

Ex-ante assessment of the “Food” thematic area under the Urban Agenda for the EU



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Authors: Roxana Triboi, Irina Rotaru, Adina Pasărel

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Contact Person: Mr. Alexandru Matei urbanagenda@urban-initiative.eu

Table of content

ACRONYMS	5
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
2. CONTEXT	8
2.1 Positioning and objectives of the EAA	8
2.2 Methodology	9
3. THE FOOD THEMATIC AREA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU 10	
3.1 Multi-level governance	14
3.2 Food TA regulatory environment	15
3.3 Existing gaps	17
3.4 Trends and evidence about EU cities	27
3.5 Articulation of the Food TA with other Thematic Areas	28
3.6 Overview of the Food TA policy environment and action	29
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	47
4.1 Food systems sustainability and resilience	47
4.1.1 The interpretation and focus of the thematic scope of the subject	
4.1.2 Integrated global food system perspective	
4.1.3 Enabling capacity at different levels of governance	
4.1.4 Integrated food policy	
4.1.5 Resources for supporting cities in tackling local food systems resilience.	
4.1.6 Similar Food Thematic Partnerships	
4.2 The development of the UAEU Food Partnership	55
4.2.1 The role of the UAEU Partnership on Food	
4.2.2 The most suitable form of multi-level cooperation (Partnership/OFC)	
4.2.3 The organisation and possible members of the UAEU partnership	
4.2.4 The suggested type of expertise of the members	
4.2.5 Potential institutions/stakeholders of interest, relevant and related to the thematic issue, to be involved in the multi-level cooperation set-up	
4.2.6 The timing for successful implementation	
4.2.7 Possible themes for the UAEU Partnership on Food	
4.2.8 Possible actions of the UAEU Partnership on Food	
4.2.9 Type of support that will be required for the implementation	
4.2.10 Assessment on the opportunity for a Partnership/OFC	

Interviews schedule

General guiding questions for the interviews

Selection of relevant publications defining the Food TA framework

Bibliography



ACRONYMS

CAP - Common Agricultural Policy

CERV - Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values

CFP - Common Food Policy

CoR - Committee of Regions

DG - Directorate General

EAA - Ex-Ante Assessment

EC - European Commission

EESC - European Economic and Social Committee

EFSCM - European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism

EIB - European Investment Bank

EU - European Union

EUI - European Urban Initiative

FTP – Food Thematic Partnership

F2FS – the Farm to Fork Strategy

ICT - Information and Communications Technology

IPES Food - International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems

MaWP - Multiannual Working Programme

MLP - Multi-Level Perspective model

MS - Member States

FSFS - Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System

TA - Thematic Area

TCFP - Towards a Common Food Policy

TFS - Territorial Food Strategies

TP - Thematic Partnership

UAEU - Urban Agenda for the EU

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final report discloses the results and conclusions of the EAA on the Food TA started in January 2023 and provides recommendations for the new Partnership on Food to be launched in the frame of the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU).

Food is a global and transverse subject, impacting all of us. It is a crucial topic especially nowadays, in times of crisis and accelerated change. As Hans Bruyninckx from the European Environment Agency said in occasion of the Cities Forum 2023, there is a need for systemic transformation and not only improvement of the existing urban systems (including food systems¹) towards more just, equitable and resilient ones.

In order to position and orient the new UAEU Partnership on Food, the main criteria considered by the EAA were: multi-level governance; policy environment; regulatory environment; existing gaps, challenges and needs; and trends and practices / experiences of EU cities, including assets, values, and inputs that can be capitalised.

Multi-level governance:

Multi-level governance is strongly advocated as the most suitable approach for addressing the complexity of the food system, given its broad stakeholder involvement, legislative implications, and the need to uphold sustainability across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. By integrating policies, fostering collaboration, and ensuring participation at various levels of governance, this approach enables a holistic and inclusive response to the multifaceted challenges of the food system. It promotes coordination among diverse actors, facilitates coherent policymaking across interconnected sectors, encourages adaptability to local contexts, fosters knowledge exchange and learning, and addresses power imbalances, ultimately working towards more equitable, resilient, and sustainable food systems.

Policy environment and action:

A large variety of food policies and actions are present at different levels. Among the various references the most prominent ones that have to be considered by the UAEU partnership are the FSFS with the EU Food Policy Council and respectively the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact.

Regulatory environment:

The establishment of the European Union was primarily driven by the importance of agriculture and the establishment of a free market. The implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) played a significant role as one of the EU's foundational policies. The CAP, which undergoes periodic renewal, governs agricultural production and trade within the EU. Its objectives include promoting sustainable farming practices, ensuring food security for EU citizens, and maintaining a fair agricultural market. More recently, initiatives such as the Farm to Fork Strategy and the European Green Deal have highlighted the need for a transformative shift toward a more systemic and sustainable approach in the food system. In response, the EU is currently developing the Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System, which aims to provide a comprehensive regulatory framework to address these pressing challenges and guide the future of the EU's food system.

The EAA desk research and interviews confirmed the following issues as main gaps, challenges and needs of the Food TA that can be addressed through the UAEU Partnership on Food:

¹ Food systems embrace the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal (loss or waste) of food products that originate from agriculture (incl. livestock), forestry, fisheries, and food industries, and the broader economic, societal, and natural environments in which they are embedded. Source: https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/food-systems-definition-concept-application-un-food-systems-summit-paper-scientific_en

- Even if the Food TA is endorsed by all DGs and the food system approach is promoted especially through the EU Farm to Fork Strategy , the systemic approach of food at EU level is not yet fully embraced ().
- The food system dependence on global networks and corporate agri-food business players is a factor of vulnerability, barely approached at the European level. The UAEU can contribute by enhancing the role and capacity of cities to address this issue.
- The attention is on rural-urban linkages and territorial cohesion through reducing disparities, but the understanding of the city-region concept approach of the food system as a city-led ecosystem / bio region² is limited, as there are its benefits in terms of food systems resilience and sustainability.
- There seems to be insufficient focus currently on the possible role of cities in supporting resilient and just local food systems. At the same time, the silo approach of food systems still persists in relation to subjects like agroecology³ and food justice considered in an isolated manner. The consolidation of an overarching legislation and institutional organisation remains an actual issue, which the Farm to Fork Strategy attempts to address.
- Lack of a comprehensive repertory, “one stop shop” of the EU initiatives, programmes, and projects on Food and of their outputs, situation that is jeopardising their harmonisation / correlation and capitalisation potential and implicitly their positive impact.
- An overall difficulty of actors working on EU food legislation to become and remain aware of the UAEU and the role of cities in the transformation of food systems, emphasized by the scarcity of systematic evidence on the work of cities and disparities across Europe.
- Current scarce adaptability of the EU and national legislation and institutional framework to integrate emerging forms of governance (such as food councils and strategies) and effectively respond to new societal challenges.
- In the spirit of the cohesion policy, solidarity has to be considered not only between different categories of people but also among regions;
- Lack of a clear integrated funding of Food systems as part of the Farm to Fork strategy, similar to the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy.

Trends and practices / experiences of EU cities:

There is a very large number of city initiatives on food (see chapter 3), most of them in pilot stage, and following a bottom-up trajectory. Connection and synergies between them and also with upper administrative levels (department, region, national and EU levels) are needed, so the UAEU Partnership represents a great opportunity for this. Articulation is also needed with other TA and initiatives and UAEU partnerships.

The principal assets, values, and inputs that can be capitalised through the UAEU Partnership on Food refer to the following aspects:

- By concentrating consumers, financial and technological resources, innovation and decision and by actively engaging and connecting with the surrounding territory, cities have the ability to

² A bioregion is a land and water territory which limits are defined by the geographical limits of human communities and ecological systems rather than by political boundaries. Such an area must be large enough to be able to be self-reliant and be able to maintain the integrity of its biological communities, habitats, and ecosystems. People Matter. Defining Bioregions – Department of Bioregion deptofbioregion.org/bioregions/defining-bioregions/

³ Agroecology is a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where their food is produced. Source: FAO

play a significant contribution to the food system transformation through local policies and collaborative horizontal structures (like Food Councils).

- Scientific research supports the view that the appropriate scale for the consideration of the food system is the city-region (bioregion approach), conception also embraced by the 7 DG contributors interviewed (from DG REGIO, DG Agri, DG SANTE, DG RTD and DG MARE).
- The establishment of food councils and strategies led by cities shows promising perspectives and needs more consideration.
- At an appropriate scale (city-region), solidarity (and risk sharing) between different players of the food system can be facilitated for a more ethical power balance. Activating the voice and involvement of the less visible (especially vulnerable socio-economic population) can also integrate the question of food justice and democracy and improve food systems resilience at a local level.

EU institutional, political, and financial support can enable and accelerate the process. The European authorities have the capacity to support and facilitate integrated development and systemic change, enabling local action to reach its full potential. It is in their power and duty to create the context and provide the general framework (in terms of legislation and funding), so much needed for addressing food systems vulnerabilities. Regarding the funding, a possible solution could be found for eg. through the cooperation with the EIB or through the redirection of existing funding streams from areas very much impacted by the food system (like rural funds and ERDF).

Some of the ongoing cities' initiatives in the food area showed flexibility faced to challenges, attaining promising results in improving the sustainability of food systems, and they can really act as catalysts for systemic change. Also, numerous urban experiences, researches, and projects such as food councils, food strategies and food hubs have demonstrated that the city-region level is among the most appropriate ones for meaningful food system transformation. However, in order to reach their full potential and impact, there is a clear need to simplify and align EU and national laws, better correlate regulation and improve subsidies efficiency. Food overarching legislation and institutional organisation need to be consolidated to fill the gaps and responsibility ambiguities at the European and national level. Better coherence and synergies are needed both vertically (between the different levels of governance) and horizontally (between peer initiatives and authorities).

The positioning and organisation of the UAEU Partnership on Food

The UAEU Partnership on Food should gather relevant stakeholders from all parts of the food chain at the same table in order to build a shared vision together with the necessary means for its sustainable implementation. It can bring added value by creating a major one stop shop platform of exchange enabling a better visibility on and synergies between the ongoing initiatives. Its role should be to provide input to European regulation and funding and multilevel governance actors so as to better address local challenges; connect and build capacity for cities to support positive food system transformation. Its sustainability and effectiveness could be ensured through:

- a multi-layered organisation enhancing the visibility and contribution of cities and allowing alternative punctual involvement of multiple local authorities depending on the subject at stake and needed expertise and input;
- a series of data collection, analysis and visualisation digital tools facilitating an overall comprehensive perspective on the topic and action in the field as well as collaborative contributions, comparative scenario building and evaluation and informed decision making.

The exchanges with the Dutch City Deal representatives, URBACT cities and representatives, FAO, IPES Food and umbrella organisations like ICLEI and Eurocities confirmed that cities have limited capacities in terms of effort and funding and are looking for practical tools, peer learning opportunities as well as for occasions to test different solutions together with their peers and exchange experiences on very concrete issues.

The following **priority themes** are proposed at the core of the partnership:

The Food EAA showed that there is a large variety of initiatives on the Food TA (see chapter 3) and even different kinds of fragmented or sector partnerships. According to the interviews, the initially proposed building blocks of the Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System could serve as good basis to indicate areas of interventions. In this context, the following main themes could be tackled by the partnership: food security, food system sustainability and its transformation process, food resilience⁴, raising consumer awareness and education, sustainable public procurement, agroecology, food justice, access to land, public land management, governance with food strategies & food councils.

Possible partners:

Following the guidance provided by the Pact of Amsterdam, the core partners of the UAEU partnership could be: representatives of concerned EC DGs (DG AGRI, DG SANTE, DG RTD, ...), different level public administration umbrella organisations, regional development agencies, EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), CoR, EU Food Policy Coalition, representatives of URBACT, representatives of Food Councils and City Food Policy Departments, EIT Food, representative of the EU executive agencies in charge of the Food area (food systems) REA B Green Europe, thematic associations (NGOs working with cities and on territorial development and food issues), AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Group, Food Policy experts, representatives of food system actors (from production, transformation and distribution). Furthermore, we consider that representatives of education and research institutions should be also included as they can bring real added value for the advancement and use of metrics, connection of different stakeholders and harmonization of various points of view, acting as true catalysers.

Expected expertise of partners

Based on the analysis, interviews, and lessons learned from previous partnerships that have linkages to the food theme, it is proposed that partners cover collectively the following expertise:

- Knowledge on food thematic concrete and tested solutions.
- Knowledge on integration of food into urban and spatial planning and local strategic documents such as Integrated Strategies and Plans for Sustainable Urban Development and Integrated Territorial Investment Strategies and Action Plans.
- At least one member needs to have a tested knowledge in developing food topic in an urban context.
- Experience with including and coordinating various city stakeholders (such as Regional Development Agencies; universities and research institutions; Civil Society Organisations, etc.)

⁴ Food system resilience refers to the ability of a food system to withstand and recover from shocks, disruptions, and stresses while maintaining its essential functions, including the production, distribution, and access to food. It involves the capacity of the system to adapt and respond effectively to changes and challenges, such as natural disasters, climate variability, market fluctuations, policy shifts, and socio-economic disruptions. Food system resilience aims to ensure that the food system can continue providing sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet the needs of individuals and communities, even in the face of adversity. It encompasses a wide range of factors, including the diversity and flexibility of food sources, the robustness of supply chains, the adaptive capacity of agricultural practices, the responsiveness of governance and policy frameworks, and the resilience of local communities and food-related institutions. Achieving food system resilience is crucial for mitigating food insecurity, reducing vulnerability, promoting sustainability, and enhancing the long-term viability and adaptability of the food system.

Possible actions to be considered by the partnership⁵

Based on the actual needs in the area and inspired by the proposals of the previous UAEU partnerships that this new partnership can further advance and enhance, the actions taken may regard:

- analysis of national multilevel development and planning regulations with focus on food systems (better regulation);
- guidance on EU regulation and public support for sustainable food systems, including for eg. proposals for the reconsideration of the cohesion policy to ensure that it supports the development of / the shift towards sustainable food systems (better knowledge);
- cooperation with the EU bodies to advocate / support the promotion of a food funding (EIB funding & synergies with EFSI and InvestEU funds) (better funding);
- link the food TA with health TA for eg. by mapping and assessing existing (health) impact tools or monetization tools (eg. cost benefit analysis), regarding their applicability for monitoring and informing about food impact on health and healthy lifestyles (better knowledge);
- development of a roadmap / tool for strategies for sustainable food systems / food councils (better knowledge);
- knowledge pack on sustainable food systems, including innovation briefs of best practices in this area (better knowledge);
- develop indicators for monitoring and assessing the sustainability of the food TA (better knowledge & better regulation);
- analyse the regulatory obstacles and drivers for boosting a sustainable food system (better regulation);
- data collection and smart use for the management of food systems (better knowledge);
- observatory on food systems (better knowledge);
- capacity building and spreading of pilots in regions and cities, including awareness-raising with and education of consumers (better knowledge);
- development of a self-assessment tool for urban authorities regarding the sustainability of their food system and possible improvements (better knowledge);
- setting up a European framework for fostering sustainable innovations in the food TA (better regulation);
- identification and mobilisation of funding for cities to support the development of sustainable food systems (better funding);
- mapping and monitoring of the local food projects and initiatives enabling their exchanges and collaboration (better knowledge);
- development of a food systems data and tools sharing platform for cities (better knowledge).

All of the above should happen in full coherence with the legislative provisions to be laid down in the Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System.

Also, another key aspect that has to be considered in the preparation and implementation of the UAEU partnership on Food is the connection with the EU Food Policy Council, following and advising the process and its outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt the action of the partnership according to the new context given by the two major processes mentioned above.

⁵ For a complete overview see section 4.2.8

2 CONTEXT

a. Positioning and objectives of the Food Ex-Ante Assessment

In 2016, the Pact of Amsterdam agreed upon by the EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters on 30 May 2016 established **the Urban Agenda for the EU**. The latter is an integrated, coordinated, and multi-level governance initiative pursuing to better enhance the urban dimension in European and national policies and to improve the quality of life in urban areas by focusing on concrete priority themes within dedicated Thematic Partnerships. 16 Partnerships have been defined so far on the following themes:

- air quality
- circular economy
- climate adaptation
- culture and cultural heritage
- digital transition
- energy transition
- housing
- inclusion of migrants and refugees
- innovative and responsible public procurement
- jobs and skills in the local economy
- sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions
- urban mobility
- urban poverty
- security in public spaces
- greening cities
- sustainable tourism

Two new ones are in preparation on Food and respectively on Cities of Equality. Similarly to the 2 previous ones on Greening cities and Sustainable tourism, these new partnerships are substantiated by dedicated Ex-Ante Assessments (EAA). **The present report is the result of the EAA on Food TA** (including desk research, interviews, participation to food related events, interim report consultation process and different other exchanges).

According to the Multiannual Working Programme (MaWP) for the UAEU⁶, the EAA should “*enable the deployment of a pragmatic, effective and result-oriented approach aiming at increasing the impact of future UAEU deliverables. EAA will look at the proposal to help optimise focus, timing and activities of the multi-level cooperation and safeguard suitable levels of partners’ thematic and procedural expertise.*”

⁶ issued by the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters of the 26th of November 2021 (Ljubljana Agreement)

However, it should still allow the flexibility in the work and decision making of Partnerships according to the spirit of the UAEU⁷.

Hence, the scope of this analysis is to investigate:

- the most appropriate organisation, timing and activities for the Food partnership to be launched in the frame of the UAEU;
- the themes pertinent to the Food thematic area (TA);
- the possibilities for contribution to better regulation efforts of this TA;
- useful cooperation and coordination with other initiatives.

It will also explore the best governance approach to deliver on the objectives of the UAEU for this topic by considering the policy and regulatory context. Furthermore, it will propose a preliminary list of possible partners, incentives and promotion.

b. Methodology

This EAA started with the identification of an extensive list of publications, initiatives and case studies related to the Food TA. These were subsequently organised according to a series of criteria including the geographic coverage, relevance, origin, positioning, date of issue etc. The most relevant ones at the European scale were selected for the core desk research, which enabled the distinction of:

- main policy trends;
- gaps, challenges and needs that have to be addressed;
- assets, values and inputs that can be capitalised;
- relevant best practice examples that could be replicated and inspire sustainable food systems transformations and
- preliminary orientations regarding the possible role and organisation of the UAEU partnership.

The desk research also served for the framing of interviews, preparation of the generic and specific guiding questions and identification of further relevant stakeholders to be engaged in the EAA beyond the minimum requirements of the assignment.

The 12 interviews (among which 6 with European Commission DGs and 6 with representatives of other relevant organisations in the Food sustainability arena possibly to also engage in the UAEU partnership like IPES Food⁷, ICLEI⁸, Eurocities⁹) and event participations enabled to validate and further advance the conclusions of the desk research. ICLEI and Eurocities were selected among the additional organisations interviewed based on their comprehensive research and action taken in the Food TA. Another important aspect in their choice was that they represent cities and their interest, one of the priorities of the UAEU being to support cities in addressing actual challenges.

⁷ IPES-Food is an independent panel of experts shaping debates on how to transition to sustainable food systems around the world. <https://ipes-food.org/about/>

⁸ ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 2500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 125+ countries, ICLEI influences sustainability policy and drives local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. Its Members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability. <https://iclei.org/>

⁹ Eurocities is the network of more than 200 cities in 38 countries, representing 130 million people, working together to ensure a good quality of life for all <https://eurocities.eu/>

At the beginning of the EAA, experts had already a long date collaboration with the French National Network of Territorial Food Strategies and Cities Network for Agroecology offering a solid reference framework. In this context, the prompt availability of the Dutch City Deal representatives to share their experience was considered very welcome, especially given the very limited time.

IPES Food was identified as it is the international organisation that published most of materials providing a comprehensive overview on the Food topic and different level action in this field. Exchanges have also been organised with IFOAM and several local Food Partnerships in the UK where this kind of organisations are in place since 13-15 years (like Plymouth Food Partnership). The possibility to exchange with the COPA-COGECA¹⁰ representatives was also explored, but the very short time and busy agendas did not allow this.

Starting from the challenges to be addressed, assets and opportunities to be capitalised, and visible EU cities trends, the research focused on the identification of concrete practical solutions in terms of multi-level governance, policies, regulation, funding, Food TA action and its articulation with other TA and UAEU partnerships.

Our focus was on the overall correlation of the main aspects of the Food TA to ensure the appropriate framework for the effectiveness and sustainability of the partnership, allowing sufficient flexibility for advancements on specific issues and enabling it to further continue this correlation work. This decision is also justified by the actual key momentum defined by a large number of initiatives, including at EU policy level (like FSFS and EESC Food Policy Council), that generated the critical mass for a systemic change. Acknowledging the complexity, broadness, and relevance of the Food TA, we consider essential to prepare the UAEU partnership in line with actual trends and transformation, while enhancing the role and positioning of cities. It is a context particularly prone to the latter enabling them to express their needs and insights from pilot experiments that can inspire further sustainability policies. Collaboration between the UAEU partnership and the soon to be created EU Food Policy Council has to be supported as it can foster the impact of change at both the EU and cities levels.

