

Engagement and involvement of partners in a collaborative research project for a sustainable food system – experiences from NewTools

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Background and objectives:

It is well established that most food systems need to transform to become more sustainable. NewTools (2021-2025) is a research and collaboration project involving 28 food system actors (Figure 1) from across the Norwegian food system representing research institutions (7), food industry (13), government agencies (3), and non-governmental organisations (5).

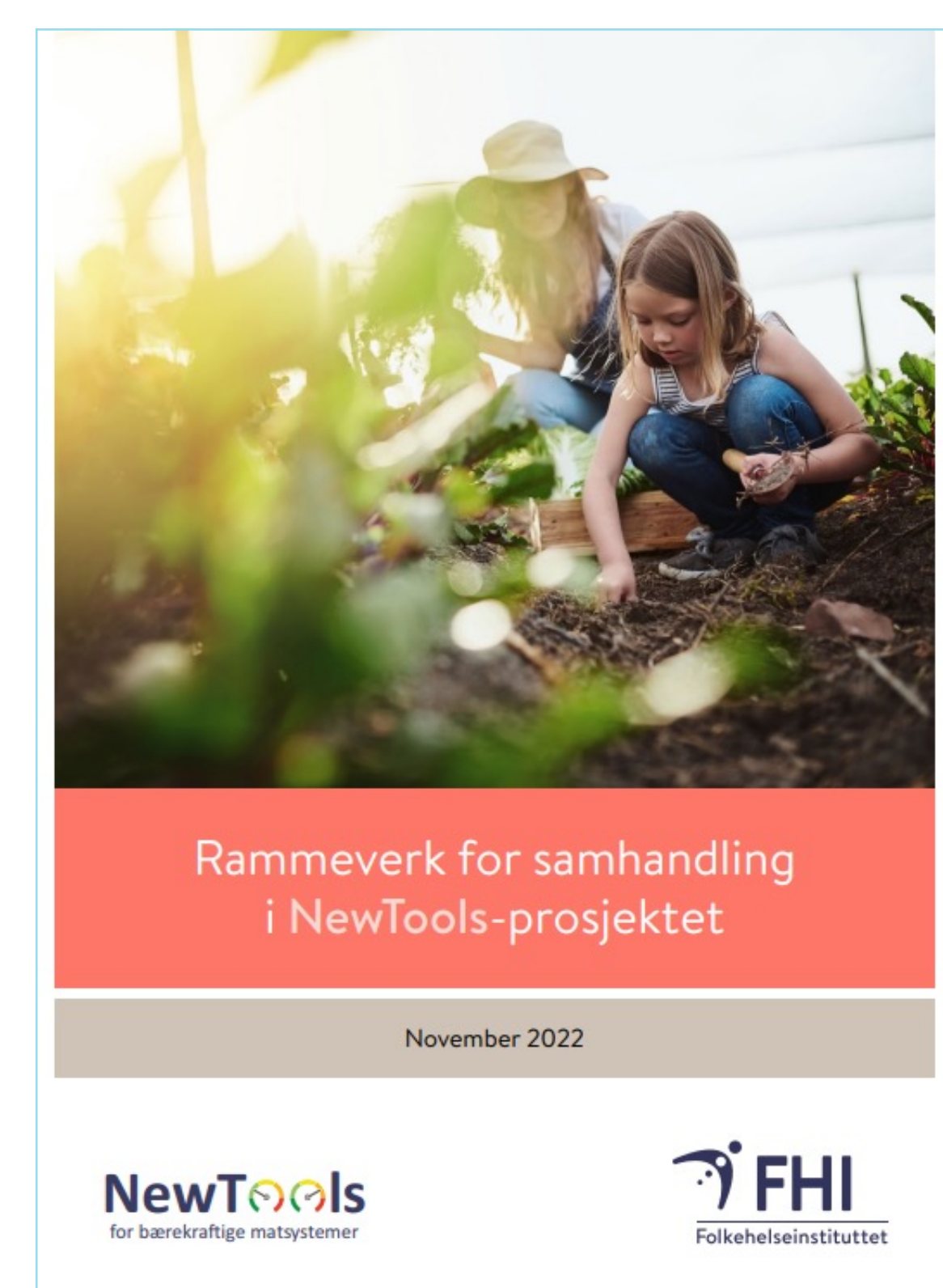
Through interaction with project partners, NewTools aims to develop scoring systems for foods (nutrition, environmental and social impact) and to explore potential areas of application of these scoring systems.

Research projects with multiple partners from different sectors require active project management. Arenas where all partners can contribute must be established so the project can benefit from the different perspectives involved. Simultaneously, transparency and research integrity must be safeguarded. Qualitative research to explore project partners' experiences will be conducted. The objective of this sub-study is to present experiences related to project governance and engagement of partners in the project.

Methods:

A framework for engagement was developed to guide involvement of partners in the project. With basis in the framework, activities such as consultations, surveys, webinars and workshops are regularly conducted to facilitate dialogue and to gather partners' perspectives to the ongoing research activities.

