Urban food policies for a sustainable and just future: Concepts and tools for a renewed agenda

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ABSTRACT

In the context of pressing socio-ecological challenges, from poverty and pandemics to climate change, urban food policies are expanding across the globe. The special issue on "Urban food policies for a sustainable and just future" aims to reflect on a decade of work and identify key concepts to deepen and broaden a transformative urban food agenda. This editorial provides an overview of the twelve papers that make up this collection, demonstrating some of the breadth of approaches used to study this phenomenon in different regions of the world, informed by different epistemic traditions and exemplified by diverse case studies such as urban agriculture, street vending, public procurement, spatial planning, city networks or deep explorations of specific urban policy-making processes. Building on this work and the broader literature, in this paper we identify three core turns in the urban food governance scholarship: a shift towards systemic engagement with the food system; increased engagement with scalar complexity; and a growing focus on relational aspects of urban food governance and policy-making dynamics. However, our analysis also points out three key aspects that require further focus for the field to be transformative: a stronger conceptualisation of the urban; a clearer definition and articulation of the nature of governance and policy; and a more engaged focus on issues of power and inequities. To address these gaps, we propose a set of tools in the form of definitions and frameworks to support the unfolding of an urgently needed more just and transformative urban food agenda.

1. Introduction

In a context of increasing urbanization, cities have been signalled as key sites for revolution, where the transformation of nature becomes most visible, both in its physical form and its socio-ecological consequences (Heynen et al., 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). The urban has become a critical space to re(produce) current environmental, social and economic dynamics spanning within and across geographies (Brenner et al., 2011), and, therefore, a vital site to rework the spatialised politics that result in different forms of socio-economic, political and environmental injustice within and beyond food systems (McFarlane, 2011; Roy, 2009; Uitermark et al., 2012). In the last decade, city governments (also regularly identified as local governments) around the globe have mobilised the convening power of food to develop urban policies that integrate different sectors and actors implicated in delivering good food for all (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015). Hundreds of cities are actively engaged in addressing socio-economic and health inequalities as well as environmental sustainability challenges using

food as a multifunctional vehicle (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010). Cities are therefore progressively realising their responsibility for providing access to adequate food for all their citizens in a sustainable manner and the rippling positive effects these changes can have on our planetary health. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and its multifaceted effects have further exposed the challenges urban powers face to fulfil this mandate as well as the multiple vulnerabilities of contemporary food systems (IPES-Food, 2020).

The role of cities in creating more sustainable and just foodscapes is also now recognised in key international arenas such as the United Nations New Urban Agenda or the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015; UN Habitat, 2015). This rise of the urban in the global agenda needs to be situated in its diverse conceptual and political history in order for us to understand how and why urban food governance is being mobilised in particular ways in different regions and by different actors. There are multiple, and politically divergent, roots to this emergence, each leading to different framings that shape engagements in urban food governance work.

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The first was the establishment of Local Agenda in the wake of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. This focussed attention on city or local government action on the basis that many of the world's sustainable development challenges had roots and solutions at the local scale. The conference tasked local authorities with undergoing consultative processes with their populations to achieve sustainable development goals. The process of urban governance envisaged here is inclusive, participatory and democratic (Evans and Theobald, 2003).

The second framing is of cities as growth engines, which gained increasing prominence in debates about the declining relative power of the nation state in an era of economic globalization (Soja 2000) and the rise of cities as "motors of the global economy" (Scott et al 2001, 15). In this framing, cities are considered networked, adaptive and sites of physical and social infrastructures that enable responsive governance approaches (Castells & Hall 1994, Sassen 1991). Within this framing, Michael Bloomberg, when Mayor of New York City, said, "We're the level of government closest to the majority of the world's people. We're directly responsible for their well-being and their futures. So, while nations talk, but too often drag their heels, cities act." (Bloomberg in Acuto 2013, 487). While the academic debate about the nature of the city has progressed considerably, the governance impact of this framing has been profound, leading to the development of powerful global networks of mayors and city to city networks.

The third framing has been the recent rise of new municipalism, which moves from the celebratory vision of cities as engines of growth and instead views "the municipality as a strategic site for developing a transformative and prefigurative politics" (Russell 2019, 991). The new municipalism thus frames the urban as a site of contestation and collaboration, and where citizen power can be reclaimed.