¹⁰ Copa (the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations) represents over 22 million European farmers and their family members in a combined effort with its members to promote the best interests of the agricultural sector among the EU institutions and other relevant stakeholders. Cogeca (the General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives) represents the general and specific interests of European agri-food, forestry, and fishery cooperatives among the EU Institutions and other socio-economic organisations contributing to European decision making.

3 THE FOOD TA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU (UAEU)

The mission assumed by the UAEU in the Food TA through the new Thematic Partnership planned to be launched revolves around gathering relevant knowledge and stakeholders at all levels to exchange ideas, promote regulations and investments that can improve local food supply chains for urban areas to increase proximity and quality food production and consumption. This includes the strengthening of human and economic exchanges between the urban centres and their rural peripheries and a circular approach to food production, loss and waste, while also considering affordable food for healthy diets, innovative solutions, urban agriculture and preservation of soil and biodiversity.

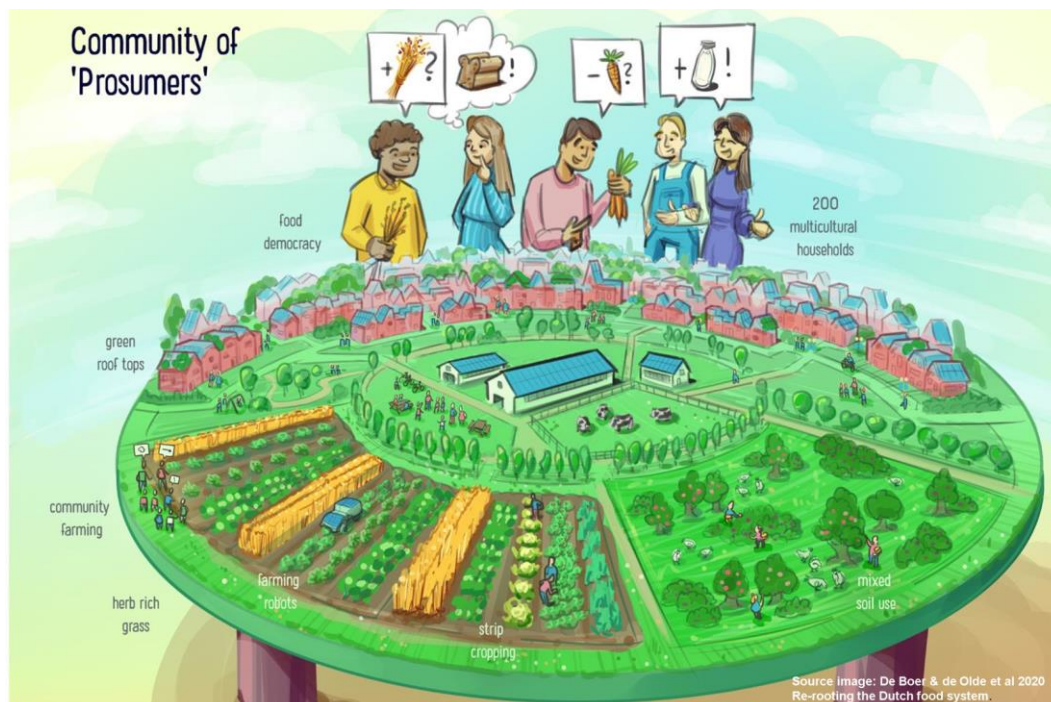


Fig 01. Community of 'Prosumers',
Source De Boer & de Olde et al 2020, Re-rooting the Dutch food system

a. Multi-level governance

The *multi-level governance* term was originally developed by the EU's Committee of the Regions (CoR) in 2009¹¹ and subsequently recurrently included as a core principle of the EU policies. It outlines the European Commission's aim to build Europe in partnership and have an inclusive European decision-making process. Multi-Level Governance means "coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and Local and Regional authorities, based on partnership [...] to create and implement EU policies. It leads to responsibility being shared between the different tiers of government". In other words, multi-level governance should ensure the coherence between what is planned at upper European

¹¹ Source: The Committee of the Regions, 2009 White Paper,
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/cdr89-2009_/cdr89-2009_en.pdf

and national levels and the corresponding translation and implementation at local level, more specifically, the capacity to effectively and sustainably apply strategies and recommendations at different territorial scales through concrete action plans and measures.

The 2020 New Leipzig Charter emphasizes the need for multi-level governance for sustainable urban development, while The White Paper on European Governance advocates 5 principles of “good governance” which correspond in fact to the very concept of multi-level governance:

1. Openness and transparency: communicate and make information easily accessible and understandable to all stakeholders and the general public
2. Participation: ensure widespread participation of all stakeholders, each step of the way – from the design, to the implementation of the policy
3. Accountability: clarify everyone’s role and objectives
4. Effectiveness: clearly identify objectives and expected results, and evaluate their impact
5. Coherence: ensure that there is coherence between different actions (particularly other governance processes)

The principle of partnership, which is a key feature in the attribution of subsidies, builds on the multi-level governance approach ensuring the involvement of regional, local, urban and other public authorities, civil society, economic and social partners and, where appropriate, research organisations and universities.

In order to provide continuity in the organisation of partnerships, the European code of conduct on partnership for Partnership Agreements and programmes supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds established by the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 (8) (the ‘European code of conduct on partnership’) and its updates continue to apply in correlation with the EU regulation for 2021-2027 programming period (as example : regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund plus (ESF+) and regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund).

Governance is one of the key aspects of sustainable urban development, as good governance arrangements can contribute to more transparent, inclusive, responsive, and effective decision-making¹². The New Leipzig Charter focusses on the transformative power of cities for the common good and highlights that good urban governance is necessary to help all cities develop just, green, and **productive urban systems**. In this regards, UAEU Partnership on Food represents a relevant tool to facilitate the implementation of the strategic priorities of the New Leipzig Charter.

The UAEU Partnership on Food can explore to what extent the urban food systems challenges can be addressed in partnership and in complementarity by different levels of governance – namely the EU level (The European Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and other relevant EU institutions); MS national authorities and national associations; regional authorities and regional associations; local authorities (large cities and small and medium-sized ones) and other stakeholders (civil society organisations, experts, professional organisations of producers and distributors, consumers protection agencies, private sector companies etc.).

Raising awareness on and addressing the socio-economic inequalities and environmental issues related to food production, transformation, distribution, and consumption are some of the major challenges for a

¹² Source: <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/governance#the-chapter>

sustainable food system. Cities and local communities are powerful drivers that have to be included in the overall governance arrangements as they can lead the implementation of transformative solutions as a response to the challenges they face, more faster-acting compared to those delivered at national level. Urban areas provide local public representatives with the opportunity to both develop and implement innovative solutions to deal with sustainable food system challenges. Creating sustainable food systems can be achieved also with the support of innovative local entrepreneurs. This can strengthen a place-based economy that is closely linked to local sustainable food production and distribution networks, creating a more productive economic environment.

What are the connections between governance, stakeholders, and participatory approach?

- multi-level governance, referring to the coordination and alignment of actions (interventions) between different levels of government;
- a multi-stakeholder approach, referring to the inclusion of all relevant actors throughout the whole policy cycle;
- a bottom-up and participatory approach, referring to the use of community-led initiatives to encourage local actors' active involvement and response.

Multilevel action

Multilevel action refers to the idea that addressing complex problems requires action at multiple levels, from individual behaviour change to systemic policy shifts. Tackling food systems unsustainability requires action at the individual, community, national, and international levels.

IPES-food suggests that enabling multilevel action is crucial for addressing the food system's complex issues. This would translate in implementing innovative mechanisms that facilitate communication and collaboration across different levels of action, such as Thematic Food Partnership and establishing policy frameworks that support coordinated action.

The Dutch City Deal Food¹³ partners confirmed their interest in participating in the Food TA of UAEU as long as they can enable concrete multi-level action.

The broadness of the food-related challenges can make it challenging to take action. However, it is encouraging to see that subnational and national governments are already leading the way in developing integrated approaches to create resilient food systems¹⁴.

The policy processes need to be capable of handling the complexity of food systems and the associated health risks. Integrated food policies are seen as essential for overcoming biases in sectoral policies and ensuring alignment across different policy areas. The objective of these policies is to establish

¹³ Starting in 2015, the Netherlands developed the City Deal approach to drive innovation in urban development and social issues. City Deals are theme-centered partnerships between frontrunners in public and private sector. Ministries, local and regional governments, universities and businesses work together on an equal footing to develop solutions for issues such as circular building, smart cities and health care and energy transition. In this context on 26 January 2017, 12 Dutch cities, the Province of Gelderland and 3 national Ministries jointly signed the Dutch Urban Agenda on Food, with the objective to strengthen the Dutch food system together with the private sector, knowledge institutes and societal organisations. The partners specifically work on four themes: 1) Governance innovation; 2) Ecological and economic sustainability innovation; 3) Regional food systems and strengthening of fair and short supply chains around cities; and 4) Food education, health and social inclusion.

¹⁴ Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) consultation on "New Food System Integrated Program to support the transformation of food systems into nature-positive, resilient, and pollution free system", <https://www.fao.org/fsnforum/consultation/food-system-integrated-program-transformation?page=1>

environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable food systems. They should consider trade-offs, set long-term systemic goals, and address specific challenges like reducing chemical load in food and farming systems and managing emerging risks such as antimicrobial resistance. Additionally, the process of developing these integrated food policies should involve the participation of the general public, making them partners in public risk management and priority-setting.

Beyond the ongoing EU Food Policy Council initiative from the EESC, inspiring examples were already provided for eg. by The Dutch City Deal (at national level), the French Territorial Food Strategy (national policy of the Agriculture Ministry supporting the promotion of local level strategies), the Catalan Food Council (at regional level) and the initiatives promoted by cities like Vitoria Gasteiz (Spain) and Ghent (Belgium). This is an important step towards addressing the complex and multifaceted issues related to food.

In this regard, FTP could represent a relevant step in facilitating multi-level action and creating a more comprehensive and effective mechanism supported by harnessing the strengths and resources of different stakeholders at different levels in the food system.

Enabling Multilevel action

According to “A Guide to Multi-level Governance For Local and Regional Public Authorities” published by Coopenergy Consortium in December 2015, in order to favour multilevel action one needs to:

1. Use high-level coordination mechanisms, whether located within the Centre of Government or a lead line ministry as appropriate, to promote integration of sustainable development across central agencies, line ministries and other public institutions;
2. Establish clear mandates, capacities and mobilise adequate resources, as appropriate;
3. Encourage formal governance arrangements and informal working methods that support effective communication between ministries and departments, and between ministries and other public sector bodies under their aegis;
4. Build capacity in public administrations and align training strategies and programmes for public actors.

The interviews with the EC DGs suggested the intention to assess current food policies and administrative organisations in order to evaluate and reinforce their synergies and coherence. This follows the already existing assessments of local initiatives¹⁵ that underline that the EU regulatory structure of the current food system does not support a sustainable Union food system.

Today, multilevel governance effectiveness is a very sensitive topic tackled at EU level¹⁶. While there are supportive EU policy frameworks that provide flexibilities in public procurement and food safety rules e.g. to assist small-scale farmers, these opportunities are often not effectively communicated or

¹⁵ “Local food systems: Reviewing two decades of research” <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308521X21001797>
“Using local initiatives to envision sustainable and resilient food systems in the Stockholm city-region”
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211912419300501>

“The sustainability of “local” food: a review for policy-makers” <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41130-021-00148-w>
“Envisioning the Future of European Food Systems: Approaches and Research Priorities After COVID-19”
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2021.642787/full>

¹⁶ Directorate General for Internal Policies, “Challenges of multi-tier governance in the European Union. Effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy”, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474438/IPOL-AFCO_ET\(2013\)474438_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/etudes/join/2013/474438/IPOL-AFCO_ET(2013)474438_EN.pdf)

implemented at the national and local levels. Instead, they are overshadowed by competing priorities such as enhancing competitiveness in conventional markets. Consequently, the promotion of local experimentation, social innovation, and the establishment of sustainable food systems at the territorial level remain optional rather than obligatory for Member States. Additionally, food represents a very broad scope that interferes with a lot of administrative bodies at all levels. Therefore, the consequences of incoherence at whatever level may generate a considerable overall impact. The fact that food is a basic and necessary good, treated as a commodity, in an intensive, subsidised and profitable system managed in large percentage by the private sector regulated more on economic and food safety issues, has also major consequences on the ecosystem, human, plant and animal health. Recognizing food as a human right or common good offers a broader perspective that incorporates social justice, access, and sustainability considerations, ultimately shaping more inclusive and transformative food policies¹⁷.

Innovative social practices are flourishing within food systems, bringing forth a range of advancements such as short food chains, community-supported agriculture, waste reduction strategies, urban farming, and creative public procurement initiatives. Cities and regions are assuming significant roles in driving these innovations, forging partnerships between public entities, local entrepreneurs, and civil society organizations. However, a gap persists between national and EU-level policies and these grassroots social innovations. Instead of fostering and incentivizing local experimentation, top-down policies often prioritize efficiency gains through standardization and competition, resulting in a loss of diversity. It is crucial for the EU to shift its focus and support the richness of diverse approaches rather than promoting uniformity. Embracing the shift towards re-localisation¹⁸ and reterritorialization¹⁹ of food systems should be seen as an opportunity to create fairer and more sustainable models. The EU can play a vital role by facilitating these transitions, fostering collective learning, establishing networks of local actors, and ensuring the widespread sharing of the most successful innovations.

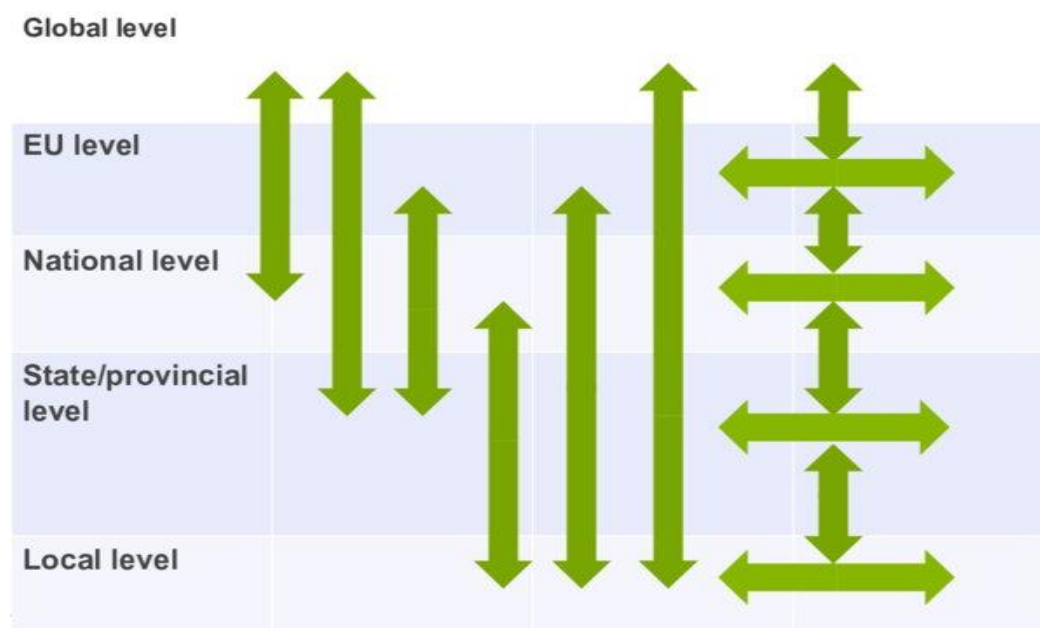


Fig 02 Source: Martin Jänicke, Multi-level governance: possible horizontal and vertical interactions

¹⁷ Source : <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00245-5>

¹⁸ The relocation of food systems in territories pursues both a political and civic ambition to reconnect agriculture and food, and to face the challenges of sustainable development. source: https://www6.inrae.fr/ideas-agrifood_eng/Research/Scientific-publications/Our-flagship-publications/Relocation-of-food-systems-within-territories

¹⁹ Demand or seek renewed forms of both spatial and relational proximities, mostly in order to improve urban metabolism

Some local governments (such as the Region of Madrid²⁰, Warminsko-Mazurska Voivodeship²¹ or the Municipality of Ghent) may be more progressive than others in their approach to sustainability and may have already implemented policies and initiatives that can serve as models for other cities and regions. By sharing best practices and collaborating with other governments to test together further solutions, pioneer cities can help to accelerate progress towards a more sustainable and equitable future as also stated by one of the representatives of the Dutch City Deal “Healthy and Sustainable Food Environment”.

Overall, strong partnerships and collaboration between cities, regional governments, and other stakeholders are key to achieving meaningful and lasting change towards sustainability. A lot of ongoing initiatives demonstrate the importance of taking a holistic approach to food policy, involving all stakeholders and using data to identify areas for improvement.

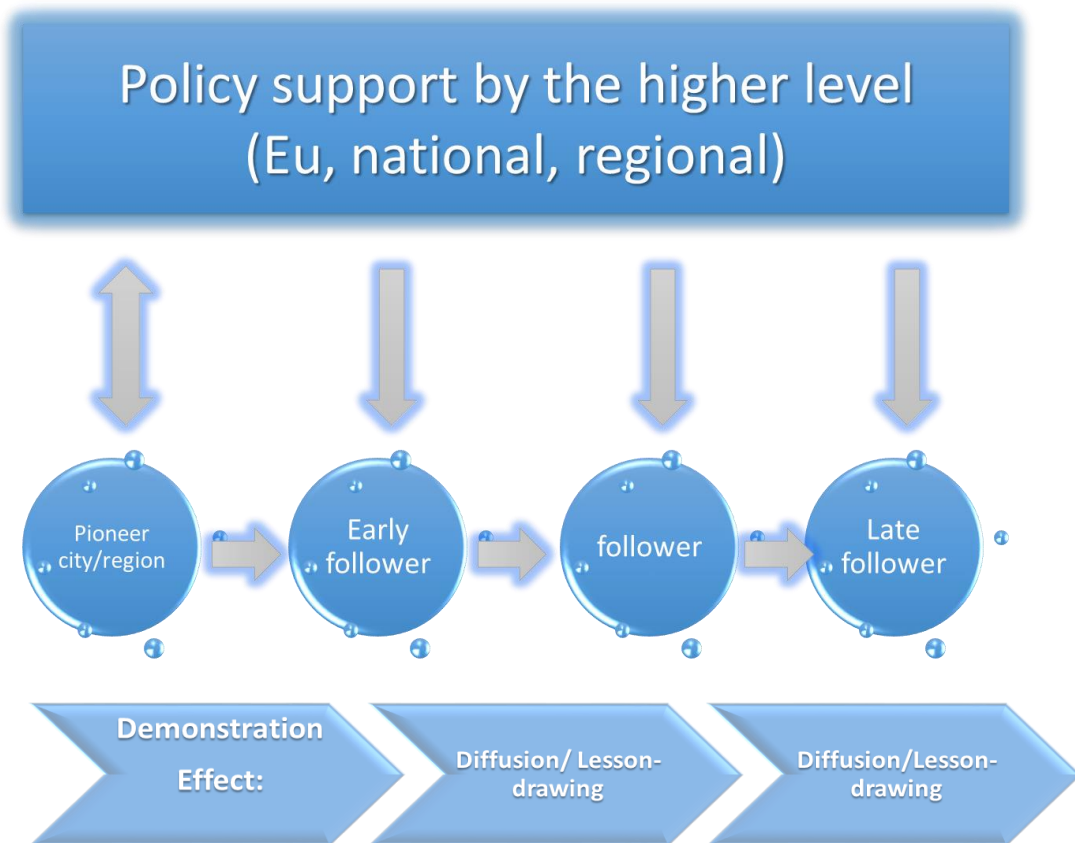


Fig 03 source: authors redraw after Martin Jänicke

²⁰ Source : <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264275122005972>

²¹ Source : https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Sustainable_food_systems.pdf

Lessons learned from various crises

Some years ago, before the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, a JRC Report on Global Food Security 2030²² underlined that Europe needs to better exploit the opportunity of the development of the food sector and presented the following key messages and policy recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Policy coherence and coordination is needed between different EU policies to work towards a 'food systems' approach Policy recommendation. Commission's relevant policy DGs can discuss the future of the food system and Europe's strategic role within it.

Recommendation 2: Clearer recognition that "feeding the world in 2030" will essentially be "feeding the cities". Stronger coordination of cities on food security issues is needed, possibly through joint interventions on strengthening rural-urban linkages.

