

## **Food sharing: A potential strategy against the food waste problem and a local contribution to local climate change mitigation?**

- A proposal for a shot paper-presentation at the Degrowth 2014 conference -

In the context of Degrowth, the organization of food supply in a socio-ecological economy is widely discussed topic. Conceptions like community supported organic agriculture or urban gardening are held to re-regionalize alimentation and to solve some of the problem of industrial food production such as the drop-off of still-eatables. However, also in a Degrowth society or at least on the way towards such a state, the produced food still has to be distributed among consumers. Anymore, there still the objective of an efficient use of resources which in the context of food retailing means that everything that is offered also has to be eaten up by anyone.

It seems that markets are not able to guarantee this efficiency and to find a demanding eater for every supplied apple. Especially, super markets routinely generate a huge amount of waste that ranges between 10% up to 50% of the sold volume.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, households in industrial nations tend to not use their bought nutrition efficiently and produce, themselves, further waste. All in all a huge amount of what is produced for alimentation is littered, although it could have been consumed. Quedsted et al. (2011) for example, estimate that 80% of food and drink waste generated in the United Kingdom is avoidable or at least potentially avoidable.<sup>2</sup> Similar figures are likely of being valid in other industrialized economies. The present research project examines how much avoidable food waste is generated by super markets in Heidelberg.

Just like in other cities, the described nutrition waste problem has caused several reactions from ecological activists in Heidelberg. Some people semi-illegally go out in the night and search in super market's dumpsters for food that is still consumable and feed oneself partly or almost completely with the offcut of nutrition markets. Other people practice "food sharing" and use local or online social networks (e.g. [www.foodsharing.de](http://www.foodsharing.de)) to bring still-eatables in their fridge to potential consumers in order to avoid throwing them away uneaten. Third, an organized group called "Gemüseritter" (that is "vegetable knights") tries to 'save' food by cooperating with the super-markets. Before littering still-eatables, the activists pick the rejected food up before it is littered and re-distribute it via an organized regional network. By this, the activists are able to reduce the amount of food waste and contribute to a more

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<sup>1</sup> Institut für Siedlungswasserbau, Wassergüte-und Abfallwirtschaft (University of Stuttgart) & Institut für Abfallwirtschaft (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna) (2012): Ermittlung der weggeworfenen Lebensmittelmengen und Vorschläge zur Verminderung der Wegwerfrate bei Lebensmitteln in Deutschland.

<sup>2</sup> Quedsted, T. E., Parry, A. D., Eastal, S. & Swannell, R. (2011): Food and drink waste from households in the UK, *Nutrition Bulletin*, 460–467.

efficient use of resources. In these examples the coordination of supply and demand takes place without the use of markets. Additionally, the barter circles not only realize the distribution of food, but also create new links between peoples and enable them to exchange knowledge about recipes and how to make preserves. Since the knowledge about how to plan properly and what to do with food rests is crucial in avoiding food waste, this might even enhance the food-saving effect of the project.

The problem of food waste can be seen in the context of local climate mitigation policy. The municipality of Heidelberg has adopted the so-called master plan “100% Climate change mitigation” that contains the ambitious aim of reducing carbon emission by 95% until 2050. Amongst others, consumption is defined as a field of action in this master plan. In order to contribute to the local discussion and the debate about the realization of a Degrowth economy in general, the paper will give some insights on the quantitative dimension of the food sharing circles in Heidelberg. A quantitative estimate will be provided how many persons could supply themselves with food “waste” of supermarkets. Furthermore, some insights on the motivation of the “Gemüseritter” activists will be given and critical factors of success of a stable non-market coordination of demand and supply for nutrition are identified. Finally, suggestions for potential local measures by activists, supermarkets and the municipality are formulated.

The methodology of the study contains both qualitative and quantitative research. Expert interviews are conducted with key figures of the local activists, municipal executives responsible for the local master plan of climate mitigation and managers of local supermarkets. Furthermore, data of the local supermarkets’ inventory control system are used to calculate the local amount of food and drink waste.

## References

1. Institut für Siedlungswasserbau, W.-u. A. (. o. S. & Institut für Abfallwirtschaft (Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (BOKU)). Ermittlung der weggeworfenen Lebensmittelmengen und Vorschläge zur Verminderung der Wegwerfrate bei Lebensmitteln in Deutschland.
2. Quested, T. E., Parry, A. D., Easteal, S. & Swannell, R. Food and drink waste from households in the UK, *Nutrition Bulletin*, 460–467, (2011).