A final strand has been the re-emergence of the urban on the global development agenda in the wake of the urban demographic transition. Within the African context in particular, there has been historic resistance to focussing on urban issues (UN Habitat 2001). The developmentalist framing that has emerged focusses on decentralisation and addressing critical development challenges, such as poverty, housing and infrastructural deficiencies (Pieterse et al 2018). The process of governance envisaged here tends towards capacitating the local state and the development of projects, programmes and technocratic solutions. Elements of four strands are evident in the framing of cities and urban governance in the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, in the literature on urban food policy and in the papers presented in the special issue, albeit rarely formally articulated as such.

While the urban food agenda has deep historical roots, it has been just in the last decade when research and practice on urban food policy has gained prominence. Much of this work is implicitly informed by the framings of the urban food agenda. In this period, the literature on urban food policy has focused predominantly on two domains. First, the analysis of the emergence and implementation of specific policies and programmes such as public procurement (Smith et al., 2016; Sonnino, 2009), urban agriculture (Cohen and Reynolds, 2014; Mansfield and Mendes, 2013; Poulsen et al., 2015; Taylor and Lovell, 2013), urban planning (Battersby et al., 2016; Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; Wiskerke and Viljoen, 2012) or health-related initiatives (Atkinson et al., 2015; Dixon et al., 2007; Smit et al., 2011). Secondly, many scholars have documented the creation and evolution of cross-sectoral spaces of deliberation such as food policy councils. These groups convene stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector to take a holistic and place-based approach to food policy reform. To date, researchers have explored in depth the creation, actions, and initial impacts of individual food alliances (Blay-Palmer, 2009; Landert et al., 2017; Mendes, 2008; Santo et al., 2014; Shey et al 2013), as well as comparing the structures, issues, and activities of multiple spaces of deliberation (Clayton et al., 2015; Moragues-Faus et al., 2013; Scherb et al., 2012; Schiff, 2008), although with limited evaluation of their collective impact on changing policy or shifting conventional food

governance paradigms (Clark et al., 2015). More recently, a number of authors are exploring how cities assemble knowledges, resources and experiences that result in *trans*-local flows that expand across geographies and time (Friedmann, 2018; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2018).

However, despite these widely celebrated advances in global food policy fora and academic debates, urban food insecurity figures are not improving, even in the most pioneering cities in this respect, such as Brighton and New York where food bank users are increasing or racial divides in terms of access to good food persist (BH Food Partnership, 2018; Freudenberg et al., 2018). Increasing socio-economic and racial inequalities within urban spaces are reproducing a 'food' tale of two cities. At the same time, cities are hotspots driving social-ecological change at multiple scales; indeed their material demands modify land uses and access to resources at the local, regional and international level, with urban consumption and related waste also affecting local to global biogeochemical cycles and climate (Grimm et al., 2008). The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on urban food system inequities and fragilities, including: inequitable access to food (O'Hara & Touissant 2021); issues of food justice and dignity (Power et al 2020); and exclusionary policies (Battersby 2020; Liverpool-Tasie et al., 2021). The pandemic has also precipitated shifts in the food system and its governance, including a shift to digital shopping, increased efforts at relocalisation and scaling up of crisis food interventions (Cummins et al 2020).

In this context, we launched this special issue to respond to the urgent need to revisit the role of cities across the globe in delivering sustainability and food security outcomes, as well as providing refreshed theoretical tools to critically understand urban food dynamics and their multiscalar and spatial interdependencies. This special issue aimed to reflect on a decade of urban food policy and identify key concepts and levers to deepen and broaden a transformative urban food agenda. In this editorial, we first provide an overview of the papers that make up the special issue. Building on their contributions to the urban food agenda and reflecting on the wider literature, we identify three turns in this scholarship: systemic, scalar and relational. We then turn to critically analyse key gaps in the current scholarship which constitute pointers to develop a new urban food agenda. Mainly, these include the need to engage more directly with the urban dimension of food system dynamics, the importance of differentiating between urban food policy processes and outcomes with the governance of urban food systems, and a call to centre materialities and inequities at the heart of urban food policy reform.

