# Local food systems: a framework for food sovereignty?

**by**

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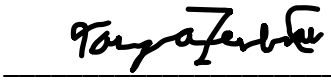
Signature of Candidate 

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**Abstract**

There are increasing debates about the importance of promoting collaborative local food systems – interconnected networks that merge the strategies of local food initiatives – to build collective power to address sustainability and food security challenges. However, in-depth explorations of the dynamics and potentials of local food systems in differing socio-institutional environments are still lacking. This research addresses this gap by investigating the constitution of local food systems in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, and Preston, England, and how internal and external processes affect the delivery of potential outcomes.

In order to ground this research focus, the study introduces a conceptual framework to analyse local food systems: a political food systems approach for food sovereignty, combining a food systems approach, urban political ecology and food sovereignty. The importance of this framework relies in its analytical attention to process-outcome interactions, multi-scalar dynamics, and power relations, which this study demonstrates are crucial considerations to analyse local food systems. To implement this framework, the research project adopts a case study methodology constituted of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

The analysis of findings identifies three critical aspects to advance integrated local food systems for food sovereignty. First, the findings illustrate the relevance of a systemic view of food that prioritises people's lived experiences of injustices and the collective construction of territories to address current discrepancies within local food systems. Second, this study highlights the need to accept diversity within local food systems and promote spaces of deliberation for the reflexive construction of collective visions. Finally, the findings illustrate the relevance of balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies in urban food governance processes, which should facilitate intrinsically transformative practices by enacting food sovereignty principles. The thesis ultimately proposes three main strategies that could help achieve this: politicising local food systems, embedding reflexivity, and promoting co-production.

**Keywords:**

Local food systems; food sovereignty; local food initiatives; urban food governance

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**Preface - Origins of the study and research journey**

Food has always been an essential part of my life. I remember all those times sitting at the table with my family in Peru after school or going out on Sundays to eat 'chifa' or 'pollo a la brasa'; both of which I ended up hating after eating a million times. Nevertheless, even though I did not like the food eaten, as years passed, I learnt that coming together to eat and all those family reunions with endless plates were not merely about food. Food was a way of connecting, communicating, welcoming, thanking, loving, and even grieving. However, the more I grew up, the more I realised that much of the food we used to eat and the restaurants that we used to frequent started to be replaced by big fast-food chains and international brands. This inspired me to pursue a career in Nutrition, from which I transitioned to Public Health because of a recognition that change needs to come at a much higher level than the individual.

My immersion in Public Health, and particularly health promotion, made me realise the power that food can have in changing people's life when used in the way I had seen in my family – more than a nutrient, more than a meal. Nevertheless, from helping in community gardens and kitchens to protesting against the closure of a school canteen in Granada, I became aware of how, progressively, we were losing not only 'our' places to eat food but the meaning of food itself. These experiences led me to engage with international food movements, such as la Vía Campesina, and come across the concept of food systems. At this point, I was thinking about what to focus on for my master's dissertation. After several days spent at home researching food systems and change, I learned about the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and urban food strategies, which encouraged me to research that subject. The opportunity to research the urban food strategy of Madrid opened my eyes to the potential of collaborative work and social mobilisation to install change in cities. I was inspired by the passion and dedication of those involved in networks of local food initiatives. More importantly, I was intrigued by what made a group of people come together to demand public intervention in a diversity of food issues successfully. The experience of my master's research project and subsequent engagement with local food initiatives in Spain highlighted the importance of on-the-ground alliances, which are sometimes missed in discussions about food systems. This led to me searching for opportunities to continue to work on local food systems, eventually finding this PhD project in 2019.

However, while the PhD provided an opportunity to question how to collectivise change for food system transformation, the journey towards its fulfilment has had many ups and downs, like any process that requires a high degree of self-discipline and awareness. 'What is my motivation to continue?' became a question that continuously danced in my mind. Indeed, keeping the initial spark of excitement when starting the PhD in 2019 proved to be a struggle over the years. While the topic continued to be something that inspired me, the problem became managing the compatibility between overworking, having a social life and ensuring that I followed self-care strategies. I was losing my 'essence', as much as food has been losing its own due to conventional food system structures. This feeling was only exacerbated by the conditions under which my PhD was conducted – the Covid-19 pandemic (see Appendix 1 for a more thorough explanation of its impact on the research journey). Because of these challenging circumstances, the PhD journey

has become not only a mere research project but also a process of personal self-discovery, internalisation, and transformation. Writing a thesis can be a lonely journey; if not well managed, you can drown in the process, with the PhD becoming the satellite of your life. For me, it was for a while, but I could eventually see the bigger picture of the *PhD within* my life – not *my life within* the PhD – due to my personal network of friends and colleagues.

The opportunity to evaluate the PhD journey and origins of the study in this preface has made me realise that the whole process has been a powerful learning experience – academically and personally, not regretting pushing through it even at difficult times. Notably, the feeling of admiration for local food initiatives expressed before has continued throughout this research, particularly the level of care and solidarity in them. At the same time, however, I have found that understanding them is a much more complex undertaking. Their work and engagement with others can be filled with contradictions that limit their potential benefits. Significantly, one thing I take from this research, beyond the academic knowledge acquired, is that everything is social, including the PhD journey, and social is everything we do in conjunction with others. In this context, social relations are filled with contradictions and power struggles, which do not necessarily disappear when we go from individuals to organisations or even systems. As everything is social and all social comes from interactions, what is essential in the end is building relations around care, and caring for each other, recognising our multitude of interdependencies across levels, structures, meanings, discourses, etc. I very much hope that this thesis can shed light on some of these processes and contradictions and provide some avenues to address them so that food systems change can be advanced.

## List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AC(s) | Autonomous Community(ies) |
| AFN | Alternative food network |
| ANT | Actor-Network Theory |
| CAP | Common Agricultural Policy |
| CCG | Community Connectors Group |
| CEA | Centro de Estudios Ambientales - Environmental Studies Centre |
| CSA | Community supported agriculture |
| ETA | Euskadi ta Askatasuna – Basque Homeland and Freedom |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations |
| FOFS | Friends of Fishwick & St Matthews |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| IPC | International Panel for Food Sovereignty |
| LCC | Lancashire County Council |
| LE | Life expectancy at birth |
| LGP | Let's Grow Preston |
| LVC | La Vía Campesina |
| LFI(s) | Local food initiative(s) |
| LFS(s) | Local food system(s) |
| PCC | Preston City Council |
| PMF | Preston Muslim Forum |
| PNV | Partido Nacional Vasco – Basque Nationalist Party |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| SDG(s) | Sustainable Development Goal(s) |
| UAGA | Unión Agroganadera de Álava – Álava's Farmers Union |
| UCLan | University of Central Lancashire |
| UPE | Urban Political Ecology |

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| UK | United Kingdom |
| VCC | Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council |

## Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND: SETTING THE CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Besides providing essential nutrients, food is an issue that crosses many boundaries in our everyday lives. The act of eating brings with it a web of networked relations consisting of material, social, political, and economic aspects and more abstract symbolic and heuristic dimensions. These dynamics lead to multi-layered processes affecting our bodies, food systems and the broader political and economic arrangements that underpin society (Goodman & Sage, 2014). On a global scale, the rules that structure food systems – the complex interrelated activities involved in producing and consuming food (Ingram et al., 2013) – are usually referred to as a 'food regime' (McMichael, 2009). Within this perspective, several scholars theorise the current regime as the 'corporate food regime', due to the consolidation of power in transnational corporations and foundations in trade and economic liberalisation that support the globalisation of food systems (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013). This regime sets the underlying paradigm for the conventional food system we experience today.

The conventional food system is characterised by global food supply chains, industrialised methods of production, and an inclination towards operational efficiency and corporate modes of financing and governance (Levkoe, 2011). Although the increased productivity resulting from these dynamics has broadly ensured the consistent provision of food across the world, ongoing conflicts and crises have highlighted several adverse consequences concerning its economic, environmental and social outcomes (FAO, 2021; HLPE, 2017; Lang, 2010). The collateral effects of this increased food industrialisation and corporatisation include health-related problems such as the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition; micronutrient deficiency; overweight/obesity); food price hikes and volatility; widening socioeconomic inequalities; and environmental sustainability concerns such as climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss (Clapp, 2014a, 2016; FAO, 2021; UNICEF, 2019; Willett et al., 2019). These shortcomings unveil the multiple repercussions of the market- and corporate-driven policies installed since the last century that have led to the development of the conventional food system (McMichael, 2009).

In this context, new food arrangements have materialised in the form of local food *initiatives* (LFIs)[1]. LFIs usually seek to bring consumers and producers closer together through market and

[1] The term alternative food networks (AFNs) is often used by food scholars. However, the term AFNs holds two main problems in its application for this study – whether the practices are 'alternative' and whether they constitute 'networks'. First, as will be explained further in Chapter 2, 'alternative' can mean different things in relation to what is being discussed and several studies demonstrate that many of these food initiatives might resemble the conventional food system in several ways (Guthman, 2008b). Second, using the term 'network' to denote individual organisations might be problematic. AFNs refer to specific schemes that resemble more organised *individual* innovations (single entities), such as farmers markets or food cooperatives, that conduct a range of activities that contribute to building sustainable or just food systems for their community and surrounding environment. Using the word network to denote these single entities in a study that focuses on their collective potential would have led to

non-market strategies while promoting some degree of ecological values, shorter food supply chains, and cooperation between food system actors (Renting et al., 2003). Examples include food cooperatives, community gardens, buying groups, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farmers markets (Misleh, 2022). Although LFIs can be characterised as responses driven by *ideological* discontent with the downsides of the conventional food system (Rosol, 2019), many LFIs focus on immediate practical needs or conditions, regardless of ideology. LFIs might seek to address food inequalities, or provide fairer commercialisation avenues for farmers (Constance et al., 2014; Mount et al., 2014). Nevertheless, LFIs usually share the same goal of rearranging food systems configurations, envisioning a different food system than the conventional one. In relocalising different dimensions of food (spatial, informational, governance, ownership), LFIs are regarded as having beneficial effects on sustainability and food security in a locality (Mount, 2012). This is attributed to the alternative character of LFIs because of the foods circulated in them, the production processes used, and motivations and principles of the actors involved, which promote values beyond profit maximisation and industrial logics (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015). Overall then LFIs are argued to implicitly contribute to food sovereignty processes, helping reassert the right of peoples to define their own food systems and develop more just and sustainable food systems (Matacena & Corvo, 2019; Simon-Rojo, 2019).

However, even though several studies have brought about more understanding of the benefits of LFIs, recent literature argues that their actual potential regarding sustainability and food security is still not clear (Cerrada-Serra et al., 2018; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015; Schmutz et al., 2018; Vittersø et al., 2019). Critical scholars warn about an uncritical celebration of LFIs without considering their real-life dynamics. Several studies demonstrate that LFIs can contain a plurality of values and actions that do not necessarily conform to their attributed potentials in the literature (Forssell & Lankoski, 2017). This discussion raises the question of whether too much pressure is put on individual practices without considering their dynamics and interaction with other elements and agents of food systems, which inevitably affect their attributed benefits. Indeed, despite the increasing body of work on LFIs, their collective potential as local food *systems* (LFSs) lacks more empirical investigations, particularly in diverging socio-economic landscapes, as will be explained in Chapter 2. Understanding how and why LFIs might come together and how this helps advance change is particularly imperative. It has been argued that merging individual efforts can bring about collective power to drive more structural change and counteract the downsides of the conventional food system (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

The limitations of LFIs in driving change also raises the need for a thorough engagement with the dynamics and processes that affect LFIs' collective actions and outcomes and how these affect potential benefits. As will be argued in Chapter 2, this means moving away from analysing LFIs and LFSs through the lenses of food security and sustainability toward a food sovereignty framework. Using food sovereignty as an analytical lens does not preclude evaluating the benefits

confusing arguments, as in this case a network refers to an interconnected group of these single entities. In this regard, some scholars prefer the use of 'local' to denote diverse food models in a specific locality and 'initiative' to more specifically signal their individual rather than collective character (Franklin et al., 2011; Levkoe, 2015). This study thus uses the term local food initiative (LFI) to refer to the diversity of locally based innovations that reconfigure food systems.

of LFSs and LFIs regarding food security and sustainability, but it focuses the analysis on the meanings attached to them and trajectories used to achieve them, raising questions of power asymmetries, resource distribution, control and influence. Nevertheless, food sovereignty is yet to be applied in the context of analysing the articulation of LFSs. Food sovereignty may hold different meanings according to how it is used; the concept of food sovereignty will be fully discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. This thesis argues that the core value of food sovereignty for studying LFSs can be synthesised as a struggle for the democratisation of food systems and the realization of the right to food for all. This perspective allows for an examination of the processes (*how*) in the name of achieving more just and sustainable food systems, rather than simply prescribing specific practices (*what*).

This study addresses the previously discussed research gaps by investigating the interactions of LFIs in England and the Basque Country and how these affect greater possibilities for change. As will be further explained in Chapter 2, such a study should follow a systemic approach that looks at the interactions between LFIs, and other organisations, acknowledging power relations and contextual factors within these processes, as well as the outcomes of these dynamics concerning food system transformation. In order to ground this research focus, the study develops a conceptual framework to analyse LFSs: a political food systems approach for food sovereignty, combining a food systems approach, urban political ecology and food sovereignty (see Section 1.2 and Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of this framework). As will be argued in Chapters 2 and 3, this framework deals with the shortcomings of other approaches identified in the literature, following calls for more critical investigations of the individual and collective potentials of LFIs.

This chapter sets the context of this study. Section 1.2 introduces the rationale for studying LFIs as a collective in the form of LFSs filled with power and uneven relations rather than individually. Section 1.3 outlines the aim and objectives of the study and Section 1.4 introduces the methodology used to achieve them. Section 1.5 considers the contemporary context for LFIs in England and Basque Country, and Section 1.6 provides an overview of the thesis structure. Section 1.7 ends this chapter with the study's contribution to knowledge.

## 1.2 WHY STUDY LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES COLLECTIVELY AS LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS?

Research on LFIs has increasingly recognised that isolated efforts are not enough to change the underlying dimensions of current food system structures (Hebinck et al., 2021). Indeed, as will be further discussed in Chapter 2, LFIs are influenced by different power and decision-making processes and interdependencies at multiple scales (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). As demonstrated by previous studies, collaborations between LFIs and other organisations are vital in leveraging resources to surpass individual operational burdens and lead to better food security and sustainability outcomes (Bellamy et al., 2021; Hodgins & Fraser, 2018; Saxena et al., 2021a; Zerbian et al., 2022a). These arguments call for LFIs to surpass their individual boundaries towards the collectivisation of strategies. This emerging body of work raises the need to understand the collective impact of LFIs and the connections between LFIs that provide the potential to fulfil the requirements needed to transform food systems. As argued by Goodman

et al. (2012), a better understanding of LFIs would be achieved if a relational and process-based conceptualisation of their practices is advanced. This framing admits that LFIs might never be perfect, but that they can be improved by working with others. This means that LFIs do not act in isolation, nor are they absent from interactions with diverse dynamics in their localities, including interconnections with other organisations and LFIs. This argument provides the rationale for the study, which aims to move from individual to collective assessments.

As mentioned in Section 1.1, LFIs may have different motivations but are unified in their aim to address the challenges of the conventional food system by providing practical alternatives and solutions to its detrimental effects (Andrée et al., 2019; Friedland, 2010). This starting point of convergence provides opportunities to redefine the respatialisation and relocalisation of food (Rossi, 2017) and thus potentially help LFIs confront their challenges and criticisms. Because of this imperative, several scholars argue that LFIs are adopting the tendency of systemic approaches seeking to address multiple food-system issues, thus building a collective movement (Andrée et al., 2019; Levkoe, 2015). However, as will be explained further in Chapter 2, there are still significant gaps in understanding how much LFIs are surpassing individual values and motivations, as well as the potential implications of this convergence. This means that much work is still needed to unpack the dynamics that underlie the formation of the alliances between LFIs, which is where this study sits.

As Chapter 2 argues, this is because of a common focus on understanding how LFIs might create a social movement by analysing spaces of possible convergence. The collection of LFIs is conceptualised in this literature as a 'movement of movements', involving a specific form of purposeful collective action for social change where actors involved in this process share common opponents, are linked by dense informal networks and relations, and share a collective identity (della Porta & Diani, 2006; Huber & Lorenzini, 2022). Nevertheless, a key issue of this literature is that by focusing on movement building, studies are missing the investigation of the real-life dynamics of the collectivisation of strategies beyond the construction of coherence between LFIs. As will be seen in Chapter 2, emerging literature is uncovering the power-laden dynamics of why LFIs might come together or not, raising the need to look beyond the willingness of LFIs to surpass their ideologies to the uneven construction of LFSs. As Sbicca et al. (2019) argue, "with hundreds of case studies of food movement organisations and campaigns, the diversity of the movement is clear. However, our understanding of how communities self-organise into networks at the meso level of cities and the implications for food movements are muddy" (p. 2).

In this regard, this study builds on emerging literature that views the connections between LFIs as the reflection of self-organised networks or systems, paying particular attention to regional and local formations (Dwiartama & Piatti, 2016; Lamine et al., 2019). That is, it focuses on the ideological, resource-based, and relational connectedness of LFIs by unpacking the controversies and trade-offs in their alignment. Chapters 2 and 3 will expand on the framework used to undertake such investigation: a political food systems approach to food sovereignty. This framework conceptualises the collection of LFIs within a place as *local food systems* (LFSs); complex systems composed of diverse LFIs and food-related activities that are in constant interaction through a diversity of intricate processes that shape certain conditions and processes

that influence their collective potential for food systems change. The usefulness of viewing LFIs collectively as *systems* relies on acknowledging the complexity and heterogeneity of the interactions of LFIs, which, even without LFIs fully converging, still create specific conditions that affect food security and sustainability trajectories. However, following a system-based conceptualisation can fall short in analysing the controversies and trade-offs in the construction of LFSs. This thesis thus combines the food systems approach with a political ecology perspective – urban political ecology (UPE) – to avoid uncritical accounts of LFSs. As will be argued in Chapter 3, UPE drives attention to the outcomes and processes of LFSs but also symptoms and causes of injustice within them, allowing a focus on the contested and power-laden processes that permeate the collective organisation of LFIs and what this means for food sovereignty.

### 1.3 STUDY FOCUS, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This study involves an empirical investigation into the constitution, context-based dependencies, and internal processes and tensions of LFSs following an in-depth engagement with the phenomenon, specifically from a food sovereignty perspective. As explained in Section 1.1 and fully discussed in Chapter 3, food sovereignty in the context of LFSs means understanding why and how the alignment of LFIs might help achieve the right to food through fairer and more democratic food systems (for people and nature). From this perspective, this research project assesses the dynamics that affect the collective transformative capacity and agency of LFIs to achieve this goal.

Within the context of the relatively small but emerging literature on LFSs, much of the emphasis is on the dynamics surrounding the barriers and facilitators of the coalition of LFIs (see Chapter 2). While this study engages with these questions, it expands the analysis beyond the internal drivers of collaborative networks towards multi-level constraints. It also adds the element of the outcomes of LFSs in relation to food security and sustainability using food sovereignty. Exploring LFSs under this lens is especially interesting given the possibility of deepening understanding of why LFIs sometimes fail to meet individual objectives. Significantly, food sovereignty helps identify some limitations of LFIs, but also collaborative opportunities to surpass these constraints. This research thus offers an original and timely set of empirical engagement with LFSs as dynamic social processes and their implications, rather than just describing the interactions of LFIs. This was perceived to be particularly relevant given the pressing questions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic around developing more resilient, sustainable and equitable food systems (Béné, 2020).

This research integrates two other theories – a food systems approach and urban political ecology – into the concept of food sovereignty to approach LFSs from this perspective. As explained in earlier sections, combining these frameworks with food sovereignty forms the guiding and analytical framework of this study: a political food systems approach for food sovereignty. A vital feature of this approach is its close attention to power relations within LFSs and between LFSs and their social, political, and economic environments. Only limited studies have previously considered this dimension of the processes of LFSs. Besides identifying the micro-

politics and external influences of LFSs, this framework provides an essential focus on the solutions needed to address the interactions of LFIs based on unequal power distribution.

The **aim of the research** is: To examine how local food systems contribute to, and illuminate understandings of, food sovereignty and explore the implications of this for future policy, practice and research.

This is supported by four **specific objectives**:

1. To investigate how local food systems are constituted in two contrasting geographical and socio-political contexts by identifying what kinds of local food initiatives and other organisations operate in each case, including their values, discourses and corresponding approaches.
2. To examine how the socio-political, economic and natural environment within which local food systems are located influence their composition and function.
3. To evaluate the circulating material, social and capital flows that shape the dynamics of local food systems and how these affect their assemblage and components.
4. To analyse how the social processes, power relations and discursive constructions within each local food system influence the delivery of food sovereignty processes.

### 1.4 INTRODUCING THE INSTRUMENTAL COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study examines LFSs in two diverse local settings: one in Preston, England, United Kingdom (UK), and the other in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, Spain. While the rationale for selecting these study sites will be further addressed in Chapter 4, the importance of not confining the study to one place lies in the opportunity to strengthen theory on LFSs beyond individual experiences. Although some crucial facilitators of the collective action of LFIs have been identified in previous research (Rivera-Ferre et al., 2014), there is still not much information on how these are context-dependent or applicable to the whole LFS. There is also a lack of information about the influence of different socio-political environments on LFSs in urban settings. Comparing experiences across diverse socio-institutional settings provides a unique opportunity to strengthen knowledge around the potential benefits of LFSs and actions needed to drive change within them.

In this regard, this study uses an instrumental collective case study methodology (Stake, 2005). Instrumental collective case studies aim to draw from lessons learnt from individual cases to understand a phenomenon – in this case LFSs and their potential contribution to food sovereignty – and thus assist further knowledge development. Case study methodology concerns understanding how and why something happens in real-life settings or why it might be the case (Thomas & Myers, 2015). As will be explained further in Chapter 4, this study used multiple data sources and methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document analysis, in order to meet these criteria. In particular, the case study methodology used in this study includes being aware of the contextual conditions in which the research is undertaken to understand how this might constrain or enhance certain forms/combinations of LFSs that lead to food sovereignty conditions. Therefore, the next section provides an initial

contextualisation of the selected cases, which will be further expanded in each case's analytical chapter (Chapters 5 and 6).

## 1.5 THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT FOR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS IN ENGLAND AND THE BASQUE COUNTRY

Despite sharing general similarities in their approach, the development of LFIs, and subsequent particular focuses, are heavily influenced by the place-based characteristics in which they are located (Martindale et al., 2018). In particular, the interactions of policymaking at different governance levels and outcomes of these processes can determine the success or failure of LFIs at the city-level (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative to have a comprehensive understanding of the policy contexts which affect the characteristics of LFSs. This section provides a background for this by discussing the political economy context of the LFSs studied.

Given the within-country differences of food practices outlined in previous literature (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019), each sub-section will also outline several key characteristics that foreground food dynamics in the specific administrative regions – England and the Basque Country – where the LFSs are located. It was decided to focus the contextualisation of the study on England and the Basque Country – and not the UK and Spain – because both administrative regions are devolved parts of broader nations and hold similar competences for food. Sub-section 1.5.1 focuses on the food system in England by paying particular attention to the UK's food policy context due to its high level of influence on English food-related concerns. Sub-section then introduces the food system in the Basque Country, emphasising the decentralised nature of food policy in Spain. The specific context of the cities of the selected LFSs will be discussed further in the empirical and analytical chapters to support the discussion of the cases.

### 1.5.1 England's Food System and The Role of Local Food Initiatives

A centralised governance structure characterises England's food system. The UK Parliament deals with food matters centrally, merging the UK and English political institutions (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). Compared to the other devolved nations of the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), English regions do not have powers or autonomy concerning food and agriculture (Lang, 2021). As there is no devolved English administration for food, England's food policy context and system mainly depend on UK-based dynamics. The current UK food system has been heavily influenced by a reliance on imported food since the industrial revolution (Clapp, 2016). This has led to significant governmental support for international trade liberalisation, which continues until today (Lang, 2021).

Currently, only 60% of consumed food is produced domestically in the UK (Defra, 2021). Several logistics tools have been implemented for this structure to work, such as just-in-time distribution. In parallel with other global food dynamics, much of the distribution and retail is concentrated within a few companies, which strongly influences price setting for both farmers and consumers (Lang, 2021). The highly centralised nature of the food system and prevalence of capital-intensive farms means that small farmers and production focused LFIs are forced to operate within more industrial and market dynamics (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). Significantly, the farming sector is

heavily reliant on subsidies to be viable (Marsden & Sonnino, 2008), which were previously provided by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) until Brexit – UK's withdrawal from the EU. Alongside these dynamics, the UK's food culture mainly revolves around consuming cheap food and meat. Much agricultural land is directed towards servicing livestock, and there is high consumption of processed food based on either meat, sugar, wheat or vegetable oil from intensive agriculture (Lang, 2021).

These overall characteristics of the national food system have had several repercussions on health, environmental and social aspects. For example, greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) from food production from agriculture account for 19% of all domestic emissions, excluding GHGs from land-use change for imported foods (Garnett et al., 2016). At the same time, agriculture is putting soils under stress, causing increased loss of organic carbon content (Lang, 2021). With a percentage of around 65% of the total adult population, England has one of the highest overweight and obesity rates in Europe (Lang, 2021; NHS Digital, 2019). Meanwhile, the country is permeated by entrenched inequalities in food access given the mismatch between the price of a healthy diet and socio-economic conditions (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015). Recent events such as the Covid-19 pandemic have accentuated these inequalities, increasing the already established use of food banks due to a growth in economic hardship amongst low-income communities (Power et al., 2020).

As part of the EU until 2020, much of England's and the UK's food dynamics were dictated by the CAP (Lang, 2021). Following Brexit, new legislations, such as the Agriculture Act 2020, have been implemented to redirect England's food system from subsidy dependency towards support for implementing sustainable practices from farms to local landscapes (Lang, 2021). In a similar vein, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted several of the downfalls of the UK's food system and the need to redirect policies across the UK Government to address health and sustainability challenges. This is reflected in the National Food Strategy for England, which proposes legislating unhealthy foods, strengthening social safety nets, guaranteeing a budget for agricultural payments until 2029 that support sustainability transition, and setting minimum trade standards (Dimbleby, 2021). However, the Government's response to the National Food Strategy lacked specific proposals to make sustainable and healthy food easy and affordable for all, maintaining a focus on opportunities for economic growth through innovation and trade and changing consumption choices (Defra, 2022; White, 2022). Although it is yet to be seen whether the Government's food strategy will address the challenges of England's food system, it is worth mentioning that the role of LFIs as key drivers in changing food systems is only considered in a limited manner in these new developments.

### 1.5.2 The Basque Country's Food System and the Role of Local Food Initiatives

Spanish food policy is relatively decentralised. This is because the 1978 Spanish Constitution, following the death of Francisco Franco, the previous Spanish dictator (1936-1975), divided the country into Autonomous Communities (ACs), which hold a certain degree of autonomy to manage and legislate in certain areas. The Basque Country holds a relative higher political and economic autonomy than other AC. The Constitution recognises the historical rights of the so-

called ‘foral territories’, constituted by Navarre and the Basque Country (Woodworth, 2008). This foral system gives these territories independence in tax, fiscal and civil law. Notably, each Basque province collects and manages its own taxes through the Diputación Foral (Provincial Council), albeit with a limited decision-making margin under the Spanish government and EU (Villa, 2007). In this context, the Basque Country holds exclusive powers for certain food system elements, such as agriculture. Nevertheless, policies or legislation developed under such competencies must still align with overall national objectives (Rodríguez Portugués, 2010). Similar to the UK, Spain’s food policy also favours an industrial, intensive approach to agriculture to increase productivity, especially marked from the second half of the 20th century and subsequently reinforced by the CAP (Lopez-Garcia, 2015). This has been accompanied by a clear focus on export agriculture, with many programmes supporting cooperativisation and the professionalisation of specific food sectors (Díaz-Méndez & García-Espejo, 2021; Lopez-Garcia & Álvarez-Vispo, 2018).

In the Basque Country, agricultural competences are under the three Basque Provincial Councils – Guipúzcoa-Gipuzkoa, Vizcaya-Bizkaia and Álava-Araba. Although relatively autonomous, Provincial Councils still must follow the general rules set out by the Basque Government. Every five years, the Basque Government develops a rural development strategy to capitalise on available resources to support the modernisation of agriculture (Besga & Bilbao, 2019; Calvário & Kallis, 2017; Lopez-Garcia & Álvarez-Vispo, 2018). The Basque Government also has developed a strategic plan for gastronomy and food, which focuses on developing a competitive business model for the food supply chain by promoting tourism and local food for added economic value (Alberdi Aresti & Begiristain Zubillaga, 2021). Attention to the quality characteristics of local food in this strategy relates to the region’s culture, which has always been extremely linked to the countryside (around 80% of the territory is rural) and food as a means of conviviality and representation of identity (Gobierno Vasco, 2015, 2020b; MacClancy et al., 2007).

Although current policies show a direction towards the industrialisation of agriculture, the Basque Country's agriculture sector is still considered mainly formed of family farms (Gobierno Vasco, 2022). Although it is unclear what this means regarding size and production systems, it usually refers to farms owned by only one person or family and not a corporation or company (Eustat, 2016; Gobierno Vasco, 2008). An essential reference point for the sector is the baserri/caserio, which are Basque rural living spaces that usually integrate vernacular farms and are considered to create synergies between nature and social life (Ainz Ibarrondo, 2001). While baserris have changed across time, Basques still maintain a notion of agriculture and the countryside as places of social reproduction and ecological protection (Gobierno Vasco, 2022). Because the conventional food system still has not reached a complete level of hegemony, LFIs such as farmers markets and food cooperatives are not unusual (Calvário & Kallis, 2017; Naylor, 2019; Sánchez, 2009). The Basque Country is also known for having a strong food and agriculture movement that focuses on influencing policy (Alberdi Aresti & Begiristain Zubillaga, 2021).

Despite these characteristics, the Basque food system is also in crisis. Urbanisation and the consolidation of farms are declining farm holdings. In particular, the extension of forests, natural landscapes, and built infrastructures has reduced agricultural land (Alberdi Aresti & Begiristain Zubillaga, 2021). The viability of farms mainly depends on CAP subsidies, which constrains their

ability to search for different production systems. Nevertheless, agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions are decreasing due to adopting more sustainable practices in the region (22% less GHG emissions in 2019) (Gobierno Vasco, 2020a). Regarding food consumption, although there is a tendency towards meat-based diets, the Basque Country consumes a higher percentage of fish, fruits and vegetables than the rest of Spain (Mercasa, 2020). Indeed, the Basque Country is the AC that spends more money on food per capita. This is related to the fact that the Basque Country is the richest AC in Spain, a position usually related to the foral system, and its extensive catalogue of social safety benefits compared to other regions (FOESSA, 2019; Zubiri, 2015). This probably is one of the causes for the lower percentage of obese and overweight individuals (46.4%) compared to Spain (52.6%) and for the low levels of people experiencing food insecurity (FOESSA, 2019). Nevertheless, there is still a presence of food banks and food aid organisations that provide food to vulnerable communities.

### 1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter 2 extends some of the themes touched upon here by offering a substantive review of the literature around LFIs, LFSs and their potentials. This is followed by a discussion of the research's theoretical and epistemological perspectives in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the methodology used for the study is presented, followed by three empirical chapters that present and analyse findings (Chapter 5, 6 and 7). Finally, Chapter 8 brings the thesis to a conclusion by drawing overall conclusions from the study. This section presents the structure of the thesis and critical issues that are addressed in each of the chapters.

Chapter 2 creates a basis to understand, conceptualise, and analyse LFSs and their outcomes. It begins by outlining how the literature review was conducted, followed by discussing the limitations and strengths of current approaches to study the interactions of LFIs. In doing so, this chapter argues for a system-based conceptualisation of LFSs that acknowledges power imbalances within and beyond LFSs and how this affects potential outcomes. In arguing for this perspective, the chapter then engages with literature on urban food governance, acknowledging the role of socio-institutional contexts in shaping the dynamics of LFSs. Following this, the central tensions found in the literature around LFIs are critically analysed, arguing for the need to investigate LFSs as imperfect processes influenced by multi-scalar dynamics. Based on this approach, the inclusion of LFIs usually marginalised within current scholarship, specifically food banks and pantries, is then justified. The last part of this chapter proposes food sovereignty as a valuable framework to address the gaps and limitations found in current literature, particularly in analysing the processes and outcomes of LFSs. A review of food sovereignty in local and alternative food scholarship is also presented to unpack essential considerations in its application for this research further discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm of the thesis, the theoretical issues it addresses and the conceptual framework that guides the whole research process. It begins by outlining and justifying the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective of this research – social constructionism and critical interactionism – based on the literature review findings. It argues that social constructionism and critical interactionism provide a bridge to analyse the socially

constructed meanings within LFSs and the scrutiny of the social structures that may be present in them. The second part of this chapter presents the conceptual framework comprising three main components: a food systems approach, urban political ecology, and food sovereignty. Drawing these theories together, the chapter introduces 'a political food systems approach for food sovereignty', which provides the basis for this research's main lines of inquiry.

Chapter 4 presents the approach to addressing the research objectives outlined in Section 1.4. In the first instance, the chapter outlines the applicability, suitability and type of case study methodology used following Stake's (2005) approach to instrumental collective case studies. This includes presenting the main case study questions that influenced the organisation of data collection and analysis. In particular, this chapter introduces the selection of cases, the study's boundaries, and data collection methods, which include semi-structured interviews, document analysis and participant observation. The final part of the chapter explains the method for data analysis and interpretation for within-case and cross-case results, which are based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework for thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 presents and analyses Preston's case findings. This chapter starts by outlining the context of Preston's case, before discussing the within-case results of the thematic analysis of the data collected in Preston. The findings follow a system-based analysis that identifies meta-themes structured according to the research's objectives. It starts with a micro-analysis of the discourses and approaches of LFIs to the internal and external dynamics (governance) of the LFS. Following the conceptual framework (Chapter 3), food sovereignty is used as a lens throughout the analysis. The discussion of the findings draws attention to the need of the democratisation of the processes to achieve change, whereby diverse and inclusive networks are constructed based on solidarity and affinity. In particular, it suggests that participatory multi-stakeholder processes closely linked to policy change might be a pathway for this goal, creating a foundation for discussing the findings of Vitoria-Gasteiz.

Chapter 6 focuses on analysing Vitoria-Gasteiz's case findings, starting by presenting the case in its social, political, natural and economic context. Building on the approach taken to Preston's case findings, this chapter aims to provide a narrative about the construction of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty from the composition of the LFS to the internal and external dynamics of LFSs and power relations. As with Preston's case results, food sovereignty is treated as a transversal theme that pervades the different processes of LFSs. The findings in this chapter point to several tensions and possible solutions that need to be addressed for LFSs to embed food sovereignty principles: diverse ideologies, pluralism within LFSs, and the constraining role of unfavourable socio-institutional environments. The discussion of these findings highlights the relevance of public-civil society alliances that follow actual participatory values (and not just consultation) for the co-construction of structural solutions.

The final empirical and analytical chapter of the thesis (Chapter 7) aims to expand on the discussions of the individual cases in a cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis explores the findings of individual case studies at a higher level of theoretical conceptualisation by identifying cross-case themes and sub-themes. Based on this analysis, this chapter illustrates a range of

processes derived from the contested circulation of material, social and capital resources within LFSs, mediated by multiple forms of power asymmetries and divergent values between LFIs and with other actors. Building on the lessons learnt from each case, the main objective of this chapter is to point to crucial transformative qualities with the capacity to alter these dynamics and assist in the delivery of food sovereignty. These include: a people-centred and territorial perspective, the dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions, and creating empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 8) discusses the most important lessons learnt from the analyses provided in the empirical and analytical chapters. Crucially, it focuses on how the study extends our knowledge on LFSs and food sovereignty and their implications for how we might progressively build more just and sustainable food systems in cities by building collaborative networks of LFIs. In doing so, it discusses three cross-cutting conclusions from the empirical chapters, which have broader relevance for current debates on LFSs: politicising LFSs, embedding reflexivity across LFSs and governance spaces, and promoting coproduction. Moreover, by reflecting on the findings, strengths and limitations of the study, the chapter provides key recommendations for research, practice and public policy.

## 1.7 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis provides an original and substantial contribution to knowledge by responding to the research aim and objectives presented in Section 1.3 through the development and application of the study's conceptual framework. In the first instance, the study's selection of cases and focus make an original contribution to debates about LFSs. Current research focuses primarily on specific case studies of individual LFIs rather than their collective contribution to food system transformation within a place. Moreover, there is limited critical literature on how the articulation of LFSs and their outcomes differ between cities with contrasting socio-institutional environments. In particular, there is insufficient evidence comparing the influence of established vs. embryonic or non-existent urban food governance processes on LFSs. This research fills this gap by comparing LFSs in two different geographical locations and socio-political contexts using an original conceptual framework, which combines urban political ecology with a food systems approach and includes food sovereignty as an outcome of the dynamics of LFSs. Urban political ecology and food sovereignty are significantly under-utilised in LFSs research.

Therefore, this thesis advances understanding of LFSs as it provides an in-depth understanding of LFSs, including an investigation of their components, internal dynamics and external determinants. Examining LFSs through the political food systems approach for food sovereignty helps identify the socio-political processes that articulate the dynamics of LFSs with a particular focus on power relations between LFIs and other organisations within LFSs. Significantly, it draws attention to not just assessing food sovereignty in relation to outcomes but really understanding the processes that lead to food sovereignty in different localities. In doing so, it advances thinking on the feedback loops of diverse configurations of LFSs and their internal mechanisms and how these affect the delivery of positive collective outcomes.

