



The emergence of city food networks: Rescaling the impact of urban food policies

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ABSTRACT

Hundreds of cities across the globe are mobilising the convening power of food to deliver food security and sustainability outcomes supported by an increasing number of national and international city food networks devoted to scale-up and out this urban food revolution. This paper presents the first comparative analysis of this increasingly networked urban foodscape based on data from 13 national and international initiatives which together represent more than 500 cities across the globe. By applying a translocal governance framework, the paper explores the different aims, structures and mechanisms activated by this complex landscape of networks and how these intrinsic characteristics endow them with diverse strengths and limitations. To examine further the role of networks in rescaling the impact urban food policies, I analyse the metagovernance of these initiatives exploring discourses around coordination of these networks and identifying potential convergence points. Results from this study are translated into policy recommendations aimed at unfolding further the transformative capacity of translocal networks and elevate their role in unfolding a more integrated and equitable new urban food agenda; mainly by proposing to reinforce the cross-scalar alignment of food policies, making the case to invest in connective infrastructure such as network and backbone organisations, work with a wider diversity of agents, and provide open spaces that democratise access to collective knowledge and capacities. c. As urban food policies become the new norm, this research stresses the need for rescaling food system interventions that effectively deliver social and spatial justice in an increasingly polarised world.

1. Introduction

Cities across the globe are reasserting the power of food not only to sustain the lives of an increasingly urban population but also to deliver economic prosperity, address social and health inequalities, and foster environmental sustainability. The key role of cities in creating more sustainable foodscapes is also now recognised in international agendas such as the United Nations New Urban Agenda or the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015; UN Habitat, 2015). In midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the multiple ways in which the food system sustains urban life has been made even more visible: from nurturing its population to recognising the essential role of food workers. This crisis has shed light on the capacity of different urban food actors to innovate by setting up new infrastructures and repurposing existing ones. Examples include the creation of solidarity and community groups to feed vulnerable neighbours, reconnecting urban consumers with *peri*-urban and regional farmers or transforming school kitchens into open canteens to feed for free a city such as New York (FAO, 2020; NYC, 2020). These

responses build on a decade of cities acting as key food policy innovators through the development of cross-sectoral urban food policies underpinned by participatory governance mechanisms where a range of actors meet - from city officials to health officers or community organisations - such as food policy councils (Reynolds, 2009; Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015).

However, cities are not only integrating food policy making horizontally - by including actors from farm to fork and all sectors from health to economics and the environment -, they are also rescaling food governance vertically across scales (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019). Indeed, a further urban food policy innovation is the creation of city food networks operating at the national, regional and global levels. The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, a protocol developed in 2015 committing to develop sustainable food systems and now signed by more than 200 mayors across the globe, is a clear example of these expanding city-to-city alliances. The principles of the Milan Pact are widely shared by different initiatives focused on cross-fertilising knowledge and experiences to accelerate the transformation of urban foodscapes. These

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include thematic working groups within existing networks such as C40 or Euro-cities as well as new platforms focused on food-related challenges such as the UK Sustainable Food Cities network (recently rebranded as Sustainable Food Places). These translocal initiatives are reinforcing a “global system of sustainable food systems” (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016), by developing local capacities and generating collective action across scales. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the role of networks in this global system of local initiatives has been reinforced, with city-networks filling an essential institutional gap by quickly sharing good practice to prepare and address ramping urban food insecurity¹.

As this phenomenon expands, the urban food scholarship has been active in analysing urban food policies unfolding in specific cities (see for example Blay-Palmer, 2009; Mendes, 2008; Landert et al., 2017; Santo et al., 2014; Shey et al., 2013), or comparing them across different sites (see for example recent contributions by Candel, 2019; Doernberg et al., 2019; Filippini et al., 2019; Sibbing et al., 2019). However, to date, research on city food networks is still in its infancy. Previous works have focused on analysing specific initiatives (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019; Sandover, 2020) or comparing the cases of the UK and US national networks (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). These studies utilise social networks, assemblages and/or translocal governance as a critical lens to understand how networks unfold as well as the range of tools they employ to deliver sustainability and food security outcomes across different places and scales. Nevertheless, key questions remain to understand the implications of an ever expanding and networked urban food policy landscape – in particular determining the similarities and differences between these initiatives and their relationships. The aim of this paper is to provide the first comparative analysis of this increasingly networked urban foodscape based on data from 13 national and international networks to understand their key characteristics, strengths and limitations as well as explore their value-added in the wider urban food policy agenda. Results from this study contribute to identifying policy recommendations targeted towards increasing the capacity of these translocal initiatives to transform urban foodscapes and outline the role they might play in a more integrated and aligned new urban food agenda.

2. Methods

In October 2017, city and regional networks met in Valencia during the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Annual Gathering and Mayors' Summit. This meeting brought together networks operating at the national and international level and served to identify key topics and challenges of an increasingly translocal urban food agenda². The scientific and local committee of the event as well as networks contributed to spread the word and invite all the city-networks active at the time. The call was responded to by many initiatives, the majority of which are European based (see Table 1). This reflects different levels of international activity across the globe but also other key factors at play, such as the greater uptake of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in Europe and a lower engagement of other geographies with these networks and events. Furthermore, key global networks (i.e. MUFPP, C40 and CITYFOOD) have their food headquarters in Europe. The fact that the MUFPP hosted

the event and that it took place in Europe might have resulted in an over representation in this study of European-based initiatives and of those that have more resources for communication and travel, potentially obscuring more flexible and informal networks that do not feature easily in this type of event. The meeting participants identified the need to further examine the similarities and differences between an ever-growing number of networks. For that purpose, data on the functioning of city-networks, current strengths and challenges as well as an exploration of the relationship between networks themselves was collected through semi-structured interviews with network facilitators. The 13 initiatives interviewed are summarised in Table 1.

This primary data was analysed together with key secondary data on the form of reports, briefs and websites of the various initiatives. Furthermore, I was able to conduct participatory observation in several national and international spaces such as the UK network annual gatherings (2015–2018), UN Habitat III Conference (2017) and Milan Food Policy Pact meetings (2017 and 2019).

3. Analytical framework

The study of city of networks constitutes a new body of scholarship in the expanding urban food policy domain. In order to guide the collection and analysis of data, I rely on existing studies which build upon concepts of assemblages, governance networks and social movements to develop a translocal governance framework (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019). This framework provides four dimensions to analyse trans-local initiatives.

First, a focus on *network formation* based on social movements literature emphasizes why and how these initiatives develop as well as the mechanisms mobilised to foster internal coherence but also accommodate diversity. These questions are inspired by Routledge's notion of convergence spaces, that is, how diverse worlds come together through coalitions to articulate collective visions (Routledge, 2003). Drawing on governance networks literature (Sorensen and Torfin, 2007), the second dimension revolves around *cross-sectoral and cross-scalar agencies*, demonstrating how networks convene and share place-based knowledge and practices across diverse sites and scales. This dimension also includes key learnings from the translocality literature which studies socio-spatial dynamics in a world made up of networked places (Greiner and Sakdapolrak, 2013). This strand of work investigates the development of common translocal visions across very different urban realities; that is, how cities such as Barcelona and Lima can build common strategies.