2. The special issue urban food policies for a just and sustainable future: Overview of papers

The call for papers attracted a very diverse set of contributions from very different geographies which can be arranged in three groups. First, a set of papers described in detail a ***case study focused on a specific dimension of urban food systems*** that informed urban food policy recommendations. Contributors under this group have addressed a wide range of topics including urban agriculture, informal vending, retail and public procurement as an entry point to extract lessons aimed at developing more effective policy frameworks for food system reform. In this group, two papers analyse the role and impacts of urban agriculture and provide policy recommendations to increase their transformative capacity. On the one hand, Davies et al. (2020) study how urban agriculture affects household food security in small African cities and towns, focused on Zambia and Kenya. This research reveals that urban agriculture only contributes modestly to food security partly due to a series of barriers that households face to engage in urban agriculture activities. These barriers are mostly related to settlement formality, property rights and the location of a household in relation to food retailers. The research identifies how not only urban agriculture policies (or their absence) but also urban planning and policies shaping residential development, land tenure, transport infrastructure or retail location can impact the ability

of households to produce, sell and access food. Also focusing on urban agriculture, Halvey et al. (2020) collate and analyse policy recommendations, city plans and priorities, regulations, guidance, and city-operated programs on urban agriculture from the 40 most populous US cities. Within the findings they identify considerable diversity in authority, policy instruments and topics addressed in urban agriculture policies, which reflect the diverse histories, environments, needs and issues of each city. They highlight a trend of the increasing importance of quasi-governmental and public–private partnerships as collaborators and not just stakeholders in government-run processes. However, they caution that this shift may have implications for social equity and food justice as the voices and interests of underrepresented community members become less present.

The special issue also contains case-study based papers that engage with food retail and vending in African cities. This includes Vroegindewey et al.ś (2021) study of the challenges and opportunities to increase the urban consumption of local fresh milk in livestock-rich countries such as Mali where imported powdered milk dominates the market. By developing stacked choice experiments, they provide empirical evidence on consumerś willingness to pay higher prices for pasteurized milk made from fresh milk. However, for the Malian *peri*-urban fresh value chain to flourish there is a need to reorient agricultural policies mainly focused on upstream segments of the value chain as well as current urban food security policies largely based on reducing or exonerating taxes for imported food staples such as powdered milk. A related contribution is the case study from a secondary city in Zambia, by Giroux et al. (2020) who demonstrate the complex spatial, social and economic relationships determining the location and practices of informal food vendors within the urban food system and the urban system more broadly. Through their research, they demonstrate the need for food policy to be informed by local context and for acknowledgement of the role of informal actors in the local food system. They argue that there is a need to consider the specificities of secondary and smaller cities and be responsive to their specific needs rather than simply adopting food policies and approaches employed in larger primary cities.

The importance of how urban socio-economic and political dynamics translate spatially and impact urban food systems is highlighted as well by Havewala (2020). The study focuses on the impact of residential segregation on the relative accessibility of healthy food options. Analysing data from 353 Metropolitan Spatial Areas in the United States, the paper argues that efforts to better the urban food environment must work in conjunction with desegregation efforts. In other words, urban food policy should not be separated from broader urban policy working towards spatial and economic equity. The paper argues that efforts towards creating more equitable food environments are necessary, but not sufficient to address structural inequality in the food system.

Finally, under this first group Morley and Morgan (2021) turn to a paradigmatic topic in the urban food policy scholarship: public procurement. They present a case study of the school feeding programme in Oldham (England) to investigate the multilevel influence of municipal food policy and practice within a nested territorial governance structure. A key innovation of this research is the framing of food provisioning as central to the foundational economy, arguing that local government focus on the seemingly mundane is vital in terms of meeting human needs and transforming the local economy. They therefore argue that food policy and governance serves a wide set of urban social, economic and political goods.

