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Characterization and analysis of the redistribution of unsold meals from collective catering to associations: role of new operators

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In France as in many countries, circular economy principles are politically driven to foster societies' sustainable material use. Waste reduction receives particular attention in this field with food waste as a prominent field of policy action. As an example, the French EGalim Act voted in 2019 requires large establishments in collective catering to commit to a partnership for food donation from surplus meals to charity. This policy implies new steps and activities (packaging, collection, transport, storage, and distribution of donations) to be integrated into the supply chain. As a consequence, intermediary, new types of operators which handle these steps and activities for the account of donors and receivers have emerged. Taken together, they build a "new link" in the food supply chain. Because of its recent nature and relative complexity, very few studies have been carried out so far to understand how the collection and redistribution of unsold meals to associations work.

The NEWLINK project aims to characterize the "new link" of the redistribution of unsold meals from collective catering to associations and analyzes the role that different types of intermediary operators – companies and associations - play in dealing with unsold meals to be donated and what their contribution to more circular, less wasteful and sustainable food systems is.

We are developing a framework to analyze the new link using a multi-dimensional set of indicators. The study, which is in progress, is based on primary data collected along the new link – from large meal preparation units of public or private catering companies to intermediary operators to food aid associations — in the Paris metropolitan area (France). Data, obtained in in-depth interviews, is qualitative and quantitative and covers various aspects related to business models, types of partnerships, quantities of collected and redistributed meals, and their composition. We suggest a typology of intermediary operators to understand their diversity.

The results will be analyzed by a twofold approach: i) an analysis of a multi-dimensional set of indicators of the newly implemented steps, between the catering sector and charity, according to the types of intermediary operators ii) a systemic analysis of their contribution to food waste reduction and the circular economy. Concluding remarks address the validity of surplus food donation to charity as a recent development fostering food system sustainability. Possible improvements will be synthesized as policy recommendations.

Topics (up to 3):

Food systems, end-of-life business models

Mots clés: gaspillage alimentaire, restauration collective, aide alimentaire, politiques publiques