Recommendation 3: Increased recognition of the crucial role of demand-side dynamics in shaping future food systems is essential.

Recommendation 4: In order to build food security solutions from the ground up, a culture of innovation in food systems should be promoted in all determining factors within food systems, including production, conservation, transformation, storage, transport, processing, retailing, access in line with global needs but also attuned to local situations, lifestyle and diversity through new education models and training.

The relevance of these recommendations was confirmed by the recent events, determining an increased awareness of the importance of the Food TA at various levels. Thus, on 12 November 2021, the Commission published its Communication regarding the creation of a European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM)²³. The lessons learned from the crises generated by natural disasters, health threats like Covid-19 or by military conflicts such as Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine allow us to identify key principles to be followed to ensure food supply and food security when a crisis arises:

- a collaborative approach between all public and private parties that play a role in the food supply chain;
- horizontal coordination at political and administrative level, particularly when the crisis originates from factors outside the food supply chain, as it was the case with the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine;
- monitoring of market imbalances and where necessary, swift intervention using available tools, such as those that exist under the CAP and the CFP;
- supply chains and trade flows remaining operational, including for non-food sectors that are essential to the functioning of the food supply chain;
- free movement of cross-border and seasonal workers in the food sector as much as possible;
- early, regular and transparent communication to stakeholders and the public to avoid the crisis being exacerbated through inappropriate information.

²² European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Foresight and Behavioural Insights Unit, 2015, "Global Food Security 2030. Assessing trends with a view to guiding future EU policies, https://scar-europe.org/images/SCAR-Documents/Global_Food_security-2030.pdf

²³ Source : https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/agri-food-supply-chain/ensuring-global-food-supply-and-food-security_en

The multi-level perspective (MLP) model

The transition towards more sustainable food systems is a complex process influenced by various factors at different levels. Developed by scholars such as Frank Geels and Johan Schot, the MLP offers a theoretical framework for understanding socio-technical transitions and the challenges associated with achieving sustainability.

Existing agri-food systems are often characterized by lock-in mechanisms that hinder sustainability transitions. These mechanisms include sunk investments, behavioural patterns, vested interests, infrastructure, favourable subsidies, and regulations. They contribute to the stability and persistence of the current system, making it difficult to initiate and facilitate change.

The MLP recognizes three interconnected levels of analysis: the niche level, the regime level, and the landscape level. The niche level represents the space for experimentation and innovation, where alternative practices and technologies emerge. Niche-level activities challenge the dominant regime and can eventually replace it. The regime level refers to the prevailing socio-technical system, characterized by established rules, norms, and practices. Transitioning to sustainability involves pressuring the regime to change and adapt. The landscape level encompasses the broader socio-cultural, economic, and political context within which transitions occur. Factors such as public opinion, policies, and external shocks influence the potential for sustainability transitions.

Sustainability transitions require changes across multiple levels simultaneously. Technological innovation alone is not enough. The interactions and dynamics between niches, regimes, and landscapes are crucial, emphasizing the need for alignment and coherence. Transitions occur when niche-level innovations gain momentum and create pressure for change at the regime level. However, regimes can also influence niches by either supporting or suppressing their development. The landscape level sets the context for transitions, exerting external pressures and creating opportunities or constraints.

By considering the complexities and interdependencies within socio-technical systems, the MLP provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of transitioning to sustainable agri-food systems. It helps identify barriers, highlight the importance of niche-level innovations, and underscores the significance of aligning landscape factors and governance mechanisms to enable and support sustainability transitions. Overall, the multi-level perspective offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricacies of transitioning towards more sustainable food systems. It guides efforts to navigate the complexities of socio-technical transitions, facilitating transformative change and addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Increasing structuration
of activities in local practices

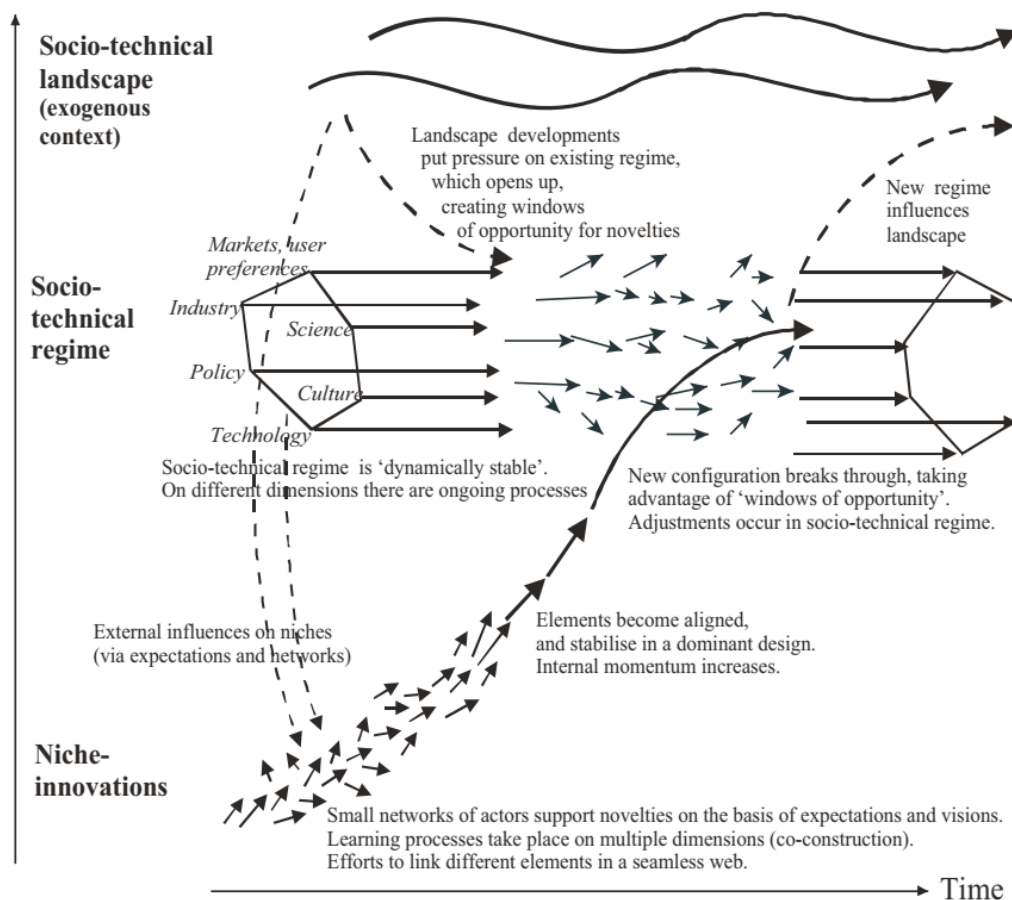


Fig 04: The multi-level perspective on transitions. source: F.W Geels, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transition 1* (2011), 24-40

1.1 Food TA regulatory environment

The **EU General Food Law 2002** provides the legal and regulatory framework for food production and trade, in particular with regard to food safety requirements, whereas the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** and the **Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)** create the framework for agricultural production and fisheries respectively. The **EU Farm to Fork Strategy** and one of its key initiatives i.e. the Framework for a Union **Sustainable Food System** delineates a more strategic vision and policy framework for promoting sustainable, fair and environmentally friendly food systems.

The **CAP** established in 1962, and subsequently renewed periodically until the most recent version known as the **CAP 2021-2027**, adopted in 2020, is designed to govern agricultural production and trade within the EU, with a focus on promoting sustainable farming practices and ensuring food security for EU citizens.

The **new CAP** harnesses the latest advances in knowledge and innovation and reinforces the role farmers have to play in several of the Green Deal's key policy areas²⁴:

- building a sustainable food system through the Farm to Fork strategy;
- adding to the new Biodiversity Strategy iv (published in May 2020) by protecting and enhancing the variety of plants and animals in the rural ecosystem;
- contributing to the climate action of the Green Deal to achieve the goal of net-zero emissions in the EU by 2050;
- supporting the updated Forestry Strategy, by maintaining healthy forests;
- contributing to a zero-pollution action plan, by safeguarding natural resources such as water, air and soil.

2021–2027 Cohesion policy: is designed to ensure the equality of chances and the European Commission has put forward a simpler and more flexible framework enabling to calibrate the investment depending on the realities on the ground.

There is a focus on five policy objectives around:

- (1) a more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity;
- (2) a greener, low-carbon transition towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility;
- (3) a more connected Europe by enhancing mobility;
- (4) a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights; and
- (5) a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives.

Food topic can represent an interesting angle for Sustainable Urban Development based on Article 11 of ERDF/CF Regulation. To tackle economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges, the ERDF will support measures focused on urban areas, including functional urban areas with the special attention on tackling environmental and climate challenges, the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by 2050, to harnessing the potential of digital technologies for innovation purposes, and to enhance the development of functional urban areas. Additionally, it is essential to highlight the importance of strengthening rural-urban linkages. As mentioned in the section "Lessons learned from various crises," there is a need for improved coordination among cities regarding food security, potentially through collaborative efforts to enhance rural-urban linkages. The city-region framework offers a valuable approach to tackling the intricate challenges of food resilience at the local level emphasizing the interdependencies between rural and urban areas. Cohesion policy continues to support integrated territorial and local development strategies through territorial tools and empower urban authorities and territorial bodies in the management of the funds, while requiring strong local partnerships with relevant stakeholders. 2021–2027 ERDF investments for integrated territorial and local development strategies will be supported either under policy objective 5 or under other policy objectives through one of the EU territorial instruments (ITI, CLLD) or another territorial tool designed by Member States.

²⁴ https://croplifeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CropLifeEurope_Deloitte_-CAP-Report-Final.pdf

As a result of the multi-DG collaboration between DG SANTE, DG AGRI, DG ENV and DG MARE, a Framework for a Union **Sustainable Food System**²⁵ is planned to be launched in the second half of 2023 as a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council. The proposal's scope is to address the resilience and viability of the EU food system, as well as the EU internal market, that may be compromised if actions are not taken in a coherent manner, both at EU and MS level. Some examples of issues that need to be addressed are: the lack of (e.g. financial, research and innovation) incentives for actors of the food system to produce/place sustainable food on the EU market; the affordability of sustainable foods, purchasing decisions are taken on the basis of short-term costs, disregarding long-term/real costs and impacts; insufficient reduction of food loss and waste across the food value chain, including at consumption stage; insufficient allocation of cross sector responsibilities to the different actors of the food system for transitioning towards sustainability. The forthcoming overarching legislation on food systems at the EU level (FSFS) marks the initial step towards a more extensive legal framework that will be developed in the future. In this regard, the UAEU Partnership can play a critical role in advocating for the reinforcement of local food system resilience at the city level. Thus, it can promote and empower cities, enabling them to have a pivotal role in emphasizing the importance of local food systems.

Fit for 55: The European climate law makes reaching the EU's climate goal of reducing EU GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels a legal obligation. EU countries are working on new legislation to achieve this goal and make the EU climate-neutral by 2050. The Fit for 55 package is a set of proposals to revise and update EU legislation and to put in place new initiatives with the aim of ensuring that EU policies are in line with the climate goals agreed by the Council and the European Parliament.

The new rules, as part of the Fit for 55 package, will increase the EU-level greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2030 **from 29% to 40%**, compared with 2005, in the sectors concerned. They will also update the national targets accordingly.

Food 2030 is the EU's research and innovation (R&I) policy to support food system transformation. It calls for a systemic approach whereby R&I policy and projects should seek to achieve the four overarching priorities (Nutrition, Climate, Circularity, and Innovation through empowerment of communities). Food 2030 targets 10 pathways for action representing key levers of change where R&I can have deep and multiple impacts. One of these is the urban food systems transformation pathway, which aims to apply R&I to drive urban food system transformation by improving strategic thinking, capacity building, multi-actor engagement, understanding, modelling and monitoring of food system transformation. It enforces science-backed, multi-actor governance processes, establishes systemic frameworks for action and reinforces the capacity of cities as innovation ecosystems and agents of change.

Additional EU policies interesting for food activities are also:

The EU child guarantee: was announced in 2019 with a view to ensuring that every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education. The initiative recommendations were adopted in June 2021, with the aim to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective access of children in need to a set of key services: free early childhood education and care, free education (including school-based activities and at least one healthy meal each school day), free healthcare, healthy nutrition, and adequate

²⁵ Source : [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=PI_COM:Ares\(2021\)5902055](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=PI_COM:Ares(2021)5902055)

housing. In order to implement the Recommendations, MS have nominated their Child Guarantee Coordinators and are preparing national action plans, covering the period until 2030.

The **Horizon Europe Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change** focuses on supporting EU regions, cities, and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience against the impacts of climate change. It contributes to putting the EU's adaptation strategy in practice by helping the regions to : better understand the climate risks they are and will be confronted with in the future, develop their pathways to be better prepared and cope with the changing climate and test and deploy on the ground innovative solutions needed to build resilience. The Mission's objective is to accompany by 2030 at least 150 European regions and communities towards climate resilience.

The EU biodiversity strategy aims to put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, climate and the planet and aims to build our societies' resilience to future threats such as : the impacts of climate change, forest fires, food insecurity and disease outbreaks - including by protecting wildlife and fighting illegal wildlife trade

The EU procurement directive: sustainable food procurement can contribute to addressing the challenges of the EU food system as outlined in the F2FS, and the purchasing power of public administrations to drive change is vast. The latter is estimated at 14-16% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP), with the social food service market for the EU estimated to be worth 82 billion euro²⁶

4.3 Existing gaps and possible solutions

In "The Conquest of Bread" (1982), Kropotkin criticizes the treatment of food as a commodity driven by profit. He advocates for communal ownership and equitable access to food as a fundamental right. Food serves as a catalyst for social relationships and solidarity.

The concept of food as a common good and fundamental right emphasizes the need to move away from treating food solely as a commodity driven by profit. Instead, it calls for a system where communal ownership and equitable access to food are prioritized. This perspective recognizes that food not only satisfies our basic needs but also plays a crucial role in fostering social relationships and promoting solidarity within communities. By reimagining our approach to food in politics, we can strive for a more just and cohesive society that ensures everyone has access to an abundance of nutritious food.

Food is inherently political, as it involves questions about the structure and evolution of food systems, the distribution of power, and the impacts on different actors. In the face of unsustainable and inequitable modern food systems, which have significant and long-lasting effects on human well-being, health, and prosperity across generations, the politics surrounding food have become highly contentious.

By recognizing the political nature of food and involving cities in EU-level politics, one can drive a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient food system.

Adapting EU legislation to empower cities to lead local food system transformations is crucial. It requires multilevel coherence, where EU policies are designed in a way that allows cities to implement and tailor them according to their specific circumstances. This approach recognizes the diversity of urban environments across the EU and allows for localized solutions that address the unique challenges faced by each city.

²⁶ https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sustainable-public-procurement-of-food-a-goal-within-reach_EU-FPC-website.pdf

This argument completes the recognised need to simplify the EU laws, better correlate regulation and improve subsidies efficacy in food system sustainability and also to consolidate an overarching legislation and institutional organisation on food issues and the existence of some ambiguity of European level responsibility (for eg. a holistic approach of food resilience is missing, the roles of different EU bodies regarding this subject not being clearly distributed and communicated).

Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System

“What we need are not new agricultural policies, but something much more wide, inclusive, in one word: holistic.” 2017, Carlo Petrini, the founder of the Slow Food movement.

One of the biggest challenges facing food policy is **the tendency to prioritise short-term crisis management over long-term systemic change**. This can lead to a focus on increasing food production, relying on unsustainable practices and not considering **food systems vulnerability to shocks and disruptions**, including climate change, natural disasters, and pandemics. In order to build more resilient and sustainable food systems, it is essential to adopt a more **holistic and forward-looking approach that prioritises the One health approach**.

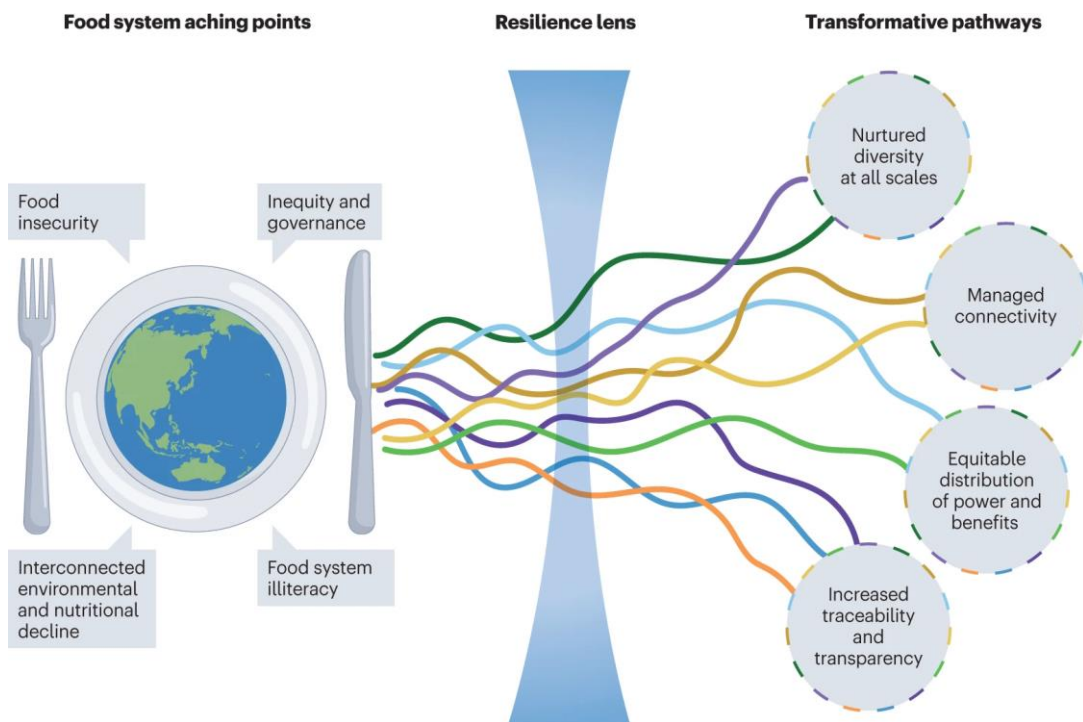


Fig 05: Four food system aching points and the transformative pathways that emerge when reframed through a resilience lens, source: Wood, A., Queiroz, C., Deutsch, L. et al.

There are several gaps in the current legislative framework related to sustainability in the food system. The **CAP**, fisheries policy, general food legislation, and environmental legislation have all been developed in a disconnected manner and do not capture the complexity of the food system holistically.



Fig. 06: source: authors²⁷

"Towards a Common Food Policy" report of IPES Food provided already in 2019 a relevant roadmap for transforming the EU's food systems, but little implementation of these policies and strategies at the administrative level has happened since, demonstrating how important the political will and resources are in the process.



Fig 07: source: "Towards a Common Food Policy" report 2019 IPES-food

²⁷ in this visual, FSFS refers to 'Sustainable Food System Framework'

According to the interviews, the EU **Farm to Fork Strategy** represents an important milestone in addressing the big challenges facing food policy, by making the transition from CAP (mainly focused on agriculture, farming, farmers, rural environment, and productivity) to prioritising food system sustainability. This initiative recognizes that food systems are complex and interconnected, and that addressing issues such as food insecurity, environmental degradation, and economic inequality requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Therefore, it is essential to continue building momentum around sustainable food policies and to mobilise support from civil society and other stakeholders. It is also important to encourage policymakers to push for policies that prioritise sustainability and social justice.

The DG representatives' general opinion was that in order to build an EU overarching legislation, it is important to first agree on the definitions, objectives and principles of sustainability in the food system. Then, sectoral legislation could be reviewed, new legislation could be developed and/or new requirements introduced to reduce the gaps and promote sustainability.

Encouraging production, distribution and consumption of healthy and sustainable food and creating a favourable food environment is essential and MS have an important role in setting up national action plans/strategies to promote sustainability, supported by a multilevel collaboration and communication to ensure that all actors are working together towards shared goals.

The most promising ongoing initiative tackling food systems unsustainability at EU level, led by DG-SANTE in cooperation with DG AGRI, DG MARE and DG ENVIRONMENT is the upcoming Framework for an Union **Sustainable Food System**²⁸ proposal planned to be adopted during the second half of 2023.

The framework aims to lay down general principles, objectives and definitions of sustainability to generate a common understanding. In addition it may be envisaged to include incentivising measures such as criteria related to sustainable public procurement and food sustainability labelling.