In making these contributions to knowledge, this study has implications for practice, public policy and academic spaces. It provides an analytical lens to examine the potential positive or negative effects of the dynamics of LFSs for food system transformation with a clear focus on power dynamics, providing critical insights into fundamental mechanisms needed to drive change within these systems. Notably, this study reveals the symbiotic nature of LFSs and their socio-institutional contexts. In this regard, using an instrumental collective case study methodology has facilitated the drafting of practice and policy recommendations from the study findings. By identifying lessons that bring about further understandings of phenomena, this methodology has aided the identification of crucial points that should be addressed in food policymaking and LFSs to address the current limitations of LFSs and urban food governance. At a crucial time of the need to change food systems, this research provides pathways by which LFSs could help develop fairer and more sustainable food systems.

# Chapter 2 CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTUALISING AND ANALYSING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertinent to the objectives of this research introduced in Chapter 1. It mostly relates to what is termed local/alternative food scholarship, which specifically studies LFIs, their outcomes and possible interactions, and its relationship with food sovereignty. As this research moves from a focus on individual LFIs to the collective formation of LFSs, one of the main aims of the literature review is to create a basis to understand, conceptualise, and analyse LFSs and their outcomes. In doing so, it informs the theoretical approach adopted for this research, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Section 2.2 explains how the literature review was conducted using a narrative approach. Following this, Section 2.3 examines current approaches to study LFSs, identifying their strengths and limitations. In doing so, Sub-section 2.3.1 argues that current conceptualisations of LFSs as a movement are not suitable to engage with the social processes that underpin the interactions between LFIs and their transformative potential. In this regard, this sub-section suggests that LFSs are better conceptualised through a system-based perspective. Moreover, it highlights a current gap in the literature regarding how LFSs lead to positive outcomes compared to individual efforts and the need to further explore power disparities within LFSs. Spurred by this notion and the fact that local socio-institutional environments influence the direction of LFSs, Sub-section 2.3.2 deals with how specific governance mechanisms such as urban food strategies or multi-stakeholder platforms have been championed as spaces for LFIs to coalesce. It highlights the need for caution in uncritically making such claims and for a broader knowledge base to understand their potential to build egalitarian LFSs, particularly in terms of place-based contingency and maturity.

Section 2.4 expands upon the introduction to LFIs and their attributed benefits in Chapter 1 to further conceptualise LFSs. Sub-section 2.4.1 examines the different counterarguments to LFIs developed in local/alternative food scholarship. On this point, it focuses on the three main aspects of LFIs found in the literature relating to their celebrated characteristics: localness, alternativeness, and justice. While this sub-section recognises that counterarguments to LFIs call for the use of a critical lens to analyse LFSs, it also demonstrates that this should be accompanied by a recognition of the influence that broader contextual processes have on LFS processes. Finally, Sub-section 2.4.2 argues that initiatives such as food banks, anti-hunger, and emergency food organisations – marginally featured in current local/ alternative food literature which tends to focus on the challenges and potentials of food relocalisation strategies – can also play an essential role in the contribution of LFSs to more just food systems.

Based on the previous sections, Section 2.5 introduces food sovereignty as an appropriate framework to address some of the weaknesses and gaps found in current literature. Sub-section 2.5.2 discusses the relevance of food sovereignty based on its attention to *how* a just and sustainable food system is achieved compared to only focusing on food security and sustainability, providing a more appropriate approach to analyse LFSs. Sub-section 2.5.3 then

examines research that has used food sovereignty in the context of LFIs and LFSs to further argue for food sovereignty's suitability for this study. The purpose of Section 2.5 is thus to examine food sovereignty as the relevant concept to be adopted in this research project and inform the analysis of LFSs. This provides the basis for a more critical engagement of food sovereignty in Chapter 3 to develop the conceptual framework of the study.

The overarching intention of the literature review is thus to develop a deep understanding of how the topic of LFSs and its components has been studied until now as well as their relations to food sovereignty, how research questions have been framed and what different approaches have been used to address them. Consequently, the literature review provides the foundation of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, which aims to build on the shortcomings and strengths of previous research and allows for the analysis of LFSs as an integrated network of LFIs within a place in terms of food sovereignty.

## 2.2 CONDUCTING THE LITERATURE REVIEW: NARRATIVE APPROACH

Given that this research includes many intersecting questions, such as the composition of LFSs and the relationship between LFSs and food sovereignty, a narrative literature review was chosen as the most suitable approach. This type of literature review does not have a restricted focus but can address one or more questions related to the research's objectives (Ferrari, 2015). This section discusses the nature of narrative reviews and how it was conducted in the context of this research.

Narrative literature reviews are a comprehensive synthesis and critical analysis of previous knowledge on a topic to identify current gaps and build a rationale for a study (Green et al., 2006). Compared to systematic reviews, or their simplified approach, rapid reviews, which formulate well-defined review questions and attempt to reanalyse data around this enquiry to collate and analyse the results (Ferrari, 2015), narrative reviews include one or more questions that can include a range of topics that closely relate to the research's aim. Narrative reviews include a critical examination of the articles included, which provokes questioning existing knowledge and helps to find a gap in the literature to set the context for a doctoral research study (Green et al., 2006). This flexible approach was considered the most appropriate because LFSs have been researched across many disciplines – particularly human geography, anthropology, sociology, political economy, and rural development. Although narrative literature reviews are widely used across disciplines such as public health, sociology, and education, a criticism levelled at them has been a perceived lack of rigour and explanation of the methods used in conducting them (Ferrari, 2015; Green et al., 2006). Therefore, increasingly, narrative reviews are following a more systematic approach to gathering and analysing the literature (Waterfield, 2018).

This study followed a partially structured approach to narrative reviews while acknowledging that the literature review for this study could not be oversimplified in one enquiry. Following the approach of Waterfield (2018), key concepts and theories within local/alternative food scholarship were identified to initiate a broad reading of the topic. These include alternative food networks (AFNs), alternative agri-food networks, alternative food initiatives, local food initiatives (LFIs), among others. At the same time, there is frequently no clear distinction between LFIs and

LFSs in the literature. However, increasingly, research uses the terms alternative food movement, local food movement, alternative food system, and local food networks to refer to LFSs. Consequently, literature searches initially included all the different permutations used for LFSs and LFIs identified by the researcher. This helped identify gaps in the literature to narrow down the review field.

After identifying a limited focus on the possible outcomes of the interactions of LFIs, the review focused on the relationship between LFSs and the attributed benefits of LFIs: food security and sustainability. Following an initial assessment of this literature and acknowledging the need to ascertain how different processes lead to positive outcomes, food sovereignty was identified as the most suitable framework for critically analysing LFSs (see Section 2.5). In its final stage, the literature review concentrated on the relationship between food sovereignty and LFSs. Table 2.1 outlines the search strategy developed based on these considerations. Food security and sustainability were still included in the search strategy to deepen background knowledge on their relationship with LFSs.

Table 2.1: Final search strategy for literature review

| Search strategy: |
| --- |
| ("alternative food network*" OR “local food system*" OR "local food network*" OR "community food system*" OR "community food network*" OR "local food initiative*" OR "community food initiative*" OR "local food movement" OR "alternative food movement" OR "alternative agri-food network*" OR "alternative agri-food initiative*" OR "alternative agri-food system*") AND (“sustainab*” OR “food security” OR “food sovereignty”) |

Literature searches were conducted in the following databases: Scopus, Google Scholar, Web of Science and ProQuest. Due to the diversity of disciplines studying LFIs and LFSs, databases were selected based on their multidisciplinary coverage of life sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The literature search was accompanied with backwards citation chasing, particularly for seminal work and to evaluate the origins and contradictions of concepts such as food security and food sovereignty. In other words, the bibliography of references for each study was examined to find new sources (Cooper et al., 2018). The literature review prioritised studies that examine the collection of LFIs within a place and their contribution to food sovereignty. In this sense, the literature review did not include studies on individual interactions within LFIs, such as consumer-producer relations or actors' motivations to engage with LFIs. Exceptions were made if studies were identified as a seminal work within local/alternative food scholarship/or could inform the purposes of this study.

## 2.3 THE DYNAMICS OF LOCAL FOOD SYTEMS AND THE ROLE OF CITIES

As explained in Chapter 1, many argue that the path towards food system transformation should be based on the coalition of dispersed efforts of LFIs (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Correspondingly, there is an emerging body of work concentrating on the

alliances of LFIs. As explained in Chapter 1, this study contributes to this body of knowledge by analysing the diversity of LFIs and their interactions in two cities. However, one of the challenges faced by a study such as this is how to conceptualise the collection of LFIs to analyse the construction of a broader coalition of practices which could promote food system change. Sub-section 2.3.1 evaluates the different literature strands regarding the analysis of LFSs as a collective of LFIs to understand how to analyse and conceive LFSs to expand knowledge on their potential benefits. In doing so, it highlights the apparent narrow focus of current studies that collectively examine LFIs, which does not widely include issues of power asymmetries within LFSs and the relationship between the internal processes of LFSs and potential outcomes. Building on this initial discussion and studies that draw attention to the role of local institutions in shaping LFSs, Sub-section 2.3.2 evaluates literature on governance mechanisms that aim to build synergies between different LFIs and other actors, such as local authorities, within a place.

### 2.3.1 How to Understand Local Food Systems

There is an ongoing debate about whether LFIs need to create a cohesive movement and build more substantial collective power to change the current food system (see Chapter 1). In particular, scholars often refer to different LFIs and their ideologies as part of a broader movement that strives to change food system configurations – the 'local or alternative food movement' (Levkoe, 2014; Morgan et al., 2009). However, many argue that this movement still has not coalesced. Friedland (2010) suggests that the lack of cohesion within the movement leads to few joint actions and non-recognition of affinity between organisations other than being alternative. At the same time, others claim that these diverse points of view are a positive aspect. Hassanein (2003) argues that due diversity in the 'local or alternative food movement' is not necessarily a negative characteristic. It can appeal to a varied range of citizens with different motivations and thus increase participation in food systems. Moreover, separate LFIs can fill different functions, complementing each other even without working closely together. Despite these different views, most authors agree that building coalitions to work on particular issues are crucial to effecting more significant change (Blay-Palmer et al., 2016; Hassanein, 2003; Kirwan et al., 2013).

The local or alternative food movement is perceived as merging a diversity of focuses and strategies of LFIs, particularly on how to achieve food security and sustainability, but with a unifying aim to provide alternatives to the conventional food system (Allen, 2014; Constance et al., 2014; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). The work of Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) is influential in this matter as they offer a typology of the efforts of LFIs, categorising them under the umbrellas of progressive or radical. For them, *progressive* movements advance practical strategies, mainly within the boundaries of the logics of the corporate food system, prioritising market-led solutions to current problems, which do not necessarily directly challenge the status quo. On the other hand, *radical* movements usually use militant political advocacy to seek structural changes to the food system. Under this umbrella, LFIs argue for the redistribution of wealth and power within the food system to advocate for a dismantling of the roots of current exploitative relations. Building on this, Di Masso and Zografos (2015) stress that the discourses and strategies attached to these diverse visions of social change are the main barriers to

developing alliances. Nevertheless, as is demonstrated later in this sub-section, the conceptualisation of the collection of LFIs as a movement misconceives the real-life dynamics of the construction of LFSs by regarding LFIs as static and unproblematically categorising them into narrow boxes. LFIs may advance both progressive, reformist, *and* radical ways of working, building coalitions according to the strategy (social mobilisation or practical avenues) needed for that particular moment. This obviates the everyday convergences between LFIs *despite* their differences in discourses and strategies.

Several studies have shown that there are many spaces where these dispersed LFIs can construct a broader food movement despite individual ideologies. For example, Ashe and Sonnino (2013) argue that a focus on a common issue – in this case, school food – may provide opportunities to overcome diverse discourses. Similarly, Levkoe (2014, 2015) suggests that common collective platforms, although potentially exacerbating tensions and power disparities between LFIs, can indeed provide opportunities to build connections between diverse LFIs and enhance their collective power. However, these spaces also present difficulties in fostering cohesive food movements. Bauermeister (2016) highlights that a lack of collective identity between LFIs hinders strong collaborations and trust among LFIs. This reveals some of the internal social processes and relations that LFSs may display, restricting or supporting collective action. However, this literature implies that for LFIs to collaborate and work conjointly, they need to have a common ground – either a common issue, identity or space – to form a coherent food movement with shared ideas and goals. By only focusing if the coalition of LFIs develops a movement, other forms of collaboration or interactions that do not necessarily have a clear direction are inadvertently disregarded as necessary in delivering meaningful impacts.

Levkoe and Wakefield (2013) argue that LFSs are better conceptualised as complex systems or assemblages. Their arrangement is related to diverse and dynamic self-organised network forms embedded in the cultural and political context from which they emerge. In this sense, LFIs driven by different ideologies can interact with each other through multiple avenues without being subordinated to the logic of a movement. However, this does not mean that impactful actions through collective projects and ideas are not produced. Rather than constantly seeking a strong joint mission or common ground, dispersed LFIs can create bridges (formal and informal) and engage in collaborative projects and, in doing so, also influence each other's goals and directions. This creates everyday spaces of engagement and contestation where new meanings emerge, potentially creating a collective voice across the heterogenous LFIs (Dwiartama & Piatti, 2016; Mars & Schau, 2019). This means that LFSs analysis needs to go beyond just investigating whether LFIs converge in ideologies and identities. As Mount (2012) argues, LFSs are not defined by the shared goals and values of LFIs, but by the processes through which goals and values come to be shared.

In this regard, Lamine (2015) proposes a territorial perspective that follows a system-based approach to LFSs, which builds on the idea that LFSs are territorial assemblages constructed by a wide range of LFIs in constant interaction. Lamine's (2015) territorial proposal focuses on the leading social actors and institutions that are key to the sustainability transitions of a place, their interactions and interdependencies, and the conditions that favour or hinder this convergence,

including the socio-economic and political context. As such, it imagines LFIs as interconnected efforts with collective trajectories without necessarily having an established collective identity, as it focuses on the processes of the formation of LFSs (Lamine et al., 2019; Reina-Usuga et al., 2020). This research follows Lamine's (2015) proposal of a systemic approach to LFSs research due to its recognition of complexity and heterogeneity within LFSs, which does not expect that LFIs need to fully converge for LFSs to function. In this regard, the definition proposed by Feenstra and Campbell (2013) of LFSs as "a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of particular places" (p. 1) is adopted to understand the intricate dynamics within LFSs, which also considers the underpinning values of LFIs explained in Chapter 1. Chapter 3 further unpacks the implications of this conceptualisation for the focus of the study.

Although contributing to understanding LFSs as formed through the relations between LFIs, the previously discussed studies usually fall short in analysing the controversies and trade-offs within LFSs. Significantly, the reasons behind collaborations or the exclusion of alliances are usually not explicitly addressed in local/alternative food scholarship. This issue has also been raised by a recent systematic literature review conducted by Kang et al. (2022). Providing a more in-depth understanding of the underpinning mechanisms of the formation of LFSs, Sbicca et al. (2019) and Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) demonstrate that LFSs are assembled according to uneven resource balances of money, land and labour between their components. As such, LFIs need to navigate differences in power and influence via resource exchange, which influences the priorities advanced by LFSs as a whole. LFIs may need to adapt their work according to the expectations and agendas of more dominant players who can provide resources or act as gatekeepers within LFSs such as local authorities (Sbicca et al., 2019). This can eventually constrain their potential to align with other LFIs, as unequal resource distribution means frequent competition amongst each other. Paradoxically, informal and formal networks within LFSs are essential to leverage capacity to defend interests and avoid a depoliticised engagement with powerful actors (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014). However, LFIs might still need to meet specific criteria to participate in these networks, creating an uneven landscape of opportunities to surpass individual barriers (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014). The construction of LFSs thus concerns much more than the willingness of LFIs to create alliances or transcend their respective ideologies; an array of intricate dynamics that relate to resource distribution and the position of LFIs within LFSs also play an essential role.

Consequently, while using a systemic approach to analyse LFSs is crucial, the contested processes by which LFSs are organised should also have a central role in any study. Attention to these dynamics enhances understanding of the ways in which LFSs might influence transitions in current systems, as Duncan and Pascucci (2017) argue. However, there is still a lack of attention to the interlinks between the contested processes within LFSs and potential outcomes in the literature. This study aims to fill this gap by applying a critical analysis of LFSs uneven dynamics with explicit consideration of how this affects the possibility of creating more just and sustainable food systems through the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 3. Moreover, as seen in this sub-section, power dynamics between LFSs and dominant players such as local authorities can constrain or enhance the goals and function of LFSs and thus their outcomes. Indeed, the

articulation of LFSs is influenced by supportive local socio-institutional environments, which are imperative in advancing food relocalisation and fostering partnerships between LFIs (Guareschi et al., 2020; Silver et al., 2017). The following sub-section examines the emerging role of urban food governance mechanisms as a catalyst of the formation of interconnected LFSs, which usually concern a greater involvement of local authorities in supporting connected LFSs for food systems change.

### 2.3.2 Urban Food Governance and Local Food Systems

While there is still a lack of a clear definition, urban food governance usually refers to strategies and multi-stakeholder platforms that cities have developed to address the adverse effects of the conventional food system (Sonnino & Beynon, 2015; Sonnino, 2009). Although providing a starting point to identify urban food governance mechanisms, recent literature warns against this ambiguous definition (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021). This critique is based on the lack of specificity of analytical and research focus, conflating food policymaking at the city level, which integrates a specific group of actors that aim to set out a direction for the city's food system, and a city's food governance, which includes multi-scalar processes that directly or indirectly influence food policies, such as national corporate consolidation.

Building on previous food governance literature (Moragues-Faus et al., 2017), this study defines urban food governance as the operational and decision-making mechanisms (modes of governing) that steer changes within LFSs. This definition considers the governance and policy conditions that favour or hinder the creation of cohesive LFSs, acknowledging the influence of different levels (local, regional and national) of policymaking in this process. In particular, it emphasises the role of urban food governance mechanisms in LFSs, such as local food policymaking and multi-stakeholder governance structures (both formal and informal), due to their explicit aim of influencing the dynamics of LFSs, as will be explained in the following paragraphs. These urban food governance mechanisms are in turn influenced by broader governance processes in cities, such as the influence of conventional food system actors and economic planning decisions in the direction of LFSs and policies (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021). This means that the dynamics of LFSs include more than just the collection of LFIs; LFSs are also shaped by urban food governance mechanisms and local, regional and national governance processes.

There are two main governance mechanisms that cities use to drive food system transformation: food policy councils and urban food strategies (Sonnino & Spayde, 2014). Although food policy councils can take many forms, be steered by civil society or municipalities, they mainly relate to multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together LFIs, local governmental departments, the private sector and civil society groups (Schiff, 2008). These spaces of deliberation are usually devised to produce, or are connected to implementing, urban food strategies, which can be understood as a participatory process of partnership-building within LFSs or strategic policy documents (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Moragues-Faus, 2017a). This sub-section discusses the literature concerning urban food governance mechanisms and their potential to build interconnected LFSs by fostering coalitions of diverse LFIs. Doing so builds the foundation to

understand how favourable socio-institutional environments influence the delivery of positive outcomes through LFSs.

Over the years, the potential of urban food governance mechanisms has been widely documented. Wiskerke (2009) states that they can create synergies within LFSs, with one leadership body driving this convergence (Haysom, 2015). Given the limited capacities of LFIs to manage governance instruments, it is usually argued that local authorities should advance a leadership role (Baldy & Kruse, 2019; Lopez-Garcia et al., 2020a; Van de Griend et al., 2019). Indeed, many city councils have introduced urban food strategies, which take a systemic approach to urban food issues (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013). Urban food strategies are usually conceived as policy frameworks that state a city's vision of its desirable urban food system by outlining recommended activities to reach these objectives (Candel, 2020; Moragues-faus et al., 2013; Smaal et al., 2021). Although some authors restrict urban food strategies to specific documents or plans (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013), more recent literature advances a conceptualisation that follows a relational approach. The focus is on the multi-actor *process* by which the vision of a city's food system is developed, extending the analysis beyond specific policy instruments (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021; Sadler et al., 2015). A relational approach to the study of urban food governance mechanisms is particularly important. It shifts the focus towards the dynamics of policymaking that might affect the articulation of LFSs, with particular emphasis on the diverse roles of LFIs and public institutions in shaping urban food strategies. As seen in Sub-section 2.3.1, special attention to the contested dynamics of the formation of LFSs is needed to better understand the possibility of building alliances between LFIs.

Urban food strategies usually coalesce in their aim to relocalise food systems by building inclusive horizontal (within LFSs) and vertical (with higher governance levels) relations (Sonnino & Beynon, 2015). Besides facilitating the networking and implementation capacity of LFIs, many interventions include public food procurement, reconnecting consumers and producers, and creating rural-urban bridges (Sonnino & Mendes, 2018). In particular, urban food strategies can create 'transformative' or 'safe enough spaces' in which several actors, including LFIs, engage in a contested process of learning and unlearning, challenging individual paradigms, towards the construction of a common goal (Pereira et al., 2020; Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). This means that a favourable socio-institutional environment legitimised through urban food governance mechanisms, such as urban food strategies, can help develop cohesive LFSs. As explained in Chapter 1 and Sub-section 2.3.1, recent literature argues that the synergies of LFIs broaden understanding of wider structural issues of the food system and enhance analysis and impact, particularly if it is connected to policy change. As such, although local authorities define the opportunities for LFSs through urban food governance mechanisms, these tools can also become spaces of experimentation and decision-making that can change broader food system processes (Medina-García et al., 2022).

While signalling that favourable socio-institutional environments can bring convergence within LFSs, most of the literature on urban food governance mechanisms consists of descriptive celebratory studies of their development. As Lang at al. (2009) remind us, food policymaking is a social construct – a manifestation of historical and contextual dynamics of policy change and the

interests of different actors and institutions. Urban food governance dynamics will thus be influenced by the socio-political contexts in which these are embedded and the social processes within these spaces, constraining or enhancing their directions and possible outcomes. For example, studies are increasingly illustrating the multi-level governance tensions between national and local levels of policymaking, constraining the potential of urban food governance mechanisms (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Moragues-Faus & Carroll, 2018; Parsons et al., 2021). In this sense, recent literature calls for an acknowledgement of the different challenges faced in using urban food governance mechanisms to democratise food systems and increasing social cohesion in LFSs (Moragues-Faus, 2020; Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). This means paying attention to why specific aims are adopted, who fosters the adoption of policy contents, and what limitations this entails to transform food systems. Although there is still limited knowledge in this area (Medina-García et al., 2022), these considerations have progressively been introduced in more critical scholarship.

Studies increasingly demonstrate that urban food strategies and food policy councils are limited by contextual, mainly political, influences such as shifting electoral cycles, party political agendas, limited municipal powers and resources (Hebinck & Page, 2017; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Morley & Morgan, 2021). Significantly, their implementation partially relies on local authorities' resources, influenced by the political support available for these processes. As the rules and framing of urban food governance mechanisms are usually in the hands of public institutions, there is a risk of creating an uneven landscape in the co-production of urban food strategies and policies (Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). In this regard, Buchan et al. (2019) highlight the importance of value alignment between LFIs and local authorities to create significant policy windows for cohesive LFSs. For this, 'policy entrepreneurs' or 'food champions' – motivated and influential individuals or groups within or outside local authorities – are vital in creating connections and trusted public-civil society relations to influence policy (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). Notably, in the case of collective food policy entrepreneurship (Giambartolomei et al., 2021), the role of networks of LFIs becomes salient if they employ what Clark et al. (2021) call 'the power to convene' (p. 187) – using institutional opportunities to align resources and co-design strategies with the aim of changing governance dynamics and normative discourses. Sonnino et al. (2014) refer to this process as 'reflexive governance', emphasising public-private dialogue, collective action, and collaboration. This signals the need for measures to ensure political support and thus increase the allocation of public resources to durable governance initiatives supporting LFSs that resist changing policy views.

However, securing political support is not a conflict-free path. Urban food governance mechanisms could indeed contribute to increased value convergence and closer relationships between LFIs and public authorities due to their participatory nature. Nevertheless, tensions between LFIs and local institutions can still arise due to diverse orientations to participatory processes. Participation of LFIs in policymaking may feel more like 'tokenism' than an active co-production of food policies (Andrée et al., 2019; Coplen & Cuneo, 2015). At the same time, there are different degrees to which LFIs can engage in governance spaces due to funding disparities within LFSs, which limit the capacity of LFIs to act politically (Cohen & Reynolds, 2014). In response, it is argued that a way to foster decentralised power structures in these systems is to

develop citizen-driven participatory processes, where public institutions facilitate meaningful opportunities for LFIs input without controlling or co-opting the process of policy change (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2020a; Sadler et al., 2015). However, as will be seen next, this does not mean that tensions within these structures nor their limitations for building LFSs are completely addressed.

Recent work highlights that power, agency, resource distribution, and voice permeate the role of LFIs within urban food governance. The discourses used in and who initiates urban food governance tools can influence the approach taken by them and thus who is included in discussions even if the process is citizen-led (Andrée et al., 2019; Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2021). For example, studies report a risk of creating elite spaces with limited accessibility for several groups within multi-stakeholder food policy platforms (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). Increasingly literature is questioning the social justice objectives of urban food strategies due to the lack of consideration and participation of vulnerable groups in their formulation, such as low-income communities or those at risk of exclusion (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2020b). Moreover, de-politicised discourses and a lack of clear objectives limit the capacity to attract radical LFIs and organisations beyond an initial steering group (Cretella, 2019; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). This illustrates the micropolitics within urban food governance mechanisms, highlighting potential exclusionary characteristics. Indeed, Koski et al. (2018) argue that urban food governance mechanisms can only be as diverse and transformative as they want to be, constraining their capacity to build more inclusive LFSs.

Overall, the literature signals the relevant role of local authorities in building supportive socio-institutional environments through urban food governance mechanisms. However, it also raises the need to assess the roles of and relationships between public actors and LFIs and the social processes and power relations that support or hinder their implementation. As argued by Manganelli et al. (2019), special attention needs to be given to tensions in organisational differences, resource mobilisation and institutional frameworks. Analysing these tensions in the context of urban food governance processes can shed light on the instances where reflexivity and opportunities for collective action within LFSs arise (Manganelli, 2020). However, despite enhancing the lens through which LFSs should be studied, the analysed literature has limitations in understanding the dynamics between urban food governance and LFSs. By focusing on already established and more formal structures, these studies only paint a partial landscape of LFSs, which might include more governance spaces than those outlined in the literature (Minotti et al., 2022). Moreover, there is little understanding of how the articulation of LFSs differs between cities with well-established vs embryonic urban food governance mechanisms. This study aims to address this gap by specifically concentrating on the construction of LFSs in two different cities with differing urban food governance journeys (see Chapter 4). Providing a deeper understanding of these issues is crucial to grasp which processes can harness collective efforts to food system change and to enrich understanding of what constitutes and leads to interconnected LFSs.

To continue the conceptualisation and focus of LFSs advanced thus far, the following section builds on the diversity of LFIs introduced in Chapter 1, drawing on the critical scholarship of LFIs and highlighting the missing practices within this literature. As Tregear (2011) argues, research on LFSs and LFIs needs to acknowledge that these umbrella terms encompass a set of

heterogenous practices that exhibit specific properties according to their pursued goals. In doing so, the following section continues to develop how LFSs should be studied to analyse their potential for change accurately.

## 2.4 COMPONENTS OF LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

As explained in Chapter 1, LFIs usually converge in their aim to reconnect different aspects of the food system by engaging in the relocalisation of food through multiple avenues and levels. Through this restructuring of food system relations, LFIs are regarded as having beneficial effects on sustainability and food security in a locality (Mount, 2012). For example, LFIs are argued to ensure fairer economic returns to farmers due to reducing players in food supply chains (Cleveland et al., 2015; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Renting et al., 2003). LFIs can also bring agriculture closer to ecological processes, building trustful and respectful relations, and improving communities' capacities to access healthier food (Kirwan, 2004; Kneafsey et al., 2017; Watts et al., 2005). Significantly, some LFIs have been attributed the potential of redistributing power within agri-food governance by reclaiming new political and inclusive governance spaces (Renting et al., 2012). LFIs are thus promoted as a means to repair the 'metabolic rift' or 'epistemic rift' in food systems (Sage & Kenny, 2017; Schneider & McMichael, 2010) – the disconnection between consumption and production and loss of situated food knowledge, control and practices in the search for increased productivity. In this sense, food relocalisation processes are believed to eliminate the negative impacts of the conventional food system and in doing so meet relevant sustainability and food security goals by engaging in food sovereignty processes (see Section 2.5).

Nevertheless, a burgeoning body of literature has questioned the capacity of LFIs to drive meaningful change beyond progressive strategies due to their contradictory reliance on market-based and conventional food system structures. Based on a review of this literature, which challenges optimistic readings of LFIs, Sub-section 2.4.1 discusses what this means for increasing knowledge on LFIs and LFSs. This provides important guidelines for analysing the potential outcomes of LFSs and clarifies the need for a critical lens to do this well. Following this, Sub-section 2.4.2 builds an argument to expand the current conceptualisation of LFIs – the components of LFSs – to include food banks, anti-hunger, and emergency food organisations, usually marginalised in local/alternative food scholarship. This section is thus the final step in understanding how to analyse LFSs in the context of this research, informing the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3 and the selection of food sovereignty as a lens to analyse their potentials (see Section 2.5).

### 2.4.1 Shared Tensions of Local Food Initiatives

LFIs and LFSs tend to be championed as a pathway to deliver food systems that meet food security and sustainability goals. This is mainly because food relocalisation is often assumed to be a counterproposal and alternative to conventional food system (Cerrada-Serra et al., 2018). However, critical approaches warn that this has led to an 'idealisation' of LFIs without considering their real dynamics (Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017). Different counterarguments have emerged that challenge the notion that LFIs inherently generate positive changes. This sub-

section analyses the three main interconnected counterarguments that can be found in the literature which shape several debates: the local scale is not inherently better; LFIs do not always display alternative characteristics; and LFIs do not necessarily lead to structural changes and social justice. While other counterarguments within local food literature may exist (see Bruce & Som Castellano, 2017; Edwards, 2016; Mares, 2017; Turkkan, 2019; Weiler et al., 2016), this sub-section concentrates on these three as they are the most prominent in the literature. Although these debates refer to individual LFIs, they still help develop a process for how LFSs should be analysed. As seen in Sub-section 2.3.1, the characteristics of LFSs are affected by the difference in ideologies and motivations of LFIs as well as their position within them.

First, some scholars have demonstrated that the local scale is not free from the different relationships of power within a place (Allen et al., 2003). LFIs can still maintain pre-existing inequalities and exclude certain parts of the population. Hinrichs (2000) argues that local-level connections do not exist in an isolated vacuum and therefore are in a dialectical relationship with global processes, building dynamic and interconnected systems. Accordingly, LFIs can also be influenced by market logics and corporate food system's power relations, whereby middle-class, educated consumers have more power and privilege than farmers or less-advantaged consumers. Winter (2003) also points out that LFIs showcase exclusionary practices leading to a 'defensive localism' (p. 26) where the drive towards relocalisation is the protection from external forces or people that do not correspond to certain community characteristics. Moreover, if local production requires enormous water inputs due to contextual circumstances, any ecological benefits of reduced producer-consumer distance could be outweighed (Born & Purcell, 2006). Thus, the local characteristic of LFIs and, in turn, LFSs should be treated with caution; LFSs and their outcomes will always be highly place-contingent, constructed by the social relations and power dynamics of the involved actors and based on socio-ecological interactions.

The second counterargument relates to the conceptualisation of LFIs as displaying alternative or oppositional characteristics compared to the conventional food system. Treager (2011) argues that this delineation is extremely blurred; LFIs do not necessarily work within these limits but rather lie somewhere on a continuum depending on specific circumstances. LFIs may showcase conventional behaviours and sell their products to corporate food chains due to the limited income from alternative food channels (Goodman et al., 2012). The relevance of this discussion is that when analysing LFSs, the focus should be on the complex dynamics within LFSs, acknowledging that LFIs do not necessarily stand in dichotomous contrast with the conventional food system. As Treager (2011) explains, the ongoing use of the alternative-corporate binary can lead to unfruitful debates of 'this practice is alternative' and 'this one is not' or induce screening for authenticity. This will most likely have a narrow focus on conventional-alternative differentiations rather than on the actual benefits that LFSs bring to the places where they operate. Moreover, it potentially overlooks LFIs within LFSs that do not appear to follow presumed alternative values and practices. Eventually, this narrow focus disregards the examination of the actual reasons why LFIs and LFSs are celebrated in the first place: their potential to induce food systems change.

The last counterargument challenges the notion that LFIs can create more just food systems. Some scholars question the transformative potential of LFIs and contend that LFIs perpetuate injustices within the food system (Allen, 2004; Cody, 2015; Guthman, 2008a; Mares & Alkon, 2011; Simon-Rojo, 2019). This refers mainly to what this research calls the 'neoliberal trap' of LFIs. That is, LFIs might contribute to the "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In this regard, Allen (2010) argues that LFIs could potentially depoliticise food and social justice because of their focus on consumer choice, market-based solutions, and personal responsibility. These dynamics risk engendering systems in which entrepreneurial initiatives create expensive niche food options that exclude those who cannot afford them (Allen, 1999; Johnston, 2008; Levkoe, 2011). LFIs can thus potentially obviate the need for structural changes to create sustainable and just food systems and at the end not address the root causes of the negative effects of the conventional food system.

These counterarguments highlight the need to uncover underlying social structures and conflicts within LFIs and LFSs. This means that LFSs should not be presumed to inherently lead to positive benefits, especially when LFIs may display different motivations than those documented in the literature. However, this does not suggest regarding all LFIs as insufficient to drive change. This risks overlooking their potentials due to a deterministic reading of their potential outcomes (Sarmiento, 2017). Many LFIs do not aim to reproduce conventional or unjust forms. Regardless of the intentions of LFIs to address justice or sustainability issues, they might still have to work within the corporate food system to ensure their survival (Allen, 2008; Hodgins & Fraser, 2018), limiting radical approaches. Taking this into consideration means understanding the potential of these initiatives, looking at their claimed objectives and underlying values, but also what they have achieved in their name, whilst at the same time acknowledging the challenges for the full expression of this potential (Rossi, 2017). This is in the belief that by starting from this position, the benefits of LFSs can be understood from the contribution they make to surpass the shortcomings of LFIs and their potential for a broader process of transition to more just and sustainable food systems.

Building on the arguments presented above, this thesis develops the notion of a reflexive local politics of food proposed by DuPuis and Goodman (2005) that focuses on processes and examining the 'politics in place' to understand LFSs. This approach, which will be further developed in Chapter 3, emphasises the analysis of the dynamic interaction between local forms of socio-spatial organisation and global processes rather than being in opposition or isolation to them. As a result, it does not presume inherent positive benefits attached to LFIs and LFSs but acknowledges that they are the outcome of imperfect processes highly contingent on contextual conditions. Through these imperfect processes, there is an opportunity to learn and further advance towards a pursued goal, introducing a reflexive effort to discuss and apply different ways of changing local realities (Goodman et al., 2012). Significantly, this approach moves from a narrow focus on open-ended goals to a focus on the different realities and hybrid forms of convergence between LFIs that influence potential place-based outcomes. The formation of LFSs, in turn, is inseparable from other systems and processes involved in food production,

consumption, distribution, and waste. Building on this, the next sub-section raises the need to broaden the conceptualisation of what constitutes a LFI in the context of this research to fully grasp the dynamics and possibilities for change within LFSs.

### 2.4.2 Missing Components

While the theorisations of LFIs discussed in Chapter 1 contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the LFIs that may interact within LFSs, something that seems to be lacking in the local/alternative food scholarship is the role of food banks, anti-hunger, and emergency food organisations. Generally, these types of LFIs, peripheral to the alternative discourse in the literature, have been discussed in another branch of food-related scholarly work and are regarded as insufficient solutions to food-related issues by alternative food proponents.

Poppendieck's work on food banking in *Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (1999) has been one of the most influential in developing an understanding of the limitations of food banks, anti-hunger, and emergency food organisations. Poppendieck's critique revolves around seven deadly 'ins': *inaccessibility*, *inadequacy*, *inappropriateness*, *indignity*, *inefficiency*, *insufficiency*, and *instability* (McIntyre et al., 2016). Since then, these organisations have been regarded as not ensuring equitable access to nutritious food adequately. It has been argued that food banks mainly distribute ultra-processed or canned food to their beneficiaries (Vitiello, et al., 2015). Critics also claim that these organisations simultaneously reinforce inequalities and injustices in the food system, benefitting big corporations along the way and fostering short-term projects that focus on emergency patchwork, creating dependant and passive recipients of charity (Allen, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2016). In this regard, scholars have framed these types of initiatives as a 'second-tier' system (Davis & Tarasuk, 1994; van der Horst et al., 2014), filled with problems of stigmatisation, and raising issues of who deserves access to food (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015; Lambie-Mumford, 2013; Purdam et al., 2016). Because of these reasons, Holt-Giménez and Shattuck (2011) refer to these LFIs as part of the *reformist* movement within the conventional food system, as they do not focus on addressing the root causes of hunger and structural change.

Providing another view, McEntee (2010) argues that food relocalisation does not necessarily need to be guided by ethical or market motivations and that food banks, anti-hunger and food aid organisations can also play a part in this process. Atypical LFIs could be guided by other rationalities, such as the basic need to obtain fresh and affordable food without an underlying motivation for change in the food system. Although perhaps not reconfiguring food system structures, these LFIs can still reconnect people with their food environment and search for new avenues for food distribution when working collaboratively with other LFIs (Dodd & Nelson, 2018; Som Castellano, 2017). Indeed, considering the potential 'exclusive' character of more established LFIs like farmers markets, many non-profit food charities are starting to work in conjunction with LFIs working on shortening food supply chains. Emergency food charities, such as food banks or pantries have started to build alliances with local farmers to cater to low-income communities, promote food-growing capacities among its service users, or develop gleaning, gardening and farming programs (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Brinkley, 2017; McEntee & Naumova,

2012; Vitiello et al., 2015). This allows 'peripheral' LFIs, usually excluded from local/alternative food discourses, to take on new roles in LFSs, thus helping achieve more just and sustainable food systems.

