Preface

Late in 2009, researchers from 'Wageningen University and Research Centre' in the Netherlands (WUR) and the 'Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique' in France (INRA) took the initiative to design and organise a special international workshop with the view to bringing research insights and practical experiences together, and to discuss papers in depth in order to form a basis for effective strategies to stimulate a transition towards sustainable agro-food systems.

The main goal was to engage a community of researchers and policy makers in the production of an overview of analytical methods, experiences and scientific insights on the main issues at stake in the sustainability projects and programmes that they were contributing to. More specifically, the workshop was to contribute to:

- comparing and contrasting the issues of analysis and governance of innovation and R&D practices in various European countries;
- providing input for rethinking government policies, socio-professional strategies and civic concerns, with the view to contributing to sustainable development in the agro-food systems on the basis of existing research and experiences;
- defining the content and the agenda of a possible consortium for further research.

Researches were expected to have an analytical component (to analyse the relevant processes) as well as a constructive component, i.e. to play a role in cooperation with other stakeholders in the development of sustainable alternatives covering several agricultural subsectors – animal production; arable farming; glasshouse horticulture; biomass production for fuel and fibre – and to target emerging innovations in agro-food systems, knowledge regimes in transition, or design practices.

Two main issues were proposed to the participants:

- Analyse the dynamics in agro-food systems, including system innovations, knowledge regimes and design practices that are currently ongoing.
- Investigate how government agencies and other actors can organize themselves and what they can do to encourage and influence such system innovations, knowledge regimes and design settings in order to make agro-food systems more sustainable.

Supported by the Dutch Ministry of Economy, Agriculture and Innovation, WUR and INRA, the Wageningen UR Livestock Research Group hosted the workshop in Lelysdat in the Netherlands from the 16th to the 18th of June 2010, entitled:
“System Innovations, Knowledge Regimes, and Design Practices towards Sustainable Agriculture”.

A scientific and organizational committee was set up under the coordination of Boelie Elzen that was composed of Barbara van Mierlo from WUR-CIS, Boelie Elzen and Bram Bos from Wageningen UR Livestock Research, Marc Barbier and Marianne Cerf from INRA SenS, and Gilles Allaire from INRA ODR. A call for papers launched through the scientific networks of the committee members and published on the Wageningen UR Livestock Unit web site. About eighty paper proposals were submitted of which 17 were selected for presentation. The format of the meeting was designed to stimulate in-depth discussions of various issues, rather than having many presentations and only brief discussions. To achieve this, the key features were to have plenary sessions based on intensive interactions among a limited number of participants. All participants were invited to play an active role, either as paper authors or discussants or both. Participation to the workshop was by invitation only on the basis of submitted abstracts (for researchers) or known expertise (for policy makers).

The invited participants came from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds such as Innovation Studies, Economics, Science & Technology Studies (including constructive and interactive technology assessment studies), Policy Studies (including studies of network governance, learning and the impact of regulation), Organisation Studies (including studies focusing on management of structural change and leadership) and Practices Based Studies. In addition to disciplinary perspectives, the workshop succeeded in attracting policy-makers and representatives of cooperative and professional networks from Belgium, France and the Netherlands, all of whom brought with them their experiences and own ways of framing insights.

After further review (two reviewers per paper), some contributions were considered mature enough to engage a publication process. We are therefore extremely happy to present a selection of those contributions that have sufficiently evolved to compose the chapters of this book. We wish to thank all the participants for the quality of their contributions, their efforts to improve their papers, and their purposeful comments and advice, which enhanced the quality of all the papers through the reviewing process. We also wish to thank Liz Libbrecht and Nonta Libbrecht-Carey for their remarkable work in helping us to produce an English-language publication thanks to a complete language review.

Boelie Elzen, Marc Barbier, Marianne Cerf, Barbara van Mierlo, Bram Bos, Gilles Allaire.
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