Numerous organisations and institutions are endorsing this paradigm shift in the approach of food issues by the EC and see the upcoming Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System, as a “*key political achievement*” in addressing current food systems vulnerability. For eg. the recently published (February 2023) “Sustainable Food Systems Law Policy Recommendations for a Meaningful Transition” by the Food Coalition is very clearly presenting the state of the art providing guidance for the development of effective and impactful policies within the FSFS. However, a **Joint open letter**²⁹ addressed to the EC in February 2023 insists on the need for a **strong proposal** of a “*new legal framework*” that “*should set a clear path for the transition to a sustainable EU food system and anchor the objectives of the F2FS into law by including all the actors in the food supply chain*”.

This joint letter was followed by discussions regarding the creation of an **European Food Policy Council** as a new governance model in the future Framework on a Union Sustainable Food System (NAT/892-[Towards a European Food Policy Council](#)). This initiative of the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) needs to be followed in order to establish further collaboration with the UAEU Partnership on Food.

²⁸ source: <https://food.ec.europa.eu/Legislative-framework-for-sustainable-food-systems>

²⁹ Source: https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/BEUC-X-2023-013_need_a_strong_proposal_on_an_EU_legislative_framework_for_sustainable_food_systems.pdf

Sustainable food systems framework

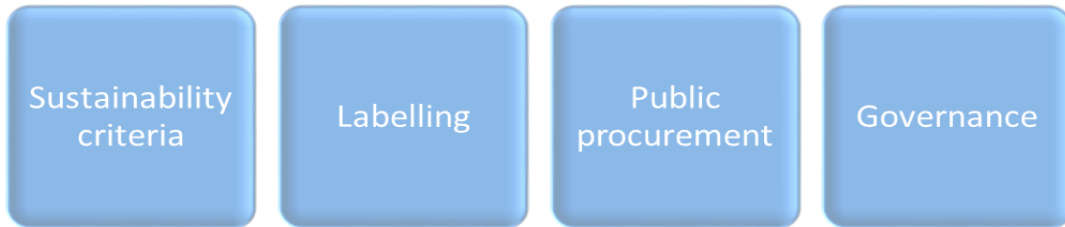


Fig 08: source: authors

The Framework for an EU Sustainable Food System considers the **four building blocks**, suggested after stakeholder consultation by JRC³⁰:

1. **Minimum sustainability requirements**: This could involve setting minimum standards and guidelines for sustainability in the food system. The criteria could be based on the principles of not causing significant harm to the environment, public health, animal welfare, and social justice. This could help eliminate the least sustainable practices in the EU.
2. **Framework for EU sustainability labelling**: A harmonised framework for labelling could help consumers make better informed choices about the sustainability of the food they buy. This could include information on the environmental impact of production, the carbon footprint, animal welfare, and other relevant criteria.
3. **Public procurement**³¹: Contacting authorities at all levels (national, regional, and local) could use their purchasing power to promote sustainable food production and consumption. This could involve setting minimum mandatory sustainability criteria for food procurement contracts, including providing opportunities for local products, and supporting small-scale farmers and producers to successfully participate to tenders.
4. **Governance enabling mechanism**: This could involve developing a multi-level governance framework that encourages and requires participation from a diverse range of stakeholders in the food system. This could include setting up local food policies councils at the national/regional/local level, involving citizens, farmers, authorities, NGOs, and businesses in decision-making, and incentivizing national-level competence to work together toward sustainable food policies.

The UAEU Partnership on Food can particularly contribute to the last 2 building blocks, on which cities can have real impact. Public procurement and governance issues are sectors where cities can really make a difference. The high-level event “*Bringing urban food policy to the table*” gathered in Brussels on March 9, 2023 eleven deputy mayors from European cities and eight cabinet members and policy officers

³⁰ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC126575>

³¹ Public procurement is also actively considered through a dedicated UAEU Partnership on which the Food TP can successfully build and that it can in the same time support.

from the European Commission that discussed what cities are doing on food policies and how they can contribute to the upcoming proposal for a Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System law.

“There should be clear and binding provisions for member states to consult with local authorities when developing their national strategies. It should not be optional, or we know that some states won’t consult us” advocated Alvaro Porro, Commissioner of Social Economy, Local Development and Food Policy in Barcelona.

According to the Head of the Farm to Fork unit at the European Commission’s DG SANTE, the upcoming proposal FSFS will provide a frame for multi-level cooperation enabling cities to play an important role in the food transition. National food action plans may be introduced as well in the proposal to which local authorities should be contributing.

Anna Scavuzzo, Vice-Mayor for Food Policy and Education in Milan said *“We ask to keep cities involved and consider our approach as we lead the change in many fields.”*

Better coherence and synergies are needed both vertically between the different levels of governance as well horizontally between peer initiatives and authorities.

Tackling food system resilience from a political perspective

Addressing issues related to food security and environmental sustainability is complex and often involves navigating political challenges. In some cases, policymakers may aim to raise standards and implement policies that promote sustainable practices, while in other cases, they may need to compromise to reach agreement among different stakeholders. However, it is important to note that the influence of the European Union and its policies can be limited by the decisions of MS, particularly in areas such as agriculture where there may be strong national interests at play.

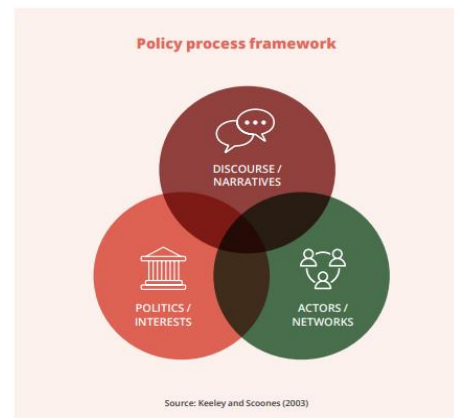


Fig 09: source: IDS & IPES-Food, 2022. Smoking mirrors

Agroecology as a framework of food systems transformation

The Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG-RTD) of the EC approaches the agroecology as a key area of research, but its principles of agroecology are not yet fully valued as pillars for food system transformation despite reports by organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) that support this claim. While there has been some progress in integrating agroecology principles into EU agricultural policies and practices, it is still not widely adopted as a mainstream approach. The new CAP does include some measures and incentives for sustainable agriculture practices, like eco-schemes that promote agro ecological principles, but this may not be sufficient to drive significant change.

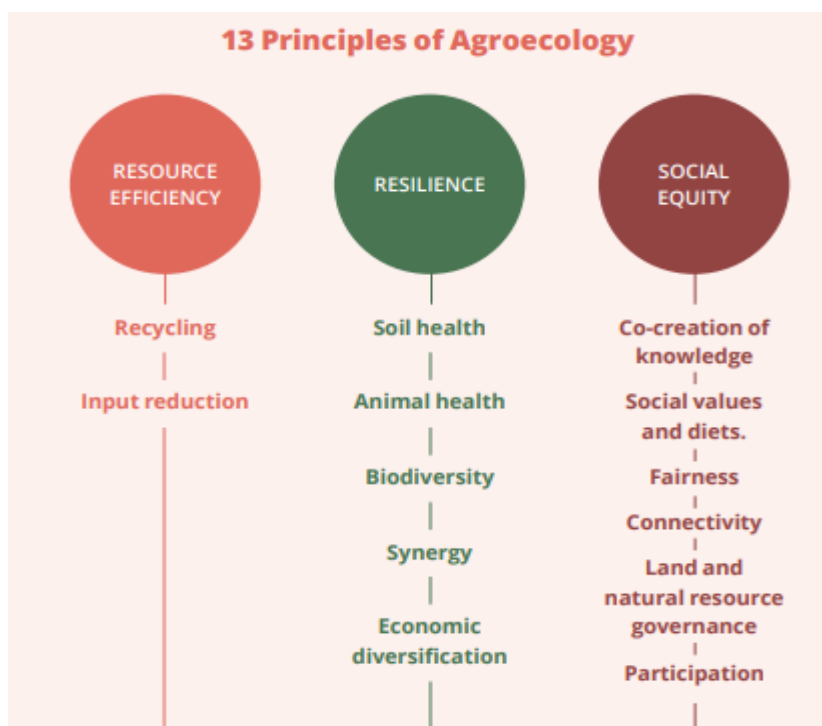


Fig 10: source: IDS & IPES-Food, 2022. Smoking mirrors

Dependence on global networks and corporate agri-food business

Food system's dependence on global networks and corporate agri-food business players is a factor of vulnerability, and it is an issue that needs to be addressed at the European level. Global networks of trade and transport make the system vulnerable to shocks such as pandemics, natural disasters, or political conflicts, which can disrupt the supply chain, leading to shortages or surpluses of certain foods, which can impact food prices and availability.

At the European level, policymakers could prioritize policies that support the development of more decentralized and diversified local food systems, reducing the reliance on imports.

The inclusion of externalities in the price of food

Externalities are the costs or benefits that are not directly accounted for in the market price of a product, but are instead borne by society as a whole. In the context of food, there are several externalities that can be considered, such as environmental degradation, greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and health impacts.

The inclusion of externalities in the price of food to reflect its true cost is indeed an ethical question that should be addressed by the Food Thematic Partnership by considering the social and environmental implications of food production and consumption and strive to promote a more ethical and sustainable food system.

Aspects to consider:

- **Equity and Social Justice:** *Certain populations, such as low-income communities, may be disproportionately affected by higher food prices resulting from the inclusion of externalities.*
- **Transparency and Accountability:** *It is crucial to clearly communicate to consumers and stakeholders how the external costs are calculated and how they contribute to the final price.*
- **Incentivizing Sustainable Practices:** *By internalizing the true costs of production, farmers, producers, and consumers are encouraged to adopt more environmentally friendly and socially responsible approaches.*
- **Collaboration and Multistakeholder:** *The Food Thematic Partnership should facilitate dialogue and cooperation between policymakers, civil society organizations, farmers, consumers, and industry representatives. By fostering inclusive and participatory approaches, the partnership aims to support the effectiveness of integrated food policies and strengthen collaboration among various actors involved in shaping local food systems.*
- **Research and Evidence-based Decision Making:** *Ethical considerations should be informed by rigorous research and evidence-based decision making. Continuous research, monitoring, and evaluation can refine the understanding of externalities, enabling more accurate pricing mechanisms that align with ethical principles.*

Food justice, insufficiently addressed

Despite The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) attesting the increasing recognition of the food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived, the food justice issue is still to be holistically addressed by the EU policies. There is a disconnection between existing policy instruments and the broader food system, making it difficult to address food justice in a comprehensive way.

Social food welfare is primarily in the hands of member states, which can result in disparities across the EU. However, it is important to continue to address food justice in EU policies and work towards more equitable and just food systems.

This topic needs to be addressed in synergy with the UAEU Partnership on Cities of Equality planned to be launched concomitantly with this one on Food.

Access to land, tackled outside the food system perspective

Access to land is a critical issue in ensuring the sustainability and resilience of the food system. In addition to supporting young farmers, there are also efforts to address land use issues and ensure that agricultural land is not lost to other uses. UAEU Thematic Partnership on Sustainable Land Use tackled already sustainable use of land as well as concrete proposals for territorial instruments and funding³², but this subject needs to be approached from the food system perspective.

³² The actions considered were: Inclusion of land take and soil properties in impact assessment procedures; Funding and financing guide for brownfield redevelopment; Identifying and managing underused land; Indicators of Land Take; Promoting FUA Cooperation as a tool to mitigate urban sprawl; Better regulation to boost NBS at European, National and Local Levels; Better Financing for NBS; Awareness Raising in the areas of NBS and the sustainable use of land; Agreeing on common targets and indicators for NBS, Urban Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Cities.

Public land management

Effective public land management for food policy requires a coordinated and integrated approach that considers a range of factors, including land use, zoning, community engagement, and food system planning. This approach should be guided by principles of equity, sustainability, and resilience, and should aim to promote social, economic, and environmental benefits for all stakeholders.

City-region framework

The city region framework provides a useful approach to addressing the complex challenges of food resilience at the local level by recognizing the interconnected nature of food systems, the role of cities as major players in shaping food systems, the rural-urban interdependencies and the need for collaboration and partnership across different sectors and stakeholders. Benefiting at the academic level of consensus as the most appropriate scale, this framework is yet to be recognised by EU and national administrative institutions as relevant in tackling food systems transformation.

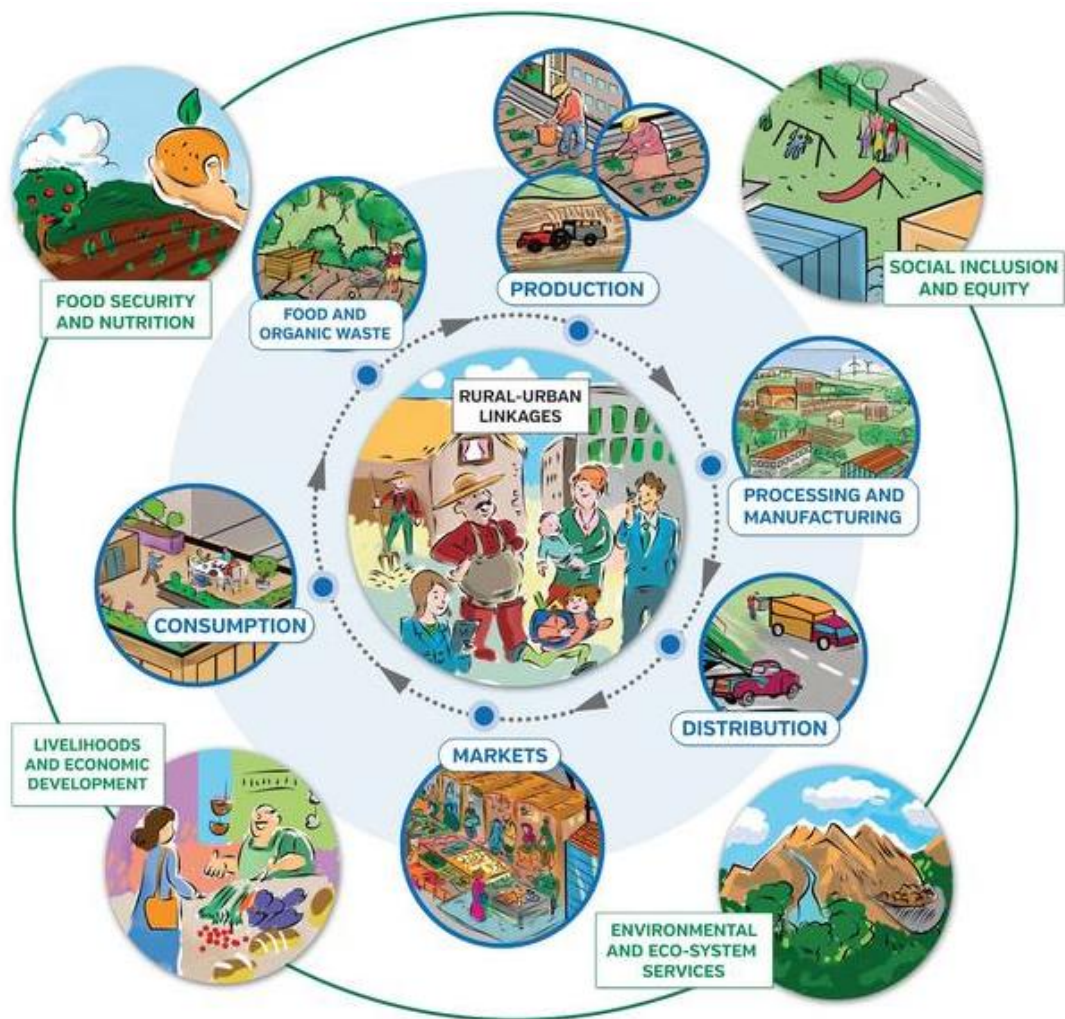


Fig 11: City-region framework, Source: FAO

In the context of the FoodE³³ project under the Horizon 2020 "Innovation Action" program, a synthetic assessment of the policy environment hindering the development of sustainable City-Region Food Systems reveals several gaps that requires closer attention and advocacy for building supporting policies.

Planning: *Land use categories separate urban and rural activities, threatening peri-urban farms. Urban planning laws are primarily made at the national level, leading to multi-level governance issues. Soil protection goals exist but are not enforced.*

Agriculture: *Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies favor larger operators, creating market distortions. EU policies reinforce the urban-rural divide.*

Education: *Training and education programs focus on scale and technology, neglecting alternative models. National-level frameworks limit curriculum development.*

Circularity: *EU regulations on wastewater recycling and animal feed hinder resource cycle closure, despite the need for resource conservation. Circular approaches conflict with the existing policy regime.*

Food Security: *Stringent EU and national regulations on food safety disproportionately affect smaller operators, leading to infrastructure loss. Policy efforts to address industrialization problems inadvertently reinforce industrial systems.*

Silos: *Fragmented policy-making at all levels hinders systemic problem-solving and transformation. Individual costs outweigh system-wide gains.*

Fisheries: *EU-level fishing regulations disadvantage small-scale fishers, who struggle to advocate in decision-making processes. Implementation and enforcement of regulations vary.*

Understand the city's power in addressing food systems resilience

Cities can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable and equitable food systems and serve as important actors in the global effort to address food system challenges. It is important to understand the legislative power that cities have as they can significantly impact many issues, including food policies, biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions. In terms of legislative power, cities often have the ability to create and enforce their own laws and regulations, subject to the limitations set by national and state laws, in particular in relation to urban food production and taxation.

Cities have varying levels of legislative power depending on the country and its political system. In some countries, cities have significant autonomy and decision-making power, while in others, their power is limited to implementation and enforcement of national laws and policies. Generally speaking, cities have more power in areas such as urban planning, zoning, and local taxation, while issues such as foreign policy and defence are typically reserved for national governments.

A good example of cities action in the area is the emergence of **local food policy councils**³⁴ and **food system dialogues** in many parts of the world. These initiatives bring together stakeholders from across

³³ <https://foode.eu>

³⁴ Food Policy Councils (FPCs) bring together stakeholders from diverse food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it. FPCs may take many forms, but are typically either commissioned by state or local government, or predominately a grassroots effort. Food policy councils have been successful at educating officials and the public, shaping public policy, improving coordination between existing programs, and starting new programs. Examples include mapping and publicizing local food resources; creating new transit routes to connect underserved areas with full-service grocery stores; persuading government agencies to purchase from local farmers; and organizing community gardens and farmers' markets. Source: <https://bristolfoodpolicycouncil.org/about/>

the food system to discuss and address sustainability challenges at the local level, including issues related to food access, equity, and environmental sustainability. By engaging with local businesses, farmers, and community organisations, these initiatives can help to build more resilient and sustainable food systems that reflect the needs and priorities of local communities.

Regarding the supply side, cities can have a significant impact through measures such as public procurement, distribution, and regulations on food production and consumption. For example, cities can promote the use of sustainable and locally sourced food in public institutions and encourage private businesses to adopt similar practices. They can also implement regulations to reduce food waste and encourage composting and recycling.

• **Localising food systems versus supporting EU free market**

The issue of local preference raises questions regarding the internal market and competition and can be seen as discriminatory and in violation of EU procurement rules, according to interviews.

The DG representatives' interviews highlighted that protecting a free-flowing food market across member states seems a central point. However, cities are considering local food production and consumption as essential for food system sustainability. For eg. the 11 URBACT networks (involving around 100 cities) working on food demonstrated that providing local food or at least food grown within a limited distance away from the city is crucial in terms of sustainability, helping to reduce carbon emissions related to freight, to boost local/regional economic development, and to reduce waste.

Approaching the food system relation to long food supply chains can be subject to disruption, not yet holistically addressed as a relevant vulnerability and therefore tensions between localising food systems and supporting the EU free market are not yet addressed.

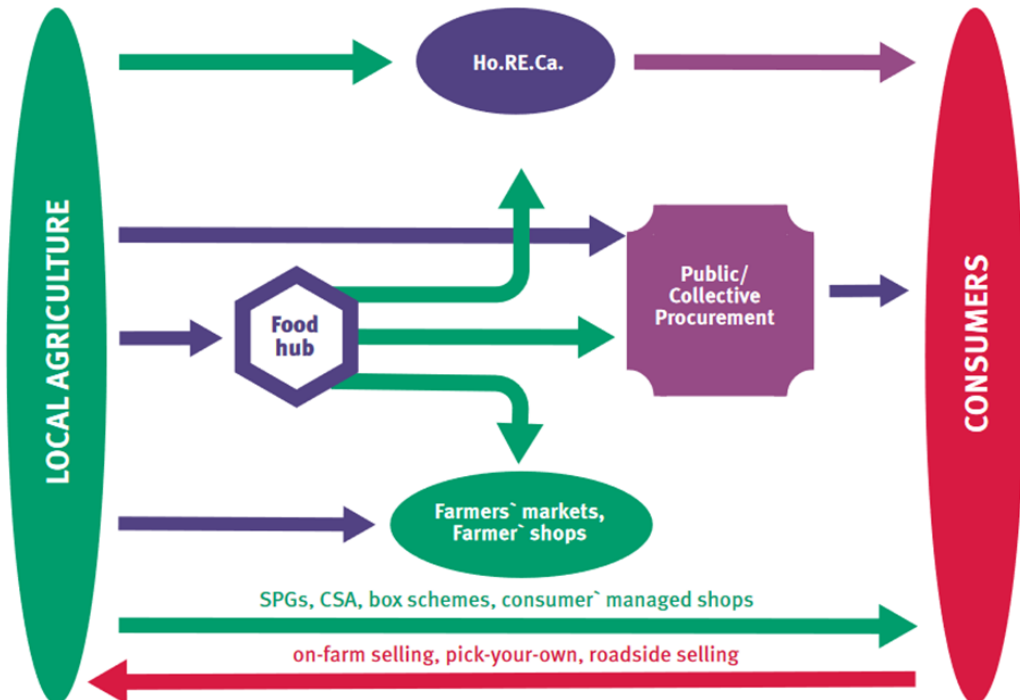


Fig. 12: Map of Sustainable food short food chains, source: United Nation Industrial Development Organization 2020

• Public procurement as a tool to reinforce short food chain

Public procurement can be a powerful tool for promoting local and just food³⁵ production, and many governments and public institutions around the world are adopting policies and initiatives to support the resilience of the local food systems.

