



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,  
Education and Research EAER

Agroscope

*u<sup>b</sup>*

*b*  
**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**



# The sustainable agricultural social system

## A social science framework to grasp the diversity of farming systems for sustainability assessment

**Judith Janker, Stefan Mann & Stephan Rist**

Trondheim, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019



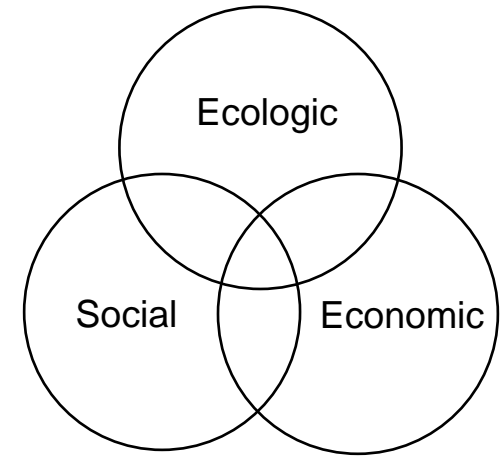


# Background



# Sustainability in agriculture

- Rising key words 'sustainable agriculture' & 'agricultural sustainability' (VELTEN et al. 2015, JANKER et al. 2018)
- Sustainability assessments evaluate what is perceived as 'good' or 'sustainable agriculture' (DE OLDE et al. 2016, JANKER & MANN 2018)
- Sustainability is mostly seen as multi-dimensional, with at least three dimensions (VELTEN et al. 2015, SLÄTMO et al. 2017, JANKER & MANN 2018)





# Sustainability in agriculture

- Previous research: In sustainability assessments on farm level, there is no consensus of what the social dimension of sustainability should entail
  - Major discrepancies: (1) actors addressed,  
(2) sustainability thresholds
  - Similarities only what is not sustainable, e.g. human rights & labour law violations (cf. JANKER & MANN 2018)
  - Potential explanation: diversity of production systems and social conditions worldwide



# Sustainability in agriculture

- Previous research: In sustainability assessments on farm level, there is no consensus of what the social dimension of sustainability should entail



VS.





# Research idea

- What is socially sustainable farming?
  - Need for a framework
    - flexible / general enough to depict individual actors and social conditions worldwide
    - precise enough to differentiate 'sustainable agriculture'  
e.g. from organic agriculture (often in the European context)  
and from obviously unsustainable agriculture (often worldwide)

Research idea:

Identify

- adequate social setting
- sustainability measure, locally adaptable
- a „way to go“ instead of fixed indicators

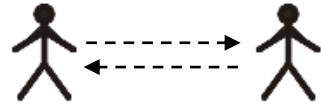


# Conception



# Step 1) 'Social'

- What does 'social' actually mean?



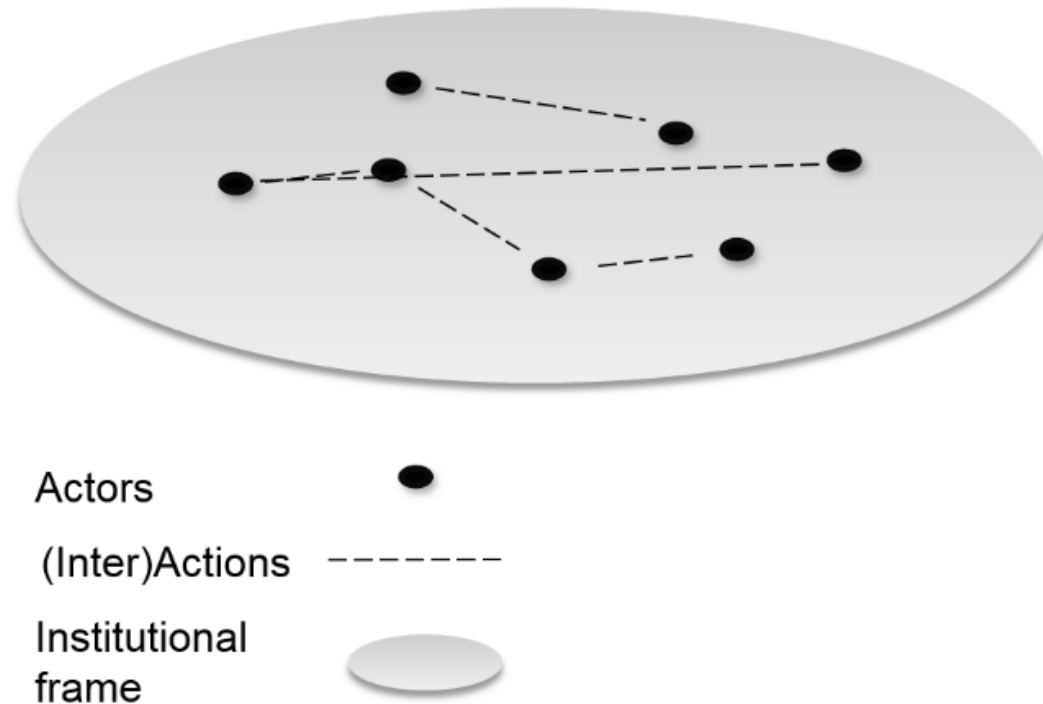
- social interaction, on individual level but also beyond
- How to grasp complex interactions in farming?
  - system approach (close to the farming system, cf. PANNELL 1999)
  - PARSONS' (1991) 'social system of change'





