

GLAMUR - Global and Local food chain Assessment: a Multidimensional performance-based approach

(Grant agreement no: 311778, European Commission 7th Framework Programme)

Glamur, a collaborative, international research project, funded by the European Commission ran from 2012-2015. It sought to advance scientific knowledge about the impact of food chains, and to apply this knowledge to help make food chains more sustainable.

There has been a growing appreciation among consumers that the contexts behind the foods they purchase and consume – such as their origins, the method of production and the organisation of food distribution - can have different types of economic, social and environmental implications. The nature of these implications can also be related to the size and scope of food supply chains.

The raised interest in local food, for example, has generated a myriad of business, civil society and policy initiatives, which have given a strong impulse to research. Research, in turn, has highlighted both good and bad supply chain performance, that relate to both local and global food chains. In spite of demands for a more complex understanding of food qualities, there have been few attempts to integrate the variety of impacts associated with the production, distribution and consumption of food. As a consequence, food businesses, NGOs and policy-makers have lacked comprehensive decision-making tools, with which to try and balance the trade-offs and dilemmas associated with their food provisioning activities.

In the light of this challenge, Glamur's objective was to devise a method for assessing the sustainability performance of local and global food chains in a range of countries both inside and outside Europe.



The importance of perception

An important starting point for Glamur was that different players in the food chain have different ideas and attitudes about how their activities can contribute to sustainability. For example, policy-makers articulate concern that environmental pressures and population growth make it desirable for agriculture to become more intensive, yet have minimal environmental impact. Public debate around food offers contradictory concerns: on the one hand, recent economic developments mean that that many consumers remain price-sensitive, while a number of food safety scandals have prompted calls for greater transparency in food

Local and global food chain case studies by country:

- Belgium - apples, asparagus
- Denmark - meals within public sector catering
- France - wine, tomatoes
- Italy - pork (ham), wheat for bread production
- Latvia - blueberries
- Netherlands - pork (fresh)
- Peru - asparagus
- Senegal - onions
- Serbia - raspberries
- Spain/Catalonia – tomatoes, apples
- Switzerland - milk, cheese, wine
- UK – cheese, wheat for bread production

Detailed national case studies and comparisons between countries may be downloaded from the Glamur project website www.glamur.eu

processing, distribution and labelling, which can impose burdens on business. Similarly, while farmers strive for competitiveness, the environmental and cultural functions they provide are not always profitable, not least because perceptions of their value are subjective. In short, the claims made about food chains are diverse, complex, interconnected and context-dependent, often contradictory and sometimes difficult to assess.

Responding to this complexity, Glamur sought to accept uncertainty and seek pragmatic and practical solutions to urgent problems – in this case, the need to improve the sustainability of the food chain.

Research process

Glamur followed an iterative and systematic research process, summarised in brief overleaf. Further details are available on the Glamur project website, and in associated publications on the CCRI website.

1. Partner organisations carried out national research which aligned perceptions of the performance of local and global food chains within four spheres – policy, public, scientific and market. This included literature searches, interviews and Delphi surveys. National reports were synthesised to produce a multi-criteria matrix of supply chain characteristics, or ‘attributes’, across five dimensions of supply chain performance: economic, social, health, environmental and ethical (see table 2, below).
2. Quantitative and qualitative indicators, and associated benchmarks, were devised to assess performance attributes for a range of 20 case studies that compared local and global food chains including cheese, raspberries, pork, apples, onions, asparagus, wine and tomatoes (see table 1 overleaf).
3. Supply chain data were further scrutinised using multiple modes of assessment previously only applied in isolation. These were: Life Cycle Analysis (LCA), shadow accounting, metabolic analysis and participatory evaluation. The results of each assessment were then compared.
4. Each stage of the research was presented to and critiqued by expert advisory panels including representatives from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, sustainability specialists within global food businesses, external academics as well as international networks representing small-scale producers or environmental NGOs.

Conclusions

The systematic, iterative and multi-disciplinary research within Glamur led to a range of conclusions and recommendations. These



should be explored in detail within project documentation. The key findings include:

Despite many challenges of scale efficiency, local food must be taken seriously as a contributor to sustainability.

‘Soft’ benefits such as landscape value and gastronomic culture must be integrated into performance assessments.

Innovation in advancing sustainability practice is not confined to scale of operation and is helped through clear policies and regulations, but this remains a challenge in a time of political dynamism and change.

Global and local food chains are inextricably linked.

The assessment of food chain performance should become more democratic, co-operative and inclusive of consumers.

Research outputs

A substantial range of reports, including national discourse analyses, food chain assessments, methodological reflections and policy recommendations are freely available via the user-friendly project website: www.glamur.eu. On this website, you can find a list of partners.

In particular:

Researchers will be interested in the assessment of the complex methodology developed in Glamur for integrating the different contexts and interests linked to food chain practices;

Policy makers can explore the effect of private and public policies to food chain performances;

Food businesses can develop metrics for gauging and recording the sustainability of their practices; and

Consumers can trace how food chain regulation, commercial practices and sustainability concepts can help guide and change entrenched purchasing choices.