The third dimension builds upon the place-based and fluid understanding of interactions - highlighted by the concept of translocal assemblages (Mcfarlane, 2009) - to call for an examination of the capacity of these networks to enact concurrently *collective and distributive agencies*. For example, explaining how cities lobby to progress global climate change policies but develop very different local actions, from focusing on short food supply chains to reducing meat consumption. These combined agencies demonstrate the complex rescaling of urban food policies, since national and global networks are made up of cities that develop their food work mostly through local networks, such as food policy councils or partnerships. Therefore, “networks of networks” are constantly reassembled in the creation of urban food policy arenas. Santo and Moragues-Faus (2019) propose focusing on infrastructures as an analytical device to explore these multiple agencies and understand how networks, by connecting diverse cities in different ways, develop distinct capacities to act, such as lobbying capacity or decentralised action.

The fourth and final dimension of the translocal governance framework, revolves around the *politics at play* in establishing networks, which includes examining how scales and sites of intervention are defined as well as the differential capacities to act of network members, from local governments to civil society organisations. This political dimension aids in critically unpacking the transformative potential of multi-actor

¹ See for example the list of webinars conducted by the SFPN here <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/coronavirus/>; the special working group on Covid created by Agroecocities <https://www.ciudadesagroecologicas.eu/covid-19/> or the collection of measures shared by C40 https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Food-and-COVID-19-How-cities-are-feeding-residents-today-and-building-a-better-tomorrow?language=en_US.

² See the report here: Moragues-Faus, A., 2017. Report meeting of city food networks MUFPP2017. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1i1Y0zlxTEX04GzLreGUjImdDJD3DMJZ/view>

Table 1
Key characteristics of networks studied.

Networks	Scale	Number of members	Year Started	Summary
MUFPP: Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Secretariat	International	210	2015	The MUFPP is international protocol aimed at tackling food-related issues at the urban level signed by majors across the globe. The governance of the MUFPP includes a steering committee and the assembly of signatory cities. The secretariat of the Pact is based in the Major's office of the city of Milan and works with different networks to disseminate good practice and progress the pact's commitments. http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/
C40 Food Systems Network	International	54	2016	C40 is a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change. Within this network, a C40 Food Systems Network was created, in partnership with EAT Initiative. https://www.c40.org/tags/food-systems
ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network	International	27	2017	ICLEI is a network of 1500 cities, towns and regions working in the last 20 years to progress sustainability. Within this structure the ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD network was created, open to local and regional government. RUAF is a leading organisation in supporting food systems transformation in city-regions. https://iclei.org/en/CITYFOOD_Network.html
UCLG - World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments	International	Flexible	2016 (Community of practice)	UCLG is as a global network of cities and 240,000 local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations which aims to represent the voices of local and regional governments in global for a. They are present in 140 countries. Following signature of many of their members of the MUFPP, and building on the Quebec declaration of 2015 that called for more territorialised food systems, they created a community of practice on "Territorial governance, food security and nutrition transition" and run pilot projects on sustainable food in different regions. https://www.uclg.org/en/organisation/structure/foodsecurity
ORU-FOGAR - United Regions Organisation	International	Flexible	2008 (Core group on food security)	ORU-FOGAR is an international network that brings together 50 regional governments across the globe, constituting a Global Forum of Regional Governments and Regions Associations. Since 2008 they have a core group working on food security. http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/en/oru-in-action/working-groups/345-food-security
EUROCITIES	International (European)	52	2016 (Food working group)	EUROCITIES works with major European cities on all urban related topics, including food. They have 140 members plus 40 medium size cities. Since the development of the MUFPP they created a food working group chaired by the City of Milan. http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/working_groups/Food&tpl=home
Organic Cities European Network	International (European)	8	2018	This network is a new association with open membership. 8 cities have joined the network, which also has strong linkages with key organic and agroecological networks such as IFOAM-Organics and Citta del Bio.
FPN: Food Policy Networks	National (US)	358	2013	The FPN is managed by the Johns Hopkins Center for Livable Future. It includes an Advisory Committee with members from academia, food policy councils and public policy circles. There is no official membership, it is a loose association of food policy councils (FPCs) and similar groups in US and (to lesser extent) Canada. This network has a listserv connecting food actors (1,458 subscribers) and an online directory of 358 FPCs which includes groups working on city/municipality, county and state levels. http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/
SFPN: Sustainable Food Places Network	National (UK)	53	2011	The Sustainable Food Cities Network was launched by an NGO Alliance made up of the Soil Association (lead), Sustain and Food Matters and six urban food policy pioneers in the UK. Membership includes UK places where cross-sector food partnerships have been created to work across key food issues through an action plan. In 2020 they changed their name to Sustainable Food Places to showcase their diverse membership http://sustainablefoodcities.org/
USCM: US Conference of Mayors Food Policy task force	National (US)	24	2012 (Creation of specific food taskforce within the Conference)	The United States Conference of Mayors is the official non-partisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. Each city is represented by the Mayor. Within the USCM there is a Food Policy Taskforce made up of Food Policy Advisors group. This group made up primarily of staff from cities participating in the USCM. https://www.usmayors.org/the-conference/committees-and-task-forces/
Agroecocities: Ciudades por la Agroecología	National (Spain)	18	2017	The network is a new association of local governments with a president, board and assembly to implement decisions. The secretariat is managed by the foundation Entretantos. Technical staff, local civil society and private organizations are encouraged to participate in the network activities. A formally approved action plan related to agroecology is mandatory to join the network. http://www.ciudadesagroecologicas.eu/
Dutch City Deal: City Deal "Food on the Urban Agenda"	National (The Netherlands)	12	2017	City Deal is an official legal instrument part of the country's Urban Agenda which involves 12 cities, 3 national ministries (Min. of Economic Affairs; Min. of the Interior and Kingdom Relations; Min. of Health, Welfare and Sports) and the Province of Gelderland to collectively strengthen the Dutch food system. Decision making and management oversight rely on a programme management team of 3 cities, 2 Ministries and a programme manager (linked to RUAF Foundation).
German Bio-Städte Netzwerk Network of Organic Municipalities	National (Germany)	18	2010 (2013 formalisation of the network)	Open network without any formal structure. Speaker is the Vice-mayor of Nuremberg, and the coordination relies on the same city. Members work together to promote organic farming and food. They collectively define and fund specific projects. https://www.biostaedte.de/

Source: Own elaboration.

governance so that it contributes to build more sustainable and just food systems (Moragues-Faus, 2020). Despite recent contributions to these debates highlighted here, to date, many urban food policies analyses brush over these politics and, particularly, not enough attention is paid to the *metagovernance* (or the governance of governance) of multi-actor networks. The metagovernance literature urges investigation of how the rules for participation and decision making are set and what is the role of the state in establishing those (Jessop, 2016). Exploring metagovernance dynamics raises new questions about the democratic implications in governing these more fluid arrangements and agencies operating through multiactor spaces.

This research builds upon these previous contributions and adapts their key analytical categories to enhance clarity in conducting more complex comparative and exploratory studies, such as the one presented in this paper made up of 13 initiatives. The analysis and subsequent results are organised around three steps which combine the four dimensions of translocal governance identified above. First, data was collected and coded around the objectives, activities and membership requirements of each initiative to understand *network formation* (Section 4). Second, the internal structure and mechanisms to foster interaction between cities are examined to understand the different *types of agencies* exercised by these networks – cross-sectoral, cross-scalar, collective and distributive (Section 5). The third step focuses on the process of *rescaling the politics at play* by analysing discourses around coordination (or the metagovernance of networks) and assessing the assets and needs of each initiative to explore potential convergence points (Section 6). This exploration of the metagovernance of networks sheds new light on the capacity of these initiatives to develop truly integrated food policies and interventions.

