



On theoretical challenges to assess the resilience of farms and farming systems

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An invitation...



- ... to step back
- ... to take 20 minutes to think about what we do, when we do what we do, as agricultural economists
- ... to reflect about some conceptualizations we don't think about any more, but which we could think differently

Resilience = farms / FS + change



- How do we conceptualize farms / farming systems?
 - As solid 'things' that have a certain 'state'
 - As patterns of relations
- How do we conceptualize change?
 - As the controllable shift from state 'A' to state 'B'
 - As on-going and unpredictable

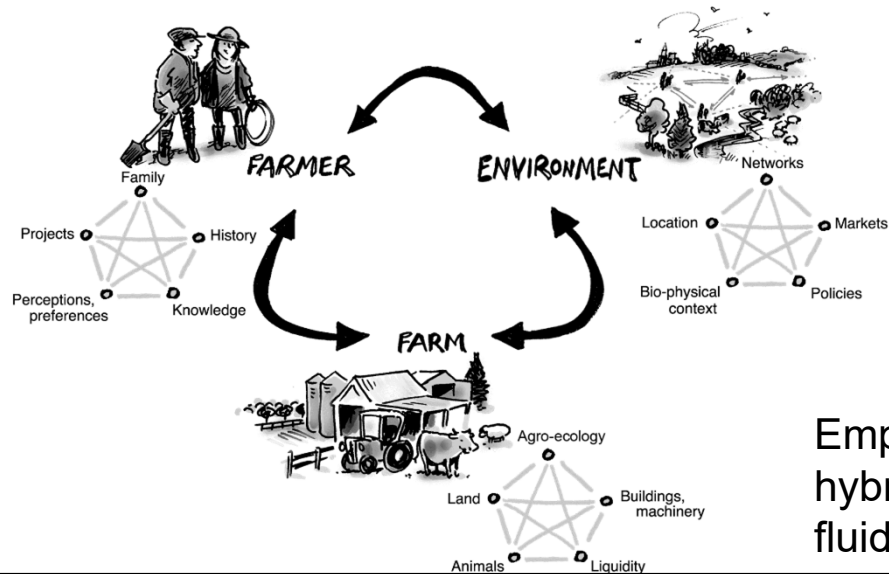


Farms / FS as distinct 'things'



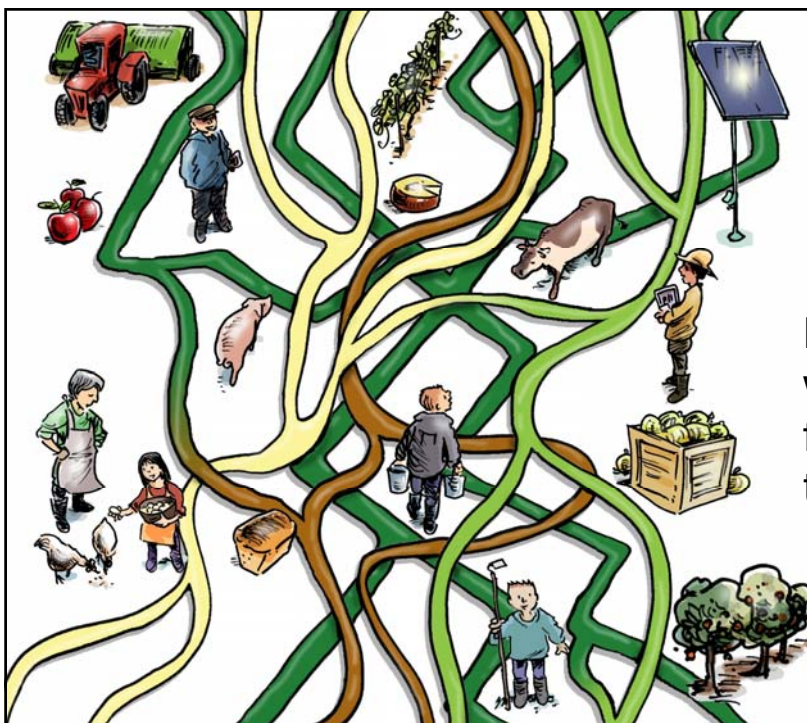
- Enlightenment science / Cartesian thinking: divide things up
 - We define boundaries: 'farming system' vs. 'context actors'
 - Create dualities, e.g. proactive vs. reactive learners, family vs. corporate farms, low / high profitability
 - Often one deemed 'better' or 'more desirable'
- Tend to forget that these divisions are arbitrary
 - They are a device of convenience
 - But we tend to take the defined difference as a feature of the 'real'
 - Once we define things as 'different', we emphasize differences (over commonalities), and understand them as separate (not as interrelated)

Farms / FS as a pattern of relations...



