

# Reflective Photobooth Workshop

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This workshop will introduce participants to a novel arts-based method to investigate and challenge personal and media images of food and farming.

## Challenging detachment in agrofood systems

### The Situation

Many countries in the western world witnessed a huge structural change in agriculture that led to a detachment between food producers and consumers. Therefore the farming images of a growing share of the population are less and less influenced by direct experience but by information from second hand sources. Media representations of farming bridge this gap with a myriad of pictures and other representations. Hereby farming is often presented in a stereotypical way that raises wrong expectations and therefore distances food producers and consumers even more.

The issue of producer- consumer detachment is even more prevalent in the global agrofood system. Although there are strong trade relationships and other dependencies between the global North and South, consumers and producers have almost no chance to have direct experiences of the lifeworld of each other and are even more dependent on second hand information. Therefore it becomes even more important to think about the perceptions we have about each other.

The motto of this year's Tropentag conference is "*solidarity in a competing world - fair use of resources*". We believe that the first necessary step to achieve this solidarity and fair share of resources is to break with existing prejudices and be open to learn from and understand each other. Therefore we think the Reflective Photobooth (RP) fits to Tropentag 2016.

### The Reflective Photobooth Method

There are many good initiatives and approaches to challenge detachment within agrofoodsystems (e.g. new forms of farmer-consume relationships, farm excursion, education programs etc.). Still many studies show a high agricultural illiteracy among non-farming people. Therefore we designed a low-threshold method that could reach a wide number of people and enables them to engage playfully with stereotypical elements of farming representations and reflect about own farming images. We view our attempt as an arts-based method and therefore a way to produce expressive forms that challenge taken for granted knowledge of participating people or the audience<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell we created Reflective Photobooshs<sup>2</sup> (RP) where we:

- Provide a range of farming related tools, costumes and props
- Set up a camera, lighting and a photoprinter
- Invite participants to dress up as farmers and stage a farming scene
- Take a picture of the participants

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition see: Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2012). Arts based research. London: Sage.

<sup>2</sup> Photobooshs are often offered at public events, allowing participants to dress up and use props to restage exotic and mostly bygone scenes. Such photographs (for example of cool cowboys with plastic pistols or Victorian women waving goodbye in front of a greenscreen "steam-locomotive") mostly reproduce stereotypes and clichés about the topics and subjects they depict. This is emphatically not the aim of our method, but we use photobooth as a starting point for reflection about stereotypes.

- Make a printout and give it to the participants
- Use the photograph as a starting point to ask reflective questions about food and farming issues

The RP got tested and further developed in the “frame a farmer” project at 9 different events in Austria and Minnesota, US<sup>3</sup>. Several potential areas of application got identified. The basic process outlined above can be modified to use the RP under different conditions and to reach different aims (e.g. to set up RPs at public events to raise awareness among a wide number of people or apply it in a more workshop like setting where it is used to question specific media representations or stereotypes about farming).

## Outline of the Workshop

At the beginning of the workshop the RP will be explained. We will present its theoretical foundations and explain why we think it can be a useful approach to challenge existing farming images and media representations. We also present results from its previous application in the “frame a farmer” project. Doing so, we highlight potentials and challenges for using the method and identify possible areas of application. The RP is a new and still experimental method and we are looking forward to discuss its theoretical foundations with the workshops participants and we welcome every feedback and critique.

In the second part of the workshop participants will be invited to try out the RP themselves. Since RP is an arts-based method it is in our opinion important to experience and not just to hear about it. We set up a small RP and provide a range of costumes and props. We will follow the basic photobooth process outlined above. Depending on the interests of the participants we will focus more on the engagement with media representations or on personal farming images.



Figure 1: RP Visualization 1



Figure 2: RP Visualization 2

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<sup>3</sup> You can find some of the produced pictures here: <https://www.instagram.com/frameafarmer/>