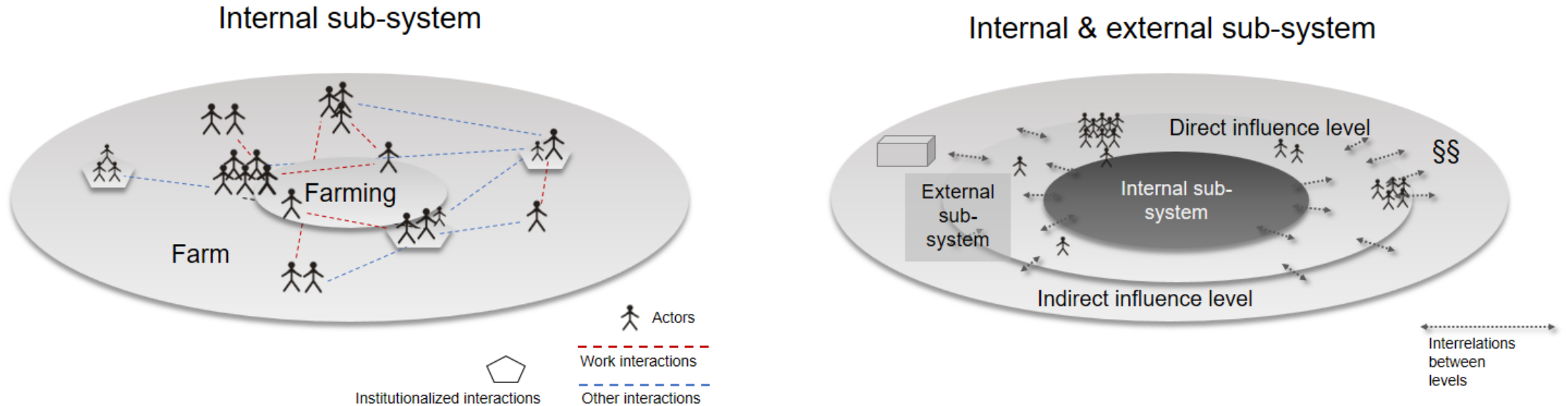
## Step 2) Social system

Parsons' «social system of change» (PARSONS 1991)





## Step 3) Agricultural social system

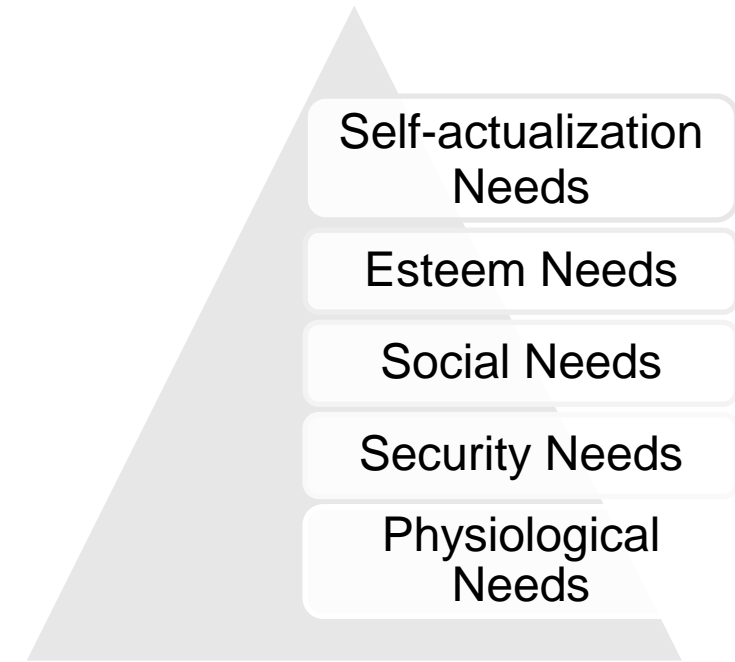


- Identify social actors and actors groups through social interactions
- Identify institutional embedding, e.g. laws, institutions etc.
- importance determined by direct and indirect forms of interactions