There are a variety of actions to support local and organic food production through public procurement:

- Implementing policies that prioritise the purchase of locally grown and just foods by public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government offices. This can help to support local food systems, reduce food miles, and promote more sustainable food production practices.
- Setting specific criteria for food purchases that favour locally grown and just foods. This can include requirements for certification of organic production methods, the use of sustainable farming practices, or compliance with fair labour standards.
- Providing technical assistance and training to farmers and food producers by local institutions and governments. This can help to improve the quality and consistency of local food production and increase the availability of locally grown and organic foods.

Overall, the issue of local preference in public procurement and its relationship to sustainability is carefully considered in order to promote fair competition, environmental sustainability, and socio-economic development guarding against politically motivated actions that neglect environmental responsibility.

Short food chains and their relationship to sustainability criteria have been discussed at the EU level in recent years, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises that have revealed the risks associated with long and specialised food chains. These risks include vulnerability to disruptions in global supply chains, increased environmental impact due to transportation, diminished local resilience, and limited consumer access to fresh and diverse food options.

Farm to Fork Strategy, for example, aims to promote sustainable food systems that support local economies, protect the environment, and promote public health, but according to the interviews with the EC DGs at EU level there may be an issue with the definition of **local food systems within the single market context** even if the vulnerability related to the dependence on long food chains and agriculture model typically associated (usually industrialised, specialised and based on monoculture which is detrimental to the environment) is obvious.

• Local Food system metrics

Obtaining data on the impact of city-level policies can be challenging, as data collection and monitoring systems may not be standardised or widely available. However, partnerships between cities and research institutions can help improve data collection and analysis, leading to more effective policy making and better outcomes. The development of standardised metrics and toolkits can be a useful tool in this process, helping to measure progress, identify areas for improvement, and track the impact of policies and initiatives over time. The toolkit could include standardised indicators and data collection methods, as well as guidance on how to analyse and interpret the data, which can be a useful step towards measuring the impact of city-level policies on issues such as food, biodiversity, and greenhouse gas emissions. Measuring the impact of food policies on diets can be challenging, however, metrics such

³⁵ Just food: reduced social and ecologic negative impact

as the availability and accessibility of healthy food options and changes in food consumption patterns over time can provide some indication of the effectiveness of food policies.

Cities are increasingly using data-driven approaches to tackle food-related challenges. The event 'Bringing urban food policies to the table' presented the case-study of Warsaw, that mapped the food flow to identify where there was food waste in the case of restaurateurs and to find bottlenecks in food distribution from the food bank. By doing so, the city was able to develop more targeted and effective solutions to tackle food waste and improve food access for its residents. This work was done as part of the EU funded project Food Trails, and demonstrates the importance of the European funds for enabling cities to promote food innovation.

• Approaching power concentration in the food system

There are several reports by international umbrella organisations (like [Food barons, 2022³⁶](#)) that underline the disproportionate power in shaping food systems, and therefore addressing them and promoting greater equity and justice within the food system is essential for achieving sustainability and promoting social and environmental wellbeing.

This can involve promoting more inclusive and democratic decision-making processes by increasing the representation of diverse voices and perspectives, including small-scale farmers, workers, and consumers, in policy-making processes and supporting alternative food systems that prioritize ecological and social sustainability.

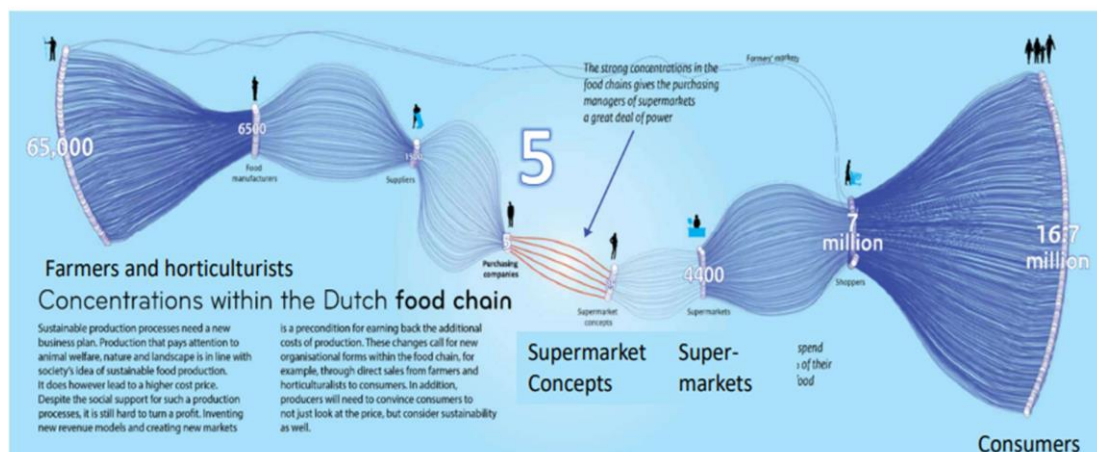


Fig 13: source: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2014

37

³⁶ https://www.etcgroup.org/files/files/food_barons-summary-web.pdf

³⁷ PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency is the national institute for strategic policy analysis in the fields of the environment, nature and spatial planning. It aims to improve the quality of political and administrative decision-making by conducting outlook studies, analyses and evaluations in which an integrated approach is considered paramount. Policy relevance is the prime concern in all of their studies, PBL conducting solicited and unsolicited research that is independent and scientifically sound.

4.4 Trends and practices / experiences of the EU cities

Cities as catalysts for food system transformation

Cities have a significant role to play in addressing food system resilience, as polarising centres of population, economic activity, and innovation that have the capacity to implement policies and initiatives that promote sustainable and resilient food systems. They can provide a space for experimentation and innovation in developing sustainable food policies and practices, and serve as models for other cities to follow, and also facilitate the development of local and regional food systems that are more resilient and equitable. Several H2020 and Horizon Europe projects as part of the Food 2030 family have showcased how cities can be a catalyst of driving food system transformation.

It is also important to recognize the critical role that local institutions and individuals can play in championing food-related initiatives that may not be feasible at the EU level. Local action can be a driving force for change and innovation in the food system. Therefore, it is important to support and empower local initiatives that promote sustainability, resilience, and equity in the food system.

Food councils, strategies, and hubs are essential tools for promoting sustainable and resilient food systems, with a vital role in shaping food system governance, collaboration among stakeholders, mobilising resources, and supporting the development and implementation of solutions that reflect local needs and priorities.

"There won't be a revolution in the food system without cities!"

Alvaro Porro, Commissioner of Social Economy, Local Development and Food Policy in Barcelona *at the high-level event "Bringing urban food policy to the table" organised in Brussels on March 9, 2023*

In **Thessaloniki**, the private sector plays a significant role in the food system, and the city's first food policy council included associations, NGOs, and businesses working actively on sustainable production, consumption, and urban agriculture. This collaborative approach allowed the city to identify ways to achieve **climate neutrality through sustainable food production and consumption**.

Vitoria Gasteiz aims to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of the local agrifood system through the use of data-intensive, digital, and adaptive governance structures, which will steer local food choices, by launching a pilot initiative to set the foundations for a short-circuit based territorialized agrifood system, which will involve highly productive regenerative agroecological farms, generational change incorporating new agricultural agents, trading of local products, and analysis and improvement of the regulatory framework.

By setting the following strategic goals, the **Gent en Garde food policy** aims at creating a more sustainable and equitable local food system and engage a diverse range of stakeholders in the process:

1. A shorter, more visible food chain;
2. More sustainable food production and consumption;
3. The creation of more social added value for food initiatives;
4. Reduce food waste;
5. Optimum reuse of food waste as raw materials.

In **Lejre**, the Municipality focused on supporting smaller farmers and businesses, resulting in their own regional "Lejre" milk brand and the establishment of a small-scale business network. Collaboration between the municipality, Organic Denmark, local farmers, and restaurateurs also influenced national

food legislation, benefiting small-scale farmers. Cross-sectoral cooperation and building trust among stakeholders played a vital role in their success.

The **City of Ostend** showcased strategic cooperation with the tourism association and the business community, linking local food culture to sustainability. Initiatives included incorporating local fish into fish festivals, organizing a shrimp festival, and promoting vegetarian menus through the "Veggie Challenge" campaign. Ostend's tourism association effectively combined environmental and resource protection, healthy nutrition, and enjoyment to increase the city's brand value while promoting sustainable nutrition.

4.5 Articulation of the Food TA with other TAs and UAEU Partnerships

The Food TA is inherently interconnected with many other TAs, as the food system impacts and is impacted by a wide range of environmental, social, and economic factors. To effectively address the challenges of the food system, it is important to understand the interrelated nature of these issues and promote solutions that address multiple challenges simultaneously in integrated food policies. The most challenging topics that have to be considered in relation with the Food TA are:

- *Climate Change*: the food system activities contribute to climate change, and the impacts of climate change on food production and security are significant.
- *Water*: The food system is a major user of water, and the impacts of water scarcity and pollution on food production and security are important.
- *Biodiversity*: The food system relies on biodiversity for its sustainability, and the loss of biodiversity due to habitat destruction, pollution, and climate change poses relevant challenges to the food system.
- *Health*: the food system has a significant impact on public health, through the availability and affordability of healthy food, but also there are significant impacts of food production and processing on air and water quality.
- *Culture*: food is part of the culture of a community and can be regarded as a component of its identity and heritage that has to be preserved.
- *Energy transition*: food implies consumption of resources among which important energy quantities to be produced but also to be manufactured, packaged and transported. In order to address food energy consumption, the possibilities to move towards more plant-based diets have to be investigated together with the favouring of short production and consumption chains.

Many of these topics have already dedicated UAEU Thematic Partnerships, the outputs of which this new UAEU TP on Food should capitalise and further advance. First exchanges for the organisation of cooperation agreements need to be started soon in order to ensure the overall coherence and effectiveness of this work.

4.6 Overview of the Food TA policy environment and action

In recent decades, different EU level initiatives and policies related to food, agriculture, and sustainability have been launched, among which the best-known ones are:

- **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact:** A global agreement among cities committed to promoting healthy, sustainable, and equitable food systems. With 260 cities with a total of 450 million inhabitants making voluntary commitments to develop more sustainable urban food systems, it shows that there is a growing recognition of the importance of food system transformation at the city level.
- **Fit for 55:** A package of legislative proposals by the European Commission to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, which includes measures related to food and agriculture.
- **Food 2030 pathways for action:** A European Commission initiative that aims to support the transition towards sustainable food systems through research and innovation.
- **Farm to Fork Strategy:** A European Commission strategy that sets out a vision for a fair, healthy, and environmentally-friendly food system, with specific targets and actions for achieving this vision.
- **Horizon Europe Partnership for Sustainable Food Systems for People, Planet and Climate:** A research and innovation partnership of participating member states to collectively develop and implement an EU-wide committed research and innovation partnership to accelerate the transition towards healthy diets that are safe and sustainably produced and consumed in resilient EU and global food systems.
- **Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy:** Two EU policies that govern agricultural and fisheries activities in the EU and aim to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources, support rural development, and provide safe and high-quality food for consumers.
- **EU Rural Vision and Action Plan:** An EU initiative that aims to support the sustainable development of rural areas (including sustainable food production) through a range of policy measures and investments.
- DG GROW's **Intelligent Cities Challenge (ICC):** A European Commission initiative that supports cities in using innovative solutions to address urban challenges, including those related to food and agriculture. The Intelligent Cities Challenge (ICC) supports 136 cities in using cutting-edge technologies to lead the intelligent, green, and socially responsible recovery. The ICC cities and their local ecosystems are using innovative solutions to address urban challenges, including those related to food and agriculture. **International Urban Food Network:** A global network of cities and organisations working to promote sustainable and equitable urban food systems.
- **Work Programme of the Commission 2023:** One of the main objectives of the Commission legislative work programme is to set up a comprehensive framework for an EU sustainable food system, to make sustainability central to all food-related policies.
- **New European Bauhaus**
- **The New Leipzig Charter** principles and dimensions and Implementing Document
- The **Pact of Amsterdam**, as well as global agendas (the New Urban Agenda, and the UN SDGs)

- **Territorial Agenda 2030**
- The **Ljubljana Agreement** and Urban Agenda for the European Union Multiannual Working Programme for the period 2022 – 2026
- **Bioeconomy Strategy and Circular Economy Package.**
- **EIB Climate Bank Roadmap** - Focus 8: Farm to fork and Focus 9: Sustainable cities and regions

Ongoing EU and international programmes on supporting sustainable food systems

Ongoing programmes and initiatives by umbrella organisations such as **EUROCITIES** and **ICLEI**, and international organisations as **IPES-food** and **FAO**, can help strengthen the capacity at all levels of governance by **providing technical expertise and support** in developing and implementing sustainable food policies and systems.

At the global level, **Urban Food Systems Coalition** is a working group led by FAO and GAIN since 2020 that plays a crucial role in connecting local and national governments, as well as various food system stakeholders. Through this collaboration, the coalition supports governments at all levels in implementing urban food policies that are both locally-embedded and globally-attuned. By bridging the gap between local and national governments and bringing together diverse stakeholders, the coalition promotes effective communication, knowledge sharing, and collaborative decision-making in shaping sustainable and inclusive food systems.

The **EU Food Policy Coalition**³⁸ is a well-established **independent structure** that results from the "Towards a Common Food Policy" process and serves as a platform for stakeholders to exchange knowledge and ideas to advocate for policies that promote sustainable and equitable food systems in the EU.

The **Eurocities Food Working Group** is **a network of European cities** that work together to promote sustainable food systems and urban agriculture. The group is composed of representatives from various European cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Milan, and Paris, among others.

At a **global level** several initiatives among which **CityFood**, a flagship program of ICLEI provides a platform for cities to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and collaborate on projects to create more sustainable and inclusive food systems by tackling issues like: food procurement, waste management and urban food planning to reshaping local food infrastructure and supply chains and encouraging behavioural change.

The **New Food System Integrated Program** is an initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), aims at supporting the transformation of global food systems into nature-positive, resilient, and pollution-free systems.

Another FAO's project, **Green Cities initiative**, focuses on promoting sustainable food systems that integrate local food production, reduce food waste, and increase access to healthy and nutritious food by working with local governments, community groups, and other stakeholders to develop policies and programs.

³⁸ Voluntary association of organisations financed by the European Climate Foundation. Its activities are based on voluntary work of the participating organisations.

The **URBACT Knowledge Hub** seems as well a valuable resource on sustainable food systems and urban agriculture, bringing together good practices and knowledge from across the EU. It provides a wide range of city cases, tested solutions and certain tools to explore cities' capacities in terms of different sub-topics: policy-making, food production, food purchase (procurement), food distribution, jobs & skills, food transformation, community-building, solidarity, marketing & branding, education & awareness-raising, circular food system (and waste), bees & pollinators. <https://urbact.eu/knowledge-hub/food>

The **AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Group** is a network of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who are interested in promoting sustainable food systems in urban areas. The group is part of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) and aims to bring together people who are working on sustainable food planning issues to share their knowledge and expertise. <https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups/sustainable-food-planning>

Numerous online tools (like **Food Systems Dashboard** that provides data and analysis on food systems worldwide) and online platforms and programs (like **AESOP4food ERASMUS+ programme** that provides free access transdisciplinary and participatory training and educational resources for food system planning) can also facilitate food policy design.

Cluster on ongoing EU research projects on food systems

EU FOOD 2030³⁹ is a Horizon Europe policy launched in 2015 with the aim to unify the communications and key messages of the projects into political directives for the European Union related to food systems transformation. Its ambition is to achieve a resilient food system that is fit for the future. This means to ensure everyone has enough affordable, nutritious food to lead a healthy life as food systems need to also deliver co-benefits for people's health, our climate, planet and communities. EU Food 2030 provides the policy framework to accelerate this transition within safe planetary boundaries. It joins up research and innovation activities in different areas and across disciplines to find answers to interconnected challenges. It is in line with, and supports, the goals of the European Green Deal, Farm to Fork strategy and bioeconomy strategy⁴⁰. Cities are major players in the projects supported in this context and through the Living Lab methodology they benefit of relevant framework to launch the debate and build through participatory and transdisciplinary project sustainable food systems. Its ambition is to:

- test innovative solutions in a variety of areas of action related to food, but looking at developing systemic policy framework
- Involve citizens in food policies
- strengthen policy coherence
- boost and leverage funding and investment
- narrow the innovation gap (the gap between actual innovation and the innovation that is needed)
- increase market take-up and societal relevance of food products, tools and services
- support the role of disruptive technologies, new approaches and business models in the food systems transition

³⁹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/environment/bioeconomy/food-systems/food-2030_en

⁴⁰ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/environment/bioeconomy/bioeconomy-strategy_en



Fig 14: Food 2030 project family,
source: <https://foodshift2030.eu/eu-food-2030-project-family/>

The **Cluster 6 Work Programme** of Horizon Europe includes over 100 topics proposing over 880 Million EUR in EU funding to support R&I projects in many areas, some of them directly relevant to **Food 2030 initiative** and sustainable food systems ambitions.

Even if some of the calls will be already closed by the time the UAEU Food Partnership will be in place, the latter can monitor these processes and their impact in order to benefit from its results.

-Developing an interdisciplinary and inclusive pan-European academic network for food system science HORIZON-CL6-2023-GOVERNANCE-01-4

-Integrated assessment of land use and biomass demands to contribute to a sustainable healthy and fair bioeconomy HORIZON-CL6-2023-GOVERNANCE-01-7

-Mobilising BIOEAST networks for the development of national bioeconomy action programmes in support of the European Green Deal HORIZON-CL6-2023-GOVERNANCE-01-8

-Data-driven solutions to foster industry's contribution to inclusive and sustainable food system HORIZON-CL6-2023-GOVERNANCE-01-17

-Supporting the fair and just transition from GHG-intensive economies facing challenges towards circular bioeconomy model regions HORIZON-CL6-2023-CIRCBIO-01-10

-Inclusive and smart ways to communicate sustainability of food HORIZON-CL6-2023-COMMUNITIES-01-6

-Using automatic species recognition and artificial intelligence to fight illegal fish discards and revolutionize fisheries control HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-8

-European partnership on sustainable food systems for people, planet and climate HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-9

-Eradicate micronutrient deficiencies in the EU HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-10

-New detection methods on products derived from new genomic techniques to enable safe innovation in the food system HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-11

-Thematic network ensuring food safety by translating research and innovation into practice HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-12

-Cultured meat and cultured seafood – state of play and future prospects in the EU HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-13

-Providing marketing solutions to prevent and reduce the food waste related to marketing standards HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-14

-Fostering resilient European food systems in a changing world HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-15

-Microbiomes fighting food waste through applicable solutions in food processing, packaging, and shelf life HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-16

- EU-Africa Union – food safety HORIZON-CL6-2023-FARM2FORK-01-20

Among the relevant URBACT networks are to be mentioned: AGRI-URBAN Action Planning Network (2015 – 2018) that explored the bio region approach; BioCanteens Transfer Network (2018 – 2021); FOOD CORRIDORS Action Planning Network (2019 – 2022) and BioCanteens Transfer Network II (2022 – 2025).

The FAO Urban Agenda and Greening Cities program aims to promote sustainable and resilient urban food systems.