4. Characterisation of city networks

All networks interviewed share a main **objective**, namely: to facilitate exchanges across cities. As one informant puts it, we “match demand for knowledge/ expertise from cities with supply of knowledge/ expertise from other cities” (Interviewee 1). In some cases, this includes assisting with knowledge transfer and capacity building as well as supporting the development of practical solutions such as food system policies or programmes. Another primary goal for some of these networks is to represent the interest of cities in different fora, for example EUROCITIES aims to represent members in the European Commission. Similarly, other networks express their vocation to help cities and regions exist as political entities (e.g. UCLG) or be the voice of regions in global debates (e.g. ORU-FOGAR). In this vein, some networks see this goal evolving into a lobbying role, asking at “different levels of government for political recognition and greater competencies” (Interviewee 11), “defining the role of cities in the national urban agenda” (Interviewee 12) or advocating for specific goals such as better links between urban and rural areas. There is therefore a distinction between networks primarily focused on knowledge exchange and co-production and those that also aim to play a lobbying and representative role.

Key activities within these networks include establishing different forms of *networking and communication* between cities, creating opportunities for collective learning through webinars and events and promoting peer to peer interactions on different thematic areas. Some of these networks such as C40, CITYFOOD or the SFPN, provide *technical assistance* to individual cities, while others just establish the first contact between relevant peers to offer city to city mentoring, this is the case with for example EUROCITIES. In the case of UCLG, they create communities of practice made up of member cities. Support to members can then take different forms. Some networks offer more *specific services* which include conducting scans and/or assessments of city-regions and formulation of associated policy recommendations, providing research support, building awareness in places yet to address the urban food agenda, developing a monitoring framework, developing issue-based campaigning, delivering small grants or developing evidence-based

practical guides and tools.

This set of networking, learning and deepening activities³ in some cases combines with actions to diversify and scale-out the impact of these networks. In this vein, another set of relevant action is the *connecting of network members to other relevant actors and spaces*, for example through events or participating in key international groups working on food security, as exemplified by all international networks.

Membership requirements across networks are very diverse. In the cases where food networks are part of wider city networks, they need to fulfil the general network requirements to join. We can distinguish between five types of requirements as highlighted in Table 2.

The requirements presented in Table 2 are combined by individual networks in different ways shaping distinct translocal initiatives that make them more or less attractive to potential members. Data on these **differential aspects** was grouped around three categories that emerged through the data analysis.

First, while all networks coalesce around a now established international urban food agenda, data shows that the *type of members* is varied and *expands beyond cities*. Key international networks such as MUFPP, C40 and EUROCITIES highlight the role of cities in front of other constituencies in food policy debates. This tendency shapes what has been called a cultural and methodological cityism which champions a focus on urban spaces over more complex understandings of urbanization processes and outcomes that affect all geographies in different ways (see literature on planetary urbanization and cityism such as Brenner, 2016; Conolly, 2019; Millington, 2016). However, some international networks and most national networks display a much more fluid understanding of place-based food policy, incorporating different types of constituencies from local to regional (see FPN) but strategically tapping on the current power of urban imaginaries and political agendas (Moragues-Faus, 2020). For example, Agroecocities includes urban and rural municipalities despite its name, and the Sustainable Food Cities Network in the UK has recently been rebranded as the “Sustainable Food Places Network” in order to reflect its more diverse membership. Consequently, the term translocal captures better these initiatives rather than the commonly used “city networks”. Networks also distinguish themselves by defining additional criteria around the type of places that make up their membership, such as the size of cities (e.g. megacities in the case of C40) or geographical boundaries, intending to provide a space for places facing similar challenges or operating within similar regulatory contexts. For example, CITYFOOD stressed their capacity to include cities of different sizes (small and medium) and geographies providing a space for cities that struggle to meet the criteria set by other international networks.

Second, networks display different degrees of *political commitment and activity in policy arenas*, with many requiring the Mayor’s office approval which can constitute an essential driver of wider food policy activity within the city (see Table 2). While most networks work directly with city government staff, three networks also involve other actors beyond the local government (FPN, SFPN and Agroecocities). These three networks engage with local food policy groups such as policy councils and partnerships, which, in the case of the US-based FPN frequently do not involve government officials. Consequently, the relationship with local governments is varied and in many cases fluid over time. Nevertheless, representation of policy arenas expands beyond local areas. A set of global networks highlighted their experience in

³ Deepening activities have been defined in the context of rural development strategies (Van der Ploeg and Roep, 2003). Adjusting the definition to the food policy context, deepening activities would refer to when activities are directed towards transforming current practices and/or linking to other players and agencies to enhance positive outcomes such as delivering products with more value-added (e.g. rebranding local products or changing to organic practices) or changing existing governance practices to find synergies that deliver more ambitious targets with fewer resources.

Table 2
Types of membership requirements and characteristics.

Networks	Geographical coverage	Annual Fee	Type of Geographical Area	Level of commitment to network activities	Stage of development of urban food policy	Key participating actor
MUFPP – Milan Pact	International (Global)	No	City	Mayoral commitment		City staff
C40	International (Global)	Broader network	Megacity	Mayoral commitment and designate contact point in council		City staff
CITYFOOD	International (Global)	No	City/municipality	Designated contact point in council		City staff
UCLG	International (Global)	Broader network	Municipalities and regions	Non specified		City/Region staff
ORU-FOGAR	International (Global)	Broader network	Region	Non specified		Region staff
EUROCITIES	International (European)	Broader network	Cities greater than 250,000 pop. and important regional centres	Mayoral commitment		City staff
Organic Cities	International (European)	Yes	Cities	Mayoral commitment	Have a project supporting organic food and endorsed by official city statement	City staff
FPN	National (US)	No	Municipalities/ cities, counties, states, tribal, multi-county or other designated region	Non specified		Food group (e.g. food policy council which might include or not government officials)
SFCN	National (UK)	No	“Places”: Cities, municipalities and regions	Non specified	Cross sector food partnership and action plan in place.	Food partnership which includes government and/or public health officials City staff (food policy advisor)
USCM	National (US)	Broader network	Cities	Mayoral commitment and designated policy advisor in council		
Agroecocities	National (Spain)	Yes	Cities and municipalities	Mayoral commitment and designate contact point in council	Official commitment to develop policy that supports agroecology (e.g. MUFPP)	City staff and local civil society organisations
Dutch City Deal	National (The Netherlands)	No	Cities, region and nation (fixed membership)	Mayoral commitment to the City Deal		City staff
German Organic Network	National (Germany)	No	Cities and municipalities	Dedicated staff in city council to achieve policy objectives		City staff

Source: Own elaboration.