Therefore, these practices should not be excluded from research on LFSs. Excluding them would only paint a partial or incomplete picture of LFSs. These LFIs add a new layer to the heterogeneity of practices and their different rationalities, and as Maye (2013) suggests, open up LFIs research to broader debates such as community development. However, for LFSs to be more inclusive, access to sustainable or local food should not be granted solely through the limited means of charities or emergency food agencies and the willingness of LFIs to donate food. Guthman et al. (2006) argue that food recovery will not solve inequalities in food access. Indeed, many of the critiques to emergency food provision still apply to these new 'local food-charity' partnerships, as the only change made is the source of food. Alongside the acknowledgement that these new collaborations start to introduce vulnerable communities to LFSs and thus slightly address justice issues, it is important again to see the goals and strategies achieved within these collaborations and how they move beyond just providing surplus food to low-income communities through charity models. In other words, the issue of justice discussed in the previous sub-section will only be addressed if these collaborations do not create a 'two-tier' system within LFSs, one for those with adequate money, which includes all the positive aspects of LFIs, and a surplus one for the poor, which reinforces the detrimental characteristics of emergency food.

Two conclusions can be drawn based on the arguments provided in Section 2.4, which lead to the discussion in the next section. First, while it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of LFIs within a LFS, LFSs still need to be analysed in an open way to avoid pre-imposing specific attributes or benefits within and between different LFIs. This study addresses this consideration through the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3. The second conclusion is that it is imperative to include a critical lens in the analysis of the outcomes of LFSs, including a deep analysis of social justice considerations in assessing what the alliances of LFIs are aiming to or currently achieve. The following section introduces food sovereignty as the right framework to do so, building on the drawbacks of other concepts used in local/alternative food scholarship. Significantly, it draws attention to food sovereignty's value in capturing the spaces of possibility within LFSs while still being critical in the strategies advanced to build just and sustainable food systems. Moreover, it also starts to point on how it should be used in this research based on previous studies[2].

## 2.5 CHOOSING THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK TO ANALYSE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS' OUTCOMES: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The literature review has illustrated thus far that the analysis of the collective impact of LFIs should focus on the different forms of convergence between LFIs and how these dynamics influence potential transformative place-based outcomes. This section highlights that the

[2] As explained in Section 2.1, a deeper engagement of how the concept of food sovereignty is understood and used for the analysis of LFSs takes place in Chapter 3. Such division has been made in order to provide a clear trajectory of how the conceptual framework was developed based on the literature review findings.

concepts usually used to discuss the potentials of LFIs and LFSs – food security and sustainability – are not particularly useful for this undertaking. Food sovereignty is proposed as a radical approach to restructuring food systems, which considers the role of LFIs and LFSs in this process, and thus as a framework to assess the potential outcomes of LFSs. As explained in previous sections, a more in-depth engagement with the concept of food sovereignty and its use for this research will be presented in Chapter 3. In this sense, the concept of food sovereignty is introduced first in Sub-section 2.5.1 from a more normative perspective to discuss its relationship and difference between sustainability and food security in Sub-section 2.5.2. Sub-section 2.5.3 ends with a synthesis of previous studies that have used food sovereignty to analyse LFIs and LFSs, building a starting point from which to articulate a critical adaptation of food sovereignty for this research further discussed in Chapter 3.

### 2.5.1 Introducing Food Sovereignty

There is a lot of ambiguity in the literature about what exactly food sovereignty entails. Therefore, in order to outline its suitability for assessing LFSs, this sub-section briefly introduces the main characteristics of food sovereignty; Sub-section 2.5.2 then moves on to discuss its relationship with sustainability and food security, arguing for its use in this research.

The concept of food sovereignty has evolved and transformed since its origins. It was first introduced and brought to global attention at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996 by La Via Campesina (LVC), an international peasant movement that joins together a range of organisations from different countries and focusses on promoting alternatives to the globalised corporate food system (Wittman, 2009). As initially conceptualised by LVC, food sovereignty was a collective struggle deeply rooted in the lives of peasants, Indigenous peoples, and small farmers. Thus, initially, food sovereignty had a strong emphasis on national self-sufficiency as a contestation to the global hegemony of food supply chains and dependency of developing countries to global markets, which marginalised farmers (Agarwal, 2014; Bernstein, 2014). Throughout the years, food sovereignty has broadened its reach to include issues of food consumption and environmental concerns beyond rural areas and global south struggles, including access to food and local food supply chains in urban settings in the global north (Wittman, 2012). However, the cross-cutting premise of food sovereignty continues to be the contestation of the corporate food regime, embedded in a global struggle for the empowerment of peoples that are affected by this model.

From this coalition of different political and justice struggles throughout the years, the concept has become a holistic framework or pathway towards more just and sustainable food systems, as elaborated in the Nyéléni declaration of the forum for food sovereignty, held by LVC in 2007:

> "Food sovereignty is the **right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food** produced through **ecologically sound and sustainable methods**, and their **right to define** their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies **rather than the demands of markets and corporations**". (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007, p.1)

From this definition, it can be deduced that food sovereignty involves shifting power within food systems away from the actors of the corporate food regime described in Chapter 1 (McMichael, 2009). To do so, food sovereignty prioritises the collective building of local economies and markets based on environmental, social and economic sustainability that ensure relations free of oppression and inequality (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Although the strategic focuses of food sovereignty vary depending on contextual specificities and aims of who uses it, the International Panel for Food Sovereignty (IPC) relates these to four primary areas of work: the right to food, access to productive resources, socially just and environmentally sustainable food production, local trade and markets (Windfuhr & Jonsén, 2005). As such, it calls for the democratisation of decision-making processes by placing power with those that produce and consume food and guaranteeing the right to food through the relocalisation of food systems and promotion of farmers as the drivers of agricultural change. In other words, food sovereignty is inherently connected to potential benefits of LFIs discussed in Chapter 1 and Section 2.4.

However, food sovereignty not only relates to LFIs and LFSs because of the main strategies promoted through its political project. As Wittman (2012) argues, food sovereignty involves an ethical framework based on control over and access to food – i.e. the food system – as an element of the convergence of a diverse set of rights: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental. In this manner, food sovereignty advocates pursuing fundamental social change using food and agriculture as a vector (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). Bringing a critical perspective to understand food system relations, food sovereignty questions who holds power within food systems, whose voices are heard in the structuring of food supply chains, and for whom food systems are shaped (Figueroa, 2015). By explicitly envisaging the food systems that LFSs may help construct, including the shift of control and power to local communities through inclusive processes, it helps to critically assess the strategies advanced in building just and sustainable food systems. Building on this notion, the next section evaluates how food sovereignty creates a pathway to sustainability and food security grounded on a radical food system transformation, rendering it a useful framework to analyse LFSs.

### 2.5.2 The Relationship between Food Sovereignty, Food Security and Sustainability

The terms sustainability and food security have arguably become a banner to encourage the growth of LFIs and LFSs, with LFIs also using them as guiding frames for their actions (Dwiartama & Piatti, 2016; Feagan, 2007; Kirwan & Maye, 2013; Lohest et al., 2019). Indeed, as seen in Chapter 1 and Section 2.4, the promotion of LFIs and LFSs as alternative ways to drive change relate to their potential to ensure access to sustainable food through economic and socially just strategies. However, as argued in Sub-section 2.4.1, the transformative capacity of LFIs is still disputed and there is still little clarity on how interconnected LFSs can help address individual LFIs' limitations to build transformative change. This section argues that, while food security and sustainability have been commonly used to analyse the LFIs and LFSs transformative potential (see Brunori et al., 2016; Cerrada-Serra et al., 2018; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015; Mastronardi et al., 2019; Vittersø et al., 2019), food sovereignty provides a better framework to do so. It still includes the pursuit for food security and sustainability, but it engages with questions on how to do so while aiming to change oppressive and unjust food systems' structures.

The concept of food security has evolved and diversified over the years, oscillating between a focus on securing enough food supply to encompass individual- and household level concerns, including the importance of livelihoods and community wellbeing (Sonnino et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it is consistently regarded as: "a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 2002, p. 49). This definition divides food security into four dimensions: food availability (ensuring supply), food access (economic, physical and social), food utilisation (ensuring nutrition), and stability of the other three dimensions over time (FAO, 2006). Although these dimensions provide some guidance, at its core food security constitutes a goal that does not necessarily favour any agenda (Clapp, 2014b). As an open-concept, food security can be used to make different, and even oppositional, claims depending on the meaning it holds for people and organisations. Mooney & Hunt (2009) thus postulate the concept as a 'consensus frame', which finds wide agreement and acceptance on its objectives but discrepancies on how to best achieve it.

Sustainability is a similar normative, yet more ambiguous, concept that provides broad guidance for changing food systems (Allen & Prosperi, 2016; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015). The term emerged from the notion of sustainable development defined by the Brundtland Report of the United Nations (U.N.) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987, p. 43 in O'Kane & Wijaya, 2015). This standard definition of sustainable development was further expanded during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development to incorporate the three mutually dependent and reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – (Kates et al., 2005), present until now in international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN General Assembly, 2015). Overall, although sustainability has evolved, there is a widely acknowledged consensus that sustainability must be achieved by attempting to search for mutually supportive benefits and considerable gains among the different pillars that constitute it (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015). Nonetheless, how these three dimensions should be approached in practice is still an ongoing debate (Gibson, 2009). Due to the inherent discursive and uncertain nature of sustainability, as Maxey (2007) highlights, there is a tendency to seek for balance among these three pillars or to prioritise some dimensions above others, trading off values among them. This means that sustainability could be reached via different paths depending on the interpretation of sustainability of those involved.

The lack of prescription about how to achieve the proposed goals of sustainability and food security has been argued to be a strength because it offers flexibility when applied to different situations and contexts (Gibson, 2009). However, it also means that food security and sustainability can be used to accept strategies that do not necessarily address the root causes of injustices in food systems, accentuating the negative effects of conventional solutions (Clapp, 2014b). As seen in Chapter 1 and Sections 2.3 and 2.4, a crucial argument for advancing LFIs and LFSs is their ability to introduce new ways of organising and framing food chains and relations that challenge the dominance of conventional food system structures. However, depending on their views of social change and understandings of food security and sustainability, LFIs might prioritise certain strategies that are not necessarily more just (Allen, 2014). Significantly, as seen

in Section 2.4.1, without a consideration of power dynamics and injustices, the potential of LFIs and LFSs to counteract the conventional food system can be uncritically celebrated. In this sense, while signalling the end-point that LFIs and LFSs aspire to, the concepts of food security and sustainability are limited in their ability to assess whether strategies used for their achievement lead to transformative change – as they do not provide an explicit framework with which to do this.

As argued by other scholars, in order to understand the potential of specific strategies for food security and sustainability, the focus should be on *what is trying to be achieved, by whom, for whom and by what mean*s (Anderson, 2008; Duell, 2013; Rossi, 2017; Sonnino et al., 2016). Previous scholars refer to this as a process-based and relational framework for understanding how different local actors navigate and manage sustainability and food security (Duell, 2013; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015; Hassanein, 2003; Maxey, 2007; Sonnino et al., 2016). This focuses the analysis on the *motivations* within LFSs, the *meanings* attached to sustainability and food security, *what* strategies are used in this context, and *how* this influences the pathways towards more just and sustainable food systems. As argued by Sonnino et al. (2016) the question then becomes how different LFIs can collectively construct a transformative basis for wider changes in food systems by active network and governance building. Drawing on this argument, the subsequent paragraphs argue that food sovereignty provides an appropriate framework for this analytical focus, mainly because of its focus on the *processes* needed to achieve more just and sustainable food systems. From this point of view, food sovereignty represents a vector of food security and sustainability through LFIs and LFSs, questioning the power relationships along the food chains they promote to contribute to their attainment.

In searching for a radical transformation of food systems, food sovereignty seeks the achievement of food security and sustainability through intertwined, mutually reinforcing strategies that search for structural changes. A standard banner of food sovereignty is agroecology, a holistic, multifunctional approach to agriculture that encompasses livelihood provision, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem function, and community well-being (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007; Wittman, 2012). Compared to the apolitical or limited character of other environmentally sustainable practices (e.g., organic agriculture (Constance et al., 2014)), agroecology takes into consideration the broader social and economic context of food production as it affects farmers and communities (Gliessman et al., 2019). In this sense, agroecology and social justice are promoted as crucial principles towards achieving sustainability goals (see Sub-section 2.5.1). As such, food sovereignty 'nests' the economic within the social domain, which in turn is embedded within planetary boundaries – thereby corresponding to alternative framings of sustainability, such as the nested sustainable development model proposed by Giddings et al. (2002) or Raworth's Donut Economics framework (2017). Through this combination of environmental and social justice concerns, food sovereignty creates a vision of social change shaped by diversity and difference (human and natural), rejecting the oppression of marginalised groups by drawing attention to who wins or loses in sustainability transitions.

Therefore, compared to normative conceptualisations of sustainability and food security, which are unclear regarding a roadmap towards their achievement, food sovereignty predefines certain

characteristics required to reach these goals. Using food sovereignty as an analytical lens does not preclude evaluating the potential benefits of LFSs and LFIs to food security and sustainability, but it focuses the analysis on power struggles, economic, environmental, social justice, and democratic control, which underpins positive governance food systems change and for which LFIs and LFSs are regarded as crucial elements. As such, it helps deal with the tensions explained in Sub-section 2.4.1. Indeed, food sovereignty can help identify exclusionary notions of local food, unjust configurations of LFIs and LFSs and whether LFSs help LFIs escape the neoliberal trap. As Akram-Lodhi (2015) suggests, food sovereignty challenges the current food regime by fostering the de-commodification of markets by assigning food with new – and reclaimed – political, social, and cultural meanings through the democratisation of food systems.

Significantly, food sovereignty conforms to the process-based and relational framework needed to analyse food security and sustainability trajectories explained above. It draws attention to the meanings and motivations attached to food security and sustainability goals by questioning the strategies used to achieve them and if these lead to transformative changes. In this way, it helps clarify what lies behind the actions of LFIs and LFSs, bringing attention to which food aspects are prioritised in this context and how and which are set aside for these particular goals and why. Moreover, it extends food justice activism, which confronts the multiple ways racial and economic inequalities are embedded within food systems, emphasising constructing pluralistic and heterogenous coalitions between diverse struggles within and across scales (Slocum, 2018). This is particularly important for this research, as it focuses on the collective potential to disrupt unjust food system relationships and thus create the necessary conditions for social change. Consequently, this study uses food sovereignty as a heuristic framework to understand the efforts mobilised by LFSs and LFIs for the achievement of food security and sustainability, as well as the understandings attached to them, and if these lead to transformative strategies.

However, although food sovereignty is helpful to clarify some of the potentials of LFSs in terms of food security and sustainability, it is not sufficient on its own to fully grasp the complexity of the dynamics of LFSs. The selected analytical tool needs to pay full attention to the everyday interactions between LFIs and self-organisation processes within LFSs, as seen in Sub-section 2.3.1. This will be addressed in Chapter 3 by presenting a combined framework that features food sovereignty with other theories focused on networks and systems. For now, the next section will start to materialise the concept of food sovereignty for this research, building on previous studies that have used it in the context of LFSs. From this introduction to food sovereignty, it could be reasoned that food sovereignty means everything and, thus, in the end, nothing due to the inclusion of all sets of concerns related to food (Patel, 2009). Consequently, the next section is highly relevant to fully grasp the potential of food sovereignty as an analytical framework for this research by identifying key focus points in the context of LFSs.

### 2.5.3 Learning from Previous Studies on Food Sovereignty in the Context of Local Food Systems

As the concept of food sovereignty has expanded beyond its initial agrarian and peasant political project, food relocalisation has gained increased attention within food sovereignty debates. Previous scholars have argued that the local/alternative food literature only rarely explicitly

refers to food sovereignty (Wald & Hill, 2016; Wittman, 2012). Moreover, food sovereignty is often treated as an abstract 'utopian' vision of change (Edelman, 2014), challenging its operationalisation for the analysis of LFSs. This section examines the limited but increasing use of food sovereignty frameworks in local/alternative food scholarship to identify possible ways of translating the concept for this research. Due to the lack of studies that examine LFSs as a collective system of LFIs, this section draws on individual LFIs studies, assessing how food sovereignty should be used for this doctoral research study. It concludes that a clear articulation of what food sovereignty entails in the context of LFSs is needed, which will be addressed in Chapter 3.

A first strand of the literature merging food sovereignty and local/alternative food scholarship refers to LFIs as vectors for food sovereignty (see, e.g., Bellante, 2017; Matacena & Corvo, 2019; Nigh & González Cabañas, 2015; Reckinger, 2018). While these studies create a bridge between food relocalisation and food sovereignty debates, they usually tend to conflate food sovereignty as inherent within LFIs efforts and thus fail to analyse whether LFIs contribute towards its achievement. These studies rarely define what it is meant by food sovereignty or how it has been used for analysis. As such, the contribution of LFIs to food sovereignty is only analysed superficially. The main problem with this type of research is that it has the potential to lead to uncritical examinations of LFSs. In this way, practices of LFIs are linked to the production of food sovereignty conditions without a strong theoretical foundation. While it is important to understand how possible food sovereignty related practices are being enacted, it is necessary to examine how these relate to broader food sovereignty debates. Presuming that LFIs and LFSs are inherently paving the path towards food sovereignty precludes the tensions related to unreflexive analyses of LFSs already covered in Sub-section 2.4.1.

In contrast, emerging literature questions the ability of LFIs to manifest food sovereignty. Robbins (2015) argues that LFIs lie in a complicated middle ground between food sovereignty and industrial modes of food supply, acknowledging that LFIs are mediated and shaped within the context of the conventional food system. In this vein, Alkon & Mares (2012) argue that the full potential of LFIs will only be realised when they adopt food sovereignty as a guiding frame to explicitly contest market-based solutions. While this literature supports the notion that food sovereignty is a useful tool to analyse LFSs, its main problem is using a typified and specific version of food sovereignty. For example, small-scale, agroecological, peasant production in the case of Robbins (2015) or self-sufficiency-based approaches in the case of Alkon & Mares (2012). Indeed, these may well be ways in which LFIs may promote food sovereignty processes. However, understanding food sovereignty practices as homogenous overlooks the complexity of food sovereignty efforts in local contexts. This approach can impose blanket prescriptions for change without considering what prevents LFIs from contributing to sustainability and food security, simplifying the dynamics of LFSs. As explained in Section 2.4, LFSs are conceptualised in this research as imperfect, place-contingent processes. This means that while underlying principles should be identified, these should not disregard the potentials of LFSs for food sovereignty by setting specific criteria that may not apply to all LFIs due to their place-based contingency.

In this regard, Lutz & Schachinger (2013) provide a useful example that explores the constraints and challenges faced by LFIs in operating according to food sovereignty principles. Their study advances an understanding of food sovereignty as a set of comprehensive values (democratic participation, social equity, cultural and natural diversity, and regenerative environments) rather than specific practices. The study concludes that the intersection of LFIs with the corporate food regime and economic landscape hinders the development of stable structures that would help transform the food system. Indeed, LFIs may have ideological and motivational aspirations to materialise food sovereignty principles and some factors may facilitate this process such as relationships of cooperation. Nevertheless, LFIs are faced with many fundamental structural limitations to move beyond small efforts for food sovereignty, such as providing a just solution for all, or ensuring that there is no labour-exploitation and low-wages to those involved in LFIs. This points to the recognition of the processes that impede or support food sovereignty in the context of LFSs to identify alternative pathways to achieve it. Thus, it is useful not only to have a description of food sovereignty principles to assess LFSs, but also develop a fuller understanding of what prevents LFSs to advance towards food system transformation.

The discussion of previous studies thus far raises an important issue: food sovereignty pathways should not be constrained within an ideal form of food sovereignty, such as small-scale agroecological distribution channels or self-sufficiency approaches. Although Larder et al.'s study (2014) only focuses on domestic food production, a crucial aspect for this research is its discussion of food sovereignty being enacted in diverse ways depending on people's understandings of it. In this way, food sovereignty is conceptualised as being situated in the practices that LFIs advance to assert their values and aims in their particular realities. In the context of studying a heterogenous set of LFIs in two cities, food sovereignty can play out differently in each case. Despite this complexity being challenging, Larder et al. (2014) suggest that – in the context of this study – food sovereignty can help identify key aspects of LFSs, such as practical or ideological strategies, which aim to transform the conventional food system. However, it would be unfruitful to disregard the previously discussed work that sets out the limitations of LFIs to create more just and equitable food systems. LFSs may still create exclusionary practices or face many limitations to foster food sovereignty processes.

In summary, the literature demonstrates that food sovereignty is a useful analytical framework to analyse the shortcomings and potentials of LFIs and LFSs. Food sovereignty engages with the various criticisms of LFIs and has a comprehensive theoretical foundation that facilitates critical examinations. However, it is essential to recognise that not all food sovereignty criteria apply to all LFIs and LFSs. The importance lies in analysing how different processes/interactions move LFSs towards food sovereignty as a whole. Notably, this section has highlighted the importance of not just assessing food sovereignty concerning outcomes but really understanding the processes that engage with food sovereignty principles (or not). Nevertheless, there is still a need to clarify what food sovereignty means to understand how LFSs might or might not be taking us towards it. For this, food sovereignty needs to be defined based on its underlying values and principles, not on 'typified' pathways, acknowledging that LFIs and LFSs are not uniform. The previous studies and discussion in Sub-Section 2.5.2 highlight some of food sovereignty's core issues in the context of LFSs: justice, rights, and the ability to engage in food system transformation. Building on this,

Chapter 3 explicitly explains how food sovereignty will be used to analyse LFSs based on the drawbacks and advantages of approaches taken in the studies analysed in this section.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

The literature review has several interconnected general conclusions. First, research on the interactions and connections between LFIs demonstrates that studies must move beyond a narrow focus on the convergence of ideologies between LFIs to the internal dynamics within LFSs without presuming that only strong collaborative networks can lead towards food systems change. However, critical explorations of LFSs dynamics and how several processes affect the potential benefits of LFSs, including urban food governance mechanisms, are still lacking. In particular, there is limited research that analyses the articulation of and uneven dynamics of LFSs in cities with contrasting socio-institutional environments and how this affects their outcomes**.** Greater insight into the mechanisms of LFSs that hinder or facilitate food sovereignty processes – and thus food security and sustainability transitions – is essential for developing and implementing context-specific strategies that address the multidimensionality of food without trading-off relevant values such as social justice. This research aims to fill this gap in the literature by analysing LFSs outcomes in Preston, England, and Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country.

Furthermore, the literature review has provided important theoretical and methodological insights concerning the objectives of this research that inform the following chapters. First, the analysis of LFSs should follow a systemic approach based on context-specific characteristics and focus on the main actors and organisations, including local institutions, that advance effort for the sustainability and food security transitions of a place. In this sense, LFS explorations should not be based on predefined framings of LFIs or redundant binaries such as 'alternative' or 'conventional'. In this understanding, through their collaborations with other LFIs, emergency food providers can take on new roles within LFSs and thus contribute to achieving a just and sustainable food system. Second, critical examinations of LFSs should be informed by a relational and process-based approach that borrows ideas from place and scale theorisations such as those proposed by DuPuis & Goodman (2005). This means recognising that LFSs and their corresponding outcomes result from place-based social processes, including urban food governance mechanisms, and socio-ecological dynamics that are in constant interplay with higher scales (regional, national and global).

In other words, the analysis of LFSs and their outcomes should be based on an approach that looks at the interactions between LFIs, and with other organisations, acknowledging power asymmetries, resource distribution, and influence within these processes. In understanding the potential of LFSs towards food system transformation, such an approach should not preclude the analysis of outcomes. Processes should always be imagined as having some effect on pursued goals. Accordingly, this chapter has argued that food sovereignty is the most appropriate concept to analyse the potential of LFSs for sustainability and food security, as it draws attention to the strategies and motivations advanced to achieve these goals through a focus on power dynamics and injustices. To be able to operationalise this concept for this research, a review of the use of food sovereignty in local/alternative food scholarship was presented. This has illustrated that it

is essential to have predefined underlying values of food sovereignty. However, their use should not be conflated with specific practices due to the place-based characteristic of LFIs and LFSs at the risk of overlooking positive changes advanced by LFSs through other avenues. Ultimately, the analysis should concentrate on how different processes/interactions of LFSs relate to food sovereignty as a whole.

The important question to ask is thus *how do the dynamics within LFSs influence the achievement of more sustainable and just solutions in terms of food sovereignty, what context-dependent conditions influence these dynamics and with what consequences?* This invokes an abductive approach that cuts across disciplines to analyse LFSs in their own contexts, as suggested by Sonnino (2013). As Goodman and Sage (2014) duly argue, food and thus LFSs do not only cross disciplinary schools of thought; it *transgresses* them. In congruence with other scholars who promote an interdisciplinary approach to study food (see Corsi et al., 2018; Goodman, 2004; Goodman et al., 2012; Maye & Kirwan, 2010; Tregear, 2011), this study recognises the need for a cross-fertilisation of ideas from different perspectives in local/alternative food research. Therefore, this study uses an interdisciplinary theoretical approach and methodology – explained in Chapters 3 and 4 – that address the considerations identified in the literature concerning the analysis of LFSs and food sovereignty[3].

[3] Interdisciplinary is understood in this research as synthesising and integrating links between disciplines into a common approach (Choi & Pak, 2006).

## Chapter 3 – RESEARCH PARADIGM AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ANALYTICAL FOCUS AND LENS OF THE STUDY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The arguments advanced in the literature review indicate that any effort to analyse LFSs in terms of food sovereignty should follow a critical and open approach to understand possible synergies or tensions between LFIs without presuming positive outcomes of these interactions. Equally important is the recognition that LFSs are socially constructed (formed by social relationships), fluid and dynamic and are spaces within which contesting interests interact and shape a diversity of meanings and, thus, potential collective outcomes (Born & Purcell, 2006). Indeed, LFSs are determined by the social relations between LFIs that exist within them and with their environment, which define who gains from these initiatives, what foods are consumed and how people engage with those foods (Blake et al., 2010). LFSs are thus best understood by examining the composition of actors involved, their goals and strategies, and the interaction between them and their context, similar to Lamine's (2015) systemic approach to LFSs explained in the previous chapter. This means that research should be informed by a conceptual framework that captures all relevant LFIs, their motivations and different discourses, and how these interactions affect the outcomes of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty. Furthermore, this framework should support the acknowledgement that higher scales influence these processes and that LFSs are shaped by their socio-economic, political, natural, and cultural contexts.

To provide the theoretical foundations for this undertaking, it is first necessary to discuss what lies underneath these arguments. For this, questions about ontology, epistemology and theoretical perspectives of the research process need to be addressed. These underpinning assumptions about the nature of knowledge, its construction, understanding and acquisition are the foundations of the methodology, methods, and research aims advanced in any academic undertaking (Bazeley, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2018; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The ontological and epistemological premises of research may be termed a *paradigm* – "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p .17). Therefore, the research paradigm influences how LFSs will be studied. Notably, the research paradigm should be suitable to foster the conceptualisation of LFSs derived from the literature review. In this sense, explicit discussion of the assumed research paradigm is imperative to acknowledge how these standpoints influence the framework of research and eventually the theories used to analyse LFSs. Moreover, a clear understanding of the research's theoretical foundations ensures that the methodology, methods and theories used meet the research objectives and thus help secure the quality of the research produced (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Section 3.2 explains this research paradigm following Crotty's (1998) elements of theoretical foundations: epistemology and theoretical perspective. Sub-section 3.2.1 presents the ontological and epistemological stance that informs this study, which suits the considerations needed to study LFSs found in the literature review; LFSs result from socio-ecological processes that lead to diverse outcomes. This combines realist and relativist ontologies using social constructionism as the epistemological perspective. As will be explained in Sub-Section 3.2.1,

social constructionism is the most appropriate perspective to answer this study's objectives because it acknowledges that LFSs and their meaning are constructed through the social interactions between LFIs and their world. Based on this research paradigm, Sub-section 3.2.2. discusses critical interactionism as the theoretical perspective used for this study, which integrates critical theory and symbolic interactionism.

To be able to apply the selected paradigms for this study, a conceptual framework that combines urban political ecology (UPE) with a food systems approach is proposed in Section 3.3. Both theoretical perspectives include multi-scalar dimensions, the social construction of scale and meaning, and human-nature dynamics when analysing place-based phenomena. Sub-section 3.3.1 explains the underpinning rationale of a food systems approach informed by the literature review findings and the conceptualisation of LFSs developed through these. As illustrated Chapter 2, the dynamics of LFSs are filled with multiple social processes that include power relations between LFIs and other organisations such as local authorities. However, system approaches such as the one advanced in this research have been criticised due to their lack of attention to power asymmetries. Sub-section 3.3.2 introduces and discusses UPE as the most suitable theory to include a critical analysis of the dynamics of LFSs when adopting a food systems approach, accounting for power relations within LFSs. Following the argument for using food sovereignty to analyse the outcomes of LFSs in Section 2.5, Sub-section 3.3.3 critically unpacks the concept of food sovereignty to identify its underlying principles and introduces its adaptation for this research. Finally, Section 3.4 presents the overarching conceptual framework – a political food systems approach for food sovereignty – grounded on social constructionism and critical interactionism.

## 3.2 INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

Crotty (1998) argues that the terminology used in social research for different concepts such as epistemology and theoretical perspective is confusing. These research process elements are usually "thrown together in a grab-bag style as if they were all comparable terms" (Crotty, 1988, p.3). The implications of this for the research process is that it lacks a coherent foundation, missing a clear explanation of how larger philosophical ideas inform the concepts, methodology and methods used in the study. Being clear about the research paradigm and distinguishing its different dimensions helps improve the overall robustness of the research, as it also provides the lens through which the analysis of the findings has been conducted. In order to avoid the agglomeration of these terms without any distinction, this study follows Crotty's (1998) seminal work that proposes a hierarchical decision-making process of the research paradigm that starts with recognition of what epistemology informs the study, followed by identification of the theoretical perspective that influences the methodology and analysis of findings. With this in mind, Sub-section 3.2.1 describes the epistemology – *what it means to know* or the construction of meaning (Crotty, 1998) – that underpins this thesis: social constructionism. Following this, Sub-section 3.2.2 discusses the theoretical perspective derived from social constructionism that has been chosen for this study to critically analyse LFSs: critical interactionism.

### 3.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology: Realism, Relativism, And Social Constructionism

While Crotty (1998) does not include ontology – *what is,* or the nature of reality – in his hierarchical decision-making process, he merges ontology with epistemology as both are mutually dependent: "to talk about the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality" (p. 10). For this reason, he argues that it is still important to acknowledge what ontological notion informs to the epistemology of the research. In this sense, this sub-section discusses first the ontological position of the study before going into a discussion of its epistemological paradigm.

Usually, epistemological paradigms are grouped in two ontologies: realism (a reality exists outside the mind) and relativism (there are multiple constructed realities) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Some views assert that realism only implies a reality out there to be discovered and thus does not include the social construction of knowledge (Gray, 2004). However, acknowledging that meaning is socially constructed is not incompatible with recognising the existence of a world without the mind. As Crotty (1998) argues, the existence of a world without people conscious of it is possible but meaning without consciousness is not. In this sense, separating the existence of the world without human consciousness from the social construction of the realities to understand this world is not necessarily useful to investigate LFSs. For example, as a natural object, local food – food produced within a geographical area – is circulated within LFSs. However, the different meanings of what 'local' entails depend on what LFIs make of it. The seminal work of Feagan (2007) demonstrates that although local food mainly refers to food produced in a particular geographical area, the meaning attached to the 'local' is associated with ecology, differentiation or a notion of tradition or trust. In this regard, different LFIs may ascribe different meanings to the notion of 'local' in local food, thereby influencing how LFSs are articulated based on the different discourses that derive from these understandings. This is the ontological position that this study adopts, which combines realist views and relativist ideologies, as it allows for recognising that LFSs are formed through socio-ecological relations.

Whereas ontology seeks to explore *what is*, epistemology focuses on 'how we know what we know' (Crotty, 1998). As such, it creates a philosophical standpoint for deciding the legitimacy and adequacy of different types of knowledge (Gray, 2004). This research follows a social constructionist epistemological stance. Social constructionism rejects the view of knowledge advanced by objectivist epistemology. That is, that meaning, and thus, meaningful reality exists without the need for any consciousness (Gray, 2004). Instead of accepting that knowledge or meaningful reality already exist and are waiting to be discovered by people as suggested by objectivism, social constructionism argues that truth and meaning come into existence through our interaction with the world (Slater, 2018). As a result, meaning and knowledge are contingent upon human practices, and developed and transmitted within social contexts (Crotty, 1998). While drawing strongly from relativist ontology, social constructionism still conforms with a realist position. It does not preclude the existence of a world without consciousness, as it focuses on the *meaningful realities* constructed through the social interactions with this world. Indeed, people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon, leading to different manifestations of it. In the case of LFSs, different understandings of

sustainability, food security – the most common banners for promoting LFIs and LFSs – or local might differ greatly between LFIs (See Sub-Section 2.5.2 of Chapter 2), which in turn influences their actions. Significantly, Section 2.3 demonstrated that this is one of the factors that influences potential collaborations between LFIs. In the context of this thesis, social constructionism, compared to objectivism, facilitates the understanding of the diverse constitutions of LFSs and knowledge within them.

Crotty (1998) argues that as much as social constructionism is not entirely subjective, it is also not confined to the construction of individual meaning. Social constructionism recognises that meaning has a social origin and is produced in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world (Slater, 2018). It differs from another epistemology grounded on relativist ontologies: constructivism. Due to their relativist foundation, constructivism and social constructionism recognise that no single meaningful reality exists (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). However, while constructivist epistemologies focus on the meaning-making of individual minds, social constructionism focuses on the 'collective generation of meaning' (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Constructivism focuses primarily on an individual understanding of knowledge; it engages with individual experiences and cognitive processes derived from personal meaning-making. Moreover, constructivism has been regarded as purely subjective and relativist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Social constructionism contains characteristics of both relativism and realism, and subjectivism and objectivism, as discussed earlier. As explained in the literature review, LFSs and their outcomes will always be highly place-contingent, constructed by the social relations and power dynamics of the involved actors and based on socio-ecological interactions (the interactions of social groups with their existing natural world). Therefore, social constructionism offers a better foundation to understand the dynamics of LFSs.

Moreover, Crotty (1998) argues that the description of the production of knowledge through human interaction needs to be set in a social and historical perspective – i.e., an acknowledgement of the context-dependent characteristics of meaning-making. Thus, the meaning created within LFSs is shaped by the contexts of the particular places where they are embedded. However, acknowledging that diverse contexts influence LFSs does not mean that all LFIs constituting a LFS may impose the same meaning to concepts such as food security or sustainability. Social constructionism is helpful in this sense, as it recognises that multiple meaningful realities coexist, even within the same place (Gergen & Gergen, 2012). The use of a research paradigm that acknowledges the plurality of knowledge and the place-based nature of particular realities is particularly important for this research. It helps the researcher pay attention to contextual differences of the studied LFSs, but also to how different understandings of the world, particularly in relation to food security and sustainability, within LFSs influence their dynamics and thus food sovereignty processes.

Taylor's (2003) work defines this plurality of meaningful realities (within and between localities) as 'social imaginaries'. Social imaginaries refer to how we construct our social surroundings and fit within a particular structure, the expectations usually met within these, and the deeper normative assumptions that underlie these expectations. Different authors have termed this notion as representations (Bui, 2021), value systems (Manganelli et al. 2019), or motivations and

intentionality (Moragues-Faus, 2017b) in the context of LFIs. In the context of this research, this relates to what lies underneath the activities, practices, and interactions of LFIs, which are key in understanding the potential of LFSs for food sovereignty. In particular, as argued in Section 2.5.2, in the context of food sovereignty this means analysing the *motivations* of LFIs, how this relates to the *meanings* attached to sustainability and food security, *what* strategies derive from this notion, and *how* this influences the pathways towards food sovereignty processes. This study advances the notion of socio-ecological imaginaries to support this investigation. As will be explained further in Sub-section 3.3.2, socio-ecological imaginaries refer to how LFIs imagine and work to shape the society and environment in which they live, following the dialectical relationship between the social and natural environment of LFIs proposed by UPE.

In conclusion, social constructionism promotes the understanding that LFSs are social constructions produced by the interactions between LFIs and with other actors influenced by the political, social, cultural, and natural environment where they are located. This implies grasping the complexity of the formation of LFSs within their own contexts and the meanings and discourses that the diverse collection of LFIs that constitute LFSs advances. It focuses the research on the social worlds constructed through the social processes and interactions within and outside LFSs. This is consistent with the aims of this study, which include specific objectives that relate to the examination of LFSs-context relations and how individual LFIs understand and promote food sovereignty processes. Therefore, this research does not focus on each individual's unique experience of LFSs, nor does it hold all knowledge produced in LFSs as valid and unproblematic. The following section discusses the theoretical perspective – critical interactionism – that derives from this understanding of LFSs and how it grounds the logic and criteria of the research.

### 3.2.2 Theoretical Perspective: Critical Interactionism

According to Crotty (1998), the theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance behind the research's chosen methodology and the analysis of the studied phenomenon. As such, the elaboration of the theoretical perspective is a statement of the assumptions brought within the research process reflected in the methodology as it is employed and understood. As social constructionism emphasises the relevance of culture to the way we see the world, it welcomes critical considerations of reality (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, as it is also engaged with the construction of meaning through social interaction, it also fosters interpretivist theoretical perspectives such as symbolic interactionism (Bazeley, 2013). This study takes advantage of the nature of social constructionism and combines both critical inquiry and symbolic interactionism. Although some scholars have argued these perspectives are oppositional (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), a traditional pragmatic approach can permeate both approaches if understood in its original form (Crotty, 1998; Martins & Burbank, 2011). Some scholars have called this approach critical interactionism (Martins & Burbank, 2011). Combining a critical understanding of LFSs with a recognition of its social construction is crucial to unpack their potential for food system change, as explained in Chapter 2.

