1. Introduction

This book is concerned with the issue of change as regards unsustainable social practices, taking meat and the current meat system as central examples and a theme. In this chapter, I will first introduce my focus and my motivation for doing this research. Subsequently, I will explain my research approach and goals for this work, and finally, briefly present the overall structure of the book.

1.1   Framing and objectives for the work

The enormous global system created to produce human food from non-human animals is argued to be the number one single cause of climate change and biodiversity loss, the two most urgent interlinked crises humanity is facing in the 21st century. Additionally, it causes many other serious problems. Whether such a fundamental practice to humans as eating other animals (Zaraska, 2016a) can be ended remains to be seen, but it is certainly possible to radically change this practice. Even if extremely challenging, it is arguably necessary to radically alter the current system of meat production and consumption — in short, the *meat system* — and go back to eating conventional animal-based meat only occasionally on more or less a global basis, supplementing, or replacing this with either meat-like or non-meat-like plant proteins. Without such changes, the dual crises cannot be sufficiently tackled, as is increasingly argued (Benton et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2016; Garnett, 2011; GRAIN-IATP, 2018; Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2018; Springmann et al., 2018). The next chapter will discuss the many reasons to transform the meat system, but one of the most compelling ones is the amount of greenhouse gases (GHGs) produced by the meat and dairy system. In a business-as-usual growth scenario — regarding global population, and per capita meat and dairy consumption — the GHG emissions from this system would take up four-fifths (81%) of the global carbon budget for the 1.5-degree scenario for 2050 (GRAIN-IATP, 2018).[1]

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1   This proportion takes the current contribution to global GHG emissions of the meat system to be 14.5% (FAO, 2013). The next chapter will discuss this contribution issue some more.

The question of meat is related to the more general question of sustainability, especially environmental sustainability.[2] Taking a social practice approach, whereby practices are the focus of inquiry, rather than consumers and their supposedly malleable behaviour, Shove and Spurling (2013) argue that achieving sustainability requires a radical redefinition of what counts as *normal* within social practices, involving not just the consumers, but all other parts of the societal system as well. In their view, changing social practices forms the foundation for a transformation towards sustainability. Therefore, understanding contemporary social practices — how they have changed, are currently changing, and how they might, especially purposively, change in the future — is essential. O'Brien (2012:588) sees indeed that to bring about sustainability, more focus has to be placed on change itself, "*how* humans individually and collectively approach change, *why* change is so often resisted or impeded, and, most important, *how* systems-scale changes towards sustainability come about".

Traditionally, social practice theories have not focused on purposive change. However, such a focus is critical, if social practice theories are to be employed to make effective public policy for more sustainable societies (Lorek & Vergragt, 2015).

Following from the above, a more thorough understanding of certain aspects of social practices can help enable transformative change, both for social practices more generally, and for meat-eating related practices in particular. Social practice theories are my point of departure in the conceptual structure of this book. However, I explore conceptually the better incorporation of especially four aspects relevant to change. Firstly, in the so-called second wave of social practice theory literature (Postill, 2010) from the last two decades, lately often focusing on (more sustainable) consumption, there has been little exploration of *how social practices and discourses combine*.[3,4] Seeing discourses as particularly relevant for change towards sustainability, I explore the conceptual connections between discourses and social practices within the framework in Chapter 3.[5] Secondly, the *role of values and emo-*

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2   The concept of sustainability is usually considered to include economic, social and environmental components. This book focuses on the environmental component. It can be considered a prerequisite for the other two components.

3   With Daniel Welch as one recent exception.

4   Social practices will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, but as regards the concept of discourse, there are many, rather different definitions for it. The one that perhaps most closely relates to my understanding and use of the word in this book is from Keller (2013:2), whereby discourses are "more or less successful attempts to stabilize, at least temporarily, attributions of meaning and orders of interpretation, and thereby to institutionalize a collectively binding order of knowledge in a social ensemble" around particular themes or issues.

