

Summary Report for OECD CPR Fellowship

1. Cover page

Name

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Subject title and theme number

Crossdisciplinary research to develop holistic multicriteria assessments of organic and sustainable agriculture (theme number 2, Sustainability in practice)

Host institution

Centre for Sustainability: Agriculture, Food, Energy, Environment (CSAFE), University of Otago, New Zealand. (Name at time of application: Centre for the Study of Agriculture, Food and Environment)

Host supervisor

Professor Henrik Moller

Dates of fellowship

4. October 2011 to 3. January 2012

Consent

I give my consent to this report being posted on the Co-operative Research Programme's website.

2. Relevance

Relevance to the Co-operative Research Programme objectives

The fellowship project has provided a basis for increased collaboration between two research environments that work with the sustainable use of natural resources within a global context, and which explicitly works with how to do multi- and interdisciplinary research in this area and how to involve stakeholders in genuinely transdisciplinary research projects. Bringing such research groups together is an important way to strengthen scientific knowledge in this area of research and thereby improve policy advice.

Relevance to theme objective

The fellowship is first of all relevant to theme two, Sustainability in practice. The project concerned issues that have hitherto limited the adaptation of sustainable practices; in particular our ability to make 'holistic' multicriteria assessments of the effects of sustainable and organic agriculture, which will provide the actors in food and agriculture with better tools to develop their systems and networks in to enable a more fair comparison with systems that are optimized only with regard to one or a few criteria with high focus and precise methods of assessment. Such multicriteria assessments must include social, bio-economic, environmental and nature quality considerations. In order to develop such holistic assessments that can function as means for communication on sustainability goals, disciplines from agricultural science, social sciences, communication sciences and cultural sciences and philosophy of science will have to be incorporated and work together. This fellowship project has supported the bridging of disciplines by bringing together two research environments that both practice such interdisciplinary research and that take part in the international development of inter- and transdisciplinary methodology.

The fellowship project is also relevant to some of the goals in theme 1, The natural resources challenge, in particular the topic "holistic economic and societal evaluation of systems where natural resources are used in the agri-food chain".

Relevance to agricultural and food policy

Both the host institution and the home institution of the fellowship applicant have as part of their objectives to promote the benefits to society and to inform policy makers, and the fellowship project will support these objectives.

More specifically, the outcomes of the collaboration on research methods to make and communicate holistic or multicriteria assessments of the effects of agriculture and food chains on nature and society will be utilized in the Multicriteria project, which as one of its objectives aims to inform policy makers in the development of more comprehensive and balanced assessments of sustainable land use.

3. Objectives of the fellowship

The overall purpose of the fellowship is to exchange ideas and experiences between two agricultural research groups, in Denmark and New Zealand, with many similarities in their general approaches and focus, but very different political conditions for agriculture and agricultural structures. This collaboration is expected to enrich and strengthen the scientific competences of both groups and provide new policy perspectives for their research in sustainable agriculture, land use and natural resource management.

Specific objectives are:

- to cooperate in the further international development of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research approaches and methods based on the extensive experiences and expertise that both groups have within crossdisciplinary and participatory research
- to exchange ideas and develop collaboration on research methods to develop and communicate holistic or multicriteria assessments of the effects of agriculture and food chains on nature and society
- to exchange knowledge and experiences on research methods to study the effects of globalisation and functional differentiation on sustainable agriculture and the use of natural resources in two countries with very different policy environments

4. Major achievements

Hugo Alrøe and Henrik Moller are co-convening a workshop on “Balancing and communicating overall assessments of food systems”, together with four other co-convenors from Austria, USA, Norway and Denmark, at the International Farming Systems Association conference in 2012 (workshop description at http://ifsa2012.dk/?page_id=351). The IFSA 2012 conference is organised by the Department of Agroecology at Aarhus University, and Hugh Campbell from CSAFE has been invited as one of the keynote speakers on the conference.

Following a successful public seminar at CSAFE on 20th Oct. 2011 with a talk by Hugo Alrøe on “Cross-disciplinary research and the structure of scientific perspectives” and a vivid discussion, there has been a range of discussions with many staff and PhD students at CSAFE on the problems and potential of inter- and transdisciplinary research and on different methods of cross-disciplinary collaboration. Possibilities for common methodological publications and for incorporating the insights into coming cross-disciplinary project applications are now being discussed.

Collaboration on the role of stakeholders in environmental management and sustainability assessment has been initiated, building on previous work by Henrik Moller on the cooperation with local Maori communities in environmental management projects and previous work by Hugo Alrøe on the ethical foundation of sustainability and precaution. Two papers are planned, one on stakeholders and sustainability assessment and one on the cultural precautionary principle.

5. Follow-up

A co-authored paper on “Stakeholders and the challenges of sustainability assessment” is planned for the IFSA 2012 conference. An abstract has been submitted and the conference paper is expected to be finalised in March 2012. There is a further ambition to develop this into a scientific journal article.

A co-authored scientific article on the cultural precautionary principle is in preparation. The paper is expected to be submitted to *Ecology and Society* in spring 2012.

An application for Aarhus University Research Fund is being prepared, which will enable Henrik Moller to stay in Denmark as a Visiting Academic in June 2012, and thus support the continued collaboration.

Following a presentation of the MultiTrust project and discussions on the possibilities for collaboration at the ARGOS project meeting in Christchurch 27th Oct. 2011, further international collaboration is being planned to support new transdisciplinary project applications in the field of food, agriculture and environment.

Heidi Pina-Gasca who is a PhD student at CSAFE has been invited to Aarhus University for an Internship in Summer 2012 or later, to work on sociological contextualization of different forms of knowledge and other issues of shared interest in relation to the MultiTrust project.

6. Satisfaction

The fellowship met my expectations. At CSAFE I was met by interesting and friendly people, with whom I have common academic interests. We had many good discussions and I initiated collaboration with several of the staff and PhD students.

The fellowship may indirectly help my career opportunities by helping achieving research funding through international collaboration on new research project applications.

7. Advertising the Co-operative Research Programme

I learned about the programme from Henrik Moller. Perhaps the programme could be made more visible by informing Universities about the options so that they can inform their researcher of this in connection with the dissemination of other funding possibilities.