Pragmatism was developed in the first instance as a method of reflection to clarify ideas and assumptions in which all meaning is tentative and needs to be tested against experience (Bazeley,

2013). Research focuses on the consequences and meanings of any action in a social situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This view of pragmatism derives from the work of Charles S. Peirce, which is regarded as the classical pragmatic stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Pragmatism has evolved since the work of Peirce, and it is now widely used as a practical approach to bridge different methodologies. This study concentrates specifically on Peirce's classical pragmatism due to its underpinning philosophy that allows for the combination of critical inquiry and symbolic interactionism. Peirce agreed that knowledge is social as each individual reflects reality differently, but that the different paths taken by this knowledge creation has practical consequences (Ormerod, 2006). Thus, pragmatism is concerned with different knowledge creation processes and at the same time prompts critical examinations of their detrimental effects.

Symbolic interactionism is a derivative of pragmatism born out of the work of George Herbert Mead (Crotty, 1998). Mead's thought was that our consciousness and self-consciousness are both dependent on our interaction with society (intersubjectivity), as we view ourselves (and other things) from the position of others (Bazeley, 2013). Accordingly, symbolic interactionism explores the understandings of the world through a focus on interaction, community, interrelationships, and communication (Crotty, 1998). Thus, it assumes that human beings interact with things based on the meaning these objects have for them, that this meaning is the result of social interaction and that behaviour derives from a reflective interpretation of stimuli (Martins & Burbank, 2011). This study uses symbolic interactionism to understand the diverse understandings, discourses and ideologies – socio-ecological imaginaries – that LFIs have in different places and that influence their approaches to food sovereignty (both as individual actors and collectively as LFSs). Crotty (1998) argues that symbolic interactionism usually has an unquestioning stance towards culture. However, Mead (1934) argued that the self was socially produced, highly influenced by culture and thus contested. Following the initial ideals of Mead and the pragmatic stance explained before, the use of symbolic interactionism – that is, the examination of meanings, interactions and the consequences of actions – does not in itself preclude the critical examination of their origins.

As an interpretive theory, symbolic interactionism tends to be an uncritical form of study (Crotty, 1998). Its combination with critical inquiry serves this study to move away from an essentially optimistic view of LFSs. Critical inquiry is a process of investigation that questions values and assumptions and challenges conventional social structures to pursue change. One of the essential principles of critical inquiry is that ideas are mediated by power relations in society (Gray, 2004). This leads to an ideological hegemony in which relationships of domination and exploitation are embedded (Martins & Burbank, 2011). As a result, certain social groups are privileged, creating winners and losers. Critical inquiry seeks to expose these power inequalities by capturing the social structures and values of society or groups studied (Gray, 2004). This critical perspective allows the research to view LFSs as networks of actors filled with power relations. Notably, it rejects the assumption that LFSs have inherent positive benefits and assumes that within LFSs, some LFIs or community groups may be marginalised, diminishing the potential of LFSs to contribute to food sovereignty processes. Consequently, the inclusion of critical inquiry is crucial

for this study. It questions the configuration of LFSs and their outcomes by understanding their linkages with broader political, economic, and social structures.

To summarise, social constructionism creates a bridge between examining meaning as socially constructed and the scrutiny of current social structures. Due to some discrepancies between symbolic interactionism and critical inquiry, pragmatism is useful to combine both theoretical perspectives into the approach termed by some scholars as critical interactionism (Martins & Burbank, 2011). Such an approach is appropriate for this research and its respective methodology as it acknowledges that different meanings of concepts such as sustainability and food security between LFIs may lead to diverse food sovereignty efforts or actions. Moreover, it supports the aims of this research as it focuses on interaction and interrelationships, which drives the analysis towards the internal processes within LFSs. Including a critical perspective integrates a focus on who wins and who loses within LFSs, supporting their analysis in terms of food sovereignty. Finally, critical interactionism views meaning within LFSs as produced through the interactions of LFSs with society and their contexts, understanding that LFSs differ across different places. While the discussion of the overarching research paradigm of this research is relevant, the implementation of such a paradigm is difficult to grasp without using a conceptual framework that helps translate these concepts into the research context. Thus, the following sections will introduce the conceptual framework proposed for studying the contribution of LFSs to food sovereignty through a social constructionist and critical interactionist lens.

## 3.3 INTRODUCING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As argued in previous sections, the research paradigm adopted for this study conceptualises the construction of LFSs and meaning within them as the outcome of the uneven and contested interactions of diverse LFIs – all with their own respective socio-ecological imaginaries – which are influenced by context-dependent characteristics and LFIs' interaction with their environment. The translation of the research paradigm discussed in the previous sections into actionable conceptual tools thus needs to capture the diverse understandings, discourses and ideologies of LFIs, particularly in relation to food security and sustainability, the individual strategies attached to them, how this influences their interactions with other LFIs and organisations and eventually what this means for the collective construction of food sovereignty processes. Significantly, this should not preclude an examination of power asymmetries, resource distribution, and influence that shape food sovereignty in the context of LFSs.

This section discusses the elements that conform to the conceptual framework developed based on these assumptions – a political food systems approach for food sovereignty (See Figure 3.1). Following the system-based conceptualisation of LFSs advanced in Sub-section 2.3.1 of Chapter 2, Sub-section 3.3.1 discusses a food systems approach as a suitable framework to examine the formal and informal interactions within LFSs and their potential benefits, grounding the social constructionism epistemology of the research. Sub-section 3.3.2 then introduces UPE to enhance the analysis of LFSs and their internal dynamics – including meaning-making – under a critical lens, following the critical interactionism perspective explained earlier. Finally, Sub-section 3.3.3 critically engages with the concept of food sovereignty and how this research comes to

understand food sovereignty in the context of LFSs under the proposed research paradigm following key insights of the literature review.

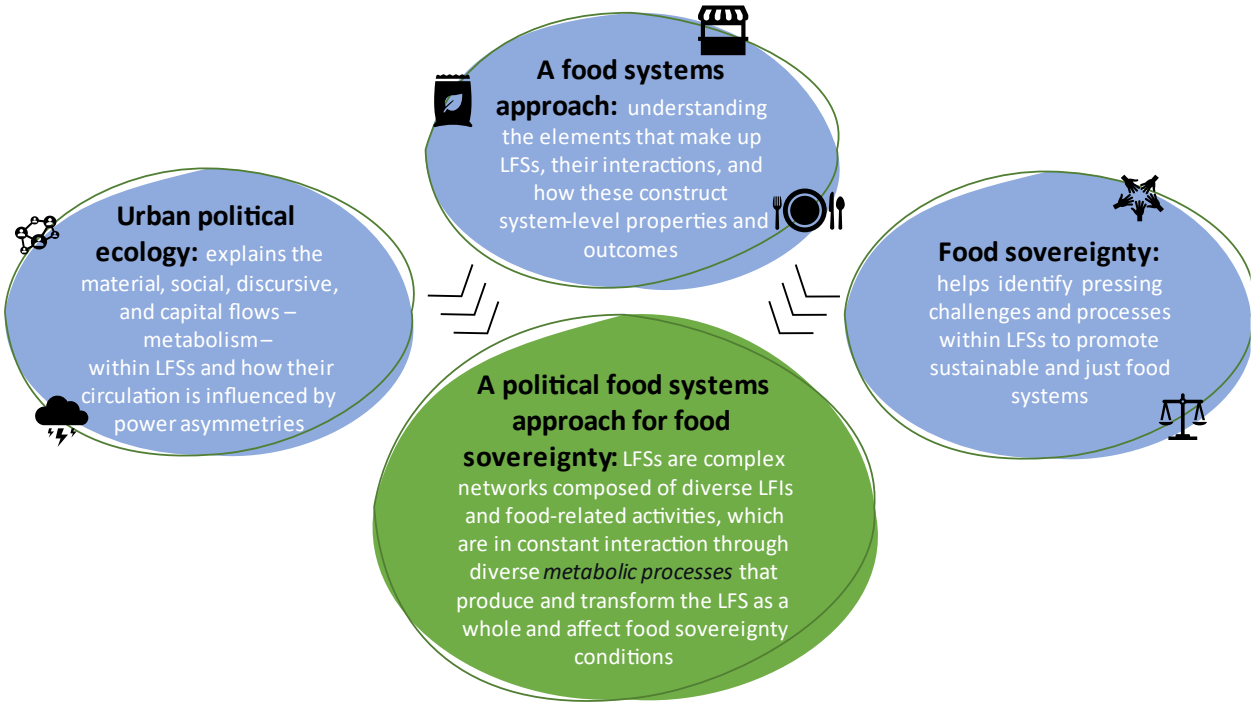


Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework: A political food systems approach for food sovereignty. Author's own compilation

### 3.3.1 Food Systems Approach

Chapter 2 argued that LFSs are best understood as "a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of particular places" (Feenstra & Campbell, 2013, p. 1). This definition conforms with the system-based and territorial proposal to study LFSs of Lamine (2015) discussed in Sub-section 2.3.1 of Chapter 2, which concentrates on the leading social actors and institutions that influence the formation of LFSs, their interactions, and the conditions that favour or hinder this converge, including the socio-economic and political context. This view closely relates to the theoretical assumptions that underpin a food systems approach. However, compared to Lamine's (2015) territorial agrifood system approach, a food systems approach is much clearer on the analytical focus and path, raising it as a suitable heuristic lens to analyse LFSs. Significantly, a food systems approach grounds the social constructionist epistemology used in this study, which views LFSs are social constructions produced by the interactions between LFIs and with other actors influenced by the political, social-economic and natural environment where they are located.

Broadly understood, food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their value-adding activities involved in the food supply chain (production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food) (FAO, 2018). The food systems approach is influenced by systems thinking,

a theoretical proposition derived from complex, chaos and network theories (Banson et al., 2018). Systems thinking sees complex sustainability and food security issues as interconnected (Sonnino et al., 2019). It suggests that systems are a network of multiple interconnected variables through nonlinear causal relationships (Allen & Prosperi, 2016). In this regard, viewing the system as a whole is necessary. Some scholars define a system as a complex set of elements that interact through various processes and self-organise so that a pattern of behaviours is produced (e.g., the overall functioning of LFSs) (Ison et al., 1997; Meadows, 2009). Briefly put, at its core, systems thinking is an attempt to see how a set of different practices are connected within some notion of a whole entity (Leischow et al., 2008). In the context of this research, systems thinking sees a LFS in two levels of aggregation, assimilating a multi-actor perspective (Avelino & Wittmayer, 2016). As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the first level focuses on the individual behaviours and discourses of LFIs, which can be part of several sectors, such as state, market or third sector and operate within and across food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management. The second level engages with the construction of the LFS through the notion that the combination of individual-level practices displays patterns of self-organisation and properties that cannot be observed at the first level.

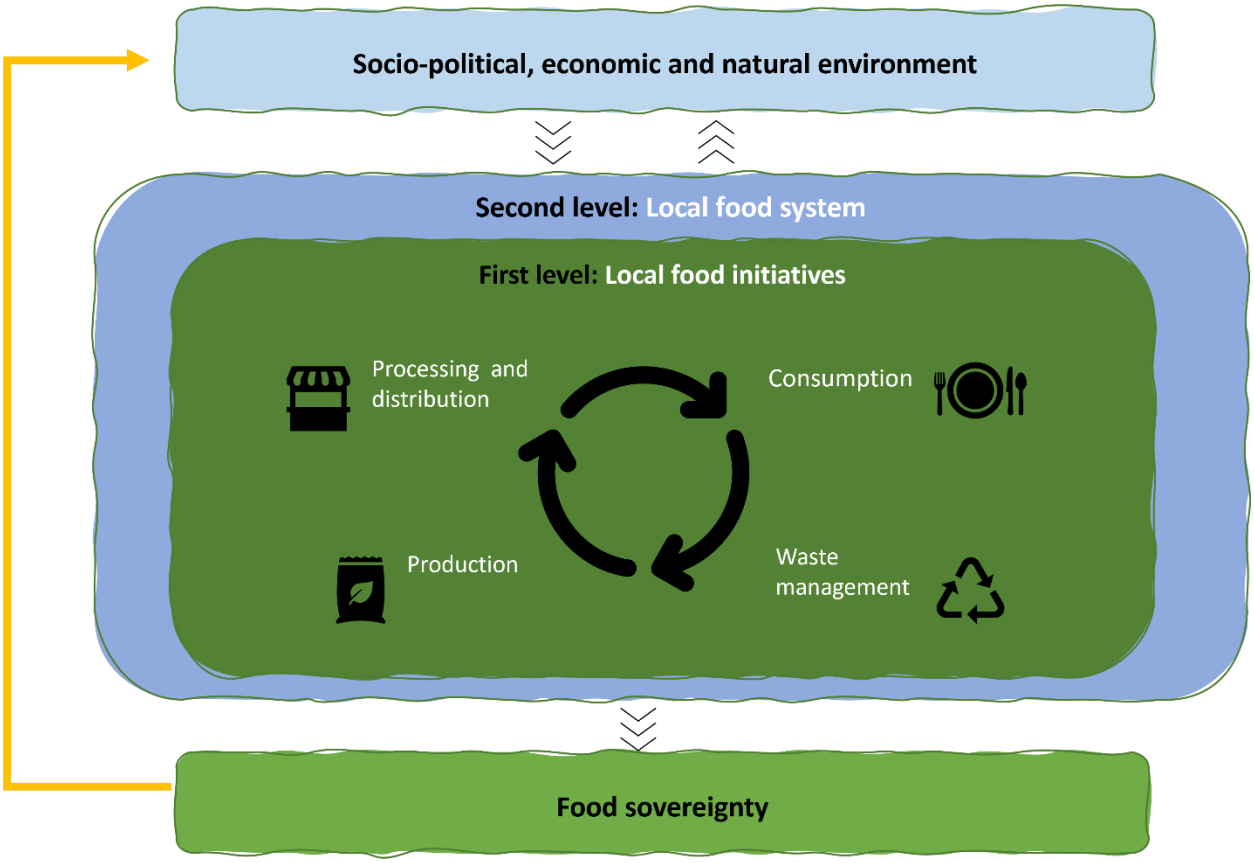


Figure 3.2: A food systems approach to understand Local Food Systems. Author's own compilation

As external drivers and forces shape food systems, the definition of a food system exceeds the boundaries of food-related activities. Food systems include a pool of other cross-scale interactions of economic, social and environmental drivers (Ericksen, 2008). The outcomes of

these activities are also included within the definition of a food system (Ingram et al., 2010; Sonnino et al., 2019), ranging from food security to environmental security and social welfare, or, in this research project, food sovereignty. As Sonnino et al. (2019) acknowledge, a food systems approach thus entails considering the socio-economic, political environmental dynamics that affect all the activities of the food supply chain and a focus on the relationships and interactions between all actors involved in those activities, and how these dynamics affect particular outcomes. As such, it is a heuristic framework that provides an analytical and practical focus on the interactions, integrations and relationalities between diverse LFIs in a place and between this system and other systems and scales. As seen in Figure 3.2, viewed through a food systems approach, the definition of LFSs for this research then includes LFIs working across the food supply chain, but also the external drivers, actors and forces that influence their construction – such as local governance dynamics (see Section 2.3.1) – and the outcomes of these processes in terms of food sovereignty.

Based on this understanding, it can be argued that a food systems approach shares many similarities with assemblage theory, a research paradigm that is increasingly permeating local/alternative food scholarship (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2013; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2019; Sarmiento, 2017). Indeed, a food systems approach relates to DeLanda's (2016) interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) seminal work in assemblage theory, as it draws on complexity theory to understand the emergent properties of dynamic networks caused by the interactions of their parts (Spies & Alff, 2020). Nevertheless, compared to assemblage theory, which focuses on relationship tracing without clear analytical boundaries, a food systems approach helps set conceptual boundaries to the research (Spies & Alff, 2020). Although the boundaries of a system are somewhat diffuse, the primary purpose of the system delimits it (Posthumus et al., 2018). Thus, the otherwise arbitrary boundary of a LFS is defined through its attributed function: the advancement towards a more sustainable and just food system in a place – for the purposes of this study, Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz. This deals with the complexity of analysing LFSs using the local scale as delimitation and keeping the research manageable and relevant. Some LFIs may transcend geographical boundaries but still influence the studied locality. As a system's boundary is defined by its main attributed function, the inclusion of LFIs that are not necessarily based in Preston city, for example, but still influence Preston's food sovereignty processes is justified.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that using a food systems approach fosters a rigid research boundary and precludes unaccounted dynamics that may cause LFSs to change. Under a food systems approach, LFSs are conceived as complex *socio-ecological* systems. As such, there is a strong emphasis on the dynamic and constant movement within and beyond LFSs, while considering the autonomy of their parts. Indeed, complex socio-ecological systems are characterised for their 'radical openness' (Preiser et al., 2018), acknowledging that several (multi-scalar) interactions might force LFSs to change or even transform their identity (or capacities) into a different configuration. Moreover, although system components may interact towards a joint function, all actors do not share the same goals, routines and values (Naaldenberg et al., 2009). Translated into this research, this means that LFIs will attach different meanings to their particular actions and main issues within the LFS, helping apply the epistemology of this research – social constructionism (see Sub-section 3.2.2).

Following the previous discussion, LFSs are imagined for this research as the aggregate of local food-related activities, their benefits (food sovereignty) and the political, socioeconomic, and natural environments in which these activities are embedded (see Figure 3.2). Accordingly, LFSs are not considered individual LFIs working independently and in silos but as an assemblage of LFIs that are in constant interaction – a LFS – and whose complex dynamics influence the food sovereignty processes of a locality. In this sense, although perhaps not explicitly addressed, a food systems approach deals with contemporary notions of place that have informed academic debates. Such notions imagine places and scales as constructed, dynamic and contingent upon agency-structure interactions (Feagan, 2007). Looking at LFSs through a system thinking perspective, thus, allows broadening the understanding of LFSs as it considers context, multi-scalar interconnections and feedback loops that are sometimes missed in the literature. It encompasses the wide range of food-related activities within a place; thus, it also moves beyond producer-consumer relations. It also allows for integrating LFIs that have not usually been included in local/alternative food scholarship, such as food banks. In other words, it creates an umbrella framework from which the different objectives of this research can be answered that acknowledges the social construction of LFSs.

Therefore, compared to other frameworks that acknowledge cross-scale interactions for food systems change, such as the theories applied to analyse sustainability transitions, a food systems perspective explicitly focuses on the interactions within a system to also understand how external forces influence these. For example, although the Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) may recognise that a network of actors constitutes LFSs, it mainly focuses on individual initiatives – niches – and their capacity to influence broader systems – socio-technical regimes or landscapes (see El Bilali, 2019 for a literature review on MLP in agri-food studies)[4]. This focus has meant that sustainability transition studies usually fail to assess the formation of specific networks within niches and beyond them (Sarabia et al., 2021). In syntony with social constructionism, which acknowledges that outcomes – or consequences of knowledge production – reflect the interactions between context and involved actors, and among actors themselves, a food systems perspective provides a better analytical framework to understand the complex constitution and outcomes of LFSs. In particular, a food systems approach helps ground the notion that that meaning within LFSs is contingent upon the practices of LFIs and other actors and developed and transmitted within a specific context and thus influenced by multi-scalar dynamics, including socio-ecological relations. As such, it applies a social constructionist epistemology within a realist and relativist ontology (see Section 3.2.1)

Systems thinking has been applied to a vast pool of food-related challenges. For example, it has been used to describe the nature and functioning of food systems, specifically food supply chains, and their outcomes on a regional, national and global scale (see Ingram et al., 2010; Ingram & Zurek, 2018). Some systems perspectives have also been used to understand the emergence, functioning and evolution of LFIs, including the interactions between LFIs as a collaborative network (see Chapter 2). This work has offered valuable perspectives on the reality of LFIs and LFSs because it acknowledges context-dependent features and concentrates on how LFIs and

[4] The multi-level perspective has been chosen as an example because it is the framework that is most often used in agri-food studies (Borsellino et al., 2020).

LFSs manage change (Tregear, 2011). However, most studies that introduce systems dynamics to understand LFIs and LFSs concentrate on the adaptive capacity, processes and resilience of LFSs by using complex adaptive systems approaches, network theory or governance studies (Tregear, 2011). Therefore, literature on LFSs has not widely used systems dynamics as explained by food systems theorists to examine the connections between different food-related activities within a place and their collective outcomes. This could be one of the reasons why Chapter 2 identified that some studies lack a focus on the attributed collective outcomes of LFIs when analysing LFSs. Compared to other system thinking and network frameworks, a food systems approach explicitly incorporates considering the outcomes of LFSs.

Ultimately, investigating LFSs through a food systems approach serves to understand and assess the processes, actors, scales, and flows of LFSs. This enables making linkages and interfaces between LFIs visible, identifying LFIs and other stakeholders' roles within the LFSs, recognising possible synergies and linkages within LFSs, detecting problems within LFSs, and discussing potential transformative processes and channels. As such, it helps to identify drivers for action and transformation within and between LFSs. However, some scholars have pointed out that network theories and systems perspectives such as the food systems approach tend to disregard power relations and inequalities and thus are weak on socio-political analyses (Foran et al., 2014; Rocheleau & Roth, 2007). Because the framework is systems-oriented, it tends to concentrate on the meso level – the overall behaviour of LFSs. Therefore, internal tensions may not always be well conceptualised or studied. However, due to the inherent nature of food systems – and LFSs – as socio-ecological constructs influenced by external drivers and scales, food systems also manifest different power asymmetries due to structural, historical or social constructions and influences.

Along these lines, some scholars suggest that network and system theories would benefit from political ecology epistemologies (Rocheleau & Roth, 2007). This is mainly because both theoretical perspectives can complement each other. On the one hand, systems thinking helps deal with the complexity of socio-ecological systems and, in part, rejects simplifying the human-nature interactions by introducing feedback loops and socio-economic and environmental drivers (Foran et al., 2014). On the other hand, political ecology introduces the idea that the networks and components of the system are relational webs that include power relations (Rocheleau & Roth, 2007). Following this line of thought, this thesis uses a food systems approach informed by a political ecology perspective – UPE – to avoid uncritical accounts of LFSs. Combining these approaches also facilitates the integration of critical interactionism into the research process. While a food systems approach understands the role of interactions and contexts in LFSs research (social constructionism), UPE understands that power structures, diverse meanings and mechanisms influence the dynamics of LFSs (critical interactionism).

### 3.3.2 Urban Political Ecology

Although the increasing literature on LFSs provides significant insight into the barriers and facilitators of collaborations and interactions between LFIs, such as differences in material resources or discourses, it fails to analyse how the processes of LFSs affect collective outcomes

(Bauermeister, 2016; Levkoe, 2014). While the food systems approach proposed in the previous section provides a nuanced framework for the analysis of LFSs under a social constructionist epistemology, it is not sufficient to fully grasp the micro-politics, power relations and meaning-making within LFSs. According to some authors, political ecology, and its derivatives, such as UPE, may be one way to address the re-problematisation of human-nature interactions to understand food systems' sustainability concerns (Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017; Galt, 2013). To ground this study from this perspective, UPE is discussed in this section as an approach that enhances the understanding of LFSs under a food systems lens due to its ability to operationalise the theoretical perspective of this research: critical interactionism.

UPE is a strand of political ecology. Robbins (2004) defines political ecology as "empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems, *with explicit considerations of relations of power*" (p. 391, emphasis added to definition). This means that political ecology includes many focuses but converge in exploring the uneven distribution of environmental transformations. Although initially borrowing from Marxist political economy to analyse ecological and resource changes through the dynamics of capital accumulation and exploitation of labour and nature (Robbins, 2012), the field has been extended in several directions. These developments were influenced by poststructuralist theories such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and gender theories (Peet & Watts, 1996). In this manner, given its multidisciplinary nature and origin, political ecology cannot be regarded as a specific framework with prescribed theoretical and methodological instructions (Robbins, 2012). This means that although initially underpinned by a notion of politics and power embedded in conflicts related to access and control over resources, political ecology now recognises broader notions of politics – including knowledge production and everyday resistance (Peet & Watts, 2004). More importantly, political ecology now has a more robust focus on the construction of socio-ecological systems through the relations between humans and non-human actors (Robbins, 2012). UPE sits under this development, focusing on the continuous and active articulation of urban processes.

UPE emerged during the poststructuralist reassessment of political ecology in the late 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to political ecology's disconnection from cities and urbanisation processes (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2015). As conceptualised by Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003), UPE borrows ideas from Latour's ANT and thus promotes a non-binary conception of urban configurations (Latour, 2005). That is, recognising the agency of nature and non-humans in shaping urban processes and the dialectical relationship between the social and the natural. However, it builds on this hybridity with an understanding that any socio-ecological system is filled with interest and power struggles between those who conform to it through two concepts: metabolism and circulation (see Figure 3.3). As will be explained next, these concepts imply that power is built through associations and social connections, producing and re-producing uneven processes that construct winners and losers. This is particularly important because it moves away from simple examinations of the interactions between LFIs to the complex social (and natural) processes by which LFSs are formed and influence positive or negative food sovereignty processes. In this way, systems thinking, and a food systems approach, is an underlying

assumption of UPE. Nevertheless, UPE guides the analysis inward, toward the micro-dynamics of meaning-making and power mobilisation.

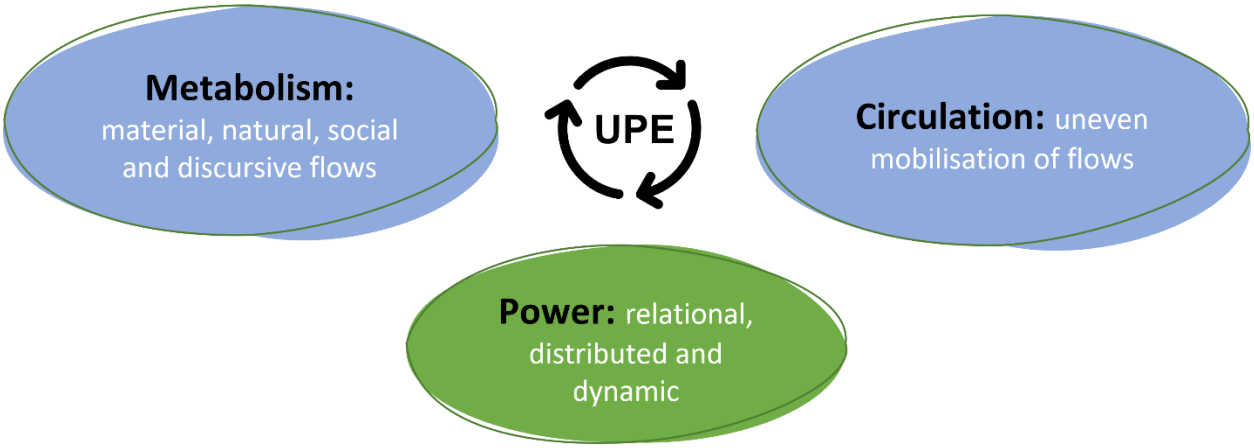


Figure 3.3: Theoretical construct of Urban Political Ecology Author's own compilation

The idea of metabolism is influenced by Marxist theories of labour to understand internal relationships between humans and nature (Swyngedouw, 2006). The notion of metabolism in UPE is particularly used to examine the socio-ecological construction of cities, creating a useful conceptual tool to apply social constructionism within a realist and relativist ontology. As “cities are constituted out of the flows of energy, water, food, commodities, money, people and all the other necessities that sustain life” (Harvey, 2003 p .34 in Moragues-Faus & Carroll (2018)), urban metabolism refers to the appropriation, exchange and transformation of these material, natural and social elements, which in turn form urban configurations and relations (Heynen et al., 2005). For example, how food is accessed, produced, consumed, and wasted in cities engages in urban environments' social and natural production (Moragues-Faus & Carroll, 2018; Shillington, 2013). Ultimately, these complex metabolic processes produce specific place-based socio-ecological conditions such as food insecurity. Although highly influenced by Marxist theories, metabolism in UPE is also a reflection of the integration of Latour's ANT into its theory. ANT seeks to understand how associations in heterogeneous networks are formulated and how the roles and functions of diverse human actors and non-human actants in these networks are attributed and stabilised (Murdoch, 1997). Although ANT could focus on how actors struggle to obtain power through networks and associations, it has been argued that it pays insufficient attention to power asymmetries and social inequalities within networks (Elder-Vass, 2008). As will be explained next, UPE accounts for these shortcomings through the notion of circulation, which recognises that social, political, and economic structures *can* influence the uneven distribution of resources.

Closely linked to the concept of metabolism is circulation, which explains how these metabolic processes could produce winners and losers (Robbins, 2012). As explained by Heynen et al. (2005) and Swyngedouw (2006), metabolic processes become politically, socially and economically mobilised – circulated – to serve particular purposes. In other words, it refers to the specific ways in which resources and social instruments that enable socio-ecological processes to take place,

shift from actor to actor, and in this process create specific configurations that benefit some and negatively affect others. This process is not politically neutral, as it always involves clashes of diverse discourses and ideologies (Moragues-Faus & Carroll, 2018). In this way, the notion of circulation helps the application of critical interactionism (see Section 3.2.2). It acknowledges that LFIs interact based diverse on meanings and understandings of the world (symbolic interactionism). At the same time, it recognises that the structures created within LFSs – based on the interactions between LFIs and also with other actors – can be filled by power inequalities that are interlinked with broader political, economic and social structures (critical inquiry).

However, due to its heritage of Marxist political economy, UPE has been criticised for taking a deterministic view of social reality, accepting pre-existing social relations as unavoidable (Holifield, 2009). This study argues that this fails to consider that the poststructuralist view of ANT has profoundly influenced the diversification of UPE. New advancements are increasingly arguing for a more situated use of UPE, which recognises power as dispersed and exercised in all aspects of life, focusing on the micropolitics between various groups and processes that shape everyday conditions (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Heynen, 2014; Lawhon et al., 2014). As explained by Swyngedouw (2006), the circulation of material and social instruments causes them to become "'enrolled' in associational networks that produce qualitative changes and qualitatively new assemblages" (p. 108). This means that social realities can always change through socio-ecologically articulated networks and conduits. Under this view, UPE acknowledges that socio-ecological systems *may* reflect structural inequalities along with class, gender, and racial lines and contain hierarchical power structures. However, it does not presume that these relations are always present or invariable.

UPE addresses power relations not by focusing on or asking what power is but by concentrating on power execution to understand the circulation of resources and metabolism. UPE analyses socio-ecological relations through the asymmetrical distribution of resources and unequal social and cultural configurations within socio-ecological systems. Some social actors manipulate this uneven playing field to decide how socio-ecological systems, such as LFSs, are constructed. Given the fluid dynamics of metabolic processes and their circulation, power is not conceived as something static or just held by individual actors. Instead, following a social constructionist perspective, power is composed of the diverse associations and networks built within and outside a system in a given socio-economic, natural and political context. As such, the formation of networks and associations depends on an actor's ability to navigate structures and form powerful alliances (Ghose, 2007). Under this view, power can also emerge through the agency of marginalised actors as they renegotiate and reshape socio-ecological relations. Fraser (2016) describes this phenomenon through the concept of powerlessness developed by Young (2011), which means having the feeling of not being capable of influencing decisions that directly affect one's situation. This feeling can lead to resistance in places through new networks and associations where people can act by imagining alternatives or going against normalised practices to introduce more just relations and ideas (Fraser, 2016). Power relations may be changed through these processes, providing marginalised or disempowered groups, including LFIs, the space to transform oppressive structures.

Although mainly referring to the socio-ecological construction of the city and used to unpack the development of uneven urban environments (see Heynen (2014) for a review), the notions of urban metabolism and circulation are helpful beyond only this application. By focusing on how the circulation of metabolised natural, social, and material elements forms urban relations and configurations, these concepts characterise and examine the formation of socio-ecological networks, such as LFSs. Building on UPE, this research investigates how the metabolic processes of LFSs affect their assemblage and food sovereignty potentials. This means recognising the LFIs (and other agents) that take part in these processes, that they are positioned in a variety of ways and operate particular roles in this configuration, but that in sum configure dynamic LFSs, prone to be continuously transformed.

Particularly critical in this process is analysing how LFIs interact – the dynamic material, social, and capital flows – and how these are mediated by the realities and divergent perspectives of LFIs, and the multiple forms of power asymmetries between them and with other actors. The recognition that diverse power dynamics influence LFSs is not necessarily new. As discussed in the literature review, LFSs should not be unreflexively championed as pathways towards more sustainable and just food systems, especially if several social processes are present in their articulation. Manganelli et al. (2019) argue that when studying LFSs, it is imperative to consider the role of the distinctive agencies of LFIs, and the power tensions between them or with their socio-institutional environment. In this recognition of agency, it is also essential to see if LFIs can affect decisions that influence them by building interconnected networks of resistance within LFSs. UPE serves this research to pay particular attention to these processes.

As seen in Chapter 2, much of the potential for constructing interconnected LFSs depends on the underlying values and derived practices of LFIs and their ability to interact in meaningful ways to eventually build collective power. In other words, it depends on the social imaginaries of LFIs (see section 3.2.1). Building on UPE's non-binary conceptualisation of urban spaces, this research raises the notion of social imaginaries to *socio-ecological imaginaries* to apply the social constructionist perspective embedded within a relativist and realist ontology explained in Section 3.2.1. The notion of socio-ecological imaginary recognises that the underlying thought-systems of LFIs are not just the result of social interactions, but also influenced by physical and ecological objects, such as natural landscapes. Moreover, although UPE's core focus is the city, urban socio-ecological processes create a nested set of related and interacting spatial scales (Heynen et al., 2005; Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). Accordingly, the socio-ecological imaginaries, metabolic processes and their circulation within LFSs are not bounded by that local scale but are in dialectical relations with other scales, a focus that is essential to understand LFSs (Manganelli and Moulaert, 2018). As such, UPE aligns with the relational sense of place needed for LFSs research and the multi-scalar notion of the food system approach, which are grounded in a social constructionist perspective. However, its particular attention to the granularities of social interactions and socio-ecological metabolic processes fosters critical examinations of the politics of the formation of LFSs.

Consequently, UPE helps look inward toward LFSs processes and outward to larger contexts and outcomes. In other words, it drives attention to the outcomes and processes of LFSs but also

symptoms and causes of injustice (Agyeman & Mcentee, 2014). Accordingly, it critically explains what is wrong in specific socio-ecological systems and explores alternatives, adaptations, and innovative collective action in the face of inequalities (Robbins, 2012). Significantly, UPE values context-specific work and understands that LFSs are not politically neutral as they can showcase conflicts, division and exercise of power. This conceptualisation includes a dialectical approach of human-nature interactions, recognising the interactions of local ecological conditions and LFSs. Therefore, it does not separate the notions of culture, space, economy, politics, and materiality with which food research is so closely interconnected (Goodman, 2016). As such, it enhances the food systems approach by integrating nature, scale, and social dynamics more fully in the understanding of LFSs without depoliticising the analysis of their internal processes and outcomes. Through this view, UPE translates the theoretical perspective of the study – critical interactionism – into practice, particularly through the analytical question: how LFSs articulated in particular conjunctures provide strategies for food systems change and how this is mediated by power relations and social processes that constrain this? A critical aspect in this analysis is to understand how these dynamics influence potential outcomes. Moreover, as seen in Sub-ection 3.3.1, in order to apply a food systems approach understanding process-outcome interactions is imperative. The following section discusses how food sovereignty is used for this purpose in this research.

### 3.3.3 Analysing Food Sovereignty in Local Food Systems

Food sovereignty promotes an all-encompassing ongoing process in which structural changes are pursued to achieve food security and environmental, social and economic sustainability (see section 2.5 of Chapter 2). As discussed in Chapter 2, food sovereignty's usefulness as an analytical tool comes from the underlying principles that it promotes, as well as its attention to the strategies advanced in the name of food security and sustainability, including the meanings attached to them. This section focuses on using food sovereignty analytically in the context of LFSs in alignment with the epistemology, theoretical perspective and conceptual framework explained thus far. In doing so, it proposes a relational approach to food sovereignty, acknowledging that a universal definition is challenging (see Sub-section 2.5.3 of Chapter 2). However, this does not mean that that the underlying principles of food sovereignty are lost in this conceptualisation. Building on Section 2.5 of Chapter 2, this sub-section argues that the core value of food sovereignty, and its meaning for this research, can be synthesised as a struggle for the right to food through fairer food systems (for people and nature), where participatory and direct democracy is fundamental.

Scholars have started to promote a relational understanding of food sovereignty based on place and scale social theories, galvanising a push back against the rigidity of food sovereignty proponents and arguing that food sovereignty is a dynamic process rather than a set of predefined criteria (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2015; Shattuck et al., 2015). Scale in this new approach is conceptualised as networks of elements and processes in complex multi-scalar relationships and systems, in concordance with social constructionism, a food systems approach and UPE. In this vein, these new conceptions reject the assumption that food sovereignty pathways are homogenous and acknowledge they are dependent on the unique place-based set

of circumstances, as also discussed in Chapter 2. Shattuck et al. (2015) suggest that food sovereignty is contextualised as reflections of specific histories and identities in this framing. This approach shifts the focus from what food sovereignty *is* (e.g., small-scale farming) to the situated *processes* of power restructuration in particular localities in the pursuit of food security and sustainability. This understanding of food sovereignty is particularly relevant due to its attention to place-specific meanings. For example, a recent study by Naylor (2019) outlines that food sovereignty framings in the Basque country follow a deep appreciation for regional foods influenced by a struggle to maintain Basque identity and autonomy, which may not directly translate to England. As explained in Chapter 2, recognising diversity based on place-based conditions is essential to understand LFSs, particularly under a social constructionist epistemology (see Sub-section 3.2.1).