A second group of contributions analysed in detail *specific urban food policies* and reflected on its evolution and impacts. The papers in this group include the analysis of urban food policy pioneers such as New York and London, but also a comparative study of newcomers like Cork and Bergamo and a national US survey of urban food policy interventions. The evolution and expansion of New Yorḱs food policy boundaries from a focus on diet-related outcomes like obesity to equity-centered policies is thoroughly traced by Cohen and Ilieva (2020). This

transformation situates long overlooked urban and socio-economic challenges - such as wages and working conditions, availability of affordable housing and access to education - at the heart of food policies. Through specific policies designed to address inequities, New York is improving its food system and therefore evidencing the need to broaden the scope of urban food policy with a focus on social justice. In the case of London, Parsons, Lang and Barling (2021) mobilise a historical institutional approach to provide a critical analysis of the citýs food policy development, highlighting how policy-making capacity and potential is shaped by broader historical, social and legislative institutions. Londońs complex multilevel governance has resulted in using hard but mostly soft power techniques such as Mayoŕs advocacy capacity to advance their pioneering food agenda, supported by inhouse staff, policy networks, advisors and street-level implementers which have successfully adapted the food remit to changing political agendas. Despite key advances such as the implementation of the junk food advertising ban of the Transport for London network, authors call for urgent action over the disconnections between food interventions at the local, metropolitan and national levels to develop coherent and transformative actions.

A different perspective is provided by Giambartolomei et al. (2021) in their analysis of the development of Urban Food Strategies in Cork (Ireland) and Bergamo (Italy) using the lens of individual and collective policy entrepreneurship. They argue that collective policy entrepreneurship enables the development of place-based food narratives. This policy entrepreneurship can build collective agency, but also depoliticise food issues and marginalise actors with less power. The paper therefore argues that policy entrepreneurship can nourish human relationships and trust which are indispensable features of effective transformation of our food system, but that this is only the first step in the process of moving towards more equitable and inclusive urban foodscapes and governance mechanisms.

The last paper in this group consists of an exploration of the nature of urban government engagement in metropolitan infrastructure in the US. Clark, Conley and Raja (2020) analysis of data from a national survey with over 1200 respondents shows that production, retail and food service are the main focus of urban food policy intervention while the middle infrastructure (processing, wholesale and distribution) remains less visible. This gap is particularly relevant given the contribution of middle infrastructure to building self-reliance and resiliency by connecting food production and consumption. Furthermore, the study highlights an overreliance of specific policy instruments such as regulation which are essential to enable certain activities or prohibit harmful actions but less effective to support developing and connecting activities that create resilient regional food infrastructures.

Finally, and linked to this second group, the third set of papers focuses on *urban food governance processes* within and across cities. This includes an analysis of the roles of the public administration and civil society organisations in policy co-production processes in three Spanish cities: Córdoba, Madrid and Valencia. Vara-Sánchez et al. (2021) highlight the relational nature of governance processes and the need to invest in the hard work of understanding and responding to the different needs and demands that co-exist within these processes. They argue for the need to conceive the development of food policies as processes underpinned by formal and informal 'safe enough spaces' (Pereira et al., 2018) that support learning and unlearning, build trust, generate new collective knowledge, and create a shared collaborative framework. The special issue also includes a contribution on multiscalar urban food governance processes. Moragues-Faus (2020) uses a translocal governance framework to examine the role of thirteen national and international city food networks in rescaling the impact of urban food policies. She argues that in order for this rescaling to be possible, it is important to enable alignments as well as flexibility within and beyond networks to develop alliances based on city needs. This requires increased capacity of cities and of translocal networks, which is dependent on investments that support facilitation at different scales, integration of diverse actors

and knowledge co-production mechanisms conducive to promoting fair systemic food policy transitions. The paper insists on ensuring that efforts to scale-up interventions do not lose sight of the need to enact spatial justice across territories in an increasingly polarised world.