5   I am aware that especially the works of Michel Foucault, and his broad view of discourses, are relevant to the study of both discourses and practices (see e.g. Jäger, 2001, for a discussion). However, his work is conceptually different from the contemporary social practice theory literature that focuses on a more specific definition of social practices, and especially on

tions is rarely discussed in social practice theory literature, even if their existence may be acknowledged. However, I see values and emotions, and conflicts between them, as having an essential intertwined role in both practices and discourses, in various ways often hindering change. This is, therefore, another aspect I explore in the conceptual structure. A third aspect linked to the practice-discourse connection is the *role of discursive consciousness*, of practices, and their related values, emotions, and knowledges, as well as any related conflicts. Although seen as a rare state of mind in social practices (Warde, 2014), discursive consciousness can also be seen as a key concept for purposive change, as discussed later. Finally, discursive consciousness of social practices can better enable change at both individual and societal levels in the *context of distributed agentive power* residing within different components related to social practices, including discourses, and including collective, and sometimes even individual, human agency.[6]

Taking the somewhat widened and interdisciplinary version of a social practice theory approach from the conceptual chapter (Chapter 3) to meat-eating related practices in the empirical chapter (Chapter 5), I examine discourses related to what I call the *new meatways*. The new meatways are comprised of eating alternative meat-like foods, such as cultivated meat, plant-based meat, or insects (called together the new meats), and flexitarianism, i.e. eating conventional, animal-based meat only occasionally, in the strong version, and less than daily in the weak version of flexitarianism.

Due to the under-exploration of the connections between discourses and social practices mentioned above, using discourse data to study social practices is rare (but see Fairclough, 2001a). However, I find it a useful way to investigate some of the underlying issues to do with especially controversial practices, such as those related to meat eating. Discourses are useful for examining cognitive frames, essential for the values, emotions, and knowledge linked to social practices. In particular, discourses may touch upon issues such as coping strategies, related to the value or emotion conflicts often hidden in meat eating, and the ideologies or values embedded, and often taken for granted, in such practices.

My overall goal with this work has been to explore ways in which societies can transform towards more sustainable practices in general, and more sustainable

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(un)sustainable social practices. In this literature, practices and discourses are largely considered to be separate entities, and I take this view as well, even though I explore the important connections between them.

6   The more general issue of (dominative) power is of course relevant too. In social practice theories, the issue of power is often an underlying assumption, whereby the "hidden" part of individual practices containing cultural values, ideologies, materialities, infrastructures, etc. on the one hand, and the interconnectedness of many if not all social practices, on the other hand, are hindering change. This book will include discussion of such power as well.

meatways in particular. In Chapter 6, I will return to the issue of the potential relevance of this research.

1.2   Research approach

My research approach in this book is two-fold. Somewhat unconventionally for a doctoral dissertation which this book is based on, I include specific research related goals for both building the conceptual structure and doing the empirical analysis. This approach came about from my desire to work on the issue of meat, but in the contexts of both social practice theories and discourses, as I consider discourses essential for purposive change. As mentioned above, more recent social practice theory literature in general, and the social practice theory literature focusing on sustainability transformation in particular, has not (yet) engaged much in the connections between social practices and discourses, and therefore, I decided to explore this issue in this book, in addition to focusing on the case of meat. The conceptual structure will therefore not only accompany and support the empirical part, but also extend beyond it, and independent of it.

I call the first of my research related goals a *research task*, and it is the following:

- Exploring social practice theories and the connections between discourses and social practices, in order to create a framework that could help enable purposive change in unsustainable social practices both at individual and at societal levels.

In the conceptual chapter (Chapter 3), I will approach this task by looking into not just social practice theory literature, but further literatures, such as social psychology, cognitive linguistics, philosophy, critical discourse analysis and sustainability science itself. Spotswood and Marsh (2016) assume that the future of behaviour change is transdisciplinary. In such a manner, I will combine aspects of these literatures in my conceptual work.

The second research related goal is to answer a more specific *research question*, namely the following:

- How could the new meatways and discourses around them enable a purposive transformation in meat-eating related practices?

In the empirical chapter (Chapter 5), I will attempt to answer my research question by examining the collected discourse data from various angles, engaging in detailed analysis with a critical approach. The data itself is collected from the online Guardian, a broadsheet newspaper based in the United Kingdom, from four

separate articles and their reader comments[7] from between 2015 and 2017. The articles all discuss one or more of the new meatways.

As conclusions, I will include several suggestions on how specific elements of meat-eating related discourses can connect to change in practices, as answers to the research question, while reflecting on the research task, i.e. the more theoretical connections between discourses and social practices.