In the frame of Urban Innovative Actions (Actually European Urban Initiative – Innovative Actions), 5 projects proposing food related activities were funded, namely:

- A2UFood - Avoidable and Unavoidable Food Wastes: A Holistic Managing Approach for Urban Environments⁴¹ (Circular Economy), led by Heraklion;
- TAST'in FIVES - Transforming Areas with Social Talents: Feed, Include, Value, Educate, Share,⁴² (Urban Poverty), led by Lille;
- URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD - Establishment of Innovative Urban Soil Based Economy Circles to Increase Local Food Self-sufficiency and Minimize Environmental Footprint⁴³ (Circular economy), led by Maribor
- OpenAgri - New Skills for new Jobs in Peri-urban Agriculture⁴⁴ (Jobs and skills in the local economy), led by Milan
- MAC - Monteruscello Agro City⁴⁵ (Urban poverty), led by Pozzuoli

⁴¹ <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/heraklion>

⁴² <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/lille>

⁴³ <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/maribor>

⁴⁴ <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/milan>

⁴⁵ <https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/pozzuoli>

The urban planning perspective of food systems

Cross-cutting issues are crucial to achieving sustainable and resilient food systems in urban areas

Good urban governance is essential for ensuring that food policies and programs are integrated, coordinated, and effective. It is important to involve diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes and to ensure that food policies are aligned with broader urban development goals. Food is not a traditional competency of cities, therefore it needs to be developed along with appropriate participatory mechanisms like Food councils.

Urban-rural, urban-urban, and cross-border cooperation are also critical for sustainable food systems. Collaboration between urban and rural areas can help to ensure a reliable and diverse supply of fresh and nutritious food. Meanwhile, cooperation between urban areas can help to promote knowledge sharing and best practices.

Sound and strategic urban planning is also necessary for promoting sustainable and resilient food systems. Urban planners should consider the potential for urban agriculture, green infrastructure, and sustainable food procurement policies in their plans.

An integrated approach is essential for addressing the complex challenges facing urban food systems. This includes considering social, economic, and environmental factors and promoting a systems approach to food policy and planning.

Innovative approaches, including the use of new technologies and business models, can help to promote sustainable and resilient food systems in urban areas. Moreover, the impact of food policies and programs on societal change, including behavioral change, should be considered.

Small- and medium-sized cities face unique challenges and opportunities in promoting sustainable and resilient food systems. Strategies should be tailored to their specific needs and opportunities.

Urban regeneration can provide opportunities for promoting sustainable and resilient food systems. Urban regeneration projects can incorporate urban agriculture, green infrastructure, and sustainable food procurement policies.

Adaptation to demographic change is also necessary for promoting sustainable and resilient food systems. This includes considering the needs and preferences of diverse populations and ensuring equitable access to food.

The availability and quality of public services of general interest, including food retail and distribution services, should be considered in promoting sustainable and resilient food systems.

The international dimension of sustainable and resilient food systems, as highlighted in Habitat III and the Sustainable Development Goals, should be considered. This includes promoting international cooperation and knowledge sharing on sustainable food policies and programs.

The need for a sustainable food system is already recognized in Europe, but in light of increased impacts of climate change and continued high emissions from agriculture, this shift must be accelerated, according to three related EEA briefings. The transformation of Europe's agriculture sector and food system has never been more important amid the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and impacts of climate change, all of which raise concerns over food security and resilience. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/serious-challenges-in-agri-food>

"Rethinking agriculture" critically examines the multifaceted aspects of agriculture, delving into the underlying causes of its unsustainability and presenting potential pathways for the future. European Green Deal and its Farm to Fork Strategy have broadened the scope of agriculture beyond its economic dimensions, recognizing its pivotal role in achieving sustainability objectives such as social well-being, ecosystem health, and food and nutrition security. Promoting agroecological approaches that emphasize ecological sustainability, diversification of crops, and support for local food system and integrating scientific research, innovation, and stakeholder engagement are essential in formulating and implementing effective strategies to achieve a more sustainable and resilient agriculture sector.

The briefing "Reimagining the food system through social innovations" emphasizes that social innovation is crucial in transforming our food systems into economically and socially sustainable models, requiring systemic changes and collaboration among stakeholders. It explores alternative approaches to food production, trade, and consumption, highlighting the need for inclusive and participatory practices to address issues like food insecurity and environmental degradation. Scaling up social innovations requires supportive policies, resources, knowledge sharing, and collaborative networks. Ultimately, social innovation can drive the necessary transformation towards sustainable and resilient food systems.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The interpretation and focus of the thematic scope of the subject

The complexity and multidimensionality of the food thematic necessitate the consideration of a wide variety of policy objectives, tools, and actors to ensure its sustainability and resilience. Over the past decade, there has been an exponential increase in emerging initiatives at the city-region level, experimenting with local participatory governance in food systems. This has pushed food onto the urban agenda, even though it traditionally falls outside the jurisdiction of municipalities. Various platforms at the EU and global levels are supporting cities in formulating food strategies and taking action at the city-region level. Activist and umbrella organizations are advocating for the consideration of food systems at the EU political level, advocating for more coherent multi-level governance to facilitate integrated and effective policies.

Given the momentum that has been built around the food system approach and the pressing need for overarching legislation in this regard, it is important for the Thematic Partnership to align with the current trends. This involves striking a balanced focus on the three pillars of Better Regulation, Better Funding, and Better Knowledge.

Better regulation processes are gaining importance, supported by the upcoming Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System and the European Food Policy Council, which are planned to be launched in the same period as the Thematic Partnership for the Urban Agenda for the EU. The coordination and collaboration between these three initiatives at the EU level are paramount for driving global transformation in food systems and positioning cities as catalysts for this process. Cities are where actions and changes materialize, and the scale of their engagement is crucial.

The intense dynamics that have emerged from the local to the EU level require greater flexibility and a systemic focus within the Partnership. This allows for better adaptation and correlation with ongoing processes. The Partnership must be able to align with and complement the existing initiatives, frameworks, and platforms, integrating the knowledge and experiences gained from local food governance experiments. This systemic approach ensures that the Partnership remains responsive to evolving needs and effectively contributes to the broader transformation of food systems.

In conclusion, the wide-ranging and dynamic nature of the food thematic necessitates a flexible and systemic approach within the Thematic Partnership for the Urban Agenda for the EU. By aligning with ongoing processes, coordinating with the Framework for a Union Sustainable Food System and the European Food Policy Council, and incorporating the experiences from local initiatives, the Partnership can contribute to food system transformation and empower cities to play a central role in driving positive change.

4.1.1 Food systems sustainability and resilience

“Starting where the energy is!”

Ir. Jeroen de Vries, sustainable food planning researcher, LE:NOTRE Institute Director

More than 70% of Europeans live in cities where over 70% of food is consumed, hence the importance of “supporting resilient urban-rural food system through inclusive, multi-level governance and integrated food policies” as stated by a group of MEPs advising the EU executive to proclaim 2024 as a European year of ‘sustainable and resilient food systems’⁴⁶

“Access to quality food good for both health and the environment should not be a privilege for a few that live in urban cities. It’s a fundamental right of every European,” commented Irène Tolleret, French liberal MEP and first signatory of the call in her capacity as EFF president.

At present, in the food area there is a special momentum due to the large number of local initiatives and pilot projects, reaching a critical mass and enforced by the preparation of the EU FSFS + EU Food Policy Council. “Starting where the energy is” involves identifying areas where there is already critical mass and interest and using this as a starting point for broader food system transformation. In the particular case of Food TA, subjects such as public procurement, prevention and reduction of food waste, and food councils are gathering increasing attention and initiatives and have to be further focused on.

The local experiments generating new ideas and nurturing innovation are representing a real window of opportunity for producing a systemic change. In order to reach this objective, they need to be correlated. Furthermore, the overall political framework has to be adapted to bring to the fore the cities’ experience and advocate for sustainably by addressing their needs and thus increasing the multi-level impact of the EU policies.

By analysing interactions between the niche, regime, and landscape levels, the multi-level perspective (MLP) model advanced by Frank Geels and Johan Schot can guide efforts to overcome lock-in mechanisms and facilitate the transition to sustainable food systems.

As it results from the interviews with umbrella organisations, traditionally, food topic benefited from a limited approach at the political level, mainly focused on the production, food safety and security aspects. This is reflected at an institutional organisation tackling this subject in a silo and disconnected (horizontally and vertically) way.

The recent awareness, enhanced by crises such as the Covid-19 one and the Ukraine war (energetic and economic crises), pushed the reflection toward a more global and integrative perspective on food systems, based on the awareness that they are extremely complex and acupuncture actions could have little or no effect.

Even if the administrative capacity (especially at the national and supranational level such as EU) in adopting and implementing food system perspective is challenging, aggravated by the multilevel governance inefficiency, the amount of evidence (ongoing research projects, conferences, reports, local initiatives...) on this subject is very encouraging and supporting the hope in a future shift in tackling food systems unsustainability.

⁴⁶ Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/meps-push-to-dedicate-2024-as-european-year-of-food-sustainability/>

The interviews with the DG representatives reinforced the idea that the abundance of studies and projects related to food is in fact enhancing the difficulty of considering the most relevant ones. Still, there is consensus that food should be treated in a systemic way and there is a need for complete transformation in the way we handle it at administrative level.

Creating more sustainable and equitable food systems requires a coordinated effort among a range of actors at multiple levels of governance. This imposes building capacity and expertise among policymakers and other stakeholders and fostering a greater appreciation for the potential of local food systems to drive positive change.

4.1.2 *Integrated global food system perspective*

When considering global food systems perspective, the protection of the EU single market rises double standard issues. The European Union (EU) has made a commitment to promote sustainable food systems globally. With its status as the world's largest food importer, the EU possesses the potential to leverage its trade policies and agreements to encourage and incentivize more sustainable practices among its trade partners.

The EU's actions, agricultural and trade policies have an impact on the sustainability of food systems more broadly and therefore **an equal level-playing field in standards in trade and competition need to be ensured**. Exporting pesticides and other toxic agro inputs that are not allowed in the EU to other countries can lead to questions of fairness and social justice in the global food system. Similarly, exporting food products to countries where local producers are unable to compete can lead to loss of livelihoods and contribute to economic instability. Such disparities in food systems should be addressed by establishing more equitable and sustainable trade practices, ensuring fair and just treatment of migrant workers throughout the food supply chain and other measures from the perspective of interconnectedness of food systems at a global level and the EU's role and impact.

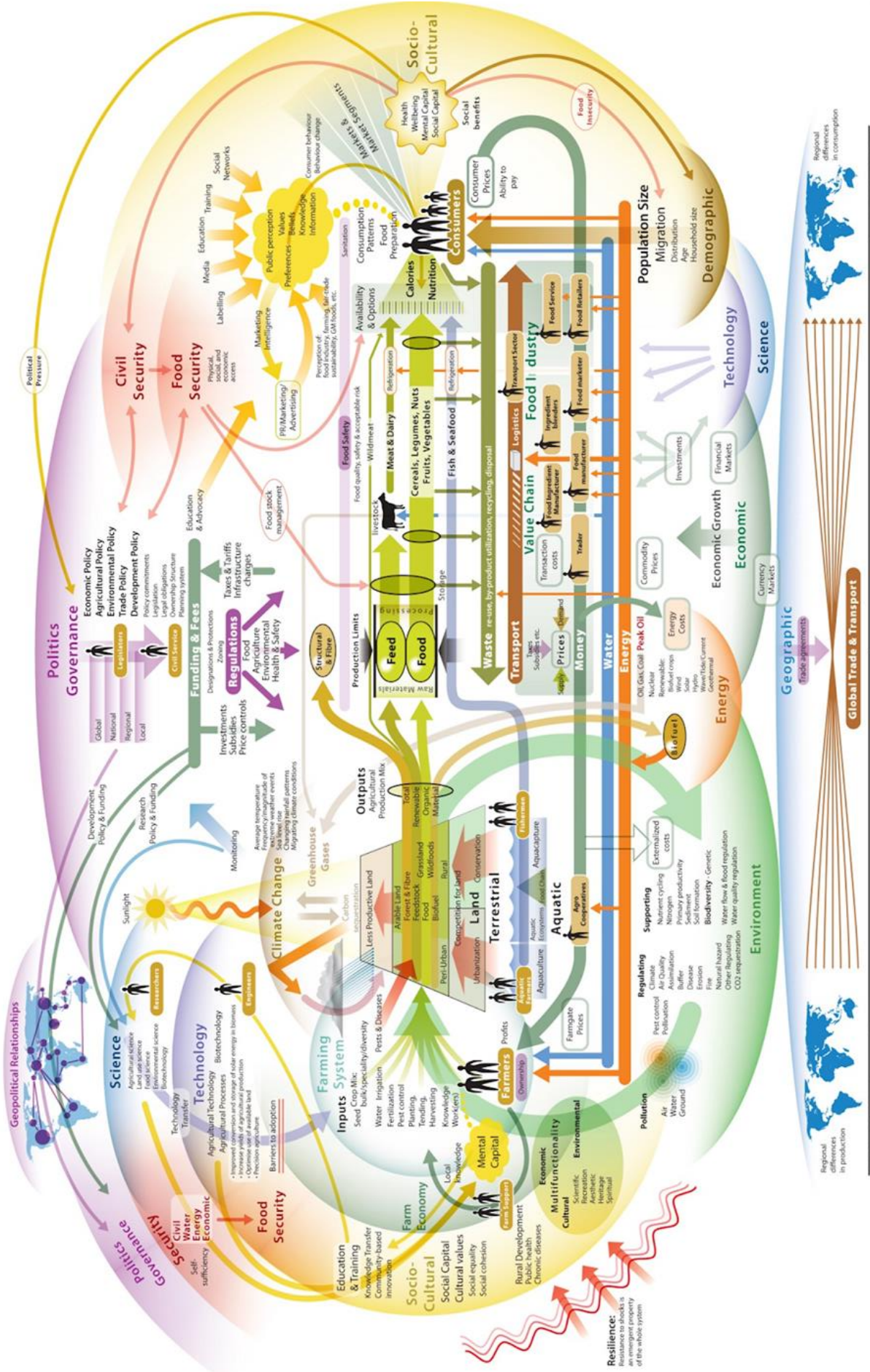
Starting where the energy is by focusing on subjects that meet societal and political support such as public procurement, prevention and reduction of food waste, and national food councils can help to build momentum and create a sense of urgency for broader food system transformation. By addressing these issues, it may be possible to create a foundation for more comprehensive and systemic change in the food system.

Public procurement can be used as a tool to promote sustainable and resilient food systems providing opportunities to local and regional producers, reducing food waste, and promoting healthy and sustainable food choices. For eg. the city of Ostend has collaborated with the private sector to provide healthier meals for care home residents, linking food and social issues in order to create a more sustainable and equitable food system that benefits all residents. Similar examples were provided by Sodertalje (SE), Mouans-Sartoux (FR), Mollet del Valles (ES), Trikala (EL) and Messina (IT) involved in URBACT networks. The present public procurement legislation provides opportunities for local systems and healthy food (as Directive 2014/24/EU allows introducing environmental and social criteria in public procurement providing opportunities for local producers). However, according to the city representatives interviewed, improvements can still be made.

Prevention and reduction of food waste is a major challenge for the food system, with significant economic, environmental, and social impacts. However, there is already a growing awareness and interest in addressing food waste, with a range of initiatives and campaigns aimed at reducing waste throughout the food system, from farm to fork.

Considering the complexity of the food actors network anchored in the local context, including the economic, environmental and social specific aspects and deriving priorities, a new form of participative governance is needed. This one can take the form of Food councils. Possible to create at local, regional, national and even EU level, food councils are platforms for collaboration and decision-making among diverse stakeholders involved in the food system. They can help to facilitate coordination and cooperation among different actors, promote innovation and knowledge sharing, and provide a platform for community engagement and participation in food policy decisions.

Since historically food is not a traditional city government competence, urban authorities have to be supported in the development of the corresponding capacities for reinforcing food system resilience. A dedicated municipal service might be very effective as tested by cities like Milan or Barcelona.



4.1.3 Enabling capacity at different levels of governance

The enthusiasm at the governance level in tackling food system unsustainability, globally recognised, will not enable transition towards more just and equitable food systems without **proper institutional capacity and political incentive**. Building capacity at different levels of governance is an essential step in seizing opportunities and creating synergies at horizontal and vertical administrative level.

For example, lack of resources in terms of personnel and funding seemed to be a common issue enhanced in the interviews with representatives of the DGs of the EC. When considering the feasibility and practicality of policies by evaluating their impact, the **collection and interpretation of data** is necessary to ensure that policies are having the intended effects and to make adjustments as needed. However, this process is time consuming, and demanding in terms of personnel.

Fostering **space and support for an integrated food system approach** is vital. This could be done through a strong network of food system officers connecting the relevant DGs (DG-SANTE, DG-AGRI, DG-MARE, DG-ENVI, and DG-RTD) around a **shared agenda on this topic** that could seize opportunity of funding or policy elaboration and link different governance levels to produce a significant impact.

The **Food** partnership could represent in this instance **a platform to support capacity building and connectivity for different institutions and governance levels**.

Of course, capacity building should be also reflected at national, regional, and local level. In this regard, a lot of hope comes from the already existing experiences which only enlighten important disparities and different pace of action especially at the city level.

Having a **systemic approach and building synergies and trade-offs among various stakeholders** is crucial in addressing gaps and developing strategies for a sustainable food system. The role of the European Commission is essential as a facilitator and coordinator of this process because of its institutional, political, and funding and expertise capacity to push forward systemic change, especially for food systems resilience.

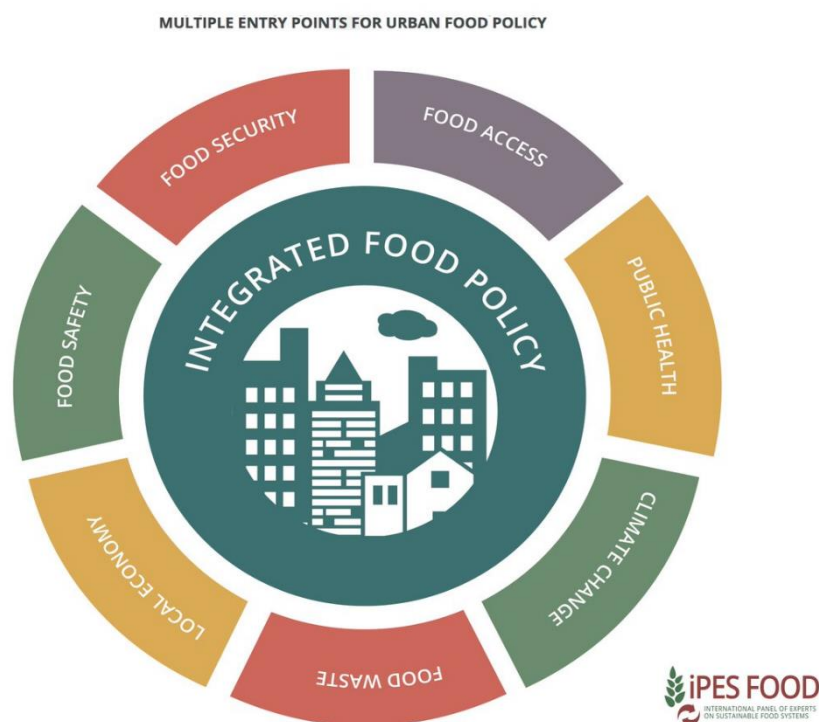


Fig 16: Source IPES Food

4.1.4 Integrated food policy

Food system perspective and multilevel governance are not enough for systemic change at all levels and therefore integrated food policies are a relevant methodology for tackling food resilience.

Integrated food policy approach is a relevant methodology for tackling food resilience because it takes a holistic view of the food system and recognizes the need for coordinated and coherent policies at multiple levels of governance. The purpose is to maximise their positive impacts on food resilience, while minimising negative impacts on other areas. This can take a range of different forms, such as cross-sectoral coordination, participatory governance, and policy coherence assessments.

The food system is complex and interconnected, and that policies in one area can have unintended consequences in another. Therefore, it is important to **coordinate and align policies across different sectors and levels of governance**, in order to achieve more coherent and sustainable outcomes in the food system.

Types of Integrated Food Policy

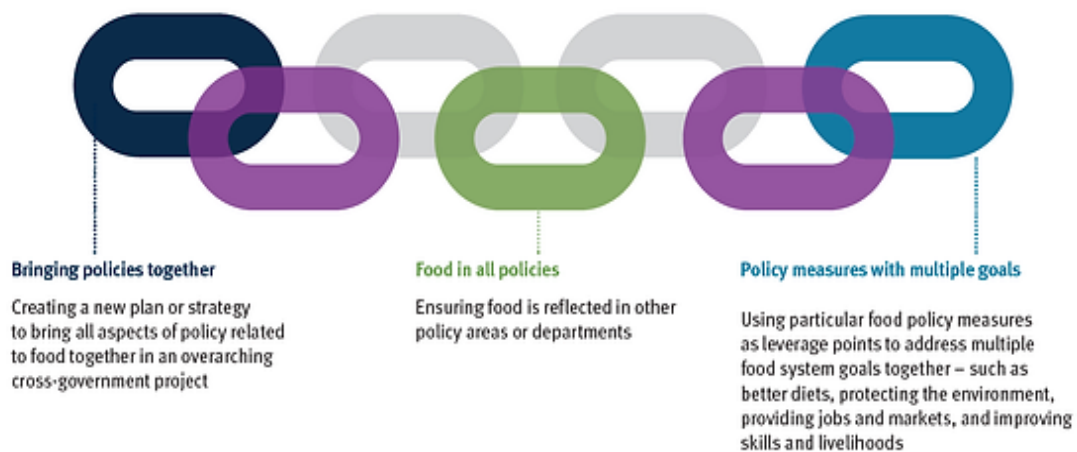


Fig 17: Source: Centre for Food Policy

An effective integrated food policy must have a **clear structure and governance system**, be **grounded in evidence-based research and analysis**, engage stakeholders, and prioritise **equity and social justice**. By taking a comprehensive and collaborative approach to food policy, we can create a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient food system.

