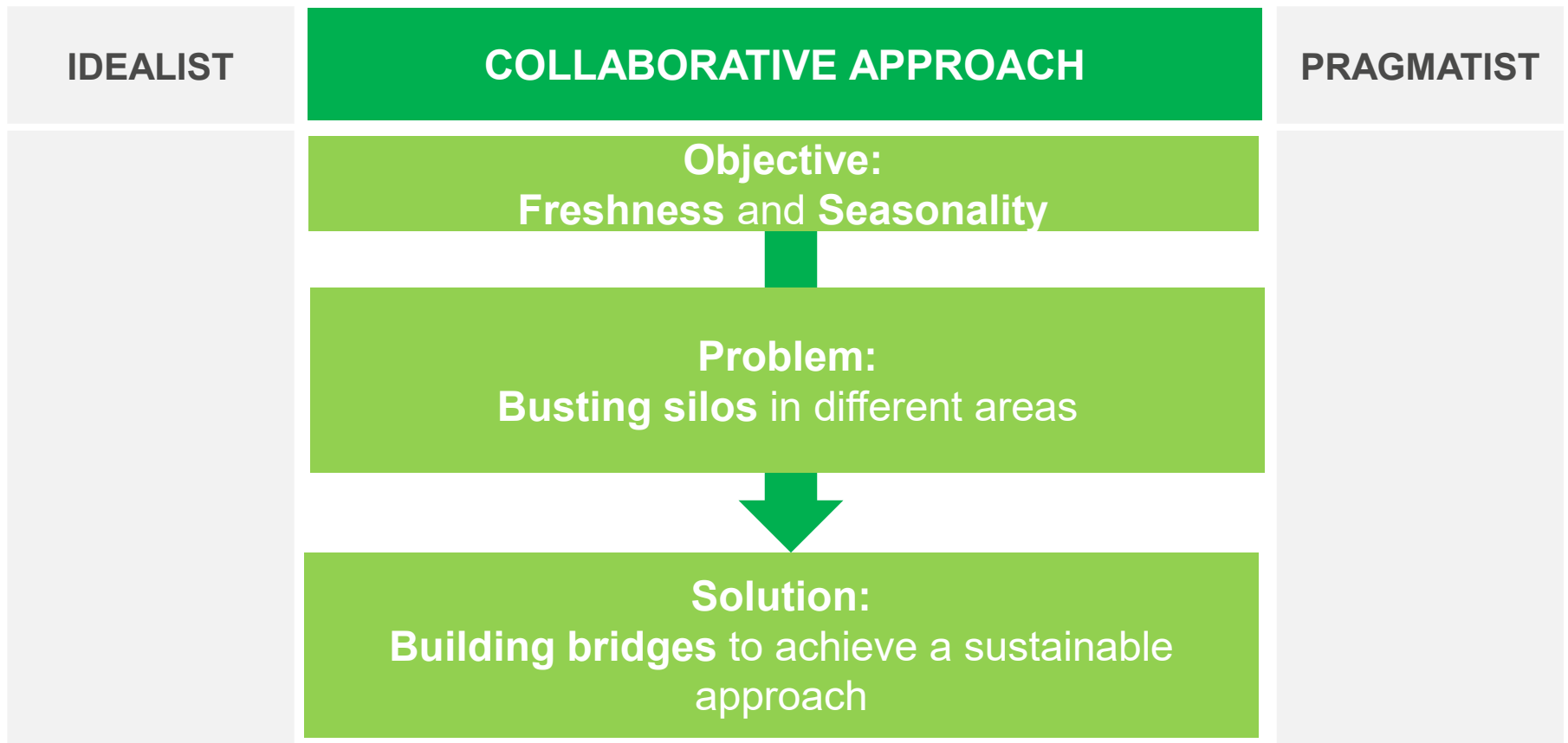


STUDY 2

Research Questions

- How does sustainable food organizing look like in Japan?
- Is it an extreme case of the dynamics seen in Germany?

... but sustainable food organizing in Japan happens “in between”





OBJECTIVE

Freshness and seasonality as the key priority

*“Trying to read the **season** when it's the **right time** to plant the rice, grow the rice. So, this kind of mindset is the important spirit of the Japanese people, which I try to **express**.” (Chef)*



PROBLEM

Interviewees problematize “silo thinking”

- Between industries and professions
- Between different approaches to cooking and serving food
- Between the city and country
- Between hierarchies

“Especially people in the 20s, still like there should be more and more opportunities There's still hierarchies, and then basically you are stuck in one restaurant or a hotel, and there's not too much, you know, like outlook about your career.” (Michelin chef)

Solution: “Busting silos” by “building bridges”



Drawing
inspiration
from others

Leveraging
emerging
synergies

Giving
back to
others

1. Drawing inspiration from others

Different professions, the local community, other generations ...

- *“Once I stopped being committed to one restaurant, I spend like half of the time cooking as a chef, but then half of the time to go for **research outside**. So, I often go to the **countryside**, go and meet the people who actually grow vegetables and work in the rice fields, the sake producers **to learn** from them.” (Chef and food hub manager)*
- *“Because the **younger generation** chefs are already interested in sustainability ... we can **learn** from them.” (Michelin Chef)*

2. Leveraging emerging synergies

Using the whole product, catering to different budgets, and different generations ...

- *“There are more and more people who are getting older and, you know, have problems chewing or swallowing. As a chef, I’m trying to address this ... and I thought, okay, this is something as a chef, I want to help them with ... I walked into hospitals and work with tech and the medical industry ... this is a food printer to produce foods like jellies. People don’t need to chew. You can make meals that you can drink. When I try to solve this kind of issue, to help people at hospitals to eat, this kind of food can be used in like baby food or space food. So, it suddenly **opens up the field, the opportunity.**”
(Michelin chef)*

3. Giving back to others

Educating people and involving the next generation of chefs ...

- *“Although we cannot change the price, we can still try to change the people’s **perception** ... by using ingredients considered food waste showing that there is a **hidden value** to it.”
(Sushi restaurant owner)*
- *“I always try to bring my team together. I was a chef at XX, and now, as a fact, the sous chef who used to work with me is now becoming the head chef here. I try to **hand over** my mindset ... The younger generation should feel they want to become a chef.”
(Michelin chef)*

Conclusion: It comes down to being passionate about sustainable food

IDEALIST

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

PRAGMATIST

*“I **love** cooking, I want to, you know, try to have more people get involved.”* (Michelin chef)



*“Basically, I think the most important aspect is to have **fun**. If it doesn’t involve something fun, it won’t work ... and don’t lose your **curiosity**.”* (Michelin chef)