Results:



The framework for engagement (Figure 2) defines a set of arenas for involvement and dialogue, with corresponding procedures for transparency.

Half-way, the project has organised:

- eight dialogue-based webinars,
- seven workshops,
- four consultations,
- two surveys,
- two project conferences,
- one study trip to EU institutions and stakeholders in Brussels,
- two consortium meetings.

Figure 2: Framework for engagement in NewTools

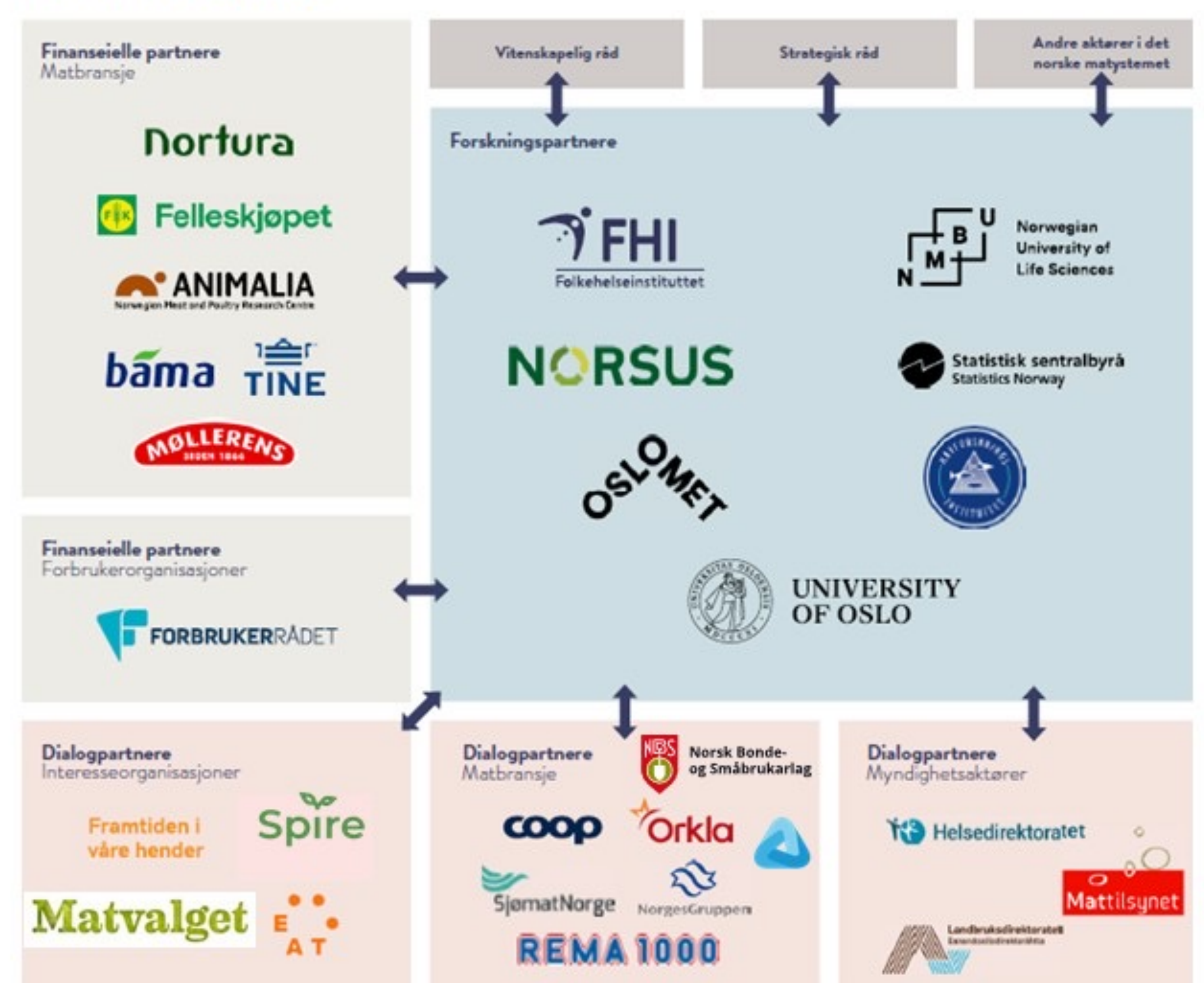


Figure 1: Partners in the NewTools project

Discussion:

NewTools is an innovative and ambitious research and collaboration project as it aims to develop new knowledge on how to transform our food system in a sustainable direction together with a diverse group of food systems actors. Facilitating partner involvement is crucial as partners provide information, critical perspectives, data, and feedback. Most partners consider collaboration as a value. However, it is challenging to get all partners actively involved, which may be due to capacity and resources.

Conflicting interests are present and must be managed transparently by the researchers to safeguard research integrity. Firm project governance and clear communication that secures common understanding of project goals seems crucial.

Acknowledgement

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