3. The systemic, scalar and relational turns of the urban food policy scholarship

The twelve papers of the special issue, together with recent contributions to the field, allow us to identify three key turns in the urban food policy scholarship. First, by and large in the last decade this scholarship has integrated a food system approach in its variegated analyses of urban food policies. **Systemic thinking** is now deemed as essential to understand (and act upon) the complexity of actors, activities, drivers and their interrelations that result in a range of sustainability and food security outcomes. In the last decades, cities have been pioneers in applying this holistic approach to develop food policies and programmes when national policies were still developed in sectorial silos (Moragues and Morgan, 2015). In their study of US cities, Clark et al (2020) clearly illustrate how the focus for urban food planning and policy often considers the entire food supply chain. However, working across sectors and food chain stages remains a challenge, as clearly illustrated by the evolution of New York's food policy and its recent integration of food needs within social policies (Cohen and Ilieva 2020) or when Vara-Sánchez et al (2021) explore the disconnections between actors and departments within the City Council of Córdoba, Madrid or Valencia. Despite these challenges, urban food policy studies have clearly embedded systemic thinking in their analysis contributing to a better understanding of the complex dynamics that generate vulnerabilities but also opportunities for co-benefits across health, socio-economic and environmental goals, as well as illuminating gaps and disconnections to guide effective action on the ground.

A second turn revolves around the need to work through scalar complexities in the study and design of transformative urban food policies. While the **scalar turn** is increasingly visible in the urban food scholarship, the notion of scale is mobilised in different ways, as exemplified by the authors of this collection. On the one hand, scale is considered an administrative boundary where specific competencies and responsibilities lie. For example, Parsons et al (2021) emphasize the constraints of London's food policy to advance on topics such as school food or food security since key levers for change reside at the national level. Similarly, Vroegindewey et al (2021) highlight the role of taxes on imported food staples as a key factor hindering the development of *peri*-urban fresh milk markets. On the other hand, contributors also investigate the relational construction of scale, that is, how specific policy practices engage at different levels, from local to global. This process of rescaling is explored by Moragues-Faus (2021) in her study of city food networks which analyses the capacity of city food actors to act across scales and build translocal alliances for multilevel policy reform. This scalar sensitivity contributes to question the politics of scale at play in shaping urban food systems, which includes political economy analysis around jurisdictions and power structures but also shedding light on other practices that assemble multiscalar capacities to change the food system through more fluid alliances.

Finally, the third turn highlights the evolution of the concept of urban food policy which has increasingly embraced a **more** relational approach. While the concept of urban food policy is often elusive - for example most of the papers within the special issue do not endorse a specific definition of the term-, authors tend to mobilise it to broadly refer to urban processes where diverse actors come together to transform food systems. Policy analysis has therefore expanded from a focus on specific instruments and actions of public administrations to affect food systems to also study the process of policy making, with special emphasis on analysing the role of public and non-public actors as well the conditions and tools that support or hinder effective policy-making processes. This relational turn contributes to a deeper understanding of how policies are developed and implemented, including a more comprehensive assessment of why they contain specific contents, as well as their potential capacities and limitations to unleash much needed systemic changes. An example in this collection, is Giambartolomei et al (2021)'s exploration of the collective and relational nature of policy-making through the concept of policy entrepreneurship to understand how place-based processes of development of urban food strategies evolve.

4. A transformative urban food agenda: urban, power and materiality

While the urban food policy scholarship has developed systemic, scalar and relational sensitivity, in our engagement with the topic at the academic and practitioner levels, we identified three key aspects that require further elaboration and constitute pointers for a transformative urban food agenda. First, we observed the need for *a more rigorous engagement with the urban dimension* of these policy processes. Through the review process we asked once and again to authors (and ourselves) what makes this particular analysis urban? Is it just about local processes or food system interventions that happen to be in urban places? How does "the urban" condition and shape these processes and interventions? These provocations were present in some cases, such as Havewala's (2020) analysis of the nature of spatial segregation and Halvey et al's (2020) reflections on the nature of cities as shaping the kinds of urban agriculture policies and the range of governance processes enacted. However, these questions in many occasions did not find clear responses and therefore compel us to explore tools that support meaningful engagement with the urban dimension of food policies.

For that purpose, we propose a framework of the urban as a trialectic in which the urban is viewed simultaneously as a spatial container, a conceptual terrain and a governance structure. In this framing the physical, material and relational properties of urban place and space need to be understood not simply as where policies and governance processes take place, but as active agents in shaping the nature development and enactment of these processes, as sites of complex socio-spatial relations (Jessop et al 2008). Second, and related, is the conceptual terrain of the urban, the ways in which the urban is described and understood by governance actors. While often appearing value neutral, these discursive practices wield real power in framing inclusion and exclusion of people and ideas within governance approaches (Yiftachel 2020). These need to be critically engaged. Finally, the work requires a rigorous theorization of the urban as a governance structure. There is a need to interrogate what are the specific characteristics of the urban as a scale of governance, what kinds of relationships and capacities are embedded at this spatial scale and how do we conceive of the networks and hierarchies across scales and location (da Cruz et al 2019)?