Addressing gaps in the policy environment regarding CRFS requires advocacy for more inclusive and integrated approaches and involves promoting policies that recognize the importance of urban and peri-urban agriculture, supporting small-scale operators, revising education curricula to incorporate alternative models, encouraging circularity, protecting the environment, streamlining food safety regulations for smaller operators, promoting coordinated policy-making, and ensuring equitable implementation and enforcement in the fisheries sector.

4.1.5 Resources for supporting cities in tackling local food systems resilience.

“Outside funding (From EU R&I subsidies) allowed us to take the risk of going wrong,” Karolina Zdrodowska, Head Director for Entrepreneurship and Public Dialogue in Warsaw at the high-level event “Bringing urban food policy to the table” gathered in Brussels on March 9, 2023.

Combining public and private investment and conducting impact assessments are important in addressing the lack of resources, according to Thom Achterbosch from Wageningen University and Research that suggests that private investors are interested in making a positive impact, which aligns with the goals of food transition initiatives.

Investing in urban food systems brings opportunities for both cities and investors. With fiscal limitations in cities, increased access to financial capital and services can foster the growth of urban food policy actions. Impact investment allows investors to channel their investments towards transformative changes that lead to a more sustainable world. Cities can leverage impact investments to sustain and scale up successful food policy actions that have initially benefited from public initiative and funding.

One good example in this regard is the Food Trails Horizon2020 project that brings together 11 European cities to develop innovative food policy solutions that can be replicated in other cities and regions. Its partners work on the 6 areas of action of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the 4 overall drivers of the Food2030 policy initiatives: sustainable food production, food waste reduction, healthy and affordable food access, and social inclusion through food.

The main financial challenges in financing food systems transformation include the need for prioritization of investments in a resource-constrained world. With limited resources, it becomes crucial to allocate funds effectively and efficiently to address the diverse needs of food systems. Additionally, a key challenge is the difficulty in determining the actual costs envisioned by governments for food systems transformation, which hinders the development of targeted investment strategies.

Engaging regulators, domestic private sectors, national banks, and small actors is important in overcoming these challenges and mobilizing financial resources. Their involvement brings valuable expertise, resources, and financial capacities to support the transformation of food systems. Furthermore, refining and perfecting the tool for **targeted investments** is necessary to improve financial planning and decision-making processes and ensure effective utilization of available funds.

These challenges underscore the importance of strategic financial management and collaboration across sectors to drive the necessary investments for sustainable food systems transformation.

4.1.6 Similar Food Thematic Partnerships

Other than the Urban Agenda for the EU previous partnerships experience, there are further similar initiatives that can nurture and inspire the present work. The Thematic Food Partnership for City Deal in the Netherlands and the Territorial Food Strategies (Projet Alimentaire Territorial) in France are two example partnerships that can serve as case studies for structuring this initiative.

The recent European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) initiative NAT/892- [Towards a European Food Policy Council](#) launched the discussion on the creation of a **European Food Policy Council** as a new governance model in the future EU Framework on Sustainable Food System. Even if the debate have just been started (April 14, 2023), a monitoring of this process together with a strategy of collaboration with TFP could be relevant.

The **City Deal on Food** in the Netherlands is a collaboration between several Dutch cities, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, and The Hague, as well as the Dutch government and several NGOs. The partnership focuses on developing sustainable food systems in urban areas, with an emphasis on reducing food waste, promoting healthy and affordable food, and supporting local food production.

The foreseen Horizon Europe Partnership for Sustainable Food Systems for People, Planet and Climate will be an important partnership to collaborate with and create synergies by design.

The **Territorial Food Strategies** (Projet Alimentaire Territorial) in France is a collaborative initiative between local governments, farmers, consumers, and other stakeholders to develop sustainable and equitable food systems at the regional level. It uses a participatory approach to engage stakeholders and develop policies that reflect local needs and priorities.

While TFS can be an important tool in promoting food sovereignty and security, they face important limitations to be effective: restrained participation, optional and underfunded, lack of support for constant development. Without strong policies and regulations, TFS may not be able to effectively address the challenges of food insecurity and lack of food autonomy.

According to the interviews, the EU funding is mostly directed to the supply side (farming and food production) and there is not enough focus of public policies and funds on demand side (consumers).

Cities councils should include all relevant actors, especially representatives of those less empowered ones such as low-income consumers.

The Red de Municipios por la Agroecología (Network of Municipalities for Agroecology) is an association founded in 2018. It comprises 22 municipalities and aims to promote sustainable and healthy food policies aligned with agroecology. The network brings together policymakers, politicians, and social organizations to support cities in developing and implementing local food policies. It creates Communities of Practice, engages in awareness-raising efforts, and advocates for sustainable food systems internationally.

The quadruple helix collaboration between public administration, academia, civil society and industry sector for the development of standardised metrics and toolkits can be a useful tool in this process, helping to measure progress, identify areas for improvement, and track the impact of policies and initiatives over time.

Having in view the 2025 midterm review for regional strategies at national and regional level for all EU member states, this could be a very good opportunity for the UAEU Food Partnership to provide guidance and recommendations regarding possible dedicated EU funds allocations from ESF and ERDF and financial instruments.

In this context, **EIB** can be a strategic partner for the cities for building capacity but also for financing with the possibility of creation of a Food Innovation Fund. The final report will be fed by further exchanges and interviews proposed with the Committee of Regions (CoR) and respectively with the European Investment Bank considered as key stakeholders that have the capacity to support the positive evolution of this TA. Furthermore, food related innovation priorities will be also advanced, as well as the possible funding and incentive system to put in place in order to support the attractiveness and long term sustainability of the Food Partnership.

4.2 The development of the UAEU Partnership on Food

4.2.1 The role of the UAEU Partnership on Food

Bringing cities to the table is critical, as they often have a direct impact on food production, distribution, and consumption.

A multilevel mechanism can help ensure that cities are heard at the regional, national, and EU levels by creating networks of cities and regional governments to share best practices and advocate for policies that support sustainable and resilient food systems. Additionally, it may be beneficial to have a designated liaison or representative for each city to ensure that their perspectives and needs are considered in decision-making processes at higher levels of government. Furthermore, this partnership should be included among the priorities of CoR and supported by CoR.

Overall, strong partnerships and collaboration between cities, regional governments, and other stakeholders are key to achieving meaningful and lasting change towards sustainability. However, it is essential to ensure that the audience is receptive to the ideas and goals of the partnership. This may require education and awareness campaigns to engage citizens and policymakers. Also, by defining specific goals and targets, engaging citizens and policymakers, and establishing multilevel mechanisms can help narrow the focus and make progress in creating sustainable and resilient food systems at all levels of government.

Efforts to empower cities in driving food systems transformation can be supported through EU funding programs and policy frameworks. Allocating resources and financial support to cities that demonstrate a commitment to sustainable and equitable food systems can help accelerate the implementation of innovative projects and initiatives. Additionally, integrating food system considerations into EU policies related to agriculture, environment, health, and urban planning can create a coherent framework that supports cities in their efforts.

Cities, for example, may have more direct control over certain aspects of food systems, such as local food production and distribution, while other stakeholders, such as national governments and private companies, may have a greater impact on other areas, such as trade policies and global supply chains. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders can help to ensure that efforts are coordinated and resources are used effectively.

The partnership should be designed to question and challenge the current food system, recognizing that it may not be working for everyone and that change is needed to create more sustainable and equitable food systems. This requires a willingness to take a critical look at existing practices and policies, and a commitment to exploring new approaches and solutions.

Advocacy is important in promoting more progressive food systems policies. This can involve identifying and promoting best practices at the local level, as well as advocating for policy changes at the state, national, and supranational levels.

The Food EAA showed that there is a large variety of initiatives on the Food TA and even different kinds of fragmented or sector partnerships. The 4 building blocks of the Framework for a Union Sustainable Food systemk (sustainability criteria, sustainable labelling framework, public procurement and governance) could serve as good basis to indicate areas of interventions. The role of the UAEU Partnership on Food can be to *guide existing and planned European regulation, funding and knowledge*

regarding food systems resilience in order to better address current challenges; connect and build capacity for cities to tackle food system transformation.

Building a shared vision of what a sustainable and just food system should look like, and develop concrete plans for implementation that take into account the unique challenges and opportunities of each local context could be supported by creating a *major platform of exchange* enabling better visibility on ongoing initiatives. This platform can serve as a central hub for sharing best practices, exchanging ideas, and promoting collaboration among cities, regions, and other stakeholders. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, we can build a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of food systems in Europe and identify opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Guiding the European level of regulation and funding is essential to better address local challenges. This can be done by ensuring that EU regulations and funding mechanisms are aligned with the needs and priorities of local communities and requires a coordinated effort between the EU institutions, national and regional governments, and local stakeholders. The partnership can support this by ensuring a better communication between the different levels of governance.

The UAEU Food Partnership can play an important role by bringing together actors from different sectors and levels of governance and *building consensus around shared goals and priorities* for sustainable food systems, and advocate for these at the national and EU levels. In this sense, the UAEU Food Partnership should take full advantage of the governance mechanism that is to be developed under the Framework for an EU Sustainable Food System. The partnership can also *provide tools and resources for evidence-based decision-making and policy design*, and play a role in *monitoring progress* towards achieving these goals, by tracking policy developments, assessing the impact of policies and programmes, and reporting on progress towards agreed-upon targets.

Capacity building for cities to tackle food system transformation is crucial and can be made by the partnership by providing technical assistance, training, and resources to local governments and stakeholders to help them design and implement effective food system policies and initiatives.

4.2.2 The most suitable form of multi-level cooperation (Partnership/OFC)

The Thematic Partnership (TP) remains the most suitable form of organization within the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU). While the concept of "other forms of cooperation" (OFC) exists, the TP is recommended for its effectiveness in addressing all three pillars of the UAEU.

The TP offers a comprehensive approach to multi-level cooperation, particularly in the context of the "food" area or domain. It allows for coordinated efforts among cities, member states, civil society, research institutions, and other stakeholders to drive transformative change. The TP provides a platform for knowledge exchange, policy development, and advocacy for better regulation, funding, and collaboration.

While the OFC option allows for experimentation and innovation, its application within the UAEU requires careful consideration and a justified proposal. At present, the TP remains the primary and most appropriate form of organization, ensuring a cohesive and coordinated approach to address the challenges and opportunities within the "food" area.

4.2.3 The organisation and possible members of the UAEU partnership

Transforming food systems requires a coordinated effort between all relevant stakeholders, including government, civil society, businesses, and citizens. By gathering relevant stakeholders together, creating a platform of exchange, guiding European regulations and funding, and building capacity and knowledge for cities to tackle food system transformation, TFP can support a more sustainable and just EU food system.

To support institutional learning within the administration and promote new ideas and approaches, it is essential to adopt systems thinking and strategic collaboration. Complex challenges, such as food transformation, require integrated approaches that consider the interconnections between various actors and the impact of their actions on each other.. This approach will enable the exploration of new ideas and approaches, leading to effective cooperation and action in tackling complex challenges such as food transformation.

In order to bring real added value, it should gather knowledge and relevant Food Partnership stakeholders at the same table and help them build a shared action plan together with the necessary means for its sustainable implementation. To accomplish its cohesion and capacity building role, beyond the support for its administrative organisation, it needs to have some *tools associated*, among which for e.g. a communication tool enabling a comprehensive data collection and visualisation of all EU initiatives and projects on this TA and maybe also scenario building and evaluation tool. It could also enable the preparation of further studies and analysis for guiding food systems sustainability (through a mechanism similar to ESPON Targeted Analyses or even a cooperation with this one) and might also have a Food innovation fund system associated. In addition to their main role, these tools could also serve as incentives for motivating partners to get involved and maintain their long-term commitment through sustained continuous contribution.

In order to facilitate a good representability and optimal effectiveness, a multi-layered organisation can be proposed including a core partnership and an advisory board of local authorities and Member States representatives allowing alternative punctual involvement of multiple local authorities depending the subject at stake and needed expertise and input. The core partners could be: representatives of concerned EC DGs (DG AGRI, DG SANTE, DG RTD, DG MARE, DG ENVI,...), different level public administration umbrella organisations, regional development agencies, EIT Food, representative of the EU executive agency in charge with the Food area (food systems) REA B Green Europe, thematic associations (NGOs working with cities and on territorial development and food issues), education and research institutions, AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Group, Food Policy experts, representatives of food system actors (from production, transformation and distribution). EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), CoR, EU Food Policy Coalition, representatives of URBACT, representatives of Food Councils and City Food Policy Departments can constitute an advisory board.

Existing partnerships focused on food systems serve as valuable examples to inform and shape the establishment of the Food Thematic Partnership. Initiatives such as the City Deal on Food in the Netherlands, the Territorial Food Strategies in France, and the Red de Municipios por la Agroecología demonstrate successful collaborations among cities, governments, NGOs, and stakeholders. These partnerships offer practical insights into sustainable food policies, participatory approaches, and addressing food system challenges. By drawing from their experiences, the Food Thematic Partnership can be better equipped to develop effective strategies and foster collaboration across various sectors and stakeholders.

4.2.4 The suggested type of expertise of the members

It is crucial to select highly motivated applicants who are committed to advancing the “Food” theme within the UAEU framework. Their dedication and drive to enhance EU policies, regulations, and knowledge related to sustainable and resilient food systems will play a vital role in driving positive change.

Based on the analysis, interviews, and lessons learned from previous partnerships that have linkages to the food theme, it is proposed that partners cover collectively the following expertise:

- Knowledge on food thematic concrete and tested solutions.
- Knowledge on integration of food into urban and spatial planning and local strategic documents such as Integrated Strategies and Plans for Sustainable Urban Development and Integrated Territorial Investment Strategies and Action Plans of Cohesion Policy.
- At least one member needs to have a tested knowledge in developing food topic in an urban context.
- Experience with including and coordinating various city stakeholders (such as Regional Development Agencies; universities and research institutions; Civil Society Organisations, etc.)

4.2.5 Recommendations for potential institutions/stakeholders of interest, relevant and related to the thematic issue, to be involved in the multi-level cooperation set-up

EU Institutions, including the European Commission Directorate Generals (DG AGRI, DG SANTE, DG MARE, DG ENVI, DG GROW, DG REGIO, DG R&I, DGs GROW, DG REGIO...), the Secretary General of the Commission, EESC, CoR, and JRC, can play a valuable role in the Thematic Food Partnership by contributing their expertise and knowledge of ongoing policy and regulation processes related to food systems sustainability.

Representatives from selected EU Member states, particularly relevant ministries and agencies responsible for health, agriculture, and territorial development, are essential participants. Their involvement allows for exchanges and collaboration between different types of actors in a neutral setting.

Cities, defined as local administrative units (LAUs), should also be involved. This includes engaging the food policy service and representatives from Local Food Councils or similar networks of actors within the food systems. It is crucial to include cities of varying sizes and geographical contexts to ensure diverse perspectives.

Umbrella organizations and stakeholders with thematic relevance should be actively involved. These stakeholders are committed to addressing food systems resilience at the EU, national, and local levels and possess valuable insights into the issues at hand. This includes NGOs, EU organizations dedicated to food systems such as ICLEI and IPES-food, umbrella organizations like CEMR and Eurocities, and social economy partners and businesses.

Expert organizations, such as research institutes and experts specializing in applied research related to food themes, should be engaged. These organizations have the capacity to provide multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary, and intersectional analyses to support the partnership's objectives. Urban planning institutions responsible for urban, spatial, and landscape planning in cities should also participate, bringing their insights and technical expertise to integrate food strategies into cities development

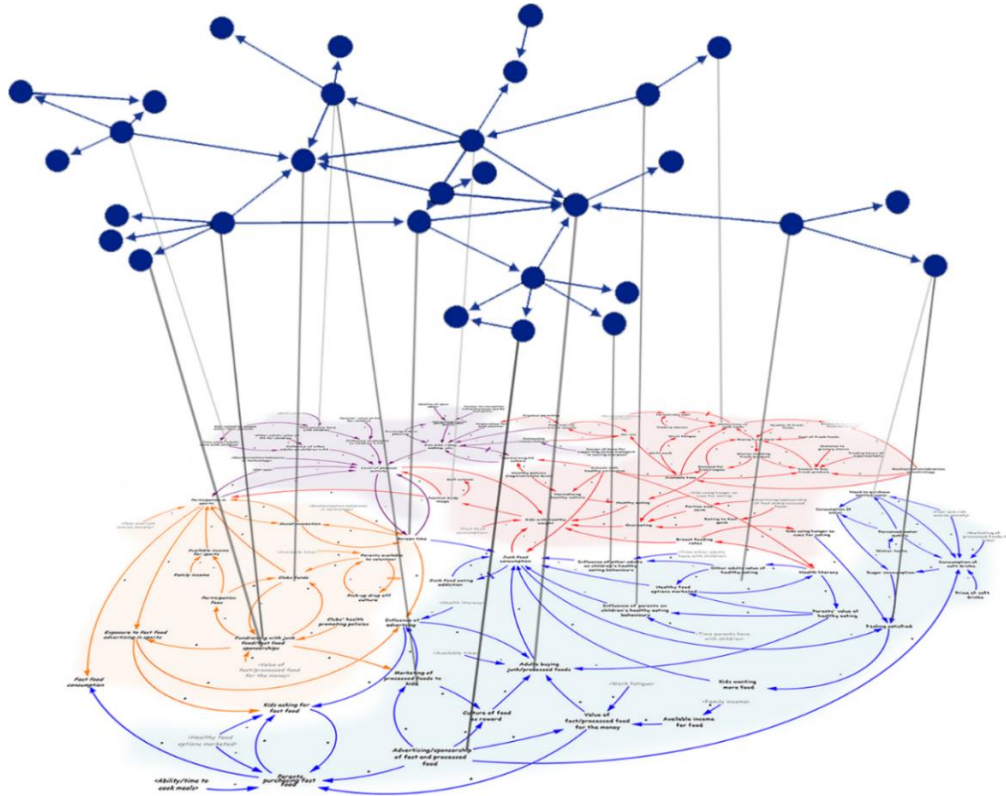


Fig 18 : Source McGlashan, J., de la Haye, K., Wang, P. et al.

These proposals regarding the organisation and role of the UAEU TPF were discussed with key stakeholders to confirm their feasibility and pertinence. For eg. they were presented to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in the context of the initiation of the **European Food Policy Council** as a new governance model in the future EU Framework on Sustainable Food Systems, with which cooperation is considered essential.

4.2.6 The timing for successful implementation

For the sustainable implementation of the UAEU Food Partnership, from timeline perspective there are four main phases as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Action proposed	Estimative timeline	Details
1. The timing of the launch of the partnership.	If the preparation of the partnership will be finished by the end of 2023, the estimated timeline of the partnership launches at the end of 2023 or the beginning of 2024.	Based on the EU Sustainable Food 2030 Initiative plan the recommendations for the member states should be aligned with the scope of the Food partnership

2. The timing of the action's preparations and the delivery of the action plan.	Mid 2024	Is preferable to synchronize the delivery of the Partnership actions with the deadlines of the EU regulatory and policy processes
3. The timing regarding the funding of partnership	End of 2024 /Mid 2025	The capacity building of the partnership is recommended for the sustainability of the project. This could be done until end of 2024. By focusing on capacity building and providing the necessary resources, the partnership can empower cities to approach local food systems sustainability with expertise and effectiveness, thereby bridging the gap in municipal capabilities and driving positive change in the long term. This could be set as a priority for the first year of functioning. The Food Innovation Fund could be set up until Mid-2025
4. The timing of the implementation of the actions promoted / supported by the partnership	2025 – 2028/ 2030	The realistic timeline for a fully functional partnership as example Food Council is 2025-2030 (initial 3 years of Partnership + possible 2 year extension)

While the UAEU Partnership on Food may be programmed for a duration of three years with a possible extension of two years, it is crucial to consider the broader vision and sustainability of the supported actions much beyond this timeframe. Considering the broader vision and sustainability of the Thematic Food Partnership beyond its programmed duration is essential, particularly in light of the increasing focus on food system resilience. The momentum gained by other initiatives at the local level and within the EU, such as the EU FSFS (Sustainable Food Systems Framework) and the EU Food Policy Council, further emphasizes the importance of long-term action.