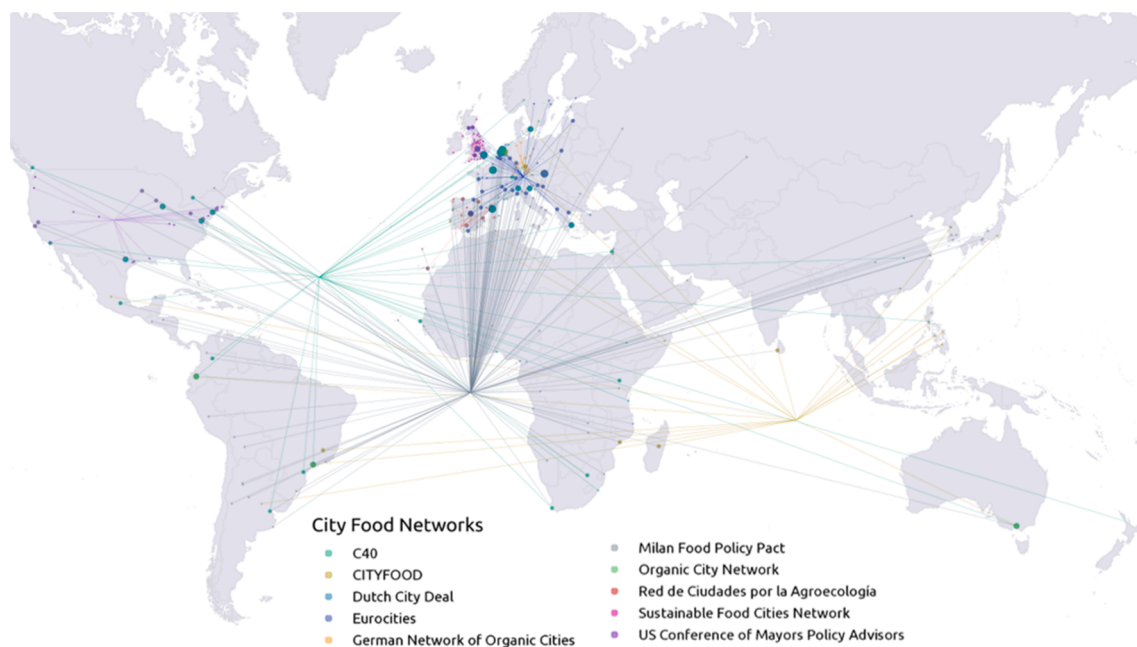


Fig. 1. Map of city networks. Source: Own elaboration with data collected in 2018 provided by networks. Each dot represents a city and the size of the dot is relative to the number of networks each city participates in. The networks that are not mapped is due to their more fluid relationship with cities, and therefore more variable and less easily identifiable membership (ORUFOGAR and UCLG) or the case of FPN (US) whose membership includes cities but also counties, states and regions that are difficult to map and compare with the other city networks.

international fora and presence in spaces such as the United Nations as one of their main assets (e.g. ORUFOGAR, UCLG). Other networks also provide access to high-level institutions such as the European Commission (e.g. EUROCITIES, CITYFOOD). Some national networks are particularly active in national political debates such as the Dutch City Deal or the SFP. It is important to note, that some networks very active in advocacy activities do not require explicit city-level political commitment (see examples above and Table 2).

Finally, the networks display *different approaches to and expertise in urban food policy* which align with potential members' interest. For example, EUROCITIES highlighted its cross-cutting inter-sectoral approach based on thematic urban topics, one of them being food but in constant interaction with others, such as transport or housing. Similarly, CITYFOOD situates its food work in the broader context of sustainable local development. Some networks have developed flagship initiatives such as awards-based frameworks (SFP and MUFFP) or links with research bodies (FPN). Within the food policy agenda, other networks champion specific food domains, such as Organic Cities or the German network which work on organic food, or the focus of Agroecocities on agroecology. There are also differences in how to support food policy processes. For instance, the FPN stresses their independence from funders to shape objectives and how they effectively combine specific needs of members with being an open and inclusive space for knowledge exchange.

5. Functioning of translocal networks

5.1. Structures of networks

Networks make decisions and manage their everyday activities in different ways. There are two main types of network structures, those operating within larger (international) city-networks and networks purposefully created to address food policy challenges. All national networks studied have emerged to work specifically on food-related challenges and do not establish clear relations with other national municipal or urban networks in their countries. These two groups also present differences, as highlighted in Fig. 2.

The two types of structures have different facilitators (from civil society organisations or hired technical staff) and also display a range of degrees of city involvement in the management of the specific network, as shown in Fig. 2 where initiatives have been listed from less to more participation of network members in formal structures (see arrow). Increased participation of members takes the form of steering committees or appointed chairs held by city officials and therefore a more direct and formal involvement of local governments. Nevertheless, all these initiatives consult members to decide which activities are relevant and provide input for specific events and training processes. This consultation can take place through informal ad hoc interactions (C40), regular meetings (Agroecocities) or general annual assemblies (Dutch city deal). A number of networks, particularly the smaller or younger ones (such as German Network or Organic Cities) exhibit less clearly defined decision-making structures. This looseness is in many cases portrayed as part of a bottom-up process and organic evolution of these spaces. Flexibility is highlighted as necessary to cope and adapt to cities' needs and demands.

Other key actors are also shaping the functioning of translocal networks. On the one hand, these networks are actively creating alliances and partnerships with different actors. For example, many dedicated food policy networks are closely linked to civil society organisations or institutions acting as facilitators and coordinators, such as SFP and the Soil Association in the UK or the FPN and Johns Hopkins' Center for a Livable Future in the US. Nevertheless, some international networks are also establishing strategic partnerships with research groups. For example, UCLG has created an Observatory where four French Universities play an active role, or the partnership between C40 and EAT Forum. Similarly, the emergence of CITYFOOD marries decades of food systems expertise (RUAF) with a long tradition of working with local and

regional governments (ICLEI). On the other hand, funders can also play a key role. For example, Esmee Fairbairn has been supporting the UK network since its inception, funding the facilitation of knowledge exchange and capacity building activities but also allowing the network to create a grant system that supports directly local food partnerships. The Carasso Foundation also supports Agroecocities in Spain taking a co-productive approach to defining the funding streams and providing input from their expansive expertise in supporting transformative and place-based food innovations. It is worth noting that these organisations and institutions supersede the local level, acting in national and international landscapes; however, in the cases studies here, there is no direct participation of regional, national or international government actors in these networks except for the Dutch City Deal.

5.2. Mechanisms to foster interaction between network members

Interaction between network members largely relies on online communication which provides the means to maintain regular interaction, build capacity and create learning flows across distant cities. Networks employ different tools to build these flows mainly facilitated by technical staff such as online platforms and dedicated websites allowing the exchange of documents and information between members, newsletters, webinars and, increasingly, online meetings due to movement restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Initiatives also rely on other tools that promote self-organising such as mailing lists since all networks actively encourage and curate city to city exchanges.

Physical meetings are carried out more often by national networks and are highly valued by international groups. Limited time and economic resources constrain face to face interaction. However, some networks are actively seeking funding to overcome these limitations by developing specific projects to conduct joint activities between members, such as improve public procurement or develop food innovations. For example, CITYFOOD led meetings at the regional level around the world in 2018 and continues to seek funding to create opportunities for members to participate in in-person exchanges.

In most cases, interactions within these networks are restricted to designated city officials (see Table 2) which shapes the content and focus of knowledge exchanges. Few networks report efforts to create different spaces that target a range of urban food stakeholders such as elected politicians. Nonetheless, some networks such as Agroecocities, FPN and SFPN directly integrate urban food partnerships – alliances of civil society organisations, the public and/or private sector working on food at the city level – and, subsequently, interact regularly with the wider urban food community.