As a relational sense of food sovereignty aligns with social constructionism, it also acknowledges the multiple realities within and between LFSs. As such, it opens opportunities for the analysis of initiatives that fit some characteristics of the food sovereignty framework, perhaps unintentionally, but might not be using the language of food sovereignty (for example, through the notion of agroecology). This notion is similar to the concept of 'quiet food sovereignty' proposed by Visser et al. (2015), which: "*does not challenge the overall food system directly through its produce, claims, or ideas, but focuses on individual economic benefits and ecological production for personal health, as well as a culturally appropriate form of sociality, generated by the exchange of self-produced food*" (p. 525). Notably, the relational sense of food sovereignty aligns with Chapter 2's argument that food sovereignty should allow an analytical focus on the *motivations* within LFSs, the *meanings* attached to sustainability and food security goals, *what* strategies are used in this context, and *how* this influences the pathways towards more just and sustainable food systems. This use of food sovereignty then aligns with critical interactionist perspective introduced in Sub-section 3.2.2, which draws attention to the examination of meanings, interactions, and the consequences of actions. Nonetheless, while it is essential to recognise that food sovereignty might play out differently in diverse places according to diverse meaning-making processes, it is still necessary to identify crucial attributes that constitute it in order to analyse whether LFSs are taking us towards the food system aspired to by its political struggle (see Sub-section 2.5.3 of Chapter 2). The question to ask is: how are the different struggles for food sovereignty connected, and how this can help analyse LFSs?

Several scholars and activists argue that food sovereignty is to be understood as a set of collective mobilisation and actions mainly related to *agrarian* struggles such as the right to land or the rights of peasants (Claeys, 2012, 2015b; Wittman, 2012). However, since LFSs in this research include a heterogeneous collection of LFIs with diverse focuses, drawing from these perspectives would not allow for valid comparisons. It would disregard efforts of more urban-based practices such as consumer-based or LFIs focusing on food access, which are increasingly being recognised as part of food sovereignty's political struggle (Shattuck et al., 2015). The positioning and conceptualisation of food sovereignty to analyse LFSs should be universal enough to apply to urban and rural concerns and relate to the internal processes within LFSs to comply with the conceptual framework advanced thus far.

As seen in Sub-section 2.5.1 of the literature review, food sovereignty aims to achieve sustainability and food security by promoting the right to food, access to productive resources, socially just and environmentally sustainable food production, local trade and markets. However, Sub-section 2.5.3 of Chapter 2 also argued that narrow frames of food sovereignty that only focus on relocalisation or production systems, even if they include a recognition of agroecology, are problematic to understand LFSs. The use of food sovereignty in analysing LFSs should focus on different processes that lead to transformative change for the achievement of food security and sustainability. In other words, assess what is trying to be achieved, by whom, for whom and by what means, and how the interactions between LFIs play out in this context. In this regard, this study proposes the right to food and food democracy as valuable principles – intrinsic in food sovereignty – that allow for this analysis under a relational and process-based approach (see Figure 3.4).

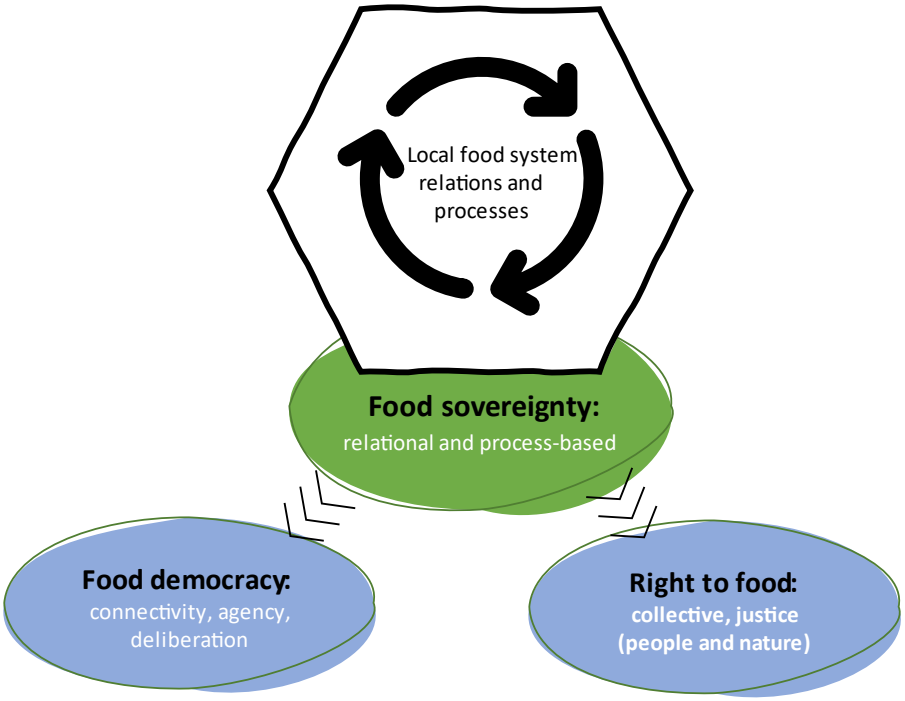


Figure 3.4: Food sovereignty in Local Food Systems. Author's own compilation

Building on Windfuhr and Jonsén (2005), this study argues that while food sovereignty's definition cannot be universal, at its core food sovereignty's struggle is a call for greater democratisation of food systems. Using this notion is particularly helpful in analysing LFSs. As seen in Chapter 1 and 2, one of the main arguments for promoting interconnected LFSs is to build greater collective power to drive more structural change and thus counteract the conventional food system. However, while this principle creates a foundation to understand LFSs in the context of food sovereignty, it does not really set out what should be achieved through the process of collectivising strategies. This study argues that another principle of food sovereignty – the right to food – is a valuable tool to analyse the outcomes of LFSs concerning food security and sustainability. As will be seen next, it involves both equitable access to productive resources and

to sustainable and healthy food, integrating the key characteristics of the food sovereignty concept discussed in Chapter 2. As such, it allows the analysis of both urban LFIs and those focusing on rural challenges in the dynamics of LFSs.

*Food democracy*

Despite debates on what food sovereignty would look like or what is needed for its achievement, there is one meaning of food sovereignty with which activists and scholars agree: the establishment of democracy in food systems. In its broadest definition, food sovereignty asserts the right of peoples to democratically determine or control the structure of their food system (Desmarais, 2007; Wittman, 2012). This involves the integrative goal of reclaiming the voices of those marginalised within the conventional food system (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; González de Molina & Lopez-Garcia, 2021). Patel (2009) argues that food sovereignty is ultimately a call to exercise the 'right to act' or 'the right to have rights' to achieve more just and sustainable food systems. In other words, it orients itself not only toward the institutions responsible for ensuring this right – the state – but toward the people who are meant to hold it so that they can occupy a space in the construction of food systems. Building on post-political scholarship, Moragues-Faus (2017b) highlights that food sovereignty is related to the right to act politically in egalitarian spaces of heterogeneous groups and individuals. In this way, food sovereignty relates to the notion of food democracy advanced by Hassanein (2003), albeit moving away from notions of representative democracy and consensus policy-making criticised by post-political scholars (Swyngedouw, 2005, 2014).

Expanding on Lang's (1999) notion, Hassanein (2003) defines *food democracy* as the active participation and empowerment of citizens to determine food policies and practices through equal and effective opportunities. This involves the following foreground: sharing ideas, becoming knowledgeable, developing one's own relationship with food, collective action, and working towards the common good (Hassanein, 2008). That is, building the grounds for food citizenship – promoting citizens' rights, responsibilities and practices to achieve positive change (Fladvad, 2019; Food Ethics Council, 2021; Saxena et al., 2021b; Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Compared to Lang, Hassanein conceptualises food democracy as having a specific end (Di Masso & Zografos, 2015). It sees the collective definition of policies and values as a means towards ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just food systems. Significantly, this notion of food democracy opts for pragmatism, recognising that there might be compromises to change the food system. This has led to some critiques of food democracy as being 'progressive' or 'reformist' and thus not conforming with food sovereignty's 'radical' ideals of social mobilisation to uncover injustices and reclaim political spaces (Di Masso et al., 2014; Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017). However, this study argues that food democracy and food sovereignty's premises could be the same, as expressed by other scholars (Ayres & Bosia, 2011).

Hassanein (2003) suggests that food democracy can be transformative if it engages with a dynamic inquiry, modification, and reflection process. Framed under a food sovereignty paradigm, this reflexive process means analysing if the 'right to act' is truly being promoted. This entails not only analysing if the right to define food and agriculture systems is recognised but also

if structures and processes are being constructed to allow people to actually participate in the democratisation of food systems (see Sub-section 2.5.1 of Chapter 2). In other words, food sovereignty recognises that having the 'right to act' is not enough if there are no strategies that contribute to enhancing people's *capacity* and *agency* to engage in food systems. As will be seen further in this sub-section, food sovereignty aims to shift power towards people who produce and consume food for the achievement of the right to food through democratic and just pathways. As such, it also questions whether democratic processes diverge from unjust power configurations of the current food system (Swyngedouw, 2014), bringing the voices of those who 'do not count' into democratic spaces.

LFSs contributing to food democracy would thus enhance "the capacity to act authoritatively (or asserting agency); the ability to influence political and economic processes; and the rights to participate and to be consulted" (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2015, p. 485). For example, by building networks of LFIs to contest current food policies and increase citizen mobilisation on the ground. However, this does not mean an individualistic struggle for change, with some powerful actors leading the process and excluding others. A relational understanding of food sovereignty argues that fairer food systems should be built through collective processes of democratic deliberation and debate, in which dissenting voices are included, and there is an acknowledgement that some may divert from food sovereignty 'typified' trajectories (Agarwal, 2014). As Alonso-Fradejas et al. (2015) highlight, food sovereignty is a call for an alliance embedded in diversity (intra- and intersocial); rather than building silos (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2015). In this notion, there needs to be a certain tolerance for pluralism to allow for a constructive interchange between the various LFIs within a place, albeit always with the final objective of just and sustainable food systems in mind. This means also assessing if the interactions between LFIs are fostering a constructive 'diálogo de saberes', as conceptualised by Martínez-Torres and Rosset (2014), whereby meaning is collectively constructed based on dialogue between diverse groups and involving those that have been stripped of meaning.

With the above discussion in place, it can be argued that as much as food sovereignty is about creating connectivity for food democracy, it is also about maintaining autonomy within different spaces and institutions, leaving room for different sovereign actors to coexist (Iles & Montenegro de Wit, 2015). Developing this further, Werkheiser (2016) argues that food sovereignty's notion of democracy includes the concept of self-determination. Nevertheless, food sovereignty does not focus on the autonomy of independent and rational individuals, but communities' self-determination as self-governed entities with the power to achieve justice on their own terms (Noll & Murdock, 2019). This includes effectively engaging in collective projects that allow these communities to flourish. However, building alliances and collective transformative processes does not mean that certain groups must resign their agency. More importantly, the relationships built upon collective projects should be horizontal and thus include the ideas of those affected by these projects (Werkheiser, 2016), as will be explained in the next sub-section. In the context of LFSs, this means balancing the goals of individuals and the autonomy of LFIs with cooperation, solidarity, and justice within and between LFI whilst advancing strategies to democratise food systems.

*Right to food*

Another cross-cutting pillar of food sovereignty is the right to food (Calvário, 2017; Di Masso et al., 2014; Sage, 2014; Wittman, 2012). Although La Vía Campesina, the international peasant movement that introduced the food sovereignty concept, had an initial ambivalent approach to the right to food under a legal perspective (Claeys, 2012), recent reconceptualisations of food sovereignty include the right to food as one of its principal goals. For example, the first sentence of la Vía Campesina's definition of the concept that "food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods" (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007, p.1). This may be due to a cross-fertilisation of both concepts. Indeed, Haugen (2009) demonstrates that many elements of food sovereignty fall under the human right to food framework. However, this adoption of the right to food extends its meaning beyond a legal concept that places responsibilities on the state. Under a food sovereignty paradigm, the right to food is filled with social and political meaning. It places it as a social good, signalling a collective commitment for its achievement.

The right to adequate food is a human right recognised under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN, n.d.; UN General Assembly, 1966). The *General Comment 12* of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights contains the fundamental text of the right to food and the obligations of states to protect, fulfil, and respect this right (UNESC, 1999). Recognised under international law and ratified by 160 countries through the ICESCR (including the UK and Spain), its normative content is binding for states. Since these covenants, the right to food has been further conceptualised. It now could be understood as the "right of every individual, alone or in community with others, to have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, adequate and culturally acceptable food that is produced and consumed sustainably, preserving access to food for future generations" (De Schutter, 2014, p.3). Although it includes a small mention of community, at the centre of this notion is the individual, who is granted an entitlement that should be claimed, defended, and fulfilled. As a human right, the right to food incorporates addressing issues of discrimination and dignity (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012; Sonnino et al., 2016). Despite acknowledging the relevance of sustainability, the right to food does not expressly stress the transformation of the agricultural production model (Beuchelt & Virchow, 2012). Here is where food sovereignty enhances the concept. It highlights that achieving the right to food has certain conditions, such as the democratisation of food systems explained previously and the inclusion of agroecology to achieve food security (see Chapter 2). The advantages of how food sovereignty frames the right to food for this research are two-fold: the elevation from the individual to the collective and its achievement through just food systems (for people and nature).

The right to food has been criticised for following a highly state-centric and individualistic perspective (Claeys, 2012; Wittman, 2012). Most of the guidelines for its achievement, such as the FAO's *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* (FAO, 2005), refer to policies that governments should implement to enforce this right. However, scholars argue that this risks sustaining current

power structures within food systems (Claeys, 2015a; Mazhar et al., 2007). Human rights, and thus the right to food, is mainly approached from a liberal and social-democratic approach, focusing on the individual. State interventions apply redistribution measures without changing the structural elements that generate inequalities. Food sovereignty, in contrast, leaves right-to-food-holders unspecified by referring merely to 'peoples'. Under a food sovereignty lens, individuals, communities, regions, or territories hold and implement the right to food (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). In other words, without taking responsibility from the state as a guarantor of this right, the realisation of the right to food involves concerted efforts (including the participation in decision-making processes) of all social actors, including LFSs and LFIs.

Second, from a food sovereignty perspective, the right to food is about improving individual access to food *and* addressing fundamental issues of the system. In this conception, justice becomes fundamental by reclaiming social structures free of oppression and injustices, balancing nature and society, and explicitly rejecting the accumulation of power in the hands of the conventional food system (Nyéléni, 2007). It should be noted that there is a tendency to understand food sovereignty as *mainly* referring to the marginalisation of small farmers (Beuchelt & Virchow, 2012). Indeed, food sovereignty discourses tend to be narrowly framed in academic and activist spheres to only encompass the promotion of local economies, small-scale farmers, and national and local self-sufficiency; a focus that has been criticised by previous scholars (Agarwal, 2014; Bernstein, 2014; Edelman, 2014; Edelman et al., 2014). Yet, looking at the definition of food sovereignty (see Chapter 2), it can be argued that food sovereignty embraces a pluralised conception of justice; "enacted in situated contexts in response to the multidimensional, embodied injustices" (Coulson & Milbourne, 2020, p. 46). Drawing on this plural vision of justice, food sovereignty's right to food paradigm relates to new developments of justice in the context of food.

Building on the work of Young (1990, 2011) and Fraser (2005, 2009), recent literature on food justice argues that the achievement of the right to food for all involves the fair redistribution of material resources (equal share), recognition of cultural diversity (diverse food needs and ideas of 'appropriate' food), and political representation (food democracy) (Coulson & Milbourne, 2020; Moragues-Faus, 2017c; Smaal et al., 2021; Tschersich & Kok, 2022). Injustices are thus best addressed through interconnected practices with an awareness of uneven power relations and diverse notions of the world (Goodman et al., 2012). Translated into LFSs, this requires an assessment of their inclusiveness (who counts) and situated justice practices (what problems/justice and how), including if they perpetuate inequalities shaped by context-based histories of oppression and exclusion. Moreover, the right to food argues that environmental sustainability should be considered for its achievement (see previous definition). Bringing this a step further, food sovereignty follows new developments in food justice scholarship through the notion of agroecology to recognise the inseparable nature of the social and ecological world (see Chapter 2), recognising more-than-humans as subjects of justice (Coulson & Milbourne, 2020). Thus, the right to food under a food sovereignty paradigm provides the conceptual tool needed to account for uncritical celebrations of LFSs as vectors to achieve food security and sustainability. This involves understanding how the processes of LFSs help LFIs move beyond

creating privileged spaces or charity and enhance the work of LFIs to improve people's capabilities and participation in the food system while promoting harmony between socio-economic domains and nature.

In conclusion, this study understands food sovereignty as a place-based phenomenon and not a checklist of practices to translate homogenously across geographies. Therefore, it has adopted a relational sense of food sovereignty that concentrates on the processes of power restructuration of different localities in the search for food security and sustainability. In this sense, the analysis focuses on the social relations and processes that LFSs advance in their particular places. In other words, the metabolic processes and system interactions within LFSs construct specific food sovereignty conditions. With this in mind, it has been proposed that food sovereignty eventually revolves around asserting the right to food and the democratisation of food systems. Both principles do not prescribe specific *things to do* but include a broad definition of food sovereignty's core values to acknowledge the specificities of each place, for example, by considering the diversity of justice struggles and knowledge that is present in the studied cases. Moreover, these principles do not refer to individual LFIs but rather to the LFSs as a whole. Based on the theoretical approach advanced in this chapter, this thesis concentrates on the internal dynamics of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty. In this way, the proposed principles should not be considered a simple checklist to analyse LFSs in terms of food sovereignty but rather as a framework to ascertain how the different LFSs dynamics or *metabolic processes* affect the development of these conditions. Ultimately, this focuses on the *how* rather than the *what*, understanding that food sovereignty processes are dynamic and alive.

## 3.4 CONCLUSION: INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK – A POLITICAL FOOD SYSTEMS APPROACH TO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The integration of the conceptual approaches discussed in this chapter with this research study's epistemological and theoretical perspectives – social constructionism and critical interactionism – leads to the following conceptual framework: a political food systems approach for food sovereignty. As seen in Figure 3.1 in Section 3.3, this conceptual framework frames LFSs as complex networks or entities composed of diverse LFIs and food-related activities, which are in constant interaction through different discursive, material, social and capital flows – or *metabolic processes* – that produce and transform the LFS as a whole and affect food sovereignty conditions. Under this view, LFSs and their outcomes in terms of food sovereignty result from interactions and negotiations (informal and formal) of different actor groups – including influential actors – embedded within historical, contextual and asymmetrical socio-ecological relationships. As seen throughout this chapter, this conceptual framework helps translate the research paradigm into the research context.

The food systems approach helps ground the social constructionist epistemology of the study by focusing on the interactions of LFIs and other actors working across the food supply chain, their socio-economic, political, and natural environment, and how these dynamics construct system-level properties and outcomes. Complementing this focus with UPE then brings the analytical lens to the micro-politics and power relations within LFSs, which involves diverse understandings,

discourses and ideologies – socio-ecological imaginaries – aiding the application of critical interactionism as the theoretical perspective behind this study. In this context, and particularly under a social constructionist and critical interactionist perspective, a relational understanding of food sovereignty is adopted, which focuses on the situated processes of power restructuration in specific localities concerning food and efforts to build sustainable and just food systems. This draws attention to the place-based meaning-making processes, particularly in the name of food security and sustainability, within LFSs that influence the food sovereignty dynamics of a place, understood as collectively asserting food democracy and the right to food. Significantly, as place-based socio-ecological constructs, LFSs are in a dialectical relationship with the regional, national, and global and are shaped by the social processes, power relations and natural conditions. Because of this interdependency, LFSs and their food sovereignty processes also influence the environment where they operate, creating feedback loops.

Through this focus, the proposed conceptual framework deals with the shortcomings of other approaches discussed in Chapter 2 and addresses the theoretical considerations needed to analyse LFSs as the collection of LFIs in cities. The conceptual framework deals with the reflexive politics of place-making and the relational sense of place and scale that scholars have advocated and identified as necessary when analysing LFSs (see Chapter 2). Moreover, it incorporates a process-based and relational sense of food sovereignty. This deals with the complexity of LFSs and rejects the introduction of binaries and presumptions when studying them. Accordingly, it provides a robust conceptual foundation to capture all relevant actors within a LFS. Furthermore, it avoids overly celebratory accounts or examinations focused only on organisation processes because it includes a political and social perspective with a strong focus on process-outcome interactions.

In order to bring this conceptual framework into practice, the research concentrates on various interconnected inquiries. First, it examines the place-based processes through which LFSs are created, including the political, social, natural and economic relations that operate at different scales and influence the construction of LFSs (Objectives 1 and 2 – see Section 1.4). Second, it analyses the internal metabolism of LFSs. In other words, the circulating metabolic flows that impact food sovereignty dynamics (Objective 3 – Section 1.4). This is informed by an examination of the social processes, discourses and meanings that shape food sovereignty conditions (Objective 4 – see Section 1.4). Significantly, these inquiries put forward the understanding that LFSs are assembled and arranged depending on the different views and social constructions of reality, particularly concerning sustainability, food security, nature, the local and food, of the interdependent actors of LFSs. In particular, as seen in Sections 2.5 and 3.3.3, food sovereignty is used as a lens to assess sustainability and food security strategies within LFSs. By concentrating on these issues, the research ultimately evaluates how LFSs, as place-based socio-ecological systems, produce enabling or disabling environments and social conditions in terms of food sovereignty – the achievement of the right to food and the democratisation of food systems.

## Chapter 4 – METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the theoretical foundations for this research: social constructionism and critical interactionism. Under this research paradigm, it is understood that meaning within LFSs is generated in a social context through the interactions and interrelationships between LFIs and is influenced by their political, social, cultural, and natural contexts. To operationalise this philosophical and epistemological standpoint in the context of this research, Chapter 3 also presented the conceptual framework used for this study: a political food system approach for food sovereignty. This framework interprets LFSs as the result of place-based social phenomena and socio-ecological interactions composed of diverse LFIs and food-related activities. Within these complex networks, LFIs are in constant interaction through different discursive, material, social and capital flows – or *metabolic processes* (Heynen et al., 2005) – that produce and transform the LFS as a whole and influence food sovereignty processes. Food sovereignty processes within LFSs are understood in this research as a struggle for the right to food through fairer food systems (for people and nature), where the democratisation of LFSs is fundamental.

Building on this conceptual framework, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this study regarding how LFSs contribute to food sovereignty in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston using an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2005). Before going into the details of the chosen methods, Section 4.2 outlines the applicability and rationale of case study methodology for this study, including the choice of case study type and approach, contextualised within the research paradigm explained in Chapter 3. Section 4.2 also presents the main case study questions that guided the research and discusses the selection of cases and data collection sites. Section 4.3 discusses the data collection methods and management, including how the methods had to be adapted due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and the subsequent reassessment of the data collection methods to address the research objectives successfully. Following this, Section 4.4 discusses ethical considerations, including informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, trustworthiness and rigour, and the researcher's reflexivity. Finally, Section 4.5 explains the method for data analysis and interpretation for within-case and cross-case results. The final section summarises the methodology and methods used for this study and their appropriateness.

### 4.2 QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

This research examines how LFSs contribute to food sovereignty processes by analysing the different LFIs and discourses that compose LFSs, particularly in relation to food security and sustainability, how contextual factors influence their composition, and how the different metabolic processes within LFSs influence food sovereignty dynamics (see Section 3.4). This means that it focuses on the interactions between LFIs understood from their perspective and the influence that knowledge production within LFSs – partly determined by their social, political, natural and cultural environment – has on their actions to pursue sustainability and food security. Accordingly, a qualitative research design was selected based on the theoretical framework

presented in Chapter 3. Qualitative research starts with the assumption that the social construction of realities is reflected in participants' perspectives and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study (Flick, 2007). According to Flick (2007), the methodology and methods used should be appropriate to these considerations and open enough to allow a deep understanding of processes and relations. In this case, it was performed using a qualitative *case study* methodology.

Although qualitative case study has been regarded as a method by Crotty (1998), case study proponents refer to it as research methodology (Greenwood, 1993; Yazan, 2015). For this research, the case study approach was used as the overarching methodology operationalised through the use of following methods: document analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews (see Section 4.3 for further detail). Case study research aims to capture a case's complexity (Stake, 1995). Therefore, researchers should view a case as a bounded and integrated system with working parts in which the case's embeddedness and interaction with its context is also considered (Stake, 1995). In order words, it is an approach that promotes understanding of complex social phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2009). This methodology facilitates understanding a phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014), combining different data collection methods to capture its complexity and analyse it holistically (Yazan, 2015). In contrast to statistical generalisation, case studies strive for analytical generalisation or transferability (Yin, 2009). As such, case studies aim to illustrate the generalisability of theoretical constructs and expand current knowledge of phenomena.

This study also considered other methodologies, such as phenomenology, ethnography, or grounded theory. However, compared to the case study methodology, ethnography and phenomenology concentrate on participants' individual or tacit knowledge and experience rather than on the social construction of phenomena or bounded systems such as LFSs (Crotty, 1998; O'Reilly, 2009; Simons, 2009). They conform to a more *constructivist* perspective rather than the social *constructionist* approach advanced in this study (see Chapter 3). On the other hand, case studies investigate the case *of* a social construct – in this case, LFSs. Moreover, both ethnography and grounded theory promote relatively 'unstructured' data collection approaches and are primarily inductive, which means that they usually reject having theoretical assumptions at the outset of the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). In contrast, case study bridges deductive (theory-testing) as well as inductive (theory-generating) reasoning – an abductive approach (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). It acknowledges that researchers are never *tabula rasa* at the outset of the study, but also that they should be open to re-think, modify, challenge, and reject theories in their interaction with data (Kennedy, 2018). This is appropriate for this study, as assessing the contribution of LFSs to food sovereignty cannot be separated from previous theory; LFSs and food sovereignty are theoretical concepts in themselves. However, they can also be adapted, translated, and transformed throughout the research processes as new insights start to be identified.

In sum, qualitative case study methodology is appropriate for understanding complex socio-ecological systems such as LFSs, where many LFIs coalesce and interact. In addition, the consideration of context within the case study methodology is imperative for this research. The

contexts of LFSs determine the different understandings that LFIs have regarding local food, sustainability, and food security, as discussed in previous chapters. Moreover, LFSs are in constant interaction with higher scales, which influence their approach and sometimes constrain their impact. Case study methodology fosters this analysis by carefully examining the meaningful realities that LFSs construct and the conditions by which they are shaped while evaluating the consequences of these processes. In such a manner, this approach presents a view of research that takes a pragmatic view of knowledge (explained in Chapter 3) which promotes a view of social phenomena in their complexity (Thomas & Myers, 2015). By considering previous theory and the contexts of LFSs, this study concentrates on the usefulness of the findings to transform current phenomena and knowledge about LFSs and the transferability of the findings to other contexts. The following sections explain the case study type selected, the case study research questions and issues that guided the data collection methods and the selection of cases and data collection sites.

### 4.2.1 Instrumental Collective Case Study

Several authors stress that case study has different meanings for different people and disciplines, leading to a range of different case study approaches (Simons, 2009). Two of the most acknowledged approaches are the ones proposed by Yin (2009) and Stake (1995). Whereas Yin's (2009) approach is framed within a more positivist and objective approach that requires an explicit protocol based on previous theory, Stake (1995) emphasises the qualitative interpretation of cases following a social constructionist perspective. Stake (1995) conceives researchers as interpreters and gatherers of meaning (Yazan, 2015): "the qualitative researcher emphasises episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of the individual" (Stake, 1995, p. xii). This recognises the iterative nature of qualitative research, whereby research is informed by the interplay between collected data, participants, and the researcher. Because the epistemological stance of this research views knowledge as socially constructed rather than discovered (see Chapter 3), Stake's (1995) approach was selected for this study.

Stake (1995) classifies cases into three types: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are exploratory research projects in which cases are studied based on the intrinsic interest in the case itself. In contrast, instrumental case studies aim to understand a particular phenomenon. A case is chosen to explore an issue or research question, not because of the particularity of the case itself. In instrumental case studies, the focus is more likely to be informed by previous theory and knowledge (Grandy, 2010). Collective case studies – also called multiple or comparative case studies – include analysing several cases to form a collective understanding of a phenomenon (Simons, 2009). According to Stake (2005), in collective case studies, the *quintain* or phenomenon is the object of interest rather than the individual cases. The individual cases are of interest because they illuminate essential aspects of the studied issue.

For this research, an instrumental collective case study design was adopted. It is collective, as it includes two different units of analysis: the LFSs of Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston. It is instrumental, as it tries to serve the broader understanding of LFSs by addressing the identified knowledge gaps

in the current local/alternative food literature. Therefore, it pays particular attention to how the internal dynamics within LFSs affect their contribution to food sovereignty processes by bridging geographical and theoretical biases in current local/alternative food scholarship through a cross-country inquiry.

The procedure to conduct this case study research followed an adaptation of Stake's (2005) approach to conducting a multiple case study and expanded by Miller and Salkind (2002):

1. Determine the type of case that will best yield information about the *quintain* or phenomenon under study. As explained in this section, this study uses an instrumental collective case study (Sub-section 4.2.1).
2. Organise the multiple case study around a conceptual structure based on research questions or issues to be studied (Sub-section 4.2.2).
3. Gather multiple forms of data to develop an in-depth understanding (Section 4.3).
4. Analyse issues or themes present *within and across cases*. Data analysis involves developing a detailed description of the case (Sub-section 4.5)
5. Situate the cases within their context or setting in the analysis (Section 4.5).
6. Interpret the meaning of the multiple case analysis based on previous knowledge and the gathered data (Sub-section 4.5).

This step-by-step guide helps deal with the complexity of case study methodology. Case study research often involves the use of multiple types of data where the definition of the phenomenon and its issues studied is imperative to guide the research process. Following this guide, the next sub-section describes the conceptual structure – case research questions and issues – that organised the research process.

### 4.2.2 Case Study Questions

Case study research aims to expand and generalise theory and knowledge, rather than enumerating frequencies of variables as in statistical generalisation. For this, Stake (2005) suggests proposing case study questions based on issues that help broaden the understanding of the *quintain* – the phenomenon in question. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest that the use of guiding questions or issues increases the likelihood that the researcher will be able to place limits on the scope of the study and increase the feasibility of completing the project. The issues or questions usually arise from the literature, personal or professional experience or theories. For this study, they were based on the research's objectives, the literature review and the theoretical framework. Based on the abductive approach explained at the beginning of section 4.2, the case study questions were used as flexible guidance, providing the possibility to re-think, modify, challenge, and reject them through emergent concepts in the interaction with data. See Table 4.1 for the details of the resulting case study questions.

Table 4.1: Case study questions

| Research objectives | Issues | Case study questions |
|---|---|---|
| To critically investigate how LFSs are constituted in two contrasting geographical and socio-political contexts by identifying what kinds of LFIs operate in each case, including their values, discourses and corresponding approaches. | LFSs are comprised of a heterogenous set of LFIs and other organisations, each with different roles within the LFS. This depends on the different agendas that components of LFSs pursue | 1. What are the kinds of LFIs and other organisations that operate in the LFS of each city?<br><br>2. What are the main activities of LFIs?<br><br>3. What do LFIs aim to achieve through their activities?<br><br>4. How do the different approaches of LFIs differ between the two cities? |
| To examine how the political, economic and social environment within which LFSs are located influence their composition and function. | The composition of LFSs depends on multi-scalar processes, influenced by their contexts and historical processes. | 5. How do the overall characteristics of LFSs differ or assimilate across the studied cases?<br><br>6. How does this relate to contextual characteristics – governance dynamics, culture, etc.? |
| To evaluate the circulating material, social and capital flows that shape the dynamics of LFSs and how these affect their assemblage and components. | LFSs are characterised by complex metabolic processes between LFIs without being subordinated to the larger logic of a food movement. This can influence the goals and approaches of LFIs. | 7. Why are the LFSs studied connected or dispersed?<br><br>8. What are the complex & collaborative relationships/networks/partnerships in each place?<br><br>9. How do the material, social and capital flows influence the characteristics of LFSs and the LFIs working within it?<br><br>10. What are the differences in the metabolic processes within LFSs between the two cities? |
| To analyse how the social processes, power relations and discursive constructions within each LFS influence the delivery of food sovereignty processes. | The circulation of relevant resources and flows within LFSs influence food sovereignty processes. This also determines who wins or loses or is excluded within these complex LFSs. | 11. To what degree does the work of LFIs complement each other in relation to food sovereignty?<br><br>12. How do the internal dynamics of LFSs influence food sovereignty processes? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | 13. How and why are certain LFIs marginalised within LFSs?<br><br>14. Who wins or loses within these complex LFSs? Who is excluded?<br><br>15. How does this differ/ assimilate between the two cities? |

These case study questions constitute the analytical frame by which the study is organised. As Thomas and Myers (2015) argue, if the aim is to conduct case study research, the research needs to be placed within a context and have a means for interpreting it (conceptual structure). In such a way, the case study approach concerns understanding how and why something happens in real-life settings or why it might be the case (Thomas & Myers, 2015), which concurs with the proposed case study questions for this research. This satisfies the condition of instrumental case study approaches that aim to understand complex phenomena beyond the chosen cases. According to the procedure to conduct case study research explained in section 4.2.1, another critical step is setting the boundaries for the case study research. That is, selecting the cases to be studied and the different data collection sites that conform to them. This will be explained in the following section.

### 4.2.3 Selection of Cases and Data Collection Sites

Case selection aimed to provide rich information about LFSs to maximise and broaden current understanding. Grandy (2010) argues that instrumental case studies offer a thick description of a particular phenomenon. In this sense, the cases are carefully selected to yield insightful information about the research objectives. Flyvbjerg (2010) argues that a representative case or a random sample is not necessarily the most appropriate strategy due to this aim. Thus, Flyvbjerg (2010) proposes various case selection strategies: extreme/ deviant cases, maximum variation cases, critical cases, and paradigmatic cases. The selection of cases for this study was based on maximum variation, using a differential dimension as main selection criterion (Flyvbjerg, 2010). In this case, the cases were selected based on their difference in socio-institutional and political environment, given the importance of place-based characteristics and urban food governance in the construction of LFSs (Chapter 2). This study selected Preston, England, and Vitoria-Gasteiz, the Basque Country, as cases.

Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz are cities with complex socio-economic landscapes. In the last decade, Preston, the administrative centre of Lancashire, England, has been affected by post-industrial decline and increased public austerity (Lockey & Glover, 2019). It is within England's 20% most deprived local authority areas (Lancashire County Council [LCC], 2019). This has led to a community wealth building strategy proposed by the City Council in Preston, often termed the 'Preston Model' (CLES, 2017). Preston sits in the middle of the Lancashire agricultural hub, engaging in various food production activities, including livestock, dairy farming, field vegetables and crops. Vitoria-Gasteiz is the Basque Country's the de-facto capital, one of the wealthiest

autonomous communities in Spain that holds relative economic and political autonomy, where the Basque identity is acknowledged as separate. Vitoria-Gasteiz is ranked as one of the best Spanish cities to live and has obtained the titles of European Green Capital 2012 and Global Green City Award in 2019. It is also at the centre of agricultural production, and there is a stronger emphasis on the development of sustainable food systems, exemplified by the implementation of a municipal food plan in 2017.

Miller and Salkind (2002) define a case as a system bounded by time and place. For this research, the boundaries for the cases were based on the geopolitical boundaries of Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz. Following the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 3, LFSs are socio-ecological abstract constructs developed through the interactions and dynamics between LFIs and their contexts. Thus, to collect data about LFSs, one needs to start first with the examination of the LFIs that compose it. LFIs were treated as the empirical units from which data is collected; – about themselves as individual practices and the LFS as a whole through their inter-organisational interactions – (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010).

Chapter 2 argued that LFSs are best understood as "a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of particular places" (Feenstra & Campbell, 2013, p. 1). Drawing from this definition and the food systems approach discussed in Chapter 3, a key component of LFSs are LFIs working across the food supply chain – production, distribution, consumption and waste management. The selection of LFIs for this research thus aimed to represent LFIs working in each of these different stages of the food supply chain. However, the site selection process clarified that the work of LFIs is highly permeable in real-life contexts, with LFIs conducting activities that relate to more than just one stage. For example, a community garden working on producing local food, but also engaging in educational activities to change consumption habits, cannot be categorised as only working to produce food. Thus, focusing the selection process on acquiring a sample based on food supply chain activity was problematic. More importantly, LFSs are influenced by the context where they are embedded, leading to a diverse and unique set of practices in each studied location that may or may not include LFIs representative of these stages.

Accordingly, the selection of LFIs was mainly guided by a situational understanding that focused on the variety of types of LFIs in each place (Martindale et al., 2018). In recognising this complexity, a general inclusion criterion for this research was determined: aim to improve sustainability and food security at the local level and/or have innovative retail, distribution and production formats[5]. Moreover, a key aspect in identifying LFIs was that these organisations follow certain ethical principles that extend for-profit strategies to separate them from the conventional food system (Jarosz, 2008). This avoided limiting in advance the shape,

[5] Innovative in this context means retail, distribution and production formats that aim to relocalise different dimensions of food – spatial, informational, governance, and ownership. As explained in Chapter 1, this and promoting values beyond profit maximisation and industrial logics are vital characteristics of LFIs.

heterogeneity and range of potential organisations compared to an ex-ante bounded categorisation of LFIs.