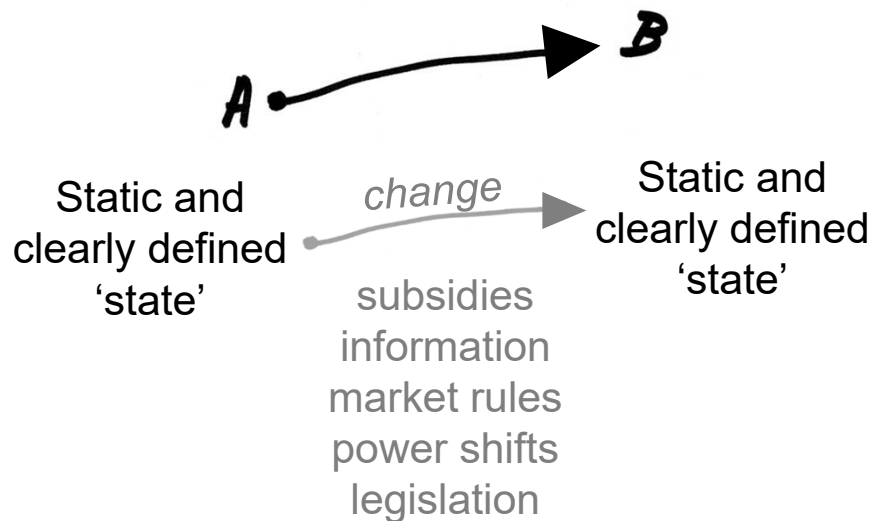
Relations:
economic,
material,
technological,
cultural,
moral,
emotional, ...

Emphasizes
hybridity and
fluidity

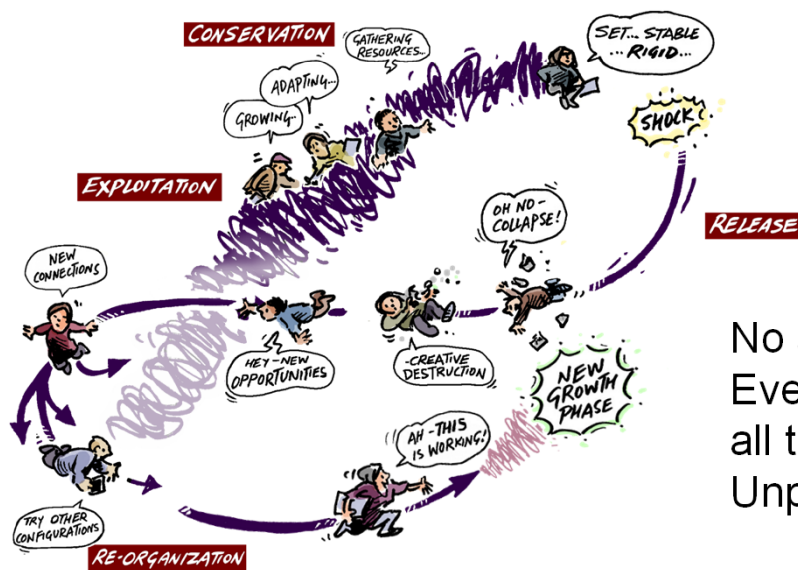


Patterns of relations
within and between
farms / farming systems
that evolve over time

How do we conceptualize change?



Change as on-going process



No stable state 'A' and 'B'
Everything changes,
all the time
Unpredictable surprises

Static state vs. dynamic process



Studying cycling as
a series of static states
vs.
a relational, dynamic
process
is quite different...

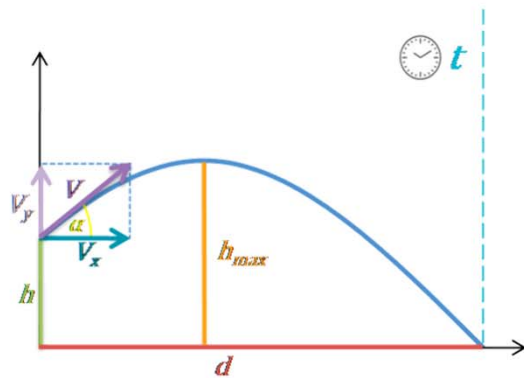
Predictability of change?



		Outcome for each option / measure / strategy	
		known	unknown
Probability of each outcome	known	Risk	
	unknown	Uncertainty	Ignorance

Stirling (1998:15) On the economics and analysis of diversity. SPRU Paper. No. 28
EEA (2001) Late lessons from early warnings

Thinking 'change' differently



A (fairly) predictable trajectory vs. an emergent social process

Farmers improvising like jazz musicians



To strengthen their resilience: should we tell them to become better risk managers as well as to improvise better?

Conceptual options / choices



- How do we conceptualize farms / farming systems?
 - Are they 'things' that produce 'states' of outcomes?
 - Are they dynamically unfolding patterns of relations?
- How do we conceptualize their resilience?
 - Is it about the 'thing'?
 - Is it about the attributes of these things?
 - Is it about the ability to integrate new things?
 - Is it about the relations between the things?
 - Is it about the ability to change these relationships?
 - Is it about looking differently at the 'things':
are they stable states or patterns of relations?

How about us researchers?



- We make many choices: theories, definitions, assumptions, operationalization of concepts, ...
 - There is necessarily an ethical dimension to these choices
 - Highlight certain aspects, constraints, possibilities, ... over others
- Performativity of science: we contribute to make this world
 - We could make it differently
 - May be it would also be more resilient



Thank you!



Illustrations by Simon Kneebone