5.3. Capacity to redistribute resources

By and large, the capacity to redistribute financial and human resources among network members is currently limited. However, there are important exceptions, with some networks developing specific projects and mechanisms to channel resources to members. This is the case of the SFPN which between 2016 and 2019 redistributed £493,359 to 31 city members through grant funding to support local food partnerships. These funds generated £7 for every £1 invested in the form of additional in cash and in-kind contributions (Hills and Jones, 2019). Similarly, Organic Cities had a project on organic provision in public canteens funded by the Ministry of Agriculture that allowed directly supporting specific cities. EUROCITIES also highlights EU funded projects as an opportunity to redistribute economic resources but also knowledge and skills across the network. In some cases, networks “pool resources” for example to conduct food system assessments (e.g. UCLG). The capacity of these networks to redistribute resources is conditioned by their access to funding, but also the contexts they operate in and associated economic landscapes which include geographical inequalities within countries but also across the globe. In this regard, informants highlight how larger cities with more resources can participate more actively in

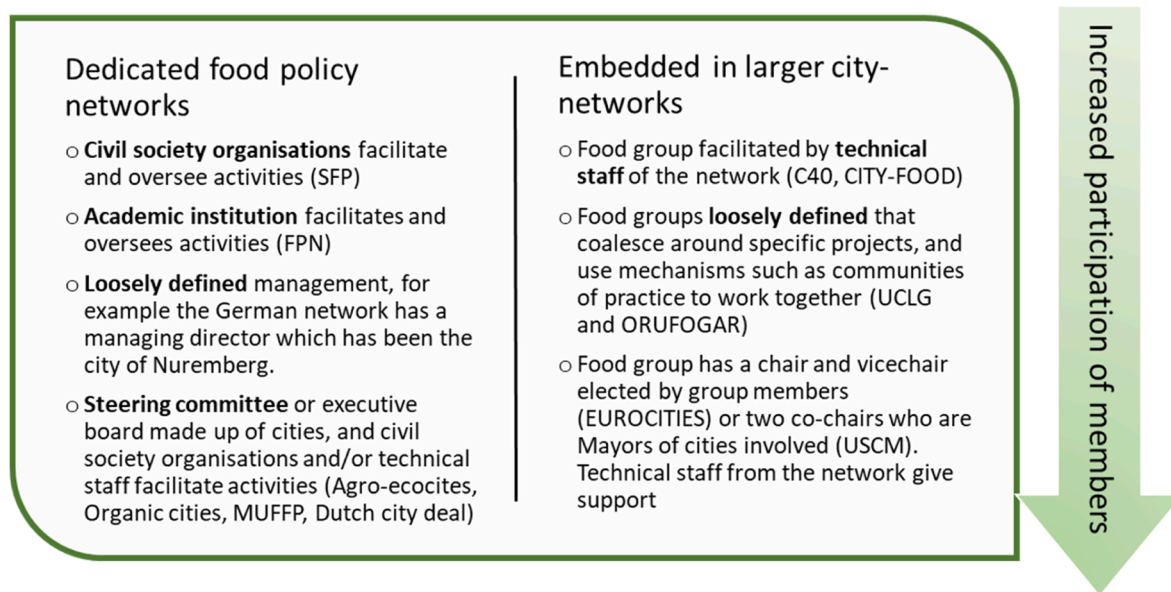


Fig. 2. Types of structures of city food networks. Source: Own elaboration.

network activities and even engage in several networks at the same time (see Fig. 1 where each dot in the map represents a city and the size of the dot is relative to the number of networks each city participates in). Similarly, the support of larger alliances, projects or foundations can make an important difference and allow cities with fewer resources to implement concrete activities but also develop cross-sectoral and participative urban food policies.

While some networks are considering how to support individual members that might have acute challenges (e.g. Agroecocities) or establish ways of supporting specific themes (e.g. ORUFOGAR), not all networks are interested in applying for funding to implement specific projects. Indeed, there is a strong emphasis among interviewees on building capacity through other means. Some initiatives report that members prioritise other goals such as exchanging good practices (e.g. C40, CITYFOOD) or focusing on policy development (e.g. Dutch City Deal) which by and large rely on good network coordination and facilitation.

5.4. Strengths and limitations

The subsections above expose the similarities but also diversity between translocal networks. This diversity was also appreciated when informants highlighted the **strengths** and limitations of their initiatives. Based on interview responses, this section discusses how different structures, activities and approaches to urban food policy, as well as the particular contexts where these initiatives unfold, shape the development of these networks and associated strengths and limitations. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the strengths and challenges of city food networks can be classified into three sets of qualifiers: membership and structure of the networks; capacities and activities, and approach to urban food policies.

5.4.1. Strengths and challenges related to membership and structure of networks

A pivotal element highlighted as a strength by some networks is **membership diversity**. For instance, the SFPN considers its initiative a well-established group with over 50 members that “feels like a democratic and inclusive movement” encompassing a wide diversity of cities. This diversity is identified as an important asset of their network. However, a diverse constituency can also present challenges. For example, within the MUFPF there are members with different levels of

knowledge, expertise and interests. This diverse membership requires additional efforts to effectively address different needs. Furthermore, it is important to note that urban food governance structures such as food policy councils have been signalled as generally lacking diversity, mostly concerning class, gender, and race (see Henson and Munsey, 2014; Moragues-Faus, 2020). Consequently, ensuring diversity at the local level in policy-making processes is thus a further ongoing challenge.

A second key element regarding the membership and structure of networks relates to the degree of *flexibility of decision-making structures*. Different structures confer different capacities or agencies. Flexibility has its benefits and limitations. For example, a flexible and loose structure sometimes prevents advancing specific topics or more active participation (Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019). However, flexibility can also contribute to cities tailoring their participation and commitment to their specific needs, such as engaging in learning environments around building alliances but opting out of political campaigns around food poverty (see the examples of FPN and SFP). In this respect, it is relevant to acknowledge how the decision-making structures will also condition the definition of priorities and the *influence of other powers in defining the network agenda*. Some networks are directly influenced by the political agendas of parent bodies or leadership members, and to a certain extent by funders. Priorities are also shaped by the different powers cities actually have, and the opportunities to develop meaningful activities that promote change at the local level.

While diversity and flexibility within networks raise challenges and limitations, there are other elements that are clearly identified as strengths. This is the case of the high level of *trust and commitment of network members*. Some networks have developed a close-knit community of city officers who actively support scaling-up efforts and therefore invest time in network development, such as the case of Agroecocities in Spain. Another example is the *support from activists and stakeholders beyond local food policy coordinators*. The inclusion of additional stakeholders in network activities provides the capacity for long term engagement with specific places beyond food policy cycles and increases the sustainability of translocal action (see SFP, FPN and Agroecocities).

5.4.2. Strengths and challenges related to capacities and activities of networks

Regarding the different capacities and activities of networks, the interviewees clearly highlighted four strengths. First, the capacity of

conducting and translating research into action. Some networks have developed strategic alliances with research centres, such as the FPN, hosted in John Hopkins' Center for a Liveable Future and therefore being particularly successful in conducting and translating research to advance policy and practice. UCLG and C40 have also strengthened this academic connection with specific universities and the EAT Forum respectively. Secondly, the ability to conduct *lobbying and advocacy activities* is also considered a strength. Examples include EUROCITIES which can lobby and influence EU governance processes or the SFP network in the UK which has run successful national campaigns that constitute a focal point for collective action, such as Beyond the Food Bank. Another key strength of networks is the *services they provide to members*, which range from pooling expertise and making it accessible, to supporting the development of programmes and policies and providing political links and suitable campaign goals. Finally, some networks provide a *high-level of expertise in their technical team and membership*. For example, by building on the knowledge of pioneer member cities such as Milan, London, Baltimore or Copenhagen which participate in multiple networks, or by having highly experienced staff, such as the FPN or the SFP. However, several networks also report a lack of stable contracts to manage these translocal initiatives but also local food policies, which results in quick turnovers of staff or less qualified personnel. This limitation relates to two other widely shared challenges faced by networks when developing their capacities and activities. First, interviewees highlighted *lack of funding* and how many funders do not necessarily share the networks' agendas as a limitation. For example, Organic cities reports a bias of funders towards more technologically focused agricultural projects. By and large, informants reported difficulties to acquire funding beyond minimum levels which hinders the development of networks beyond basic operations. Some respondents stressed that funding for networking itself is decreasing at the international level. Secondly, networks working closely with city governments reported *time constraints* linked to electoral cycles which can bring about opportunities but also limit long-term changes and increase the risk of removing innovative projects.