While it is clearly not feasible to expect all work to engage with all aspects of the trialectic and the relationships between these three components, there is a need for a more critical engagement with the issue of what is specifically "urban" in urban food policy scholarship. This critical engagement with the urban should apply not just to the study of individual cities, but also in urban food governance research that increasingly situates cities within networks or within wider territorial framings that mobilise a place-based approach to understanding governance dynamics and outcomes (see Marsden, 2013).

The second element concerns the blurring of the boundaries between *the concepts of food policy and governance*. In the last decade there has been a wealth of contributions on both topics, however they are seldom delineated in terms of their similarities or differences. Food governance itself has been signalled as an ill-defined term in academic and practitioner arenas, resulting in a rather narrow and simplistic use of the concept in food security debates(Candel, 2014) which can lead to uncritical examinations of power imbalances in the food system obscuring who are the agents and motivations shaping food inequities and sustainability outcomes (Moragues-Faus, 2017). Recent contributions in

the food domain have stressed the critical and normative dimension of governance, and accordingly define it as "all modes of governing encompassing activities carried out by different actors to guide, steer, control or manage the pursuance of public goods – such as food security and sustainability" (Moragues-Faus et al., 2017: 185 based on Kjaer, 2004). In the urban realm, the literature does not provide a clear definition of urban food governance, although it does dedicate efforts to research cities as the beacons of a new food governance. This new food governance is broadly characterised by the redefinition of the relationships between the public sector, civil society and the market (Wiskerke, 2009), and the accompanying tools to support these alliances such as food policy councils and partnerships (Blay-Palmer 2009, Mendes, 2008).

In the food policy literature definitions also differ and have evolved rapidly. Lang et al (2009:26) define the study of food policy as "of how policy-making shapes who eats what, when and how, and of whether people (and animals) eat and with what consequences (…). Food policy is about these complex webs of interaction and, centrally, about how policies - deliberate and unintended - affect food and its outcomes: who eats, what, when and how". The use of food policy in the urban arena ranges from a more technical and output focused approach as provided by Hawkes and Halliday (2017:9) who define urban food policy as "a concerted action on the part of city government to address food-related challenges"; to the adoption of a more holistic perspective which reproduces the "new food governance" features described above. For example, IPES food defines urban food policies as policies "seeking to address multiple food systems challenges, and typically require multiple government departments and policy areas to be bridged and novel governance bodies to be established". In this line, in the contributions of the special issue and beyond, the notions of urban food governance and urban food policy(-making) have become increasingly close to the point of almost being interchangeable (see Parsons et al., 2021). This conceptual evolution has been partially fuelled by the lack of definitions but also by the systemic and relational turns of the urban food policy scholarship which stress the importance of analysing the process of policy-making and its context rather than just the technical outcomes in the form of plans, strategies, regulations and the like (see above).

While the evolution of these terms has provided a much needed focus on the importance of systemic and relational practices to transform food systems, we argue for the need to clearly distinguish between urban food governance and policies for analytical and practical reasons. It is important to avoid the conflation of an urban food policy (-making) process - where only a set of specific actors, sectors and powers participate - with the wider governance of that particular urban food system. Indeed, the process of developing urban food policies might purposefully integrate (or exclude) new players from public health practitioners to farmers or food business but it will certainly not include all actors involved in the governance of the particular city's food system including all its citizens, the farmers providing food to that city from the other side of the world, big food corporations or hedge funds. An example of the workings of food governance is Clapp's (2021) analysis of how concentrated firms can exert power—both directly and indirectly—that condition food system outcomes in urban spaces and beyond: first, by shaping markets for example influencing pricing, choice and labour conditions; secondly, by shaping technology and innovation agendas and therefore related property rights and access to these innovations; and thirdly by shaping policy and governance frameworks through lobbying to promote/prevent specific regulations, influencing public discourse or weighting their structural power (e.g. number of jobs in a specific place). Battersby (2017) further demonstrates how urban food systems are being reconfigured through sets of spatial and economic planning decisions and the influence of developers, financiers, property management companies inter alia. In this she demonstrates how food governance processes are often removed from formal food policy processes and reinforce food system and wider urban inequities. In this context, we believe it is important to advance an urban food agenda that