1.3   Outline of the book

Following this first chapter, Chapter 2 is a detailed overview of the topic of meat. It will first discuss the issues involved in the meat system, discuss the history of meat eating, and review trends in the past half a century in several countries, as well as discuss what might have been influencing the trends.[8] Subsequently, the chapter will review discourses around meat from the past and present, before moving on to real and potential future action to reduce meat eating. The new meatways and the new meats will also be discussed in the second chapter.

In Chapter 3, I will move into building the conceptual structure for social practices in connection with a sustainability transformation, and this is done in an interdisciplinary manner. The methodology of critical discourse analysis for the empirical analysis is introduced in Chapter 3, as it relates to the conceptual structure as well.

Further, Chapter 4 will give an overview of the actual methods of the data analysis, and discuss other issues related to the empirical analysis, such as data choice and quality criteria for the analysis. Subsequently, Chapter 5 will contain the actual empirical analysis of the chosen discourse data. I consider the results of this analysis to be an exploration of some of the elements in the conceptual structure, and indicative of the potential dynamics of transformative change.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I will present conclusions from the conceptual work, as well as from the empirical analysis, and include some suggestions on how to potentially further the transformation of meat-eating related practices. I will also reflect on the work as a whole.

To note, the theme of discourses — the red line of discourse, so to speak — carries through the whole rest of the book.

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7   The total number of included reader comments is 607.

8   In general for this book, references to trends, influences and discourses in both the Global North and the Global South are included when available and appropriate. The empirical data, however, reflects discourses more in the Global North. The Global South and North division is a socio-economic and political division of countries. The countries in the Global South largely consist of industrializing or newly industrialized countries.

1.4   General note on style

There are a few issues to mention as regards the style of writing in this book.

First of all, I tend to use somewhat less complex language and fewer disciplinary-specific terms as might be the case for some comparable work based on dissertations. This is partly so because English is not my native language, but other than that, it is a deliberate choice. My personal preference is to avoid potentially fuzzy concepts or complex ways of presenting ideas that may not always be completely clear to readers, or sometimes not even to writers. As Billig (2009) argues, simple language is often better than technical or specialist language, as technical terms can sometimes be used more imprecisely, and their use may appear to solve a problem, when in fact, the writer is only avoiding solving the problem by using them.

Secondly, interdisciplinarity requires one to be as clear as possible and to use less jargon as well. Readers may not be familiar with the vocabulary of all the related disciplines, and therefore using too many specialist terms can make interdisciplinary texts unclear. Further, sometimes several specialist words could be applied from different disciplinary viewpoints to a principally similar idea, or, on the other hand, certain concepts may be viewed quite differently in different disciplines. Avoiding specialist words when possible often takes care of the first kind of ambiguity, and defining concepts specifically enough — but sometimes necessarily broadly — hopefully takes care of the second form of ambiguity.

Thirdly, my writing style in this book is less neutral in tone than the language in most doctoral dissertations might be. This is a style that is more common in sustainability research. Peattie (2011) notes that sustainability researchers are often criticized for doing research that is based on values and driven by a desire to do something good, as *real* research should be value-free, objective and dispassionate. However, all research is in fact laden with certain values, beliefs and worldviews. When these are consistent with the *dominant social paradigm* (whatever that may be in the particular research context), they are largely invisible, and so researchers, together with people in general, may not often be fully aware of the paradigm, and even when aware, they may not see the related values and beliefs as potentially or necessarily challengeable.[9] Sustainability, on the other hand, is *ideally* also a paradigmatic lens through which to view the world (Peattie, 2011). In the context of this book, this lens occasionally leads to — perhaps more visible — ideological arguments.[10] An example of such arguments for me personally, is that, without a sense and frame of *co-responsibility*, current societies may not be able to find a way out of the urgent ecological crises, to be tackled for our survival as organised

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9   See Chapter 3 for more discussion on ideologies and paradigms.

10   Ideologies can be seen here as general, socially shared beliefs (van Dijk, 1998).

societies. In terms of both the research lens, and the research results, it is of course important to try to remain critical and self-reflective.

Finally, on the term "meat eating", as discussed in Chapter 3 in connection with discussing *meat-eating related practices*, I generally prefer using the term "meat eating" to "meat consumption", as a more concrete term that is less associated with general consumption related arguments. In specific contexts in this book, I do still use "meat consumption", while occasionally referring to "eating animals".