5.4.3. Strengths and challenges related to approaches to policy reform

Finally, there is also a set of strengths and limitations linked to the different approaches of networks to urban food policy reform. In this area, we can discern three aspects. First, *thematic*, with some networks highlighting as a strength taking a specific entry point to urban food policy. For example, EUROCITIES identifies as a key asset its ability to work and interact with a diversity of urban-related topics, making meaningful connections between food and other sectors. Second, the *cross-scalar approach* to food policy. While all networks are displaying their capacity to work across scales, some networks report difficulties to maintain focus on nurturing a cohesive and strong network that advances meaningfully food policy action at the local level (scale deep) while branching out to diverse audiences and include new members in their country or internationally (scale-out) as well as engaging with different networks and administrative levels (scale-up). Specific challenges include engaging with cities from particular geographical locations or that are not active in food policy (e.g. FPN, ORUFOGAR), form alliances with civil society (e.g. Dutch City Deal) or connect food strategies to the concerns of citizens (e.g. Organic Cities). The third aspect relates to the *socio-economic and political context* shaped by local, national and international forces. This can present opportunities as well as challenges, and strongly influences the approach to urban food policy reform. For example, in the UK austerity measures are resulting in less funding at the local level and hindering participation in SFP. The overall disregard of food as a key area for local government is also a key challenge. In some places, certain issues often dominate the political agendas of cities entirely, such as migration, as reported by EUROCITIES. Cities across the world operate in very different political systems, which in many cases limit the capacity of cities to bring about change as highlighted in the Spanish case (Agroecocities). For instance, Organic Cities

stresses the limited competencies of cities on agricultural issues which are by large retained by the state. In this regard, countries have different levels of, and willingness to move towards decentralisation.

6. Towards a global city food movement?

The previous section discusses the differences and similarities between networks as well as their key strengths and limitations. This 'internal' and comparative analysis of the 13 networks provides insights into the diverse city food network landscape, and how translocal networks meta-govern their membership. However, there has been increasing interaction between networks themselves which raise new questions with respect to the potential of further coordination, that is, the *meta-governance* of networks. This section first explores networks' discourses about coordination, and includes an assessment of coordination mechanisms and associated challenges. Building on this analysis, I identify the needs and assets of different networks that constitute potential convergence points to align future cooperation⁴.

6.1. Is coordination the right word?

Networks identified potential benefits of further developing existing coordination efforts but were generally cautious about what coordination means in theory and practice. For example, a national network affirmed that "coordination is the wrong word since it implies some sort of central control or steering" (Interviewee 10). In this respect, it was preferred to establish an umbrella infrastructure that allowed diversity within the movement and at the same time created a sense of shared purpose among networks. Another informant highlighted how the mantra on coordination can be confusing and advocated instead for "clear and concrete goals that bring initiatives together and avoid wasting time and energy" (Interviewee 3).

There are, however, different positions with some networks being more reluctant than others in establishing concrete cooperation activities and mechanisms. First, there is a set of national and international networks that see coordination as very necessary and point out the importance of cooperation on specific issues – for example, advocacy on food policy challenges at the global level such as trade agreements or climate change. Secondly, other informants were supportive of developing exchange mechanisms and programmes, particularly for networks that share members, but also between networks operating in the same geographical area or in general to avoid duplication and minimise competition. In this regard, global cooperation is regarded as an opportunity to connect smaller cities to international counterparts and increase the value and legitimacy of their initiative. Finally, one national network called for further coordination amongst international networks but not necessarily for national initiatives.

The diversity of discourses is partly linked to the different levels of participation in ongoing joint activities as well as the already prominent position of some international networks in key urban food policy arenas. In this regard, international networks highlighted some forms of coordination that are already taking place, mainly: the Urban Food Action Knowledge Platform (hosted by FAO and supported by global networks which aims to be a comprehensive database of resources related to urban food policies) or the development of monitoring mechanisms under the MUFPP. Some informants pointed out the role of MUFPP as a coordinator of some of the networks' activities. However, others stressed

⁴ This section explores the politics at play and explores how networks differ in terms of their position towards strengthening cooperation. In order to adhere to ethical guidelines, mainly protect research participants' anonymity and ensure their participation causes no harm to their interests. Consequently, this section of the manuscript does not link directly these positions with specific networks, but more broadly with some characteristics that help understand their positionality.

that its focus on Mayors limits the participation of some cities and initiatives hindering its capacity as a hub. At the moment, there are cities such as Milan with a strong international outlook that act as liaisons between international networks. This model is also working in the Dutch City Deal where one city is a member of ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD and acts as a liaison between national and international spaces. Similarly, in the US conference of Mayors certain cities liaise with specific international networks to contribute to and bring expertise/policy/frameworks down to national arenas. Effectively, cities then become network hubs and connect national, international, and global initiatives as illustrated in Fig. 1. The challenge within this model is that resourceful cities can participate in one or more well-equipped international networks and maybe also in national networks, but many cities have limited capacity to participate in multiple initiatives.

Discourses therefore ranged from a clear commitment to further cooperation to open reluctance to dedicating more efforts. These contrasting positions were also exemplified through the discussion of creating a meta-network, an idea that often emerged when exploring coordination processes and mechanisms. For example, several networks favoured cooperative mechanisms rooted in their current modes of working. Other networks supported additional mechanisms for coordination, but most of these networks also stressed the need for 'opt-in' or a 'light' infrastructure with a careful design that aligns with the fluid and flexible character of translocal governance perspectives. Key potential tools identified to facilitate these processes of cooperation included monthly calls, collaboration through working groups and/or working together on specific projects or towards particular goals. On the contrary, other initiatives rejected the idea of an additional layer and associated infrastructure, raising concerns around the complexities of managing multilevel and multi-actor spaces which can be resource-intensive and not particularly efficient.

By and large, the support for this meta-network is mostly linked to three potential benefits: strengthen the capacity to campaign and lobby on specific issues, standardize evaluation practices, and provide early preliminary support for cities that lack resources. But there are also important critiques of 'the coordination agenda' which emerge when exploring the metagovernance of these interactions, particularly regarding the modes of participation, the decision-making procedures and the politics at play. These critiques can be summarised in the form of three challenges.

First, lack of *funding and time commitment to coordinate activities* hinder further alignment of networks activities. Funding and human resources are already scarce, therefore, increasing the workload of these networks and their members can be problematic. Even more when some informants believe that the goals of many networks could be achieved by just sharing information more freely. In this line, *duplication of efforts* is noted again as a challenge for cooperation by several networks. For example, there are significant overlaps between existing European initiatives which make it difficult to conceive a European meta-network. Similarly, some informants raise the issue of competition between initiatives not only over funds but also over member cities.

A second related challenge is the interplay of *particular interests and agendas within networks*. There is a concern that coordination efforts may be co-opted by more powerful networks and actors, or that particular political agendas may not be conducive to supporting cooperative activity. Key questions on how the interactions between networks are metagoverned thus emerge, raising issues of accountability and representation, particularly when the role of public institutions becomes more blurred as networks' interactions scale-up. In this respect, smaller and less well-funded networks feel more isolated and stress the need to develop trust among initiatives and base their interactions on more inclusive and democratic practices.