4.2.7 Possible themes for the UAEU Partnership on Food

The partnership's focus areas, as identified by the EAA, encompass a range of critical themes that need to be addressed. These themes include food security, food system sustainability, food resilience, agroecology, food justice, access to land, public land management, and governance with food strategies & food councils. Each of these themes plays a vital role in building a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Agroecology as a framework for food system transformation: The partnership recognizes the importance of agroecology as a guiding principle for sustainable and resilient food systems. While some

progress has been made in integrating agroecology into EU agricultural policies, there is still a need for broader adoption and recognition of its transformative potential.

Addressing dependence on global networks and corporate agri-food business: The food system's reliance on global networks and corporate actors poses vulnerabilities that must be addressed. Disruptions such as pandemics, natural disasters, or political conflicts can impact the supply chain and affect food availability and prices. Policymakers at the European level should prioritize policies that promote decentralized and diversified local food systems to reduce dependence on imports.

Including externalities in the price of food: Externalities, such as environmental degradation, greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution, and health impacts, are often not accounted for in the market price of food. The partnership recognizes the ethical imperative of incorporating these external costs into the price of food, fostering a more sustainable and responsible food system.

Ensuring comprehensive and holistic approaches to food justice: Despite some progress, the issue of food justice is yet to be fully addressed in EU policies. There is a need for a comprehensive approach that considers the broader food system and tackles disparities in social food welfare across member states. The partnership aims to contribute to more equitable and just food systems within the EU.

Approaching access to land from a food system perspective: Access to land is a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability and resilience of the food system. Efforts to support young farmers and address land use issues are important, but a broader food system perspective is needed to ensure long-term sustainability and optimal land use.

Effective management of public land: Public land management plays a crucial role in shaping food policy. It requires a coordinated and integrated approach that considers factors such as land use, zoning, community engagement, and food system planning. The partnership aims to develop strategies that promote equity, sustainability, and resilience in public land management for food-related purposes.

Emphasizing the city-region framework: The city-region framework recognizes the interconnected nature of food systems, the role of cities as key actors, and the need for collaboration and partnership across sectors. The partnership seeks to leverage this framework to address the complex challenges of food resilience at the local level, fostering cooperation between urban and rural areas.

Balancing the localization of food systems with support for the EU free market: The tension between localizing food systems for sustainability and supporting the EU free market needs to be addressed. While protecting a free-flowing food market is important, local food production and consumption can contribute to sustainability, carbon emissions reduction, economic development, and waste reduction. The partnership aims to find a balance that promotes both local and EU-wide interests.

Promoting public procurement favouring local organic production: Public procurement can be a powerful tool for supporting local and just food production. Policies and criteria can be implemented to prioritize the purchase of locally grown and organic foods by public institutions. Technical assistance and training can also be provided to farmers and food producers to enhance the quality and availability of local organic products.

4.2.8 Possible actions of the UAEU Partnership on Food

The partnership should propose its own agenda and action plan, supporting the city needs consideration at all levels, advocating for their inclusion and building capacity for local authorities.

Possible actions can be developed around the issues like:

- analysis of national multilevel development and planning regulations with focus on food systems;
- guidance on EU regulation and public support for sustainable food systems, including for eg. proposals for the reconsideration of the cohesion policy to ensure that it supports the development of / the shift towards sustainable food systems;
- cooperation with the EU bodies to advocate / support the promotion of a food funding (EIB funding & synergies with EFSI and InvestEU funds);
- link the food TA with health TA for eg. by mapping and assessing existing (health) impact tools or monetization tools (eg. cost benefit analysis), regarding their applicability for monitoring and informing about food impact on health;
- development of a roadmap / tool for strategies for sustainable food systems / food councils;
- knowledge pack on sustainable food systems, including innovation briefs of best practices in this area;
- develop indicators for monitoring and assessing the sustainability of the food TA;
- analyse the regulatory obstacles and drivers for boosting a sustainable food system;
- data collection and smart use for the management of food systems;
- observatory on food systems;
- capacity building and spreading of pilots in regions and cities;
- development of a self-assessment tool for urban authorities regarding the sustainability of their food system and possible improvements;
- setting up a European framework for fostering sustainable innovations in the food TA;
- identification and mobilisation of funding for cities to support the development of sustainable food systems;
- mapping and monitoring of the local food projects and initiatives enabling their exchanges and collaboration;
- development of a food systems data and tools sharing platform for cities.

These are only some indicative actions guided by the actual needs in the area and inspired by the proposals of the previous UAEU partnerships that this new partnership can further advance and enhance.

Table 2: Possible areas of intervention and actions for the UAEU Partnership on Food

	Area of intervention	Possible actions	Why
Better Regulation	Integrated food policy and regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration with the EU FSFS and upcoming Food Policy Council. - Support the development of adapted EU policies that enhance the local level in elaboration of integrated food policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the complexity and extensive impacts of the food TA require a systemic approach and overarching legislation ensuring coherence and synergies at all levels (thus supporting multi-level governance).
	Regulation analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct an analysis of the regulatory landscape to identify obstacles and drivers for promoting sustainable food systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the identification of regulatory obstacles and drivers is necessary for guiding successful action in the field; - the comprehensive understanding of the food regulatory and policy landscape can nurture policy recommendations; - the outcomes of this analysis can represent solid evidence for changes in regulations that support the transition to more sustainable and equitable food systems.
	European framework to foster sustainable innovations in the food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of an European framework to foster sustainable innovations in the food sector. This can take the form of a set of regulation and tools proposed in correlation with the FSFS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide specific guidance for various stakeholders; - facilitate the implementation, promotion and replication of successful innovative technologies, practices, and business models that contribute to sustainable food systems.
	Public procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocate for policies and criteria that favour the procurement of locally grown and organic foods by public institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can support the consumption of locally grown and organic foods through their procurement by public institutions; - can contribute to raising awareness about the benefits of local and organic production.



	City-region framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote collaboration and partnership between urban and rural areas within the city-region framework. - Facilitate dialogue and knowledge exchange between different stakeholders, including policymakers, farmers, producers, distributors, and consumers, to develop integrated approaches that address the complex challenges of food resilience at the local level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the official recognition and support of the city-region framework is needed for better cooperation between the different levels of governance as well as enhanced connections between urban and rural areas; - it is key for developing integrated approaches that address the complex challenges of food resilience at the local level.
	the EU free market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocate for the regulation of the EU market by integrating the need of localisation of food systems in the pursuit of the sustainability goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the regulation of the EU market impacts on the sustainability of food systems; - it has to be considered in relation to local production and consumption pursuing sustainability, carbon emissions reduction, economic development, and waste reduction.
Better Knowledge	Knowledge exchange and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a platform or network to map and monitor local food projects and initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can enhance knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the dissemination of best practices across cities and regions; - can inform policy recommendations and advocate for changes in regulations that support the transition to more sustainable and equitable food systems.
	Regulatory obstacles and drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performing a comprehensive analysis of the regulatory framework allows for the identification of barriers and enablers in the promotion of sustainable food systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by utilizing this analysis, policymakers can make informed policy recommendations and advocate for regulatory changes that facilitate the transition to more sustainable and equitable food systems.
	Targeted analysis and targeted evidence support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct focused analysis and gather evidence to clarify key themes requiring attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by focusing on specific areas and gathering relevant data, we can better understand the challenges and opportunities associated with those themes. This analysis and evidence-gathering process will provide valuable insights and help guide



			decision-making and action towards addressing those key themes effectively.
	Food systems data and tools	- Establish a regional food systems observatory that serves as a platform for data collection, analysis, and knowledge sharing. This observatory will systematically monitor and track key indicators, trends, and challenges related to food systems in the region.	- by gathering and analysing data, the observatory will provide valuable insights to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, enabling evidence-based decision-making and facilitating the exchange of best practices and lessons learned. This platform will enhance collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders, fostering innovation and continuous improvement in regional food systems.
	Capacity building and pilot projects	- Implement capacity building programs and provide support for the implementation of pilot projects in regions and cities. These initiatives will focus on key areas such as sustainable agriculture practices, food waste reduction, community gardens, and other innovative solutions that promote the development of sustainable food systems.	- by equipping regions and cities with the necessary knowledge and resources, these capacity building programs and pilot projects will empower local communities to adopt and implement sustainable practices, leading to positive transformations in their food systems.
Better Funding	Capacity building, and knowledge exchange	- Development of a regional food systems observatory, including enabling the identification and assessment of different funds available. For eg. for capacity building for food policy: DG REFORM funds, Governance & Public administration and Technical support for implementing the European Green Deal for training, partnerships, building capacity and new skills: ESF + and ERDF (regional development funds: eg: OP1 Smarter, OP2 Greener Europe)	- this tool enables a better access of regional stakeholders to funds helping them enhance their capabilities, establish partnerships, and acquire the necessary skills to advance sustainable and resilient food systems in their respective regions.



	<p>Innovation in Food area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tailor-made guidance for the distribution of funds available, for eg. for sustainable agriculture, food production and innovation: CAP funds (with focus on measures like Leader and Akis) and ERDF (regional development funds: eg: OP1 Smarter, OP2 Greener Europe); - Setting up a Food innovation fund can be as a blending of grants and financial instruments: grants (as a first phase) and loans (second phase) to help the food businesses overcome barriers to their innovations becoming a successful, commercial reality. The aim is to make a considerable economic impact which results in significant, sustainable business growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by leveraging these funding opportunities, stakeholders in the food industry can access financial support and resources to advance innovation, promote sustainable practices, and foster the growth of successful food businesses.
	<p>New entrepreneurship start-ups in Food area</p>	<p>Type of funds available that can be capitalised for enhancing new and existing entrepreneurship are:</p> <p>Sustainable agriculture, food production, CAP funds, with focus on measures like Leader</p> <p>ERDF (regional development funds: eg: OP1 Smarter, OP2 Greener Europe);</p> <p>ESF +; New skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - by tapping into these funding opportunities, new entrepreneurship start-ups in the food sector can access financial support and resources to launch and grow their businesses; - these funds contribute to the promotion of sustainable agriculture, the adoption of innovative practices, and the development of new skills, ultimately fostering a vibrant and resilient food entrepreneurship ecosystem.

4.2.9 *Type of support that will be required for the implementation*

From the experience of the previous UAEU Partnerships and similar initiatives, the issues that result as key for ensuring the sustainability of the FTP are responsibility, resources (especially financial ones) and link with the operational level.

The implementation of the partnership will require technical (advise, capacity building, coaching), logistical (organisation, communication and promotion of events) and financial support distributed all along the implementation.

The EU DGs and the EUI secretariat can bring significant added value by providing tailored support that addresses the specific needs and gaps identified in the new generation of the UAEU partnerships, translated especially in coordination, guidance and data access services.

Furthermore, for ensuring the engagement and durability of Thematic Food Partnership it is recommended to reflect on possible resources. This may involve developing a diverse range of funding sources, building partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and developing clear and compelling messaging around the value and impact of Food TP. A long-term vision for Thematic Food Partnership is possible and aligned with the demands of sustainability and therefore considering a diverse range of funding sources, redirecting existing funds, and establishing a comprehensive funding mechanism could secure the necessary resources to support the long-term effects of Food TPs (even if its activity will last a limited amount of time) and drive positive change in food systems towards sustainability and equity.

There are various potential sources of financing for Food TP from government funding, private sector contributions, philanthropic donations, and crowdfunding or could be integrated resources built by connected research, policy development, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building activities.

Redirecting funding can be an effective way to support sustainability initiatives and drive change towards more sustainable and equitable food systems. Strong partnerships between cities, regional governments, and other stakeholders can help to identify priority areas for funding and ensure that resources are allocated effectively.

The interviews suggested that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which provides significant funding for agricultural activities in the European Union might also support the food systems sustainability through a possible redirection of available subsidies and alignment with the priorities of ERDF and ESF. However, the current approach of the CAP generates imbalance in funding allocation especially in considering sustainable food system's needs. Obligations to redirect funding towards more sustainable practices can help to address this issue and support the transition towards more sustainable food systems. In addition, or alternatively, one might consider the establishment of a Food Policy funding mechanism, that encompasses all food-related aspects, from the farm to the fork, involving both agriculture and fisheries (including aquaculture).

The question of funding is not only about the amount of money available but also about how it is allocated and used. Funding should be associated with specific actions and outcomes, and there should be accountability and transparency in the use of funds. It is also important to ensure that funding is not only allocated for administrative work but first and foremost also for practical actions that support sustainability initiatives.

Food security is an old concern at EU level, but the actual context provided by the experience of Covid 19 and the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has brought it on the top of the EU political priorities. Sustainable Food production development could be the best source of growth and reducer of poverty in cities, but it must be constantly renewed through knowledge and innovation. Getting resources into the hands of innovators and providing incentives for producers, agricultural service providers, and entrepreneurs to collaborate in developing and applying more sustainable and inclusive practices should become a priority of the Food partnership.

In Europe, EU grants have long been used to finance agricultural, food production and innovation. The new EU context of Green Deal, Food 2030, Fitfor55 and upcoming FSFS and European Food Policy Council is the proper time for a shift of the focus *from grant funding towards the use of innovation funds*.

All these EU level regulations are providing a particularly prone window of opportunity for the set up of a Food Innovation Fund, that could be used to provide incentives and resources for investment and collaboration between innovators, producer groups, private entrepreneurs, and public institutions.

The innovation fund scope should be to offer grants (as a first phase) and loans (second phase) to help the food businesses overcome barriers to their innovations becoming a successful, commercial reality. The aim is to make a considerable economic impact which results in significant, sustainable business growth.

The source of funding for the Food Innovation Fund can be a blending of EU funds already available for 2021-2027 with funds from strategic partners as European Investment Bank or other financial or non financial institutions including private funds.

Example of EU funds that can be used: for training, partnerships, building capacity and new skills: ESF +; for Research, Development, IT and investments : ERDF (regional development funds: eg: PO1

Smarter, PO2 Greener Europe); for sustainable agriculture, food production and innovation: CAP funds, with focus on measures like Leader and Akis⁴⁷; for capacity building for food policy: DG REFORM funds, Governance & Public administration and Technical support for implementing the European Green Deal

The Food Innovation Fund can be sustainable and effective if the subvention attribution leads to innovative new products, processes, or services. It can also involve a new or innovative business model. It could support themes like:

Net Zero in food industry eg: energy; food packaging; food waste; impact of industrial processes and use of materials and agriculture and food and other sources of emissions.

Health, diet, and sustainable food eg: starting from the One Health approach; enhancing wellbeing and diet and food.

Next generation digital technologies in food eg: advanced materials and manufacturing; artificial intelligence digital and advanced computing; bioinformatics and genomics; engineering biology & robotics and smart machines.

Only for first stage Grant can be accessed for: prototyping; demonstrating; piloting; testing and validation.

As second stage lending or other type of financial instrument for: Production; Processing; Extension of digital solutions; Marketing and market access; Cooperation along value chain. Projects can last up to 5-10 years, including both the R&D and commercialisation phase.

4.2.10 Assessment on the opportunity for a Partnership/OFC

We strongly advise towards recognizing the absolute necessity and seizing the opportunity to establish a Thematic Partnership for the "food" sector within the framework of the Urban Agenda for the European Union (EU). The current breaking moment in food systems vulnerability and the pivotal role of cities in driving the transition towards more resilient systems make it imperative to take action at the EU level.

The Urban Agenda for the EU provides an ideal platform to unite stakeholders from cities, member states, civil society, research institutions, and the other relevant actors in a collaborative effort to address the pressing challenges within the food system. By formalizing a Thematic Partnership focused on "food," along with other initiatives such as EU Food Policy Council (in the making) and legislative framework on Sustainable Food Systems, the EU can leverage this framework to facilitate coordinated action, knowledge exchange, and policy development.

Through the partnership, best practices, successful initiatives, and innovative solutions can be shared among cities and regions across the EU. This exchange of knowledge and experiences will accelerate the transition towards more sustainable and resilient food systems, fostering mutual learning and avoiding the duplication of efforts.

Furthermore, the partnership in collaboration with EU Food Policy Council can serve as a catalyst for systemic transformation within the EU. By advocating for policy alignment, resource pooling, and collaboration fostering, it can create a unified and coordinated approach to tackle the complex challenges

⁴⁷ AKIS is the organisation and interaction of persons, organisations and institutions who use and produce knowledge and innovation for agriculture and interrelated fields. (def) source: https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/default/files/20191016_sgi15_10_inge_van_oost_akis_seminar.pdf

facing the food sector. This will contribute to the EU's broader objectives, such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

By establishing a Thematic Partnership for "food" within the Urban Agenda for the EU, the EU can demonstrate its commitment to transformative change in the food sector. It will send a powerful signal that the EU recognizes the urgency of addressing food system vulnerabilities and supports the role of cities as drivers of change.

ANNEXES

Interviews schedule

Institution	Representative	Month											
		February					March				April		
		10	17	22	24	27	6	7	9	14	17	3	12
DG R&I	Daniela Lueth												
DG AGRI	Marion Maignan												
DG SANTE	Isabelle ROLLIER & Wim Debeuckelaere												
DG REGIO	Pia LAURILA & Janis KRAINIS												
Joint meeting	Eurocities, CEMR												
DG GROW	Blaga Popova												
IPES food	Nicole Pita												
ICLEI food	Peter Defranceschi												
High event	Eurocities, MUFPP												
Greening cities	FAO												
Eurocities	Anja de Cunto												
DG Mare	IGLESIAS Lorella & GONZALEZ Emilia												
Cities Forum	Public												
CEA Vitoria Gasteiz	Imanol Zabaleta Altuna												
City Deal	Steven Kroesbergen												

The interviews took place during February and March 2023. Further exchanges are planned with the Dutch City Deal team, starting with an interview planned in April. The interviews were guided by a set of general questions (adapted depending on the profile of the interlocutors and their institutions) addressed previously to our interviewed guests.

General guiding questions for the interviews

The interviews took place during February and March 2023, with the exception of the exchanges with the Dutch City Deal team organised in April. The interviews were guided by the following set of general questions (adapted depending on the profile of the interlocutors and their institutions) addressed previously to our interviewed guests.

1. What are the strategic priorities of your DG related to the Food Thematic Area (TA) and on which ones are you focusing in your unit?
2. Which are the gaps in the food systems in your view?
3. Do you have a methodology to connect food with other subjects like climate change, biodiversity, and social inclusion?
4. How do you encourage the transdisciplinary and participatory approach to the decision-making processes?
5. How do you support cities in developing resilient, local, and just food systems?
6. Which are the ongoing programs for European initiatives on food you are involved in?
7. How do you think the UAEU can become a relevant partner in promoting the Food TA and enabling its sustainable development?

Considering that food thematic is a transverse and cross-sector one, we approach the main category of stakeholders (DG related to food and agriculture, umbrella organisations focused on food systems resilience) and events (High event, FAO, Cities Forum...).

The limited time dedicated to the interviews and analysis imposed a tight structured approach based on the exchange with the main DGs that traditionally deal with this subject.

Selection of relevant publications defining the Food TA framework

- European Green Deal
- European Pillar of Social Rights
- European Digital Strategy
- FOOD 2030 pathways
- Renovation Wave
- Cohesion policy
- Long-term Vision for Rural Areas
- New European Bauhaus
- 2023 European Commission Work programme
- The New Leipzig Charter principles and dimensions and Implementing Document
- The Pact of Amsterdam, as well as global agendas (the New Urban Agenda, and the UN SDGs)
- Territorial Agenda 2030
- The Ljubljana Agreement and Urban Agenda for the European Union Multiannual Working Programme for the period 2022 – 2026
- Description of previous partnerships created under the Urban Agenda for the European Union
- Ex-Ante Assessment of the Greening Cities theme
- Ex-Ante Assessment of the Sustainable Tourism theme
- Linking matrix created for the theme and the presentations made within the UAEU Workshop of 6 October 2021
- Available evidence and scientific expertise coming notably from 'Future of cities' related data and research findings, the Urban Data Platform + and recent evidence on urban development in the EU
- Fit for Future Platform (RegHub subgroup)
- National regulatory frameworks regarding the concerned theme (French Territorial Food Strategies)
- Relevant funding opportunities for the concerned theme
- Key academic research/literature indicating the "State of Play" on the researched topic WFP World Food Programme (UN/FAO)
- FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Multiannual Working Programme UAEU 2022-2026, available at:
<https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-11/Multiannual%20Working%20Programme%20UAEU%202022-2026.pdf>

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