## Step 4) Sustainable agricultural social system

- What does sustainability mean in this system?
- 'Sustainable development', according to the Brundtland report (WCED 1987) only term scientists agree upon (e.g. HOLDEN et al. 2016)
- Fulfil the 'needs of present & future generations' (WCED 1987)
- Needs concept according to MASLOW (1943)





## Step 4) Sustainable agricultural social system

- What does sustainability mean in this system?
- 'Sustainable development', according to the Brundtland report (WCED 1987) only term scientists agree upon (e.g. HOLDEN et al. 2016)
  - Fulfil the 'needs of present & future generations' (WCED 1987)
- Needs concept according to MASLOW (1943)
  - «needs» subjectively & culturally influenced (e.g. TAY & DIENER 2011)
  - categories and needs fulfilment must be defined locally, according their importance for the stakeholders
- Rights as bottom threshold (UN 1948 & 1966a/b, SHUE 1996, GASPER 2007)



# Summary & Outlook



# Summary

- Novel framework to capture and comprehend 'social' and 'sustainability' on farms
- Benefits: Framework to capture social actors and their needs within an agricultural system
  - overcomes operationalization problems, such as actors ranges and sustainability thresholds
  - integrates already existing, validated social sciences approaches



# Outlook

- Future steps / limitations:

- Framework needs practice tests, and refinement in local embedding
- Review comparability between different sociocultural systems
- Clarify role of conflicts and power asymmetries, e.g. future generations
- (Re-)Integrate with other sustainability dimensions

e.g. Rööös et al. 2019

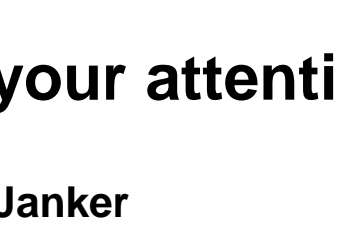
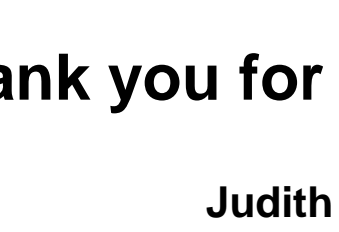
e.g. JANKER, *under review*



# References

- DE OLDE, E.M., OUDSHOORN, F.W., SØRENSEN, C.A.G., BOKKERS, E. A. M. & DE BOER, I.J.M. 2016. Assessing sustainability at farm-level: Lessons learned from a comparison of tools in practice. *Ecological Indicators* 66: 391–404.
- GASPER, D., 2007. Human rights, human needs, human development, human security: relationships between four international ‘human’ discourses. *Forum for Development Studies*: 9–43.
- HOLDEN, E., LINNERTUD, K. & BANISTER, D., 2017. The imperatives of sustainable development. *Journal of Sustainable Development* 25(3): 213–226.
- JANKER, J. & MANN, S., 2018. Understanding the social dimension of sustainability in agriculture: A critical review of sustainability assessment tools. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*: 1–21.
- JANKER, J., MANN, S. & RIST, S., 2018. What is Sustainable Agriculture? Critical Analysis of the International Political Discourse. *Sustainability*, 10(12).
- JANKER, J. *under review*, Moral conflicts, premises and the social dimension of agricultural sustainability.
- MASLOW, A. 1943. A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review* 50: 370–396.
- PANNELL, D. 1999. Social and economic challenges in the development of complex farming systems. *Agroforestry Systems* 45: 393–409.
- PARSONS, T. 1991. *The social system*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge Sociology Classics.
- RÖÖS, E., FISCHER, K., TIDÅKER, P. & NORDSTÖM KÄLLSTRÖM, H., 2019. How well is farmers’ social situation captured by sustainability assessment tools? A Swedish case study. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 26(3): 268–281.
- Shue, H., 1996. *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2. edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- SLÄTMO, E., FISCHER, K. & RÖÖS, E., 2017. The Framing of Sustainability in Sustainability Assessment Frameworks for Agriculture. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 57(3): 378–395.
- TAY, L. & DIENER, E., 2011. Needs and subjective well-being around the world. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101(2): 354–365.
- UN (ed.). (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. Geneva: United Nations.
- UN (ed.). (1966a). *International covenant on civil and political rights*. Geneva: United Nations.
- UN (ed.). (1966b). *International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights*. Geneva: United Nations.
- VELTEN, S., LEVENTON, J., JAGER, N. & NEWIG, J., 2015. What is sustainable agriculture? A systematic review. *Sustainability* 7: 7833–7865.
- WCED (ed.), 1987. *Our common future*. Oxford: World Commission on Environment and Development.





**Thank you for your attention.**

**Judith Janker**

[judith.janker@agroscope.admin.ch](mailto:judith.janker@agroscope.admin.ch)

**Agroscope** good food, healthy environment

[www.agroscope.admin.ch](http://www.agroscope.admin.ch)