The third challenge revolves around *technical and practical issues*. For example, long-standing national networks already highlight difficulties to curate and manage existing information platforms and city to city interactions so that their members can easily translate this knowledge

into local action. The emergence and development of more spaces of interaction and data platforms require careful curation to be effective. Any meta-network will most likely be presented with significant technical challenges to engage a wide diversity of cities and provide accessible and useful information.

6.2. Convergence points of translocal networks around existing assets and shared needs

Discourses and practices with respect to coordination differ, as depicted in the section above. To explore further if and how these translocal networks might converge, additional data was collected on the needs and assets of the 13 initiatives studied, which included exploring what networks can learn from each other. The analysis of the data collected through interviews led to the identification and characterisation of the following six potential convergence points:

- *Support to work effectively across scales and sectors*: Networks such as EUROCITIES have implemented a cross-cutting approach within their network and therefore offer expertise to work across key urban themes simultaneously. Also, EUROCITIES has significant experience in connecting cities to European level policy-making processes. In this vein, multiple networks identify a need to increasingly work on multiple scalar levels such as the city-region (e.g. German Network, CITYFOOD) or engaging across several jurisdictions (e.g. FPN). The Dutch City Deal has a unique experience of working with city, regional and national governments, and ORUFOGAR actively involved regions in its work. This cross-scalar approach is also of interest for global networks which want to expand their work in particular areas of the globe which brings opportunities to collaborate with national or regional networks. Members of European-based networks were particularly interested in strengthening action at the European level.
- *Sharing content and methodologies to support cities*: Several networks are interested in sharing the content and methods they have developed so far to support cities such as toolkits, guides, cases studies and good practices. Similarly, some networks collect large amounts of data such as the yearly census of food policy councils in the US developed by the FPN or the data collected by the MUFPP which can be useful for other networks. Many initiatives support sharing information and best practices across networks mainly to prevent duplication and ensure efficient use of time and resources. This is particularly useful for the networks that have developed their food strand later and therefore have more limited expertise. The Urban Food Action Knowledge Platform hosted by FAO and supported by global networks constitutes a key step in this direction. Nevertheless, some initiatives stress the need to curate better the information in this and other existing databases so that they are accessible and useful to time-pressed practitioners; as well as raise awareness about existing repositories to avoid duplication.
- *Improving sharing practices between networks*: As stated above, networks have substantially differing focuses, relate closely to different actors and use distinct tools to provide support to specific cities. These differences create a fertile ground to share networking practices and lessons learned on the facilitation of translocal initiatives. For example, Agroecocities engages directly with civil society organisations as a means to support and motivate policy-makers' involvement, while C40 focuses on policy makers and has a strong Mayor buy-in. According to informants, sharing further methodologies and experiences will allow networks to critically assess and improve their practices and services. For example, some networks highlight the usefulness of sharing agendas and activity programmes to understand what each network is doing, identify gaps in their specific network and explore how to improve their practices. New networks often expressed interest in specific aspects of how to run a

network effectively, ranging from the legal status of the entity to how to create fruitful relationships with and between members.

- *Learning from different contexts:* Several national networks were interested in learning from urban food policies developing in different geographies such as the Global South or in different European countries. For example, the SFPN emphasises the potential to learn from advanced practical solutions developed in other European countries such as improved local food infrastructure or a more sustainable and healthy food culture. Another example comes from the CITYFOOD Network where South-South city exchanges are a core component.
- *Funding:* All networks highlight funding as a key challenge and could therefore benefit from further support with raising funds. However, in many cases, these networks compete for financial resources. In the case of national networks, this support could be more feasible, for example, the SFPN has experience of winning and managing large grants while Agroecocities recognises the need to develop further capabilities to attract funding. The ability to strategize in the long term and develop plans to sustain or further develop network activities is a core aspect of funding that could be more easily shared. Examples range from sharing the benefits and limitations of expanding the initiative by including new members to changing from external funding to city contributions.
- *Dealing with inherent instability in elected governments:* Some national networks identify the instability of political processes in their host countries as a limitation to bring about long term and meaningful food policy transformations. Several informants identified this challenge as a particularly intractable and complex problem. There is therefore a need to explore further solutions and share experiences on how to increase the resilience of urban food policies to political cycles.

These six convergence points indicate a need of specific mechanisms to foster effective cooperation but, that at the same time recognise the diversity within networks and between the cities they represent. There are clear differences in terms of needs, capacities and discourses around cooperation between national and international networks which are reinforced when identifying mechanisms to align city food networks agendas. The two main mechanisms highlighted by informants are participation in collective spaces for convergence and defining common policy entry points.

First, interviewees identified key spaces where their respective networks participate that could serve as a hub or meeting point. There is significant overlap amongst international initiatives which are generally involved in the same international spaces, including the World Urban Forum, Climate Change Conferences (COP) and spaces created by United Nations agencies particularly FAO and Habitat. National networks are significantly less active within these spaces, but in many cases, they have 'liaison cities' like Amsterdam or Nuremberg within the Dutch City Deal and German Network respectively which are active international players. Similarly, the US Conference of Mayors is actively pursuing and advocating for this form of engagement, where specific cities such as Baltimore act as hubs of national and international activity. The participation in these spaces also varies from developing agreements with institutions such as FAO and actively shaping and/or participating in the agenda of international meetings (such as the World Urban Forum or the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Annual Gathering and Mayors' Summit), to having very few institutionalized links with international spaces, instead participating on an ad hoc basis. This is the case of many national networks which report having other more urgent priorities but also point out difficulties to engage meaningfully in those spaces as well as doubt of their relevance to further their national and local agendas.

A second potential mechanism is related to cooperation with respect to global policy entry points. The division between networks that operate across countries and those that operate at a strictly national level becomes particularly clear when these initiatives reflect on global

policy arenas. A number of national networks were not familiar with global debates and some questioned their relevance in the context of more urgent national and local policy priorities. Thematically, there are also misalignments. For instance, national networks tended to emphasize issues such as public health, food hubs, trade and climate policy while international networks identified the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda as critical topics. By and large, the national networks analysed display a relative detachment from global policy agendas promoted by international bodies like United Nations.

7. Policy implications to rescale the impact of urban food policies

This research exposes the diversity of city networks and exemplifies how their ways of functioning provide different forms of agency resulting in distinct strengths and limitations. Furthermore, the analysis on cooperation across translocal initiatives provides key pointers to understand current challenges to rescale urban food policies through these networks. Based on this analysis, four key policy recommendations emerge to drive a new urban food policy agenda based on reinforcing translocal alliances to upscale cities' transformative capacity:

