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The University Campus as an Edible Research and Learning Landscape: How can transformative methods promote a Whole Institution Approach in Food Systems Education? Case Study University of Hohenheim

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Due to their interconnectedness to other systems, our food systems are central to addressing global challenges and achieving SDGs (Brooks, 2016). Therefore, transforming our food systems is crucial to a sustainable and resilient path. Higher education institutions (HEIs) play an essential role in this transformation process. Moreover, at a national level, the German Science and Humanities Council 2023 recognizes the research and higher education system as responsible for taking action in this process and implementing a reorientation towards a systemic and transformative perspective.

However, within HEI, there is still a major tendency to conceptualise and tackle various challenges within the food system as isolated and unrelated issues (Valley et al., 2020, S. 247). Food system education is an emerging approach that is applied in formal and non-formal education that offers a systemic understanding of food systems in education (Meek & Tarlau, 2016; Valley et al., 2020). Moreover, the Whole Institution Approach (WIA) is an essential concept to promote transformation in HEIs and lead to concrete actions. Similar to the food systems education approach, WIA promotes a systemic understanding that integrates formal and informal learning. Creating a socio-physical learning environment aims to empower learners with abilities to design and build sustainable futures (Holst, 2023). Recently, a new conceptual framework has been created with key characteristics of WIA. To the best of my knowledge, this WIA framework has not been applied in the context of food systems education in HEI.

Further, while much is written about how HEIs need to change research approaches, teaching, and collaborations with stakeholders, little is said about how this practically applied in different domains of the institution such as food, mobility that are linked to general student life and the institutions as physical places. This research will address this gap by examining a case study mapping food in an HEI and showing the different relations to the seven action areas of WIA. By using participatory action research, this thesis looks to identify how transformative methods such as critical collective mapping, dream journeys, and collaging visions can be suitable to promote a Whole Institution Approach to food system education.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the potential of transformative methods in advancing a Whole Institution Approach to food system education. By addressing the research questions, it provides insights into how these methods can be used to create sustainable food systems within higher education institutions like the University of Hohenheim, while also contributing to broader societal goals of sustainability.