Sample LFIs in each city were identified through internet search, snowball and expert sampling (Atkinson & Flint, 2011; Patton, 2018). The internet search for LFIs used search terms based on previous literature and empirical studies that have categorised certain types of organisations as LFIs. This included, for example, community garden, organic farm, food cooperative, farmers' market, community soup kitchen, CSA, buying groups, among others. The internet search also used terms like food partnerships or food policy councils to identify potential collaborative spaces of LFIs. This process also included reviewing the activities of LFIs to determine if they met the inclusion criterion and grasp if their work included collaborations with other LFIs working in the city to identify potential connections within the LFS. After an initial mapping exercise of LFIs based on expert consultation and internet searches, a primary database of initiatives was developed for each case. Based on previous knowledge and advice with experts working on food change in each locality, such as academics or activists, a small number of LFIs (2-4) in each city were identified from the database as the main gatekeepers for each LFS. These LFIs were well renowned in each city for driving change towards more sustainable food systems and addressing specific issues related to food. The methods were initially tested with them (more on this in Section 4.3). The gatekeepers in each city provided the initial contact to already identified initiatives and other non-identified organisations. This allowed expanding the initial database and adding or taking out LFIs according to the selection criterion. Moreover, it provided access to potential sample LFIs.

From the potential sample of LFIs, the final selection of LFIs to participate in this study focused on their relevance and centrality within the cases and their ability to represent the heterogeneity of practices within LFSs. This means that the final list of participant LFIs primarily identified LFIs that were actively working towards sustainable food systems and were mentioned by the gatekeepers for each LFS and during expert consultation as key in understanding the dynamics of each LFS. However, the selection of LFIs also aimed to ensure balance and variety by including LFIs that are sometimes marginalised within local/alternative food literature such as food banks and that could provide a range of perspectives regarding the functioning of the LFS. In this sense, the selection included LFIs central in the diversity of food activities of each city, but also those that were potentially more 'peripheral' to ongoing collaborative networks, as they were not brought up in conversations during initial consultations or identified while tracing potential LFIs' connections online. As data collection progressed, some non-identified and emergent (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) LFIs were also included, following the dynamic feature of qualitative case study research (Stake, 2005). The selection of LFIs in this study is thus in concordance with the case study approach of Stake (2005), which argues that selection by the sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority; relevance to the studied phenomenon is of greater importance. This delimitation of LFIs based on their importance to understand the dynamics of each LFS was particularly crucial as it would have been impossible to apply the research methods to all LFIs within each city. This focus kept the study on track and helped deal with a manageable quantity of data without diminishing the robustness of the research.

Of the final LFIs identified as important for the research project in each city, some organisations were impossible to contact. However, continuous efforts (via phone and e-mail) were made to invite them to participate. For example, this was the case for the main food redistributor in Lancashire, FareShare and two local food banks in Preston. These LFIs could not collaborate because of the increased demand for food due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the lack of these initiatives might mean that some perspectives might have been missed this does not necessarily affect the achievement of the research's objectives. Given that the research concentrates on the whole entity – the LFS – it is more important to retain information about the overall characteristics of this system rather than individual initiatives. This was still possible without some LFIs by looking at their connections with those who did participate in the research project during data collection and analysis. Significantly, ongoing reflection on whether important information to understand each LFS was missing, and if further data collection was needed, was crucial during data collection and subsequent data analysis. After a preliminary analysis of the collected data (see Section 4.5), it was identified that theoretical saturation was reached, indicating that including more data collection would not have provided more insights into the dynamics of the LFS of each city (Saunders et al., 2018).

The previous paragraphs have argued against the selection of LFIs based on inflexible categorical boundaries given the context-dependant nature of LFIs (Martindale et al., 2018). Nevertheless, during data collection it was still deemed necessary to organise the selected LFIs into groups to have an initial understanding of the composition of the studied LFSs, helping grasp the complexity of the studied cases and identify if more data collection or inclusion of LFIs was needed. Despite the place-based nature of LFSs, the participant organisations still can be organised into five broad types based on their main activities concerning food in each city. These types were not used for the final data analysis of the study (see Section 4.5), but to develop an initial description of the variety of activities concerning food that are present in each city and how they might start to relate to each other. As explained in Chapter 2, most existing local/alternative food research does not consider some of these organisations, such as food pantries or food redistributors. However, this study included them because of the substantive role they can also play in developing LFSs, and food sovereignty processes (see Chapter 2).

The main data collection sites for Preston were:

Table 4.2: Data collection sites Preston

| Local food initiative type | Name | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Local, sustainable, or healthy food promoters and distributors | The Larder | Social enterprise running a community café, food education activities, and catering service with a network of local producers |
| | Our Food Co-op | Social enterprise run by volunteers to make local fruit and vegetables bags available to low-income communities |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | SCRAN | Student-led social enterprise providing food education activities |
| | Grimshaw Food Hub | Volunteer-led distributor of organic food to local consumers |
| Urban food growing projects | Let's Grow Preston (LGP) | Network of community gardens, also running an own food growing project |
| | Foxton Centre | Local charity with a strong focus on homelessness running a community garden |
| | Friends of Fishwick & St Matthews (FOFS) | Community-led organisation who runs a community garden |
| Local markets/retailers | Preston Market | Indoor and outdoor municipal market, including local produce |
| | Ashton Farmers Market | Small farmers market run by volunteers and connected to a local church |
| | Banana King | Local food retailer, previously part of Preston Market |
| Local and community farms | Burscough Community Farm | Extra-local permaculture community farm with close links to some initiatives in Preston |
| | Worthingtons Farm | Local farm selling to Preston Market and other local retailers with close links to some initiatives in Preston |
| Food access initiatives | Local pantry | Community supermarket linked to a housing association |
| | Intact Community Centre | Community supermarket |
| | Community Centre | BME voluntary organisation, providing food parcels during Covid-19 |
| | Preston Minster | Faith-based charity acting as a food redistributor during Covid-19 |
| | Community Connectors Group (CCG) | Community-led group running a community food market |
| | Preston Muslim Forum (PMF) | Community organisation focusing on BME groups providing meals during Covid-19 and running a soup pantry |
| **Total** | **18** | |

The main data collection sites for Vitoria-Gasteiz were:

Table 4.3: Data collection sites Vitoria-Gasteiz

| Local food initiative type | Name | Description |
|---|---|---|
| Local, sustainable, or healthy food promoters and distributors | Slow Food | Local Slow Food association promoting 'local' and traditional food |
| | Bionekazaritza | Organic food association of small producers and consumers |
| | Natuaraba | Organic food association of extensive food producers |
| | Agroecological university fair | Fair developed by the university to promote responsible food consumption |
| | Zentzuz | Fairtrade and responsible consumption network |
| | Red de Semillas | Civil society association working on autochthonous seed recovery and preservation |
| Urban food growing projects | Casa de Iniciativas | Community-led organisation with a focus on social inclusion |
| | Zabalortu | Self-managed community garden |
| Local markets/retailers | BioAlai | organic consumption association who run a small food retailer and awareness programmes |
| | Cesta urbide | organic online food retailer who distributes food around the city |
| Local and community farms | Huerta esmeralda | Peri-urban farm with close links to some initiatives in Vitoria |
| | Huerta de Bolivia | Peri-urban farm with close links to some initiatives in Vitoria |
| | Cáritas Koopera | Church-based initiative that promotes social inclusion through agriculture employability projects in urban and local farms |
| Food access initiatives | Banco de Alimentos Álava | Local food redistributor |
| | Berakah | Church-based charity with a social supermarket, soup kitchen, and delivering food parcels |
| | Soup Kitchen | Church-based soup kitchen that closed at the time of data collection |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **16** | |

While typifying LFIs is complex, as their functions are permeable, with some food access initiatives also having community gardens, these five broad headings helped provide an initial overview of the LFSs in each place. As will be seen in the analytical chapters of each case, the typologies of LFIs in each case were further refined based on the discourses that these practices advance in each city. Moreover, as data collection progressed, it became clear that LFSs were not bound to only LFIs, with other organisations, particularly public institutions, playing an essential part in their formation. Therefore, other organisations that were particularly relevant in shaping the dynamics of LFSs were also included in data collection. In the case of Preston, these were Preston City Council, Lancashire County Council and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). In the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz, these were Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council, Álava's Provincial Council, the Centre for Environmental Studies (CEA) – an autonomous municipal body part of VCC, and Álava's Farmers Union (UAGA).

As explained in previous paragraphs, the grouping of LFIs into five broad types helped with an initial description of the composition and connections of the studied LFSs. In order to increase the initial picture of the LFSs during data collection, it was also decided to schematically trace the connections between the organisations included in the study to aid decisions regarding sampling and provide a starting point for the subsequent data analysis. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show an initial sketch of the connections between these different organisations, which was then used to formally analyse the interconnections based on the detailed within- and cross-case analysis (see Section 4.5).

## Connections in the studied local food systems

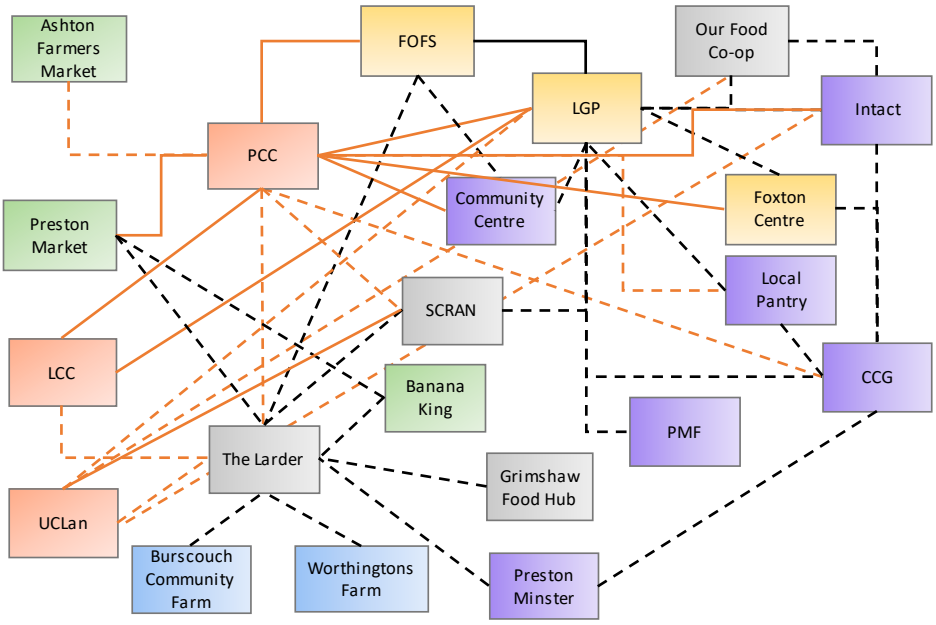


Figure 4.1: Connections of local food system in Preston

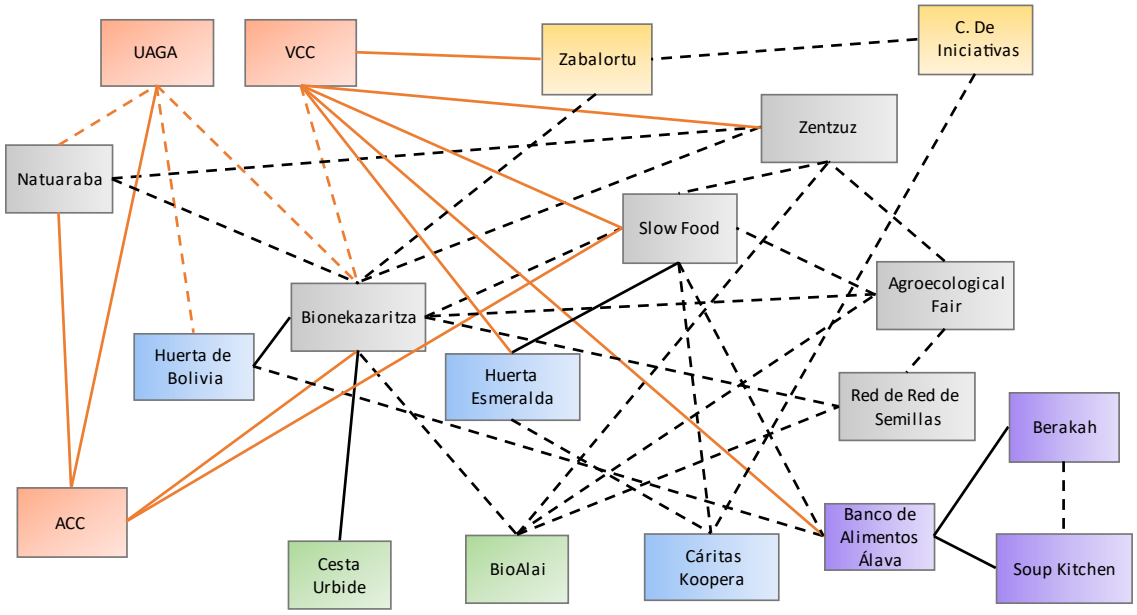


Figure 4.2: Connections of local food system in Vitoria-Gasteiz

--------: information and knowledge exchange, and one-off projects

_____: collaboration agreements, part of formal network, and ongoing provision of resources such as finances, liability insurance

Local, sustainable, or healthy food promoters and distributors
Urban food growing projects
Local markets/retailers
Local and community farms/farmers
Food access initiatives
Councils and influential organisations

## 4.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND MANAGEMENT

According to Stake (1995), qualitative research methods are best aligned with the philosophical foundation of instrumental case studies. Moreover, as argued by Stewart (2014), the focus should be on retaining the investigation unit rather than the methodological execution of particular qualitative methods in case study research. Thus, the choice of method does not define a case study; it is a means to study a phenomenon (Mills et al., 2010; Thomas & Myers, 2015). This means that data collection in collective case studies needs to be flexible enough to allow for a detailed description of each case to explore for similarities or differences between cases later in the analysis (Crowe et al., 2011). This was particularly important for this research. Due to its cross-country nature and the rapidly changing nature of the cases due to the Covid-19 pandemic, data collection focused on gathering the necessary data to answer the research objectives adapted to the case's context.

Stake (2005) promotes the use of different data sources and multiple perceptions to assure that most of the meaning gained by the reader of the case study report provides a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the phenomenon under study. Notably, Stake (2005) argues that this strategy avoids the overinterpretation or oversimplification of the case and ensures that essential meanings are not overlooked. This research used multiple sources of evidence and data collection methods to gain as much information and understanding as possible about the studied LFSs and enhance the study's credibility. Data collection methods included document analysis; semi-structured interviews with representatives of LFIs and other organisations, and local food experts (30 in Preston and 28 in Vitoria-Gasteiz); and participant observation (4 occasions in Preston and 2 in Vitoria-Gasteiz).

This section explains in detail the application and suitability of each of these methods. In particular, it concentrates on how the adopted methods helped provide a deep understanding of the cases and enable diverse perspectives to be captured, giving insight into the multiple realities within LFSs (Bowen, 2009; Gray, 2018; Guest et al., 2013; Stake, 1995). It also describes the testing out of their appropriateness through a feasibility study conducted between June and July 2020 in Preston. The LFIs relevant to the feasibility phase were selected based on convenience and availability. The feasibility study included the Larder and Let's Grow Preston (LGP) (see Table 4.2). While the main data collection units are LFIs, interviews with local food experts were also included in the research design to obtain more insight into the LFS, as will be further explained in Sub-section 4.3.1. The local food experts of the feasibility study were both academics who have worked within Preston's LFS during a prolonged period. Details of the feasibility study will be discussed throughout the following sub-sections.

### 4.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are valuable in undertaking qualitative case study research as they enable diverse perspectives to be captured, giving insight into multiple realities (Stake, 1995). In this research, interviews aimed to seek access to the discourses of LFIs concerning food security and sustainability, and the processes that LFIs advance in the pursuit to accomplish them, along with the barriers and facilitators of their activities. It also sought to obtain their descriptions and

interpretations of the interactions within LFSs and the extent to which they enhance and influence their activities. Interviews served to capture diverse perspectives within LFSs, including the input of local food experts, as explained later in this sub-section. Following the social constructionist epistemology of the study, the interview was treated as a process of co-constructing meaning with participants, a mutual reflection between both interviewee and interviewer (Braun & Clarke, 2013), where the role of the interviewer is recognised and reflected (see section 4.4.4). Given the diverse perspectives captured in interviews, interviews did not disregard what interviewees were discussing but understood it as part of their particular realities, constructed based on their particular experiences and context.

This study used purposive sampling to identify and select potential interviewees (Atkinson & Flint, 2011; Patton, 2018). This means that people were selected deliberately based on their relevance to the research objectives and the need to develop analysis and emerging theory. Types of purposive sampling include snowball sampling (based on referral by other participants) and theoretical sampling (according to the information needed to respond to the research objectives) (Morse, 2004). This study used both. In each of the sampled LFIs, the organisation's leader was interviewed as they had the most understanding of the activities of LFIs and their connections with other organisations in the area. However, sometimes other stakeholders within the selected LFIs also had to be interviewed to understand better how LFIs interact within the cases, as their role specifically related to creating connections within LFSs. Interviewees were also asked to refer to other relevant LFIs that could also be included in the study.

Interviews with local food experts were conducted to deepen the understanding of both cases. Local food experts were people that had extensive knowledge about the selected LFSs (Patton, 2018). Such interviewees were of less interest as individual persons than in their capacities as experts in the dynamics of LFSs (Bogner et al., 2009). Thus, this research included people working across the studied LFSs during a prolonged period, such as academic researchers, activists, and others. Local experts held a general overview of the LFSs and their external drivers through their professional experience and situated knowledge. In addition, as explained in Sub-section 4.2.3, it became clear during fieldwork that other organisations (e.g., city councils, county councils, farmers' unions) had a strong influence in the direction of LFSs. Interviewees with other organisations were conducted with people that had the most substantial connection with or could influence LFSs through their work.

Thirty interviews were conducted for Preston’s case and 28 for Vitoria-Gasteiz’s case (see Table 4.4). Such a high number of interviews is justified by the diversity of actors included in each LFS, following the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3.

Table 4.4: Interviews conducted in each case

| | **Preston** | **Vitoria-Gasteiz** |
|---|---|---|
| **Type** | **Interviews** | **Interviews** |
| Local food initiatives | 21 | 18 |
| Other organisations | 4 | 6 |
| Local food experts | 5 | 4 |
| **Total** | **30** | **28** |

Interviews were in-depth and semi-structured. This interviewing method was preferred because it allows for a guided and dynamic investigation of research themes by merging structure with flexibility, following the abductive approach of this research (Ritchie et al., 2014). Therefore, it enables the interviewee to raise issues and guide the content of the interview to some extent, but without losing the research focus (Ritchie et al., 2014). A previous list of issues that should be covered was formulated for this purpose (Gray 2018). Two topic guides were developed: one for the representatives of LFIs and other organisations and another for local food experts. Following the case study approach, interviews were less about the interviewee than about the case (Stake, 2005). However, the way interviewees saw the case operating was important due to the study's social constructionist and critical interactionist perspective. The interview guide covered the activities of LFIs, including their mission and motivation; the influence of the context on their activities; relationships with other LFIs and strength of the LFS; and questions to induce self-reflection and considerations for the future. Interviews were conducted in English (Preston) and Spanish (Vitoria-Gasteiz) by the researcher, given the researcher's fluency in both languages. Moreover, all quotations are presented in English in the thesis, having been translated by the researcher.

The feasibility study was conducted in Preston before starting the primary data collection for both cases, as explained in Section 4.3. This included assessing the suitability of the interview guide to address the research objectives and case study questions and explore potential themes that might come up in later interviews. Four interviews were conducted during a two-month feasibility period. Two with LFIs included in the feasibility study and two with local food experts, both academics; one was working at UCLan on community development and the second working in policy advocacy concerning Lancashire's food system. After probing the first version of the interview guide, it became clear that some questions required significant reformulation. For instance, the following question was framed as:

> From, your point of view, how do these collaborations appear to affect Preston´s food related issues?

In practice, participants found this question vague as it did not clarify to whom it was referring – beneficiaries or organisations. Moreover, many questions included the term LFS to refer to the collection of organisations working on food issues in Preston. However, this understanding was not necessarily shared by all participants. As Patton (2002) argues, the interviewer bears the responsibility to clarify what is being asked. Therefore, the interview guides were modified to enhance the clarity of questions (see Appendix 2). However, the diversity of organisations included in the study meant that questions had to constantly be rephrased or modified during the interview to apply to each participant's situation. Thus, a final version of the interview guide developed around clusters of themes to be discussed was elaborated (see Appendix 3). This interview guide is structured as a one-page diagram. While it does not include straightforward questions, it helps keep track of the conversation and ensure that all topics are discussed during interviews while considering the particularities of each participant. During the interview process, the lessons learnt from the feasibility study were applied, such as articulating clear questions whilst maintaining participants' specificities. Although a feasibility study for the whole research was only conducted in Preston, the first two interviews conducted in Vitoria-Gasteiz helped evaluate the best way to word questions and what terms were commonly used by people in that setting (Patton, 2002).

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted online to follow the university's requirement for data collection during the pandemic based on government policy at the time. As argued by previous scholars, online interviews still maintain interactional aspect of semi-structured interviews (O'Connor & Madge, 2017), thus making it a useful alternative if needed. Salmons (2016) outlines that certain characteristic of face-to-face interactions remain in online videocalls, such as non-verbal signs, because it remains a real-time communication. However, by not sharing the same space, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) may allow the participant to multitask without giving the exchange full attention (Salmons, 2012). Accordingly, prompts and probes were used with more emphasis during online interviews to keep the participants engaged. O'Connor and Madge (2017) also argue that online interviews often lack the opportunity to build rapport with participants and suggest implementing strategies to compensate for this. This study accounted for this by having an initial telephone conversation with potential participants, explaining the project, and answering questions regarding what participating meant. Overall, online semi-structured interviews proved suitable to seek access to the discourses of LFIs, and interactional processes and internal tensions within LFSs.

#### 4.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation helps grasp the cases' complexity as it provides rich data and deep understanding that would be missed by other methods, especially about social processes (Gray, 2018; Guest, et al., 2013; Ritchie et al., 2014). It was chosen over other methods such as focus groups because it allows for observing LFSs dynamics in their natural context (Morgan, 1997). Some researchers argue that focus groups offer a similar opportunity to gather data on conversations and interactions that naturally occur where attitudes are negotiated and formed (Munday, 2006). However, as Kitzinger (1994) states, it would be problematic to treat focus groups as 'natural' because the groups are convened with a research purpose, leading to an

artificially set up situation that does not necessarily reflect everyday interactions. Moreover, the fact that LFIs may have had previous relationships proved to be a significant challenge to conduct focus groups for this research. Researchers have argued that familiarity can inhibit disclosure and influence the discussion and group dynamics in ways that negatively impact the results (Jones et al., 2018). Previous relationships or dynamics could have meant a greater chance of participants monitoring their statements or not being open about negative experiences working together to forestall future uneasiness (Hollander, 2004). In a more exaggerated scenario, this could have resulted in unpleasant situations given preceding frictions between LFIs, as will be explained in the results chapters. Accompanied with feeling over-researched due to their participation in interviews (Clark, 2008), this could also have influenced the willingness of participants to attend.

Participant observation was undertaken during fieldwork and depending on the availability and recurrence of selected events to supplement the interviews to see the dynamics of LFSs (Laurier, 2010). Compared to other methods such as interviews, sampling in participant observation is not focused on individuals but on situations in which specific activities or interactions are expected to happen (Flick, 2014). Situations for participant observation are thus selected based on their suitability to help answer the research objectives. To respond to the case study questions presented in Sub-section 4.2.2, specific activities led or attended by the sample LFIs where LFIs and actors interact were purposively selected, for example, meetings where different events/ activities with other local actors were organised and discussed. Following critical ethnographic practices, power relations between LFIs were specifically considered (O'Reilly, 2009). This aligns with the social constructionist and critical interactionist perspective that underpins this research, in which critical inquiry helps expose inequalities to effect change.

For this study, the role of 'observer-as-participant' was adopted (Grigsby, 2019). This means that participation was explicitly conducted to achieve the aim of collecting data. Moreover, groups members were aware of the observation of activities; observations were overt (Corbetta, 2003). However, even after taking on this role, it was still difficult to determine the degree and amount of involvement in the activities (Flick, 2014). To account for this and to avoid participant observation in situations unrelated to the research objectives and case study questions, the feasibility study also included participant observation with the interviewed LFIs. This helped discriminate situations that were appropriate for meeting the aims and objectives of the research (e.g., excluding activities of individual LFIs). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on face-to-face interactions were a requirement made both by the government and the university ethics committee. Thus, participant observation was initially held remotely. This meant that participation was held mainly in virtual spaces that organisations had set up to continue to carry out collective operations.

A literature search of related methods was undertaken to prepare for participant observation in a non-physical setting. It soon became apparent that most virtual participant observation literature relates to *virtual ethnography* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This type of participant observation aims to understand virtual life and cyberspace as a new social milieu rather than using online real-time meetings to embody natural social behaviour outside this space. This posed a challenge for this study; use of participant observation as done in this research is still an

unexplored terrain with almost no guidance. Consequently, for this research, some considerations attached to online interviews were the starting point to deal with the possible issues during participant observation. Salmons (2016) argues it is more challenging to read distress or discomfort on the part of participants in an online setting. Accordingly, the leader checked with the participants about the researcher's involvement and status when possible before and during participant observation.

Doing participant observation online proved more difficult than expected. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that many organisations had to restructure their work to address arising needs, leaving online meetings to the side if they were not indispensable. For example, it was only possible to attend one inter-organisational event organised by the Larder during the feasibility study. This was because instead of having face-to-face weekly or monthly meetings with other organisations, LFIs called each other by phone to avoid face-to-face contact. These one-to-one calls were performed more often than collective online meetings and only involved two participants. Based on the feasibility study, a more significant effort was made during fieldwork to have regular updates with participants. This involved exchanging e-mails with participants about future online meetings and having phone conversations to discuss their ongoing activities. With the consent of participants, regular updates have also been included in the data, as they involved discussions about the connections within LFSs.

In total, four meetings were attended as part of the fieldwork in Preston. The Covid-19 pandemic provided an avenue for LFIs to work more collaboratively and resurrect some partnerships, as will be explained in the following chapter. In this context, two networks of local food initiatives and external organisations (the Local Food Partnership and an informal food poverty network facilitated by PCC) were formed to discuss how to address the food crisis induced by the pandemic. It was possible to attend 3 Local Food Partnership meetings, but it was only possible to attend one of the informal food poverty networks. This was because there were not so many online meetings during the main data collection in Preston (Sept-Dec 2020); these meetings were held every 2-3 months. Although it was difficult to observe the reactions of all meeting participants as many had their cameras off or were ‘absent’ in conversations, online participant observation was still valuable to understand and clarify some of the assumptions that surfaced during interviews.

Given the fewer restrictions during data collection in the Basque Country, most participants were meeting face-to-face rather than online, which reduced the possibility of online participant observation even further. Thus, an amendment to the research ethics was made to conduct in-person participant observation in this case, following social distancing and face mask guidelines (see Section 4.4). As approval for face-to-face research was only granted in June and given local circumstances (summer approaching and death of a significant person within the LFS), it was only possible to attend two collective events. One was organised by a public company belonging to the Basque Government, Neiker, that focuses on innovative technological strategies for agriculture within the region. This event showcased new organic production methods and successful land management interventions for local organic farmers. The other event was a social

mobilisation in a town close to Vitoria-Gasteiz organised by many LFIs protesting the construction of a macro tomato greenhouse by a national company.

Data was recorded through detailed field notes, including detailed descriptions, analytic notes, and subjective reflections of the observations (Ritchie et al., 2014). In this sense, field notes expressed the deepening of knowledge of LFSs, emerging sensibilities, evolving substantive concerns, and theoretical insights (Emerson et al., 2011). Emerson et al. (2001) describe field notes as written accounts that selectively filter observed phenomena based on the researcher's judgement. Field notes were guided by the case study questions and theoretical framework in this study. However, following abductive research, field notes remained flexible and responsive to the processes of LFSs (Flick, 2014). Moreover, subjective reflections helped to account for possible biases in interpretation as they were constantly re-read to identify possible prejudices and the changing attitudes toward LFIs and LFSs (Emerson et al., 2011).

### 4.3.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is immensely valuable in case study research because of its role in contrasting data and providing important information about the context of the case (Bowen, 2009). For this research, document analysis was used as a complementary method to enhance interviews' findings and as a predecessor to the data collection methods to obtain a context to data collection and analysis (Simons, 2009).

Documents included in qualitative research need to be treated with caution; they may lack sufficient detail, be incomplete and biased; or may be unrepresentative of the phenomenon under study (Hurworth, 2005). Special consideration was taken in selecting documents to account for these limitations. General exclusion and inclusion criteria were defined (Prior, 2008). The selection of documents was based on their relevance to provide knowledge about the LFSs and their internal processes. Thus, it was purposively decided that included documents should provide information about the activities that LFIs undertook with other organisations, such as collective events and/or consultations for collective activities. In this sense, documents about individual activities or the history of specific LFIs were not included. However, some documents related to individual LFIs were read before interviews to identify relevant issues to explore during interviews. Documents included in the study were found online or granted by interview participants. These encompassed marketing materials, agreements, meeting minutes, memory of actions, collective position papers, and evaluation reports of collective projects. These documents facilitated the comprehension of the connections between selected LFIs and the collective activities in each city. Given the relevance of urban food governance in shaping LFSs and its relative maturity in Vitoria-Gasteiz, policies promoting the construction of sustainable food systems or local food supply chains that included increased collaborative work within the LFS were also included. See Table 4.5 for the outline of the selected documents.

Table 4.5: List of selected documents for analysis

| Preston | Vitoria-Gasteiz |
|---|---|
| • Sustainable Food Strategy for Preston<br>• 4 previous reports of the work around healthy eating and sustainable food systems in Preston as part of the Healthy Cities Programme<br>• Meeting minutes of Preston's Food Partnership<br>• List of attendees of Preston's Food Partnership and an informal network working on food access<br>• Updates of collective activities sent by e-mail | • The Municipal Action Plan of the Agri-food Strategy<br>• The municipal ordinance of social benefits<br>• The Agri-food Strategy developed through a council-led participatory process<br>• The proceedings of the workshops during the participatory process for the Agri-food Strategy<br>• A previous collective diagnostic of Vitoria-Gasteiz' food system<br>• A Manifesto for a sustainable food system in Vitoria developed by several local food initiatives<br>• 2 collective reflections of the strategy's outcomes<br>• 3 memories of action and 8 short website articles of collective activities<br>• A declaration of the right to food written by a faith-based coalition<br>• 3 meeting minutes of a previous agroecological platform |

Several of these documents were produced years before the research was conducted. As Stake (1995) argues, these documents proved to be "substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly" (p. 68). Overall, documents helped assess the city's particular stage and direction concerning cohesive and inclusive LFS development, forming a basis for interviews and acting as a supplementary source to strengthen the main findings of interviews.

## 4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

There are several approaches with regards to ethical decision-making in research (Wiles et al., 2006). For this research, the ethical principles outlined by UCLan were used as guidance. These are: respect for autonomy (respect for an individual's capacity for self-determination); non-maleficence (avoid harm and potential harm); beneficence (promote benefit whenever possible); justice (fair and appropriate treatment of those involved in the research) (UCLan, 2019).

Before any primary data collection was conducted, ethics approval was obtained from UCLan's Business, Arts, Humanities and Social Science (BAHSS) Ethics Committee – Reference number BAHSS2 0069. The ethics process involved several amendments to account for the challenging

research context due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Amendments included approval for online and telephone interviews and in-person data collection in Vitoria-Gasteiz (see Appendix 4 for approval letters).

Potential risks and harm to participants were first identified to include measures to minimise them to comply with the ethical principles of UCLan. Because the research did not include any intrusive methods (such as interviews about possible distressing personal experiences) or conducting experiments, physical and psychological harm were regarded as minimal risks. However, social issues such as increased frictions and conflicts between LFIs or the researcher and participants arising from breaches of confidentiality and disregard of cultural sensibilities were identified. Several measures were taken to address these concerns, including informed consent and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Acknowledging that the application of ethical principles is paramount beyond formal ethics processes, ethical and moral issues were considered throughout the study, including study design, data collection and analysis, and presentation of findings. Moreover, throughout the whole process, quality and integrity were considered by conducting the research trustworthy and rigorous. This involved being always transparent about the research's aim and answering participants' questions regarding the research process.

### 4.4.1 Informed Consent

There is a broad agreement in the literature that informed consent is one of the most critical means to minimise the risk of harm to participants. The principles underlying informed consent are that potential participants have a genuine understanding of the research so they can make a voluntary, competent, and well-founded decision to participate (Dixon & Quirke, 2018). Moreover, reciprocal and respectful relationships must be established (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; TRUST Equitable Research Partnerships, 2019). This means that lower educational standards, illiteracy or language barriers should never be an excuse for research malpractices such as hiding information or providing it incompletely. Thus, the study's nature and the information sheet and consent form were explained to participants before the interviews via e-mail and phone, and then again prior to the interview's start.

Given that the research included three different types of data sources, there were some difficulties concerning informed consent, particularly for the participant observation aspect of the research. These issues were related to questions such as seeking informed consent from every participant present in the activity observed or whether consent from group leaders was enough to represent those participating in activities. As Guest et al. (2013) point out, there are no easy answers to these questions. However, the researcher should seek the highest standards in applying informed consent in participant observation despite these issues.

Thus, obtaining informed consent was a two-stage process. Informed consent was sought separately for each potential interview and observation. As mentioned before, observations were 'overt'. Thus, the groups that were observed were aware of the researcher and the research project (Corbetta, 2003). Consent to participate in the meetings/ events/ activities where LFIs interacted, including in online settings, was provided by the lead of the LFIs organising them. To

make participants aware of the observation, the leader of the activities assumed responsibility for facilitating the informed consent process during meetings. The leader granted permission for observations for different types of meetings/ activities/ events to ensure that informed consent was gained throughout the research process. Although this ensured that those participating in these collective activities were informed about the researcher's status, online meetings did not facilitate this process. Given the technicalities of online videoconferences or other commitments, some people would arrive late to these online spaces, missing the introduction to the research. Therefore, the chat function was used during the meeting to ensure that everyone consented to the researcher's presence. Permission was also requested for the researcher to take notes and consent was requested regarding naming their organisation.

All interview participants and leaders of LFIs were provided with an information sheet containing a description of the study, their potential involvement, and information about confidentiality. The information sheet also clarified that participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained if preferred, that withdrawal was possible at any time up to two weeks after data collection and the degree of involvement in the research. See Appendix 5 for an example of the final participant observation sheet for Vitoria-Gasteiz and Appendix 6 for an example of consent form after the amendments.

### 4.4.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Dixon & Quirke (2018) argue that anonymity and confidentiality can be difficult to apply due to the complexities of qualitative research. According to Ogden (2008), anonymity can be complete or partial. Total anonymity refers to the situation where there is no identification of participants by any means. On the other hand, partial anonymity exists when participants are disguised by pseudonyms but could be identified by disclosing some characteristics of them. For this research, complete anonymity was not possible. As the geographical location of the places was disclosed due to the contextual consideration of case study research, some degree of identification is possible. Although a diverse set of LFIs constitutes LFSs, if an explanation of the concept of LFSs and LFIs is given and the studied locations are disclosed, LFIs could be identified in each place. As Simons (2009) asserts, the issue of anonymisation is a complex one; not only because full successful anonymisation may not be possible, but also because some participants may desire for the ownership of their contributions to be acknowledged (Ogden, 2008).

Accordingly, this research considered participants' interests as the guidance to make decisions regarding anonymity. As some participants were sought in their professional capacity as local food experts and as important players of the LFSs in Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz, some participants and LFIs did not want to be anonymised. Thus, anonymity was not imposed on participants who wished to be named. Following a participant-centred approach to research (Ogden, 2008), the informed consent explicitly asked the degree of anonymisation that participants wished, from anonymous to the use of names, job titles, and organisation names in published findings. Most participants agreed that their organisations and names could be used in publications and reports. Only 3 LFIs did not want to be named, and these have been attributed a general pseudonym, such as Community Centre, Local Pantry and Soup Kitchen – see Tables 4.2

and 4.3 of Sub-section 4.2.3. To ensure consistency and potential identification of individuals that did not want to be named in the study but agreed to their organisation to be named, quote attribution for LFIs and relevant organisations of the LFSs, such as city councils, has remained at the organisation level. Local food experts were included in the study due to their professional and experiential knowledge related to working for a prolonged time across the LFS rather than in the representation of any organisation. Therefore, they will be referred to in the thesis as Local food expert 1 – Preston, Local food expert 2 – Preston, and so forth, for Preston and Local food expert 1 – VG, Local food expert 2 – VG, and so forth, for Vitoria-Gasteiz. This was also decided to ensure consistency and avoid the cross-identification of individuals who did not want to be named in the study.

Moreover, confidentiality was also honoured in the research process. That meant that participants were aware that findings would become public but that any information that participants felt uncomfortable disclosing would be respected and thus kept confidential. Special attention was paid when participants expressed this explicitly in words during the interview process, and intrusive questions were avoided. Moreover, participants could request information to be retained in confidence up to two weeks after data collection. In addition, data was only accessed by the researcher, supervisory team and the Spanish collaborating partner.

### 4.4.3 Researcher's Reflexivity

Qualitative research involves close attention to the interpretative nature of research and situating the study within the researcher's political, social, and cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This emphasises the importance of self-awareness and a transparent behaviour of the researcher about conduct, theoretical perspective and values (Patton, 2002; Seale et al., 2007). In other words, qualitative research needs to include a certain degree of reflexivity on the researcher's part. This is imperative in a qualitative case study under a social constructionist and critical interactionist perspective. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argue, the relationship between the researcher and social phenomena is interactive and research participants are affected by the process of being studied. Simons (2009) argues that demonstrating reflexivity in case study research allows the researcher to critically reflect on the actions and decisions taken throughout the research process and thus enables others to see how the presented conclusions are derived from the data. Thus, it is essential to reflect upon how the researcher's background and previous beliefs influence the study of the cases, as they will always inevitably be part of the studied situation. The rest of this sub-section is therefore written in the first person.