1. *Reinforce multi-scalar interventions:* Better alignment of networks operating at different levels (national-international) could help address challenges around the actual capacities and competencies of cities in dealing with food system challenges. On the one hand, international networks could use their advocacy tools to push for further decentralisation and recognition of the role of cities, municipalities and regions within the food agenda and vice-versa. This would involve acknowledging the planetary urbanism processes that shape food system dynamics across the globe, rather than reproducing narrow 'cityism' representations that might hinder effective and just transformations. On the other hand, national networks could support more actively these advocacy efforts but also explore further linkages with national-level institutions (such as the Dutch case) and/or other municipal networks working on different topics to strengthen the role of cities in building more sustainable food futures. There is also something of an elephant in the room regarding the interaction of urban food policies with global powers of the food system such as transnational corporations which play a key role in shaping critical elements such as trade, climate change or food prices (see [Clapp and Moseley, 2020](#)), but remain largely absent in these conversations. A more strategic approach to multiscalar concerted action might contribute to unpacking what type of relationships are possible and desirable between different stakeholders to deliver food security and sustainability outcomes globally; what are effective and democratic mechanisms to unleash the transformative potential of the multiple and overlapping local, national and international city food networks; and how does urban-focused action on food policy relates to non-strictly urban food challenges and policy arenas. Further efforts from both international and national networks in identifying policy targets and scrutinising their cross-scalar implications could contribute to multiplying the impact of the urban food movement (i.e. provide specific tools and interventions for international, national and urban powers to reach specific carbon targets in their food system).
2. *Make the case to invest in connective infrastructures such as networks and backbone organisations:* There is scattered evidence on the actual impact of networks in food system transformation at the city but also national and international level. Few initiatives regularly collect feedback from cities on whether their support is useful and how it has helped them, beyond what an informant reports as: "some cities state that a new programme won't exist without our assistance" (Informant 9). Other networks emphasise difficulties in collecting data due to the looseness of the initiative and associated activities, as well as the challenge to attribute particular outcomes to specific activities

when mobilising a systems' approach. Furthermore, impact assessment is more difficult if it is not built into the framework or regular activity of the network. However, some of the initiatives studied are required to provide evidence of their impact to funding or parent bodies which is pushing for purposeful data collection. Despite these challenges, understanding the impact of networks is paramount to identifying what types of activities are more effective and to ensuring the long-term involvement of cities. This evidence is essential to make the case and persuade a range of funders such as international agencies, foundations, national and local governments to invest appropriate financial and human resources in network development. Indeed, gaining more support and commitment from city councils and other institutions can result in more resilient interventions that expand beyond the individual food champion inside the administration. Sharing more effectively data on the multiscale impact of city food networks as well as good practices in terms of managing networks (what facilitation tools are useful for what context, how to work across constituencies and geographies, etc.) can also contribute to enhancing the sustainability of existing initiatives.

3. Increase the resilience of networks and specific urban food policies by *working closely with city officials but also other key stakeholders in the city* (such as political parties, local institutions (health, city council) and civil society organisations) – *expanding at the same time the diversity of agents involved in food system transformation*. This diversity also refers to aspects concerning class, race, ethnicity and gender. Recent research has shown the importance of addressing the systemic nature of food-related challenges regarding ill-health, environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities by adopting an integrated food policy approach (De Schutter et al., 2020). An integrated approach to policy-making involves multiple actors and sectors, therefore networks could contribute to this agenda by actively providing tools for cities to expand their engagement around food beyond the city council remit as well as connecting non-public actors such as civil society organisations or the private sector across cities. An *expansion of the type of actors engaged is deemed as essential to assure longer-term interventions* beyond political cycles as well as broadening commitment to *trans-local* action. This includes making collective efforts to continue advocating for food as an essential area of intervention within cities to elevate food to the status of other urban areas of intervention such as housing or transport.
4. *Provide platforms and networks that allow cities with overall fewer resources and capacities to benefit from the collective knowledge developed in the last decades*. As Fig. 1 illustrates, some cities have more capacity than others to participate and benefit from these initiatives given their initial resources. However, building more just and sustainable food systems requires embedding equity in policy and governance processes (Moragues-Faus, 2020). For that purpose, it is essential to have a *diversity of translocal initiatives* that can support a range of urban and non-urban realities. This includes recognising the usefulness of national initiatives and also global alliances in creating synergies and capacity for collective action across different places. Furthermore, this research illustrates the importance of flexibility within and beyond networks to develop alliances based on city needs. Therefore, it is also important to *create open spaces* for fluid participation of different cities but also of translocal networks where diverse initiatives can converge: openness can foster inclusivity within and across networks. In order to further inclusivity in these convergence spaces, there is a need to dedicate efforts and *provide further access to existing knowledge and share agendas*; among others, to actively develop the capacities of both individual cities and translocal networks. Building capacity requires willingness but also funding at the network and local levels, specifically by investing in human resources as well as supporting facilitation and knowledge-brokerage mechanisms conducive to promoting fair systemic food policy transitions.

8. Conclusions: Aligning urban food policies to rescale impact

This research constitutes the first comprehensive study on national and international city food networks presenting a unique comparative analysis of an increasingly cross-scalar urban food policy landscape. The study mobilises the translocal governance framework, with special sensitivity towards metagovernance considerations, to explore the aims, activities, structures and mechanisms activated by this complex landscape of networks. Results provide insights into how these intrinsic characteristics condition the distinct agency of these initiatives. The analysis thus surfaces key differences across the board related to their involvement in global and national policy debates, level of political commitment, types of member cities, expertise on specific topics, approach to urban food policies and forms of decision-making. These differences underlie a rich set of strengths that vary across the networks and range from having lobbying, advocacy and influencing capacity to translating scientific research into action. However, many of the challenges that these networks face are widely shared, mainly: the constraints related with the socio-economic and political context generally characterised by limited powers of local governments and scarce funding; the risks associated to political cycles and partisan agendas; and the tensions around balancing the expansion and diversity of network membership while maintaining high-level of individual city engagement, creating internal coherence and ensuring equal access to network activities.

The analysis conducted on city food networks reinforces the importance of developing more flexible understandings of policy-making processes, as argued by the translocal governance literature, where actors interact in multiple ways across geographies and scales. Indeed, by and large networks' discourses coalesce around notions of 'alignment' rather than coordination. Policy alignment has been recently used to encourage embedding "health in all policies" and more recently "food in all policies" as a means to enact a truly integrative and systemic approach to food policy-making (Howard and Gunther, 2012; Parsons and Hawkes, 2019). Efforts to align policies have mostly focused on creating policy coherence across sectors such as economic development, environment or health. In this vein, cities have been signalled as key enablers to develop more integrated food policies which are essential in realising a transition towards sustainable food systems (Galli et al., 2020). However, results from this analysis show once more that progress to transform food systems might be limited due to the lack of systems thinking in policy making (Willet et al., 2019), this time, concerning its cross-scalar dimension. While translocal networks exhibit a unique capacity to elevate urban food policies to national and international policy arenas, the actual vertical integration of food policies across these scales is still limited and the role of networks in this remit is only just emerging. Indeed, better identifying these policy entry points could prove instrumental in unleashing the potential of these networks which together can impact more than 400 million people across the globe.

As this increasingly networked urban foodscape takes hold, this study also poses new questions to critically inform the emerging new urban food agenda and its theoretical implications. First, the networks studied evidence the adoption of more territorial approaches by national city food networks as the 'urban' is constantly contested as the rightful focus of food policies. Conversely, most international networks clearly emphasize the urban dimension of their actions. While this dual approach might contribute to highlight the importance of territorial interventions and urban-rural linkages, it might pose challenges to develop integrated food policies aligned across scales where powers at the local, national and international levels should be mobilised. In this respect, further consideration of how the urban condition of food insecurity (see Battersby and Haysom, 2018) is translated into multiscale policies as well as how to integrate urban and rural needs within common national frameworks is urgent.

Secondly, this research sheds new light on how this networked urban foodscape is governed. The governance of this complex mosaic of

networks is characterised by fluidity but also showcases weak ties with the public sector. This by and large lack of public leadership in establishing participation and decision-making procedures in translocal initiatives raises further questions on who governs these fluid spaces and what are the implications. To date, existing networks are partly responsible for an unprecedented scaling-out of urban food policy action across the globe. As urban food policies become the new norm, the challenge for this new infrastructure is how to scale-up urban interventions by further aligning them with broader food policy debates to improve their resilience and transformative capacity; and, at the same time, ensure that this rescaling process contributes to enact spatial justice across territories in an increasingly polarised world.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ana Moragues-Faus: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing - review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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