engages not only in analysing urban food policies - defined as the deliberate process endorsed by the public sector of developing or approving urban interventions to address food system challenges - but also in understanding urban food governance, that is, all modes of governing encompassing activities carried out by different actors to guide, steer, control or manage the pursuance of food system outcomes[1] in a specific urban area.

Ignoring the enormous impact of urban food governance dynamics beyond the participatory policy process of a specific city and its associated food policy council, obscures the identification of key drivers and vulnerabilities leading to potential analytical failure and infective action. Indeed, urban food policy pioneers such as Brighton and New York which have implemented food policy interventions for decades do not report significant material improvements (see above). As a colleague from one of these pioneer cities put it, not being worse than before given the austerity context and further erosion of the right to good food in favour of its mercantilization can be portrayed as a win. This uncomfortable evidence in midst the celebration of the spread of urban food policies, raises the third element for a transformative urban food agenda, the need to pay closer ***attention to materialities and inequities*** in urban food governance and policy analysis.

In grappling with the complexity of systems thinking, multi-scalar analysis strands of the governance work have tended to become politically neutral. However, ongoing food justice work and last year's Covid-19 crisis have re-highlighted inequities and the fragility of the food system as well as the lack of transformative change in urban food systems despite years of urban food policy and governance efforts and research. Too often the narrative is of cooperation between governance actors and of circulating narratives of 'successful' cities.

However, the literature is beginning to draw attention to the need to consider the constellations of power within individual cities and across city networks and levels of governance (Vara-Sánchez et al 2021, Clark et al 2021). There is clearly more work needing to be done on the politics of urban food policy making (Halvey et al 2020), and the politics and economics of governance. Explicit focus is required on who funds and benefits from urban food governance processes, who is rendered invisible and who is allowed to remain invisible in policy making and governance (Battersby 2017, Clapp 2021).

There is arguably far more work to be done analysing material impacts of urban food policy and governance and how they (re)produce inequities at the city scale and beyond. A consideration of the three dimensions of justice can support a more comprehensive assessment of how inequities are generated (Fraser, 2009; Moragues-Faus, 2017). First, it is necessary to consider the economic dimension and therefore the material distribution of goods and bads that conditions people's access to good food. Second, it is important to engage with the social and cultural dimensions of justice in order to recognise different needs across social groups, cultures and bodies. Finally, it is paramount to further understand the political processes that generate inequities, focusing on how those at the margins participate or are excluded in creating the conditions that generate the inequities in the first place.

5. Conclusion: to be continued…

This special issue demonstrates some of the breadth of approaches to study urban food governance and policies in different regions of the world, informed by different epistemic traditions. Despite this diversity, we believe that the papers represent three core turns that are emerging in the urban food governance scholarship, namely: a shift towards systemic engagement with the food system; increased acknowledgment of scalar complexity; and a growing focus on relational aspects of urban

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[1] Food systems outcomes here refer to the definition provided by Ericksen (2008), that is, food system outcomes are the contributions of food system activities to food security, environmental security and social welfare.

food governance and policy-making dynamics. Building on the papers and a wider reading of the urban food governance literature, we believe that in order for urban food policy and governance to be transformative it should focus on three key aspects that are nascent in the work: a stronger conceptualisation of the urban as the site of urban food policy and governance; a clearer articulation of the nature of governance and policy; and a more engaged focus on issues of power and inequities in urban food systems and their governance. As the world of urban food governance continues to evolve and inspires more cities and more actors to get involved in midst old and new socio-ecological challenges - from poverty and pandemics to climate change-, we propose a set of tools in the form of definitions and frameworks for academics and practitioners to contribute to the unfolding of an urgently needed more just and transformative urban food agenda.

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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