As one of the research aims was to capture the different discourses among LFIs, awareness of the researcher's previous assumptions regarding understanding these concepts was fundamental. As a nutrition and public health professional, I feel a strong political duty to ensure that my work positively impacts people's experiences and relations with food. As such, the research was particularly close to my personal goal of transforming the current food system and advocating for the potential of LFSs. This meant that, although unwittingly, there were potential prejudices against some organisations even before starting data collection (e.g., those with a more conventional standpoint). Having conducted research within LFSs before, it would be naïve

to state that previous assumptions around the research objectives were not present. For example, one initial assumption was that urban food strategies could bring different actors together and would usually improve the capacities of LFSs. As discussed in the results chapters these assumptions proved wrong, an outcome that was possible due to remaining open to challenging my preconceptions.

Moreover, working in Spain before the PhD, particularly in the Basque Country, also meant that I had a different starting point when collecting data there compared to Preston. While I had no previous particular idea of what I would encounter in Preston, I had engaged in national food sovereignty networks in Spain, where Vitoria-Gasteiz was constantly mentioned as a 'best practice' for urban food governance. I had already developed a vision of Vitoria-Gasteiz as having an 'ideal strategy' for developing interconnected LFSs for food sovereignty. This meant that I had the initial assumption that the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz would provide some insights about the possible solutions for the LFSs' challenges I had identified in Preston. Nevertheless, as the research progressed, this assumption was disproved, making me realise that each LFS is unique, with its challenges and tensions. In this sense, I understood that attributing specific characteristics to LFSs does not help move our current knowledge about them forward. Paying attention to the processes and context-dependent specificities that affect each of them and then seeing how these are interconnected is better to draw generalisable lessons across the cases to understand better the dynamics of LFSs.

Another point of consideration could be how my own positionality (female, young, migrant, and Latin-American with higher education) affected the responses/behaviour of participants. This positionality did not prove to be an issue most times. Although some organisations worked with vulnerable groups, those interviewed for this study were the leaders of LFIs, which without exception could not be considered part of groups at risk of social exclusion. However, it could be argued that my positionality helped me gain access to more 'honest' responses, given that participants felt a specific relatedness with me, maybe also because of my effort to create an approachable image. Recurringly, participants mentioned that the interview process had been an enjoyable experience. According to them, they felt comfortable and could share many insights due to the safe space.

Despite these positive experiences in most of the research process, there were some situations in which I felt that there was an asymmetrical power relation between me and the interviewees. This was particularly during Vitoria-Gasteiz's case and with male participants who held a position of power (politicians/ public servants in high ranks). While I did not feel uncomfortable during the interviews, it was clear that those participants felt a degree of superiority to me, sometimes even lecturing me about some practices. Although this raises some social issues around gendered inequalities in research contexts (Brooks et al., 2015), I found I could also profit from displaying my 'ignorance' of some topics. Influential male participants did not feel threatened by me and were thus more comfortable talking openly. I used this opportunity to encourage them to go in-depth about controversial topics, allowing me to gain deeper insights into how they encouraged/ constrained sustainable and fair food practices.

Despite the previous reflection, the question as to what extent were participants' responses genuine remains, even if my presence was perceived as 'welcoming' or 'unthreatening'. All research participants were aware of the research project and could foresee that some answers could project a negative image of their organisation. Indeed, some interviewees tended to articulate their responses formally at the beginning of interviews. Nevertheless, given the wording of questions and the semi-structured nature of the interview, the formality and demeanour changed during the interviews. In this sense, the interview process provided insight into how knowledge during an interview situation is constructed between participants and researchers, as explained in Sub-section 4.3.1. For example, when prompting participants to respond to how their activities aim to incorporate vulnerable groups, many responded that those were issues they had not considered before. My impression was that many participants were more reflective and talked more freely towards the end. This meant that interviews captured both formal viewpoints within LFIs and LFSs and their ordinary and unique perspectives on several issues.

To account for possible biases or inclinations because of my positionality, previous assumptions, and influence of the questions on participants' answers, I developed a research diary based on memos, which included subjective reflections. These encompassed a description of my emotions and feelings in collecting and analysing data. The purpose of this diary was to track the unintended effects of my subjectivity throughout the research process to minimise certain behaviours and unintentional judgements as the research progressed and acknowledge the social constructionism of the research, which understands the interview process as a reflexive undertaking. This continuous self-reflection was conducted to enhance the research's validity by reflecting on the potential impact of my subjectivity on the participants and the evidence produced. Moreover, participants' responses were contrasted against each other and against other data collection methods to capture how different approaches impacted answers. Besides documenting my reflection of the research process, this journal also helped reflect on the research participants' positionalities.

### 4.4.4 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Compared to Stake's (1995) lack of specific guidelines to ensure quality in case studies, Yin's (2009) priority in every phase of the research process is to maximise the quality of the inquiry by applying four tests: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. However, as this research follows a social constructionist epistemology, Yin's (2009) approach did not seem suitable because it is embedded within a more positivist and objective paradigm. Nonetheless, the social constructionist stance of the research does not mean that quality considerations were disregarded. Notably, the question for this research is to what extent can it be claimed that the collected data is sufficiently representable to generalise understanding on LFSs? Following the guide of other researchers in qualitative inquiry, this study used the concept of trustworthiness to address such quality concerns (Gray, 2004). According to some researchers, trustworthiness is more appropriate to qualitative research than matters such as external validity and reliability because they were developed in a qualitative tradition (Gray, 2004). This is important for case study research as the aim is theoretical and not statistical generalisation.

Ensuring trustworthiness in research is the process of evaluating the confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability of reported observations, interpretations, and generalisations (Flick, 2014; Morse, 2015). Lincoln and Gupta (1985, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) propose different strategies to operationalise the components of trustworthiness. Although over 30 years old, Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that Lincoln and Gupta's criteria are still dominant in qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Gupta (1985, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) contrasting diverse data sources and methods is necessary to establish credibility. A thick description of the cases ensures that the findings can be transferred to another context. In contrast to reliability, which seeks the stability of findings, Lincoln and Gupta introduce dependability, which acknowledges that findings are subject to change throughout the research. Furthermore, rather than seeking objectivity, trustworthiness is concerned with the extent to which findings can be contrasted across data sources. Both confirmability and dependability require an audit trail of the research process.

Concerning this study, Lincoln and Gupta's strategies for confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability were present throughout the research process. The combination of different sources and methods helped create a general picture of LFSs by contrasting what interviewees said and how this differentiated from the other participants, field notes, and documents. In this sense, following a social constructionist epistemology, the use of different data sources and methods helped the identification of the multiple realities within LFSs rather than aiming merely at the validation results (Hastings, 2010). In addition, the research diary helped audit the connections between data and interpretations to check the accuracy of the qualitative account and avoid overinterpretations. The supervisory team also checked the reliability of coding and findings throughout the study. Furthermore, the results are presented so that a thick description of the cases is presented to ensure that readers can make decisions regarding transferability and whether or not the findings resonate with their own experiences and understandings. Finally, the inclusion of data management processes and the integration of the epistemological and theoretical foundations in the research design ensured that the research process was coherent and appropriate to meet the research objectives.

## 4.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Chapter 3 discussed the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective that underpins this study: social constructionism and critical interactionism. In other words, the belief that meaningful reality is socially constructed. This reality can be understood through a focus on power structures and the understanding of meaning as constructed through social and individual interactions. Crotty (1998) asserts that the theoretical perspective is the philosophical underpinning of the researcher's actions. Thus, it profoundly influences the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

Based on the research paradigm outlined in Chapter 3 and the study's aim of examining how LFSs contribute to food sovereignty based on the different discourses and processes within them, an interpretivist and critical approach to data analysis was used. Interpretivism relates to the investigation of the subjective meaning of experiences and an understanding that the meanings

derived from these are varied and multiple. This acknowledges the complexity of views in the data and prompts the researcher to rely as much as possible on the participants' perspectives of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Under a social constructionist and critical approach to data analysis, this means, however, that participants' subjective meanings are negotiated socially and culturally (Crotty, 1998). Thus, a further focus on social struggles, alienation, and the underlying social orders within the subjective meanings of LFSs was adopted.

Stake (2005) suggests that to be able to analyse multiple case studies, each case needs to be analysed separately. Following this, the researcher explores patterns of similarity or difference across the cases to make statements about the *quintain* or phenomenon under study. In addition, as explained in Section 4.2, case study, research involves a combination of deductive and inductive approaches, which is also present in data analysis. This means that data was analysed going backwards and forwards between previous knowledge, for example, in form of the case study questions described in Sub-section 4.2.2 and the data. The next sub-sections explain how the findings were analysed within each case and across cases.

### 4.5.1 Within-case Analysis

According to Simons (2009), interpretation differs from data analysis, although these are done simultaneously. Data analysis refers to organising and making sense of the data to produce findings and an understanding of the case, such as theme generation. Contrarily, interpretation is the understanding and insight the researcher derives from the holistic and intuitive comprehension of the data. This concords with Stake's (1995) data analysis strategies: direct interpretation and categorial aggregation.

Categorical aggregation is the clustering of complex data into categories or classes to ease searching for meaning. The researcher also establishes patterns and searches for connections between categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is similar to the understanding of data analysis advanced by Simons (2009). Direct interpretation refers to drawing meaning from a single instance part of the study without looking for multiple instances; "it is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 278). Therefore, case study analysis is more than just pattern recognition and category building; it is a "matter of giving meaning to first impressions and final compilations" (Stake, 1995, p. 71). However, even if Stake's (1995) approach of categorial aggregation and direct interpretation is adopted, the description of how to implement these strategies systematically is vague. As Simmons (2009) suggests, analysis and interpretation are perhaps the two aspects of case study research that are mostly lacking in the literature. This is problematic, as understanding these processes is important not only for conducting qualitative case study research, but also for reading, understanding and interpreting it. Therefore, Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis was adopted in this study.

Compared to other qualitative data analysis approaches, Braun and Clarke (2006) provide explicit guidance on how to analyse qualitative data. Thematic analysis is an approach for recognising, evaluating and reporting themes or patterns within data, along with their relevance and consequences for knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, it integrates both

Stake's (1995) strategies of categorial aggregation and direct interpretation. For this study, the analysis was carried out in QSR NVivo data management program.

All primary case data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework (see Table 4.6). In concordance with the social constructionist paradigm, data analysis was used to identify ideas that underpin the explicit data content and the assumptions and meanings in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Under a social constructionist epistemology, themes do not solely represent patterns or meaning across the data, but they are identified as socially produced. Accordingly, the analysis examined how realities and meanings within LFSs, particularly regarding sustainability and food security, are constructed and how these relate to various social structures. Thus, the interviewee's experience, documents or field notes were not treated as a transparent window of LFSs but as a reaction or recreation of society's discourses and practices. As the research focus is the construction of LFSs as social worlds, the focal point of the analysis was to identify the processes through which their realities are produced and how this relates to the delivery of food sovereignty in a locality.

Table 4.6: Six-step framework for thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006)

| Step | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Familiarising yourself with your data: | Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. |
| 2. Generating initial codes: | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data set. |
| 3. Searching for themes: | Aggregating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| 4. Reviewing themes: | Checking if the themes are coherent: in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire case (Level 2) |
| 5. Defining and naming themes: | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story of the case, generating clear definitions and names for them. |
| 6. Producing the report: | Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, interpretation of the analysis in relation to the case study questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis |

Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguish between theory-driven (deductive analysis) and data-driven (inductive analysis). However, they note "that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 84). Thus, an inductive-deductive hybrid is not precluded. Fereday et al. (2006) demonstrate that thematic analysis can be conducted in a rigorous manner when combining theory-driven and data-driven approaches. In their research, they allowed the tenets of their theoretical framework to be integral to the process of coding while allowing for themes and codes to directly emerge from the data. This study followed this approach; theoretical concepts such as food sovereignty and UPE were used to unpack data. This framework was tested during the feasibility study and proved useful to understand LFSs dynamics if themes were used to develop an overall narrative around the case. The following paragraphs explain how each step of thematic analysis was used in this study.

Familiarisation: For Braun et al. (2019) this process involves becoming 'immersed' in the data. This included transcribing interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts, documentation and field notes and making initial annotations. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher for both cases, which added a further layer in data immersion. In the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz, interview transcripts were analysed in the original language to ensure that the meaning of participants' accounts was not lost in translation (Temple & Young, 2004). Familiarisation with the data helped look for possible connections across the dataset and make sense of new ideas, increasing awareness of previous assumptions and thus fostering a reflexive process of how the analysis responded to the data and if the feasibility study influenced this. Following transcription, all interview transcripts were uploaded to NVivo. In NVivo, each transcript was read, and comments for possible codes and assumptions were made through annotations. Finally, for each interview transcript, a memo was created that summarised the key points of the interview, reflected on the interview process, and collected initial analytical thoughts. Appendix 7 provides an example of an interview memo for Preston's case.

Generating codes: The analysis then moved to a more detailed and systematic engagement with the data. During the feasibility study in Preston and initial analysis for Vitoria-Gasteiz's case, preliminary codes following Saldana's (2013) guide to develop first cycle codes (see Appendix 8 for an example). From the initial analysis, exploratory themes were identified and documented in memos. To search for themes in the collected data, a system of categories and subcategories – or second cycle codes – was developed to organise the codes, following Bazeley's (2013) taxonomic approach. This type of hierarchically organised coding system was selected because it assists in identifying patterns of relationships in data – themes – using NVivo query features. The coding system for each case had many iterations as analysis progressed and exploratory queries were conducted. Analytical memos were written to capture the process of its development. The final coding system for Preston at this stage is presented in Appendix 8 and 10 as an example. Using this coding system – particularly Appendix 8 – themes were explored. This was mainly done by analysing relationships between codes using NVivo queries, describing each code by reading through the coded text and comparing it with other codes. For each potential theme identified, a memo describing and interpreting it was developed. Following Braun and Clarke's (2013) guidance on thematic analysis, codes developed in the feasibility study were not used as a 'fixed'

codebook/coding frame. Codes evolved as new meaning was identified in the data. The abductive hybrid approach of this research meant that some of these codes were primarily data-driven while the study's theoretical framework influenced others (e.g., food democracy).

Constructing themes: Preliminary themes were developed for both cases – in Preston through the feasibility study and Vitoria-Gasteiz from initial coding (see Appendix 12 for an example). These themes were then tested to identify if they were telling a coherent, insightful story about the data related to the research objectives and case study questions as the analysis progressed. This process was beneficial to develop themes that reflected shared-patterned meaning and were organised under a central underlying idea. This iterative process meant going back to first cycle codes, cross-checking with other themes, reading coded passages, changing the coding system, and running new cross-tabulating queries. All this was recorded in memos that described the development of codes and analysis (see Appendix 13). Developing these more 'meaningful' themes meant organising themes into meta-themes so that they also provide a narrative about the construction of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty. Meta-themes were organised to produce a narrative of LFSs concerning the research objectives, going from individual discourses and approaches of LFIs to the material, social, and capital flows that shape LFSs and the social processes and power relations that influence food sovereignty processes within them. In this phase, meta-themes became more abstract and aligned more with the conceptual framework. Particular attention was paid to developing themes and meta-themes that were not domain summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2013). That is, themes did not aim to capture features of the dataset but the meaning-based pattern of the data concerning the research objectives.

Revising and defining themes: This phase examined whether the formed themes and meta-themes fit with the collected data and the cases' narrative. This involved developing clear definitions of each theme and checking the themes against each other and the whole data set. In other words, it was a process of 'cleaning' the analysis, refining themes and meta-themes names to "cue the reader in what they will read" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 857). At this stage, a final memo was developed for each theme to start to unpack their meaning for the multiple case study questions and research objectives (see Appendix 14). Moreover, a thematic framework was developed based on the meta-themes and themes of each case. The thematic diagram will be presented for each case in the results section. This offers a representational means to understand the complex local food systems' dynamics analysed in the data and provides the starting point for an explanation and a narrative concerning the research's objectives.

Producing the report: After finalising the within-case analysis, a complete case report for each city was drafted and then reviewed by the supervisory team. Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that this phase is not just writing up the findings of the thematic analysis. Writing the report meant testing the developed themes and meta-themes again, revising if these remained close to the data and answering the research objectives. In other words, it was a final stage of analysis. More importantly, in this phase, the broader meaning and implications of the identified patterns start to be theorised. This involved asking 'so what' questions beyond summarising the data, going from analysis to interpretation. This meant going beyond the words of participants, texts of documents and interactions observed, to why this is relevant and highlight essential

dimensions of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty. It is at this phase that the findings are explained concerning the theoretical framework of the study and the literature review to deepen the analysis. The final reports for each case are presented in Chapter 6 and 7, including extract examples of interviews to discuss relevant insights. Extract examples are provided in English, which means that for Vitoria-Gasteiz they were translated by the researcher.

### 4.5.2 Cross-case Analysis

Stake (2005) argues that after analysing the patterns within the cases, a cross-case comparison is needed to elucidate new insights into the phenomenon under study. After all, the purpose of collective case studies is to illuminate what is different and similar about the cases to understand this phenomenon better. The complex meanings of the phenomenon are understood differently and better because of each case's particular activity and contexts. The cross-case analysis finishes with assertions – or statements – of the phenomenon, which combines the findings within cases. In this study, assertions are present as cross-case themes concerning the research objectives.

Stake's (2005) approach to cross-case analysis involves reading the case study reports and collecting the most important findings. However, this approach is not systematic enough as within-case findings are not merged into overarching patterns that help make theoretical generalisations. Therefore, for this study, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis guideline was adapted into a five-step cross-case analysis framework that includes components of Stake's (2005) approach. Stake's (2005) guideline to cross-case analysis is still pertinent to summarise individual case study findings, given its attention to the particularities of each case. Thematic analysis enhances Stake's (2005) approach, as it helps raise the cross-case findings into a higher level of theoretical conceptualisation. Cross-case study analysis is thus a second level of analysis; it is beyond the initial familiarisation of data and code generation. Cross-case study analysis concentrates on themes and pattern recognition that capture something important about the case study questions and research objectives, highlighting the meaning of these patterns concerning the broader literature and relevance in advancing the understanding of LFSs. See Table 4.7 for the combined framework of Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Stake's (2005) approach for cross-case analysis, which will be explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Table 4.7: Five-step framework for cross-case analysis adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

| Step | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Review themes again for cross-case analysis: | Check within-case themes again and review initial research objectives. Identify main findings of each case and create a case synopsis, paying attention to context particularities. |
| 2. Searching for cross-case themes: | Read the findings of each case and merge them into clusters and give the clusters a name. Rank clustered findings according to the presumed usefulness for the research objectives. Based on the importance of merged findings for each objective, develop cross-case |

| | |
|---|---|
| | themes that are meaningful to understand the phenomenon. |
| 3. Reviewing and defining cross-case themes: | Check if the cross-case themes are coherent: in relation to the cases (Level 1) and the multiple case study (Level 2). Refine the specifics of each cross-case theme using the literature, and the overall story of the phenomenon, generating clear definitions and names for each cross-case theme. |
| 4. Gathering of evidence for each cross-case theme: | Refine cross-case themes again and gather the evidence from both cases that will help develop the theme in the report |
| 5. Producing the report: | Relate back the analysis to the research objectives, case study questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

Familiarisation: A second immersion with the data was conducted. However, compared to within-case analysis, this was at a higher level. The previous development of single-case reports was relevant for this phase. These documents helped go back to the cases and create an initial view of potential cross-case comparisons. During this step, the suitability of individual case meta-themes was questioned again by coming back to the research objectives, case study questions, theoretical framework and literature review. A vital step of this process was to review again the research objectives and case study questions (see Section 4.2.2), which would then help guide the cross-case analysis and develop cross-case themes. Finally, to consider the particularity and context complexity of the cases across the analysis, a case synthesis was developed for Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston following Stake's (2005) case summary template (see Appendix 15 for the example of Preston). This involved reading the case's summaries and annotating each case's main findings.

Searching for cross-case themes: Each case's main findings were then clustered together based on similarity to develop clusters, which were then given a name or statement that captured their meaning. The clustered findings at this point did not necessarily aim to pick out their meaning concerning the research objectives. After revising the clustered findings, a form following Stake's (2005) guideline to determine the usefulness of cross-case findings for the research objectives was filled (see Appendix 16 for an example). Compared to Stake's (2005) approach, this study used cross-case themes to start taking the clustered findings to a higher conceptual plane concerning the case study questions and research objectives. The cross-case theme development assimilated Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, organising clustered findings into more abstract and meaningful cross-case themes. Essentially, this phase dealt with analysing the study's results and considered how these provided a better understanding of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty and what was learnt from the study. This included considering the relationship between themes and between different levels of themes (cross-themes and within-

case meta-themes). This process was done using NVivo, coding the cases' findings to potential cross-case themes, and using memos to develop the cross-case themes on a theoretical basis.

Reviewing and defining cross-case themes: The candidate cross-themes were refined in step three by assessing their coherence and distinctions. This phase involved two levels of refinement. First, cross-case themes were reviewed at the level of cases to see if they appeared to form a coherent pattern. Level two involved a similar process concerning the collective case study, reflecting whether cross-case themes demonstrated the meaning evident in the study as a whole. Thus, step two compared how the cross-case themes appear in each case and the different aspects of each concept across cases. Questions in this phase included: Have essential contributions from the cases for understanding the phenomenon in question been left out? Do LFSs need to be thought about more about what is happening in the individual cases separately, or more about what is shared across the cases? Is there anything from the case that might modify cross-case themes? Should anything else be added? What else will need to be said about the research objectives and case study questions? All these comments and reflections were documented in memos.

Gathering of evidence for each cross-case themes: Cross-case analysis is a reductive process to answer the multiple case study questions (Stake, 2005). However, the analysis is not simply listing the findings to each cross-case theme. To some extent, findings in multiple case study research need to maintain their contextual meaning and uniqueness. Consequently, the fifth phase involved gathering evidence and significant passages of each case that support the development of each cross-case theme to allow for a comparison and discussion of them. This helped revise cross-case themes and produce a final version of them, identifying what each cross-theme said about the phenomenon and its relation to the literature and theoretical framework. Compared to within-case meta-themes, cross-case themes have the structure of relevant points of discussion about LFSs and their contribution to food sovereignty that need to be assessed because of their relevance in advancing knowledge of the dynamics of LFSs and previous literature.

Producing the report: The report illustrates both attention to the cases' local situations and the phenomenon as a whole. In this regard, qualitative case study research is particularly challenging as both usually contend with each other for emphasis (Stake, 2005). Thus, the final stage requires revising cross-case themes constructed in steps three and four to produce the final report. Accordingly, a final revision of selected extracts, themes and cases' contexts and their relation to the case study research objectives and literature was undertaken prior to the final presentation of the cross-case analysis in Chapter 7.

## 4.6 CONCLUSION

This Chapter outlined the methodology and methods used to meet the research's aim to examine how LFSs contribute to food sovereignty under the research paradigm and theoretical framework explained in Chapter 3. A qualitative case study approach was used for this purpose following Stake's (2005) guide. In particular, this chapter explained how an instrumental collective case

study approach serves to illuminate the understanding of LFSs by analysing how they manifest in different situations, aligning with a social constructionist epistemology.

Following Stake's (2005) approach, case study questions that guided the study were developed. Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston were selected based on the maximum variation rationale as cases to answer these questions. Within these cases, a diverse sample of LFIs was purposively selected to achieve the most significant possible amount of information on the LFSs of each place. This selection was partly based on the food systems approach that categorises LFIs in different components based on their activities. However, the permeability of LFIs in real-life contexts was also considered. Different data collection methods were used to contrast data sources, the convergence of results, and contextualisation in both cases. Methods included document analysis, interviews with representatives of LFIs and other essential organisations and local food experts, and participant observation in specific situations where different LFIs interacted. Moreover, this chapter also discussed ethical considerations, including informed consent and issues concerning confidentiality and anonymity.

All gathered data were analysed and interpreted using thematic analysis. For this research, the analysis was conducted in two levels. Level one concentrated on the separate analysis of cases. Within-case analysis followed the six-step process of Braun and Clarke (2006). The second level of analysis is related to the interpretation of findings across cases. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach continued to be used in this phase, but it was adapted to focus on cross-case themes, as codes and within-case meta-themes were already developed in level one. Because the study was conducted under the framework of qualitative research, the trustworthiness and rigour of the study were considered based on the confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability of reported observations, interpretations, and generalisations. In addition, the researcher's reflexivity was discussed alongside the researcher-participant relation.

In sum, the case study approach promotes the understanding of complex social phenomena such as LFSs within real-life contexts by integrating the perspectives of diverse stakeholders – in this case, LFIs, influential organisations, and local food experts. The following chapters present the findings from the study in three analytical parts. Chapter 5 focuses on the within-case findings of the Preston case. Chapter 6 then concentrates on the within-case results of the Vitoria-Gasteiz case. Chapter 7 discusses the cross-case analysis, which compares the cases' findings to reach a higher level of theoretical conceptualisation regarding the research objectives.

## Chapter 5 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF PRESTON'S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter engages with the first empirical and analytical part of the study, focusing on the within-case results of the data collected in Preston. Following the research project's objectives, this section aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the composition of the LFS in Preston, its place-based nature, and its dynamics. This section's ultimate goal is to assess how the particular construction of Preston's LFS contributes to food sovereignty and what can be learnt from this assessment. Before starting with the discussion of Preston's case findings, section 5.2 provides a contextual background of the LFS in Preston. The discussion of Preston's case results is then organised following the meta-themes derived from the within-case thematic analysis explained in Chapter 4, which are illustrated in Figure 5.1.

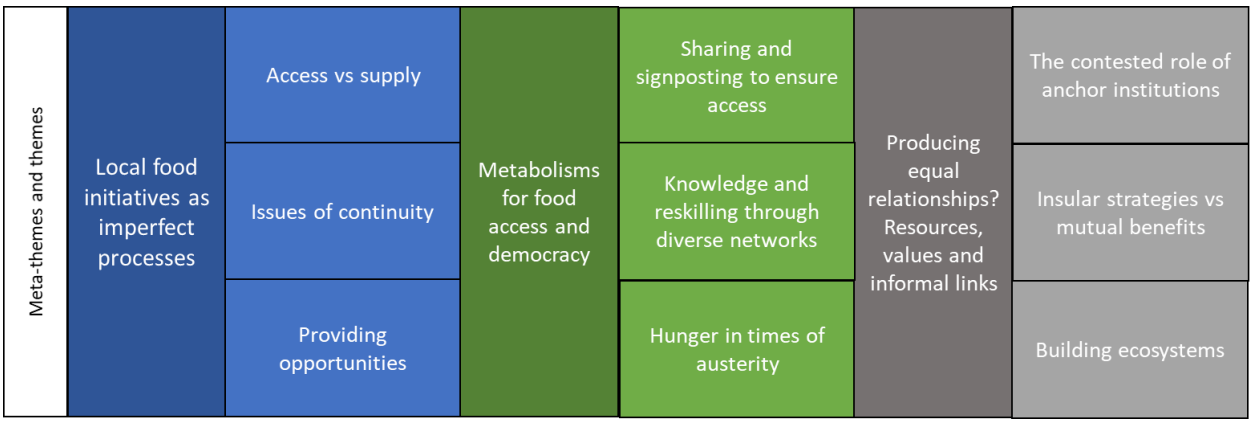


Figure 5.1: Preston's case meta-themes and themes

Three within-case meta-themes – coloured in blue, green and grey – have been identified, with three themes each (coloured in lighter colour shades). The identified meta-themes are inherently interlinked. The first meta-theme *food initiatives as imperfect processes* starts the narrative of the LFS in Preston in Section 5.3 by discussing the diverse perspectives, approaches and challenges of LFIs through the following three themes (blue box): *access vs supply* (Sub-section 5.3.1), *issues of continuity* (Sub-section 5.3.2) and *providing opportunities* (Sub-section 5.3.3). Using this as a starting point, the meta-theme *metabolisms for access and food democracy* discussed in Section 5.4 maps out the diverse interactions between LFIs and other organisations through three themes (green box): *sharing and signposting to ensure access* (Sub-section 5.4.1), *knowledge and reskilling through diverse networks* (Sub-section 5.4.2), and *hunger in times of austerity* (Sub-section 5.4.3). Section 5.5 presents the meta-theme *producing equal relationships? Resources, values, and informal links*, which scrutinises the allocation of material, social and capital flows within Preston's LFS (grey box). This meta-theme contains three themes: *the contested role of anchor institutions* (Sub-section 5.5.1), *insular vs mutual benefits* (Sub-section 5.5.2) and *building ecosystems* (Sub-section 5.5.3). Finally, Section 5.6 draws this all together in the form of a conclusion of the critical insights of Preston's case, which create a basis for understanding Vitoria-Gasteiz's case.

## 5.2 CONTEXTUALISING PRESTON'S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Preston, a city and non-metropolitan district, is the administrative centre of Lancashire, England, (LCC, 2022b). Its political and administrative structure is divided into two levels: Preston City Council (PCC) and Lancashire County Council (LCC), which are under the control of different political parties and have differentiated powers. PCC is under the control of the Labour Party (centre-left); LCC is under the control of the Conservative Party (centre-right). Planning, housing, environmental health, leisure, and culture are among PCC's competences. Given the regional inequality in England (Inequality Briefing, 2015), Preston is located in a region that underperforms in economic development compared to the rest (Steer Economic Development, 2019). Nevertheless, Preston's innovative approach to economic development differentiates it from other cities, promoting a community wealth building strategy known as the 'Preston Model' (CLES, 2017). Moreover, the city possesses a favourable environment for economic development, mainly through its service sector linked to its role as the administrative centre of Lancashire, its university – the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) – and being home to the Royal Preston Hospital (Lockey & Glover, 2019).

The 'Preston Model' was partly developed as a progressive approach to respond to the increased public austerity cuts since 2010, which almost halved PCC´s budget (Lockey & Glover, 2019). Its central premise is to foster local economic development by harnessing existing resources to retain wealth locally and fostering community control of assets (CLES, 2017). Although at risk of simplifying the 'Preston Model', it has been argued that it mainly involves the following components: localist procurement and capital investment, worker cooperatives, and municipal ownership (Lockey & Glover, 2019). Anchor institutions hold a crucial role across these components due to their size, large supply chains, substantial workforce and, thus, considerable purchasing power. Initial activities of the 'Preston Model' were mainly directed toward the development of progressive procurement of local goods and services across anchor institutions (CLES, 2019). In recent years, PCC has also focused on supporting and promoting the development of cooperatives, establishing alongside UCLan a Preston Cooperative Development Network (CLES, 2019). Moreover, although economic sustainability has been mainly prioritised, PCC is engaging in new changes in the sustainable politics of the city. Influenced and pressured by a social mobilisation of community groups, local institutions, and movements for environmental sustainability, PCC declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and created a climate action fund in 2021.

The 'Preston Model' has supported the economic development of the city. From 2014 to 2017, its unemployment rate was reduced by almost 50% (Manley, 2018). However, it is still among 20% of England's most deprived local authority areas (LCC, 2019). In addition, Preston still falters on a number of health indicators. The life expectancy at birth (LE) 76.7 years for men and 80.5 years for females, which is lower than the England average (LE for men is 79.4 and 83.1 for females). Moreover, 59.8% of adults are classified as overweight and obese, lower than the estimates for England (64%) (NHS Digital, 2019; Public Health England [PHE], 2019). Although with no current robust data on food insecurity, recent reports point to almost 20% of childhood food insecurity within the city (Bhattacharya & Shepherd, 2020). In Preston, previous research

has already raised the issue of ensuring healthy food access and affordability for certain communities, particularly in deprived wards (Caraher et al., 2010). Indeed, the city suffers from entrenched spatial inequalities, particularly concerning higher levels of deprivation in the central and southern parts of the city (MHCLG, 2019).

The depth of social deprivation and health inequalities found in Preston invites questions about the role of social services to address these issues. Welfare reforms, accentuated in the last ten years, have meant significant cuts to public spending, reorganisation of welfare services such as the NHS (by transferring some NHS services to local authorities), and the 'Big Society' political ideology (Lambie-Mumford, 2013). A key feature of these social policy changes is the increased service provision by voluntary sector groups and the importance of community engagement to meet local needs (Taylor-Gooby & Stoker, 2011). Although the notion of a Big Society has practically disappeared from the political discourse (Williams et al., 2014), communitarian ideals of philanthropy and volunteerism have continued to be rolled out in several policy initiatives (Heins et al., 2019). Local authorities have become key actors in this agenda under the *Localism Act* of 2011, fostering decentralised political and economic powers. However, the greater freedom acquired by local authorities is limited by a conditioned and "depleted funding pot that restricts 'freedom to act'" (Bentley & Pugalis, 2013, p. 265).

In this context, many non-state activities aim to provide emergency food sources, such as food banks and community pantries. Moreover, in response to increasing local and national concerns concerning holiday hunger[6], PCC and local schools developed Holiday Hunger Markets that provide food to local communities in need in exchange for a small fee. Many Holiday Hunger Markets run by community groups such as faith-based organisations and community centres now operate throughout the year with PCC's support. Other civil society initiatives focusing on developing community capacity for accessing healthy diets are community gardens, primarily structured under a local network of environmental projects. However, they are not articulated into a mature urban agriculture movement. Many of these initiatives are fundamentally conceived to foster social cohesion and overall wellbeing, supporting diverse communities.

Food production beyond the city is mainly dedicated to livestock and dairy (LCC, 2015). Nevertheless, Lancashire is perceived as an agricultural hub with particular strengths, including considerable agricultural land, favourable soils, and climate for growing field vegetables and crops (Clutterbuck, 2017). Compared to other districts in Lancashire (e.g., Lancaster), Preston has a smaller number of farm holdings and farmland (8,814 hectares in its rural hinterland), focusing primarily on livestock, arable and cereal crops reared and grown intensively (LCC, 2015). Given England's high centralisation of food policy, local governments have limited influence over food systems. However, local authorities can still help shape LFSs through school food, food safety, food standards, markets, and planning (Lang et al., 2018). LCC promotes locally produced food and drink products through marketing and general business support facilities (Boost, 2017). It also promotes catering services to schools, care, and residential homes that prioritise local and sustainable food (LCC, 2022a). Other than Holiday Hunger Markets and Preston Market, a local

[6] Holiday hunger refers to the experience of food insecurity by some children, particularly from low-income families that do not receive school meals during holiday periods (Forsey, 2017).

food retailer market hall, PCC does not currently run any initiatives explicitly related to food. Current environmental plans and spatial planning documents do not contemplate criteria to maintain the peri-urban production sites or promote sustainable production. Compared to other cities and regions in England, neither LCC nor PCC has an active policy stating clear actions towards achieving sustainable food systems.

Despite public and civil society impetus to address some food-related and sustainability issues, food poverty in the city remains a central concern, and internal inequalities persist. In addition, the livestock-based and intensive agriculture in Lancashire and lack of specific policies promoting sustainable food can create challenges, as will be seen in the following sections. Nevertheless, food is becoming a medium through which inequalities and environmental sustainability are addressed. Preston's case explores this and analyses how the different interactions within the LFS might become a vehicle (although with limitations and contradictions) to foster food sovereignty processes.

## 5.3 LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES AS IMPERFECT PROCESSES

Following the social constructionist epistemology of the study (see Chapter 3), this meta-theme discusses the kinds of LFIs in Preston based on the discourses they advance. It focuses on the socio-ecological imaginaries constructed by how LFIs imagine and work to shape the society and environment in which they live (see Chapter 3). Sub-section 5.3.1 focuses on how LFIs ascribe meaning to their actions given their realities and focus, particularly concerning food security and local food. This allows for the construction of a typology differentiating LFIs that focus on food access and LFIs that concentrate on supply, highlighting a discontinuity between local/sustainable food and equitable food access. Sub-section 5.3.2 deals with how this is mediated by the broader food system and structural processes. It argues that LFIs must navigate the rules of the conventional food system and market-driven priorities, promoting the development of this binary and affecting the survival of LFIs over time. Finally, Sub-section 5.3.3 illustrates that although this creates a challenging picture to collectively promote food sovereignty in Preston, the approaches of LFIs converge in their essence: providing opportunities for change through food.

### 5.3.1 Access vs Supply

As explained in Chapter 2 and 3, understanding LFIs in the context of food sovereignty means assessing the strategies they advance for food system change, including identifying the *motivations* within LFSs, the *meanings* attached to sustainability and food security and how these relate to the actions promoted by LFIs. The theme *access vs supply* illustrates the typology of LFIs developed based on their discourses on food security and its relationship with local food. In other words, it focuses on the socio-ecological imaginaries – the thought-systems underlying the activities of LFIs – constructed through the different discourses that LFIs advance in Preston due to their particular specificities. This paints the starting point for the construction of the LFS in Preston, identifying an initial barrier for collaborations and interactions between its components: divergent discourses. Three types of priorities between LFIs are identified: food access, short food supply chains, and those aiming to combine food access whilst shortening food supply

chains. For clarity and to allow a more fluent discussion of the results, LFIs focusing on food access will be addressed as Food-Access LFIs, LFIs focusing on shortening food supply chains as Proximity LFIs, and LFIs in the middle of these approaches as Middle-Ground LFIs. Unsurprisingly, given Preston's context of social deprivation, Food-Access LFIs are the most engaged in the dynamics of the LFS.

On the one hand, Food-Access LFIs, such as, food pantries, holiday markets, soup kitchens, seek to reduce hunger in the city through an understanding of food security – or 'food poverty' in participants' words – as multidimensional. For example, a community centre that started to provide food parcels during the Covid-19 pandemic commented that it "really is not just about food poverty, isn't it? It is about the bigger picture that is leading to poverty. So, why have we got food poverty in terms of people got no jobs, cultures, environment, housing […]" (Community Centre). The logic that informs this comment is that food security is not only about economic access to food. It is multi-layered, and thus any effort to address it needs to look at the bigger picture.

Most of these LFIs are run by community-based organisations, churches, and charities that provide support services. Compared to other LFIs identified in the literature that use market-based mechanisms and localised food systems to address community food access (Constance et al., 2014), Preston's Food-Access LFIs mainly use surplus and donated food to address immediate food needs, accompanying this with allied services to address broader socio-economic issues. This is often linked to a socio-ecological imaginary of local/sustainable food as distant from their activities and a reference that using surplus food also contributes to environmental sustainability due to a reduction of food waste:

> "We don't operate in quite the same way I know [others] operates with the having access to local food and sourcing only… We don't operate like that because it's very difficult, because the food that comes to us, the sources, we don't have that. It's not a luxury, but we don't have that […] fundamentally really, it's about reducing food waste, reducing food poverty, getting people involved, which can then help them do that cycle of self-worth, self-confidence in training and bringing people round." (Intact)

Such responses provide examples where local food is seen as a privilege or 'luxury', not just for the initiatives themselves but also for the people they serve. It does not relate to food security, understood as multi-layered food access. During a conversation about local and organic food in this context, a local pantry commented that "that would come down to affordability, and because actually, some people might want to… I don't know, source local food. But can they afford that?" (Local pantry). The priority then is positioned around ensuring that people have *access* to food and facilitating people to address food security determinants without necessarily problematising issues of current food production systems. These go beyond the scope of the people they work with and their objectives.

On the other hand, Proximity LFIs, such as local farms, retailers and markets, view food security as a problem of current food *supply* chains. The socio-ecological imaginary that underlies this conceptualisation revolves around the idea that problem is not food access, but the 'cheap'

environment constructed by the conventional food system and the logistical system it has developed, which affects farmers' financial viability. Burscough Community Farm explained:

> "The way it would work is if food was more expensive. I realise that that would have implications, but a lot of it is down to society's values. In my opinion. Society… Doesn't really value food that much or a lot of it. OK, when I talk about society… sweeping statements, but a lot of people don't value the food that they eat. They really don't care. As long as it's convenient, as long as it's affordable and cheap." (Burscough Community Farm)

In this view, the issue of food security includes challenging *consumer* attitudes that prioritise cheap food, as it reinforces the detrimental effects of current food supply chains. For example, Worthingtons farm, a local farm, commented that food security "means we should be supporting British farmers better than we are. We take pride in our growing […] We just like growing good crops to supply to people" (Worthingtons farm). In this socio-ecological imaginary, there is an overall feeling of local food as a possible solution as it is embedded within a place, including its history and communities. However, in this notion, the fact that, even if food is cheap, people still cannot afford or access it, becomes invisible. This is in concordance with previous studies that have identified barriers to the participation of low-income communities in sustainable or local food consumption, with LFIs working in this area often referring to the lack of society's awareness of the 'true cost' of food (Guthman et al., 2006; Hodgins & Fraser, 2018). However, framing obstacles to food access mainly from the consumer side fosters the idea that unequal food access exists outside the realm of responsibility of these LFIs (Hodgins & Fraser, 2018). Following this line of thought, although recognising their importance, some Proximity LFIs in Preston view Food-Access LFIs as "an outlet for what is a broken system" that does not necessarily address the root problems of it – cheap food, but rather "help perpetuate the problem" (Burscough Community Farm).

This creates a polarisation of LFIs based on their discourses of what should be addressed in terms of food security (access or supply), possibly hindering the construction of a LFS based on collaborative networks that address both equitable access to food and issues of food supply chains. Nevertheless, some LFIs actively bridge distributional, educational, and access gaps between these agendas, reaching a middle point: Middle-Ground LFIs. These LFIs address the issues of the high cost of local/ sustainable food, embedding a socio-ecological imaginary beyond the access vs supply binary and constructing ways of making local food available beyond monetary relations. For example, LGP, a network of community gardens providing locally grown food to deprived communities and SCRAN, a student organisation delivering cooking workshops using local and sustainable food sources. One LFI that stands out in this context is the Larder. The Larder has been trying to combine these agendas through various programmes and is now developing a solidarity scheme that provides people with vouchers to buy produce in local shops. Recognising the possible exclusion of vulnerable communities in the construction of LFSs, the Larder views food security as incorporating the idea that it is fair for everyone across the supply chain, including for people with disadvantaged economic backgrounds.

Of course, this typology is not fixed, and not all LFIs align with the discourses ascribed to each type. For example, one Holiday Hunger Market viewed food security in terms of food supply. Nevertheless, the overall focus and issues to be addressed were the same as those that viewed food security as revolving around access. Moreover, many community-based organisations also run community gardens besides providing food to people. However, in this case, the purpose of community gardens is rarely viewed as supporting food access. They are fundamentally conceived for supporting social cohesion and overall wellbeing. More importantly, it would be misleading to take this typology and the disconnection between local/sustainable and food poverty at face value without acknowledging their place-based contingency. LFIs in Preston must navigate a context where the rules of the conventional food system and market-driven capitalist societies are deeply entrenched, promoting the development of this two-tier system. This will be further explored under Sub-section 5.3.2. Nevertheless, the fact that some LFIs are working on bridging this binary raises the question of whether Middle-Ground LFIs are also fostering the development of diverse networks across types of LFIs, opening up possibilities for food sovereignty. This is explored throughout the analysis, focusing on how and why different agendas are converging or not.

### 5.3.2 Issues of Continuity

Having explored the discontinuity between LFIs found in Preston due to diverse discourses around the reasons and priorities of food security, this theme deals with how Preston's context mediates these discourses and differentiation. Although Food-Access LFIs and Proximity LFIs distance themselves from each other, with few exceptions, they share the same struggles in navigating the rules imposed by the corporate food system and a market-driven society, leading to a prioritisation of strategies for financial sustainability.

LFIs – from Food-Access to Proximity LFIs – referred to a constant struggle to survive. Many Food-Access LFIs are from the voluntary or third sector, thus heavily reliant on volunteers and external funding. These LFIs perceive this as one of the main barriers to their work:

> "That, you know. You know, that's the nature of the beast enforcement of the voluntary sector. Obviously, funding is the biggest challenge. Because you know, continually sourcing funding. And you, know, at times […] you are living from one year to the next, really, surviving from one year to the next. You know, because there's not a lot of funders that will give long-term funding." (PMF)

This passage evokes a deep struggle and concern for continuity in the context of the UK's welfare reform. As funding is scarce, many rely on volunteers due to the inability to pay staff. This means that there is a risk of becoming 'kind of plateau' as volunteers also have full-time jobs, limiting their commitment to the work of these organisations. In addition, there is often no consistency of people across time, as volunteers can change from one year to the next. In this vein, their limited capacity means they must engage with conventional food system players through food redistribution organisations or supermarkets who actively donate surplus food, as they have free or low-cost food available. For instance, Intact, a community centre running a food pantry, commented, "it's not a luxury, but we don't have that. We can't say no to something because it

may have travelled" (Intact). This demonstrates the disadvantaged position of certain LFIs regarding where to source food.

This disadvantaged position is also present in Proximity LFIs. Local farms and retailers explained that they work within a system dominated by supermarkets and industrialised farms that drive prices very low and overproduce food that sometimes is not even worth harvesting. Thus, there is a need to be as productive as possible or find a market niche to survive, adopting an entrepreneurial mind focusing on supply and demand and notions of aesthetic quality. Sometimes, this means balancing environmental sustainability and the initiative's survival:

> "[…] we use agrochemicals, where we need to. As little as possible because they are expensive. But we need consistency of produce. And when you're growing vegetables if you cannot supply your market, then you're out." (Worthingtons farm)

This narrative draws attention to the almost compulsory need to adopt specific mainstream approaches to subsist. Indeed, it highlights that LFIs are in a dialectical relationship with the conventional food system, navigating the intricate dynamics imposed by its market logics (Akram-Lodhi, 2015; Tregear, 2011). This is the same for Banana King, a local retailer, who explained that they do not sell organic produce as "the quality of organic produce isn't quite up to the mark as what it is with non-organic" (Banana King), referring to the aesthetic characteristics expected by consumers. This is accompanied by the perception of Preston's food culture as prioritising convenience food, which, compared to the 'wealthier South', is not so open to sustainable food systems. In this context, environmental sustainability is recognised by many, but short-term financial sustainability is prioritised. This is something discussed across LFIs, including Middle-Ground LFIs. For example, LGP commented that if they did not use compost with peat, they would not be able to grow as much as they needed, acknowledging being "very naughty from that [environmental] perspective" (LGP).

Two LFIs exemplify how these dynamics affect the survival of innovative food practices. During the identification of LFIs in Preston, it became challenging to find 'typical' LFIs such as box schemes or CSAs. Nevertheless, two were identified after long searches online: Grimshaw Food Hub and Our Food Co-op. Both organisations worked as food hubs – middlemen between consumers and producers – to enable affordable access to local and organic food. Both were voluntary-led with little to no funding while at the same time competing within market-based dynamics. At the time of data collection, these LFIs no longer existed. When discussing why these initiatives folded, the organisations mentioned that lead volunteers eventually left due to burn-out or moving out of the city. In addition, in the case of Our Food Co-op, orders had been going down throughout the years as supermarkets started doing online orders with greater variety and offer. Although these models bridged the access vs supply binary, their characteristics, which combined the constraints of voluntary and business organisations in the current system, eventually meant their demise. Volunteerism is not enough to be self-sustainable without ongoing funding. At the same time, a market-based approach is needed in any effort beyond the use of surplus food at the risk of becoming exclusionary.

These challenges draw attention to the limitations of LFIs to contribute to the relocalisation of food and scaling up efforts towards fair food systems. Notably, although these constraints are in some part created by the conventional food system, the conventional food system also provides some solutions for them. It is in this context that the binary of access vs supply is constructed. Local farmers and retailers must increase prices in niche markets to survive, limiting possibilities for local/sustainable food becoming affordable for all and situating these foods as unthinkable in addressing food access. These dynamics are deeply connected to other scholars' critique of LFIs and what this study refers to as the *neoliberal trap*. As explained in Chapter 2, this refers to how, in maneuvering current economic dynamics and paradigms, LFIs paradoxically tend to focus on market-logic solutions, entrepreneurialism, and acceptance of the devolvement of government responsibilities to civil society (Allen, 2010). Indeed, all these characteristics have been identified in this study. In particular, the situation of many Food-Access LFIs relates to the transferring of responsibilities from the state to community and voluntary organisations but with limited funding (see Lambie-Mumford, 2013). Significantly, participants of this type of LFI did not engage in a critical discourse around the state's responsibility in addressing people's entitlement to food, unintentionally accepting the devolution of the welfare state onto communities.

However, this is not to criticise LFIs without contextualising their struggles. As seen through the examples of Our Food Co-op and Grimshaw Food Hub, those that do not engage in these dynamics are prone to be unsuccessful. The question that arises in this context is: can the coalition of LFIs in a context such as Preston overcome these constraints? As will be seen in the next theme, LFIs, even with limitations, can still create a positive picture of food system transformation through a different conceptualisation of food, providing a starting point to create synergies.

### 5.3.3 Providing Opportunities

LFIs are faced with many challenges related to their engagement with the conventional food system and a market-led society, as seen in the previous sub-section. Nevertheless, LFIs in Preston were still found to create a space where food sovereignty principles start to appear. This research thus argues that LFIs are better understood as imperfect processes, following Goodman et al.'s (2012) proposal of conceptualising these practices as "relational and process-based rather than perfectionist" (p. 6). The importance is then to recognise the limitations of these practices and acknowledge that they might also be carving out spaces for change. This theme aims to demonstrate that the collection of LFIs in Preston understands and uses food as part of a broader change process. Even if LFIs must negotiate with an unfavourable environment, they are still creating new material and symbolic food spaces.

Although Food-Access LFIs in Preston use different models, they converge in wanting to provide food in a dignified way. Within Preston's LFS, this is mainly ensured by developing community supermarkets where people can pay a donation or fee for a certain amount of surplus or donated food. For example, PCC, who initiated the development of Holiday Hunger Markets, explained that "this is a pay-as-you-feel model and it is quite significant in that for a lot of families, they were saying to us something around pride and dignity and that being able to pay something even

if it is just a pound […] providing that sense of dignity and pride, and that was really important to develop this new model" (PCC). The idea that prevails is that people should be given food in spaces where stigma is reduced. These LFIs differentiate themselves from 'the usual' food banks that filter who can access food, primarily working with people in crisis. Most interviewees perceived this model as creating dependency because they drive away from the focus of addressing root causes of poverty, mirroring previous critiques of food banking (McIntyre et al., 2016). The role of Food-Access LFIs was constructed as support organisations that provide people with access to food so they can focus on other struggles in their lives through an empowerment model:

> "A family may not go every week, but they know it is there. So, if they are struggling, they know they can go there and get some food. And it is going to help them keep going […] So, it is providing that help they need when they need it […] It is about them making a choice and decision." (CCG)

Although not explicitly referring to food as a right, this notion assimilates the principle of ensuring everyone's entitlement to food without discrimination and humiliation. This opposes previous notions that receiving food is a stigmatising experience with beneficiaries losing some of their agency (McIntyre et al., 2016; Poppendieck, 1999). This is accompanied by the idea that people should also be provided with resources, be it skills or knowledge, to engage with food according to their specific situation. Indeed, many LFIs utilise food as a vector to address other social inequalities. For example, some aim to improve employability skills for different population groups through food-related occupations or food growing. In addition, many use food to bring communities together or attract people to engage in other services, such as mental health support or housing advice. All these activities converge in one aspect: they provide opportunities for marginalised communities within the current system. Kneafsey et al. (2017) refer to this as a 'latent' potential for food systems change. In a discussion around the notion of food sovereignty as a right to healthy food, LGP evokes this underlying value:

> "There's something about that's not for the likes of me, so it's not just about somebody at the top saying these people should be allowed to […] If the people that you trying to reach don't think that they have permission, don't think that it's worthy of them, then you've got a really steep hill to climb…" (LGP)

This passage signals a concern of simply stating that people should be entitled to food, even if it is under the notion of food as a right. For LGP, many social barriers need to be broken down for people to access food. Not having 'permission' in this context refers to a structural exclusion of people from the food system, who, as a result, have internalised a feeling that they are not entitled to certain foods. Many LFIs focus their work on this area, supporting the development of people's agency. Many argued, however, that this should not be done in a top-down manner, similar to the view of LGP. When conversing about the food education activities of LFIs, most LFIs referred to making sure that an inclusive, supportive environment for people is created. With Preston being a "diverse, multicultural community, you just need to be aware of cultural differences around things like halal or vegan…" (CCG). Similarly, SCRAN also mentioned that in

their cooking workshops with low-income communities, they are careful on how they talk about local or organic food so that people do not feel alienated from the activities, as these foods could be perceived as 'elitist'. Thus, many LFIs aim to ensure that no 'universalistic or perfectionist ideas' of food are imposed (DuPuis et al., 2006) but recognise the diversity of food cultures and practices.

Building a supportive environment is not only a value embedded within Food-Access LFIs. When describing their motivations, Proximity LFIs often refer to a vision of constructing a place where fair opportunities are given to those involved and building close relationships with and between communities. For example, Preston Market commented that "many people come in the market because it's a different type of shopping experience. So, you know, you can have a natter, some people call it a bit of a community centre. It's more than just a place to buy your food" (Preston Market). Banana King also referred to the importance of being part of Preston's communities, stating that "it's not all about bottom line" but being closer with the people they work with, be it local farmers or consumers. This supports existing conceptualisations of LFIs as creating spaces for reconnecting communities (including consumers and producers) while reconstructing the value and meaning of food (Marsden et al., 2000; Renting et al., 2003).

Food becomes not just a material object to feed oneself or sell but a means to address broader issues, build community connections, and engage in more significant societal change. This relates to recognising that food security is multidimensional, particularly from Food-Access LFIs and Middle-Ground LFIs, as explained in previous sub-sections. This contrasts with some of the criticism that Food-Access LFIs have received because they do not address the structural causes of food insecurity. Through their activities, food addresses several poverty determinants, such as employability or housing. This is reflected in the fact that most LFIs do not only concentrate on food provision or growing, but these are just one line of a more significant portfolio addressing socio-economic issues. LFIs in Preston might not be challenging the conventional food system, but they are engaging in broader community development and (gradually) addressing deeper, entrenched problems beyond the food system. In a sense, then, these different LFIs share the same core idea: food is something that can transform society if used as a vehicle for broader change. How and if this core idea is helping build a connected LFS that promotes food sovereignty is addressed in the following meta-themes.

## 5.4 METABOLISMS FOR FOOD ACCESS AND DEMOCRACY

Having analysed the differences *and* similarities between LFIs in Preston, this meta-theme deals with the metabolic processes within the LFS. Drawing on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3, metabolism refers to the appropriation, exchange and transformation of material, natural and social elements within the LFS, forming particular configurations and relations (Heynen et al., 2005). This meta-theme draws attention to the links between LFIs and how they affect food sovereignty – issues of how these processes are mediated by power and diverse discourses are addressed in Section 5.5. *S*ub-section 5.4.1 presents one of the main interactions between LFIs; sharing resources and signposting. This first section also examines how the Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened these connections and their relation to the right to food,

highlighting the persistence of the access vs supply binary. Sub-section 5.4.2 discusses the material, social and capital flows that build knowledge and reskilling networks in the LFS, including a consideration of their limitations in terms of community participation. Finally, Sub-section 5.4.3 draws attention to the approach of PCC to food security and sustainable food systems, following an understanding that the metabolic processes of LFSs are embedded within institutional arrangements that influence their direction and function. This starts to explain why LFSs might articulate a specific response to food-related concerns beyond the individual challenges of LFIs.

### 5.4.1 Sharing and Signposting to Ensure Access

As expressed by many scholars, building collective power within LFSs could help improve the possibilities of providing good food for all in particular places (Hodgins & Fraser, 2018; Rossi, 2017). In Preston, ensuring access to food provides a space for collaboration between LFIs and opportunities to engage with other social and institutional components of the territory. A deep normative commitment to ensure the right to food – understood as the entitlement of everyone to access culturally appropriate and healthy food and its socio-economic determinants – informs this dynamic.

One of the frequent interactions across types of LFIs for this purpose, strengthened during the Covid-19 crisis, is sharing food. In an attempt to bring closer local/sustainable food and food access, LGP collects surplus food from allotments and grows food that then is used in other activities of LFIs, such as food pantries or cooking workshops. According to those LFIs receiving this support, this is a relevant aspect of reconnecting people with food:

> "So, you know is a way of bolstering that fresh food that can be available. Also, it teaches people what fruit and veg looks like when it has come out of the ground as opposed to at the supermarket where it might not resemble what food really looks like. It is covered in mud [laughs]…But everyone seems really happy when it does come in […] Some people comment that they haven't had whatever it was for ages or and they get very excited too." (Intact)

This type of solidarity scheme is not only provided by those LFIs run by community groups. Two of the interviewed local farmers and retailers donate food to Food-Access LFIs – in some cases this does not involve surplus food. Notably, the Larder, a Middle-Ground LFI, has developed a relationship with local producers, who provide deals for the Larder and help them with particular schemes to ensure healthy food access. These relationships point to the building of solidarity networks that go beyond just profit maximisation (Nelson et al., 2019), working under different logic than those of market dynamics and addressing the right to food from a supply and access perspective. However, this is marginal, as will be seen as this theme develops, with the separation between local/sustainable food and food access still being maintained.

In Sub-section 5.3.3, the theme *providing opportunities* argued that LFIs – mainly Food-Access and Middle-Ground LFIs – also aim to address broader social issues. Many LFIs have food poverty as one of many objectives of their organisation. This is combined with an understanding that food

provision only solves an immediate problem, not the primary cause. As a result, many LFIs refer their beneficiaries to other organisations, such as social services and charities. These organisations then, responding to specific needs, start to understand the root causes of why people are accessing food provision services and find ways to address them. Thus, LFIs engage in a needs-based wrap-around service that brings many actors together, including institutional ones, addressing the right to food by considering its determinants.

While the Covid-19 pandemic stalled activities aiming to address socio-economic determinants of food access, it also provided a medium to strengthen the sharing of food and resources between organisations. Prior to the Covid-19 crisis, an informal network was formed that brought together different Food-Access LFIs with the facilitation of PCC. The pandemic solidified and expanded this network, building an interconnected response to the pandemic in terms of the right to food (Zerbian et al., 2022a). This highlights the dynamism of LFSs constantly changing and evolving as external forces start to work. The Covid-19 crisis created a common issue to be addressed, which Ashe and Sonnino (2013) argue is one of the preconditions to building 'convergence in diversity'. Through these relationships, LFIs redistributed food within the LFSs to meet each other's objectives. Moreover, during this time, many organisations, such as PCC, the police, social services, referred people in need to this network. As a result, this informal network was the leading actor in ensuring the right to food during the pandemic, filling gaps left by the public sector.

This strengthening of connections between Food-Access LFIs has helped reach a common discourse between them; nobody should suffer food insecurity because of social, economic or social constraints. One concrete example of how this leads to addressing the right to food through interconnected responses is the case of South Asian students. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Food-Access LFIs and other organisations from different faiths came together to deliver meals to 400 students for three weeks who could not go back to their respective countries. Besides ensuring that food met students' cultural needs, the diverse connections built around this issue also created a space for self-reflection:

> "Preston Minster completely forgot that Ramadan, it would be certain foods that would be fed. And we turned up on the first day with meat and we just didn't think […] So, we had to all learn to really compromise and be really kind to each other and listen to each other. We packed lots of packs of food like pasta and tinned hot dogs and then our friends at the Malayali Association said South Asian students don't want pasta and hot dogs, they want lentils and onions and tomatoes." (Preston Minster)

Indeed, building these relationships and listening to each other was the key to success during the pandemic. In the case of the South Asian students, these interactions also led to broader advocacy with the university concerning students' housing situation and the need for the university to take responsibility in students' affairs. This mobilisation of Food-Access LFIs and eventual university involvement reflects that collaborative networks within LFSs can allow marginalised voices to be heard in broader institutional spaces even if addressing an immediate

need. Issues such as this, which were addressed before the pandemic but were put on hold, have started to raise debates within the informal network of Food-Access LFIs on how to move towards a multiagency approach to food poverty, whereby the right to food is addressed by involving public institutions and other services. This indicates a degree of reflexivity within LFSs, building 'communities of practice' that are messy processes that sometimes call for pragmatic responses (Goodman et al., 2012) but can also engage in political action.

Overall, Preston's metabolic flows have formed a connected network around food insecurity, understood as multidimensional access to food. However, this development leaves a topic behind: local/sustainable food. Although local food is becoming more embedded in the LFS through LGP, a network of community gardens, and sporadic donations, ensuring the right to food through food relocalisation is circumstantial and situational. Some Food-Access LFIs mentioned that the role of LGP is not particularly important, as they can still operate with the contributions of supermarkets. Notably, usually food sharing, mainly from Proximity LFIs, is based on a moral commitment to 'help those in need', fostering a communitarian charity-based approach. Goodman et al. (2013) illustrate that values of caring are indeed important, but that beneficence in itself is not helpful to make visible entrenched inequalities to transforming current structures. Even if from local sources, food recovery cannot address the problem of the right to food by itself (Guthman et al., 2006). It depends on the willingness to donate food, which is not necessarily stable over time.

The right to food in the LFS becomes a matter of a right to access food – an important part of food sovereignty, but not how this is achieved nor how to build sustainable mechanisms that ensure access to local/sustainable food for all (see Chapter 3). Although the Covid-19 pandemic has created a space for sharing and more collaborative forms of interactions, this is not necessarily leading to "larger, cross-solidarity, collaborative modes of social change" (Goodman et al. 2013, p. 2). However, as will be seen in later themes, LFSs are not only self-organising networks constantly evolving, as seen here, but an outcome of internal and broader social processes, enabling or constraining opportunities to address these concerns.

### 5.4.2 Knowledge and Reskilling through Diverse Networks

The previous theme has dealt with how the connections within the LFS in Preston help ensure the right to food – from an access perspective, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, even before the pandemic, LFIs interacted with each other through multiple avenues, building dynamic networks, particularly concerning food democracy – citizens' active participation and empowerment to engage in the food system through equal and adequate opportunities (Hassanein, 2003). In Preston's case, it is ensured through LFIs providing services and support to each other and other organisations. Through this, food democracy starts to be developed for both LFIs and Preston's citizens in terms of being able to share ideas, becoming knowledgeable about the food system, developing one's relationship with food and recognising the value of mutual support and interdependence (Hassanein, 2008).

As food democracy scholars argue, knowledge constitutes a key facilitator for equal participation in food systems and policymaking (Hassanein, 2008). Preston's LFIs share knowledge through

food education training and support for members of other LFIs or organisations. For example, the Larder runs a Food Champions Programme that trains people from other organisations for free to deliver introductory workshops around healthy eating and cooking. More formally, some organisations like PCC or other LFIs hire the services of other LFIs to deliver activities (e.g., cooking demonstrations, nutrition courses, growing) to their service users or communities in need. This constitutes informal and formal networks that help transfer and generate knowledge on the food system, creating a cascade of associations that set conditions for democratic processes and food citizenship (Renting et al., 2012). In this context, trained or hired LFIs can help citizens reconnect with nature and recognise the value of directly engaging in the food system. According to LFIs involved in these processes:

> "It's just phenomenal, and you when you when you give somebody an opportunity to think about the possibilities of something you are broadening the horizons and you are empowering them to find out what else they could do, and I think that's what the magic of growing is." (LGP)

Deeply connected to individual activities that create opportunities for change (see Sub-section 5.3.3), these metabolic processes, as expressed by LGP and other participants, help citizens gain greater confidence in their food capabilities, helping them determine their relationship to the food system. However, it develops efficacy beyond food, as people are also provided with tools to translate to other settings (e.g., getting certification in food hygiene), increasing their opportunity to engage in other social processes. It is "like planting seeds in a way, and when the time is right, those seeds will grow into plants…" (Local food expert 4 – Preston). Given that most LFIs hold a deep concern around imposing 'ideals' of food practices, as explained in section Sub-section 5.3.3, the transfer of knowledge and skills through these collective processes is conducted so that people decide how to implement it in their own lives.

Analysing food democracy dimensions in Preston through a food sovereignty lens prompts the consideration of who wins or loses through the metabolic processes of its LFS. The dynamics of Preston's LFS illustrate that, indeed, collective projects can provide just opportunities to engage in the food system. Most projects are done to support marginalised communities and thus deal with inequalities in engaging with food-related activities. Talking about a joint project with another LFI, the Community Centre explained:

> "[…] in this country you don't get exposed to having a piece of land that you can actually go and work in a community setting with other women and start growing your own vegetables. If you look at the surrounding […] it's all living in houses that have backyards and no gardens. So, you are not getting those opportunities. So, to be able to have that and do it collectively and, you know, use the garden setting to be able to grow your own vegetables and then take them home and eat them was something that they were really keen to do." (Community Centre)

In this case, this connection represented an opportunity for a particularly marginalised (socially, spatially, and economically) group of people to practise their right to grow, share and consume

food (Kneafsey et al., 2017), although momentarily. Another critical aspect of food democracy in the context of food sovereignty is being able to share ideas about food. This enables the clarification of issues and discussion of values between divergent perspectives, building an opportunity to increase collective action to transform the food system (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). The different connections in Preston enable LFIs to engage in broader conversations around local food because of their diverse views and expertise, as has been documented in a previous publication related to this study (Zerbian et al., 2022a).

In unpacking food sovereignty's discourse concerning self-determination and democracy, Werkheiser (2016) understands that this involves the ability of communities to effectively engage in collective projects which promote the survival and flourishing of communities. From the above discussion, it can be argued that Preston's metabolic flows foster this process. They help develop people's capacities, expand knowledge about food, and address social justice issues. Finally, in recognising the need for mutual support, coalitions of diverse interests are being created by LFIs to address particular needs, fostering informal deliberation spaces for the benefit of local communities.

A vital component of this process in the context of food sovereignty is that those who benefit from collective projects should also have a say in their development and implementation. However, this is not present in Preston's LFS. LGP explained a division between those receiving and the 'experts' providing the services. Notably, some LFIs perceived that the participation of citizens rests in consultation and getting feedback about activities. However, some emphasise that communities should be the ones reclaiming their needs, rather than LFIs deciding what should be done and then consulting with citizens if that meets their needs. This resonates with food sovereignty's notion of the 'right to act' (Patel, 2009). Given the different perspectives concerning participation, the importance comes down to how LFIs can connect with each other in meaningful ways so that knowledge and ideas about this issue are discussed. In the case of the informal food poverty network, the Community Centre explained that they were raising those issues in meetings. This is particularly important as the associations in Preston's LFS through the inclusion of more transformative LFIs, perhaps not in terms of food system transformation but around the self-determination of communities, create spaces to contest ideas and develop new responses. However, as will be seen further in the final meta-theme (Section 5.5), the opportunity for these fruitful conversations are constrained by a diverse set of social processes and power relations.

### 5.4.3 Hunger in Times of Austerity

The previous themes started to showcase the role of public institutions in articulating LFS, such as in the case of the informal food poverty network during the Covid-19 pandemic. As explained in Sub-section 5.3.3, many LFIs in Preston rely on external organisations' funding and support. This gives local authorities an advantaged position to guide the internal processes of LFSs, as they hold resources that could benefit the work of LFSs. In navigating this notion, it is crucial to investigate how local authorities influence the direction of Preston's LFS. This theme analyses the focus of food policy within Preston's local authorities based on interviews with current and

previous local government officers and documents provided by these participants. It mainly concentrates on PCC, as throughout the interviews it became clear that it was the one most involved in the articulation of the LFS.

PCC interviewees acknowledged currently the Council prioritises food poverty – conceptualised as people being able to economically access food, due to a political desire from the Cabinet leader to make this a priority. An example of PCC's desire to address this issue has been facilitating community groups to self-manage Holiday Hunger Markets through funding, information, and contacting local food redistributors. The only current area focusing on food is the Community Engagement Team. As such, the approach taken revolves very much around ensuring that community groups drive any implemented action:

> "working with community groups at that grass-roots level and they are our key providers and in terms of how we develop any work, it's starts with the communities, it always starts with the communities, we ask the communities, what do they need, what support do they need, what direction do they want to take this and it is not us leading this agenda, it's the communities and that is key." (PCC)

It could be argued that governance processes through this agenda are fostering the development of a LFS embedded in principles of food democracy, with communities actively shaping it. Indeed, PCC's viewpoint is to address hunger issues through concerted efforts and avoid duplication collectively:

> "I think to be honest; we are so blessed that we've got all these amazing groups out there delivering and I think part of it, it would be quite arrogant from us to go, 'you know what? The Council is gonna set our own food bank and do it ourselves'. When actually we've got groups out there who were in need of support as well and we were able to offer them that, whether it was financial support or any other additional support or resources. And again, that is how we work as a Council, as a city." (PCC)

This narrative suggests the emergence of an acceptance of communities' engagement in addressing the right to food. However, in promoting a particular surplus scheme and having a strong political will to address hunger, PCC is influencing, although not explicitly, the direction of the LFS; that of hunger relief through surplus food. Significantly, PCC interviewees explained that sustainable food had not been prioritised within this agenda. According to PCC participants, the prioritisation of food poverty and marginalisation of other food concerns can be explained by the UK's broader political-economic austerity and welfare reform. Previous PCC and LCC officers mentioned that these dynamics had deeply reduced the ability of councils to engage beyond their legal requirements, signalling a tension between national-local power in the UK governance context (Parsons et al., 2021). Until 2013, PCC had been involved in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Healthy Cities programme. With support from LCC's funding, PCC engaged in policy change to comply with this programme, integrating a focus on food. This eventually led

PCC to consider becoming a Sustainable Food City, a programme fostering local food policy partnerships. In talking about what happened with this vision, a former civil servant explained:

> "That is part of WHO Healthy Cities agenda. That's why I got involved in lot of this stuff because a lot of the stuff that was coming from the Healthy Cities movement, I then started to mobilise not just for Preston but the whole Central Lancs. So, I used it as pivotal way to drive that agenda. And because the funding was being pulled from the Healthy Cities agenda then my time from the NHS primary care was pulled, there was nobody there to coordinate it. Nobody there to mobilise it, so that's why it's gone flat. Aspirations where there." (Local food expert 5 – Preston)

This narrative highlights the relevance of resource availability when discussing the work of local authorities around sustainable food systems (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013). Furthermore, it also highlights the critical role that motivated individuals ('policy entrepreneurs' or 'food champions') have within local authorities to drive action (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). This public officer was not just involved in policy change through the Healthy Cities Programme but also commissioned the development of a Sustainable Food Charter for Lancashire to foster sustainable food systems across the county. Similarly, another previous civil servant drafted a Sustainable Food Strategy for PCC in 2017, focusing on using internal resources to align with sustainable food principles. As PCC started and drove these processes, this approach differentiates starkly from PCC's current bottom-up strategy to food policy. However, during those times, sustainable/local food was high on the public agenda, signalling the importance of local authorities' leadership within LFSs. However, the people driving these processes left their positions with the restructuring of local authorities' work and contracting-out of services under austerity measures, with their policy legacy leaving with them.

Participants of PCC and LCC could not explain the current status of the previously explained policies. Significantly, some PCC participants even conceptualised the City Council as having only a 'small part' in developing a sustainable food strategy, for which the Larder has now taken responsibility. Even in PCC's community wealth building strategy, developing sustainable food systems is not incorporated (CLES, 2017). Preston Market was often regarded as an essential step towards this goal[7]. However, respondents recognised that there is no active involvement in creating networks with local growers or trying to scale up sustainable food supply chains. It was mentioned that nobody was putting food on the agenda and integrating it into the 'Preston Model' so that it became a priority. However, it was also recognised that there had been conversations to re-start the 'strategic' work of integrating local/sustainable food to current activities related to food poverty. This particular work was put on hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which further legitimised the focus on alleviating the hunger rather than building sustainable food systems.

[7] It should be noted that Preston Market is comprised by local retailers that do not necessarily sell organic or local food.

The characterisation of Preston's governance processes concerning food provides a critical point of discussion. PCC successfully promoting the 'Preston Model' shows that, when required, local authorities can find innovative strategies to address local challenges despite difficult circumstances. The crucial point in this account is thus understanding the underlying reasons for not engaging in actively supporting LFSs that promote food sovereignty. This problematises the acceptance of austerity politics as the main argument for not endorsing more transformative change. Besides resource constraints (Hebinck & Page, 2017), critical questions arise in relation to political will and imagination. In this regard, some PCC interviews expressed there is no 'real executive interest' for PCC to engage with sustainable food through the 'Preston Model' because it does not procure food for its activities. This shows a narrow conceptualisation of the role of PCC in fostering food systems change – with food outside their remit of action – and a disconnection from the rural landscape of the city, where agriculture is still relevant. Notably, this extends beyond food – the Council's community wealth-building strategy mainly concentrates on economic development without necessarily considering ecological sustainability aspects. However, the 'Preston Model' could provide an opportunity to elevate the work of LFIs towards sustainable food systems without necessarily changing the Council's policy direction. For example, PCC currently attempts to persuade anchor institutions to prioritise local businesses in their procurement strategies. This approach could be used to also include sustainability criteria to support the work of LFIs. As will be explained in the next meta-theme, this approach to food, community-based and focusing on hunger, and overall sustainable food seen outside of PCC's remit is something that creates tensions within the LFS.

## 5.5 PRODUCING EQUAL RELATIONSHIPS? RESOURCES, VALUES AND INFORMAL LINKS

Building on the previous meta-theme that discussed the metabolic flows that shape Preston's LFS and the role of the local authority in shaping it, this meta-theme focuses on power relations and social processes that shape them. It scrutinises how and why the resources and social instruments are allocated in certain ways and how this process creates specific configurations that benefit some and negatively affect others. Three main characteristics of Preston's LFS are discussed to unpack these dynamics. Sub-section 5.5.1 first analyses the contested role of anchor institutions, including local authorities, in articulating uneven landscapes in terms of resource distribution. Sub-section 5.5.2 then deals with the issue of how the limited capacity of LFIs explained in section Sub-section 5.3.2 mediates collaborations and connection, emphasising that this creates tension within the LFS in terms of reconciling the priorities of LFIs and addressing broader collective concerns. Finally, Sub-section 5.5.3 discusses the construction of ecosystems within LFSs based on informal links and shared values and discourses, creating disadvantaged opportunities for some LFIs and exclusionary networks.

### 5.5.1 The Contested Role of Anchor Institutions

The analysis provided in Sections 5.3 and 5.4 has highlighted that the activities of LFSs permeate the boundaries of the interactions between LFIs. Thus, the assemblage of LFSs is also configured by the relations that LFIs have with other organisations, such as anchor institutions. As seen in the theme *hunger in times of austerity*, local authorities can indeed direct the function of LFSs

through support in the form of funding, information, or other types of resources. Building on this, this theme concentrates on the role of these organisations in shaping favourable and unfavourable environments for LFIs to collaborate.

Depending on the resources of anchor institutions, their influence on LFSs can come in many ways. These include informal support, such as providing them with a space to sell or volunteers, and formal support through funding or material resources. As pointed out in Sub-section 5.3.2, many LFIs, particularly Food-Access LFIs, rely on funding. This creates a situation where LFIs must comply with the funder's expectations. Some LFIs argued that this sometimes clashes with their objectives. For example, after getting funding from a national community development programme, FOFS was disappointed with the strong authoritarian approach employed by the funders. This programme involved FOFS acting as a commissioner of grants and did not necessarily permit much community work. This was a huge disadvantage for them: "we wanna go out and do stuff, get our hands dirty that's why we did the garden. And for the last year or two we were just sat around a table giving money out" (FOFS). This account provides an example of how the agency of individual LFIs can be constrained by external actors because the resources provided come with rules of what LFIs should or should not do (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014; Sbicca et al., 2019).

Significantly, PCC and the university were constantly mentioned as essential players in providing resources. However, whether they provide an enabling or disabling environment for LFSs is contested. Universities provide many resources for the community, for example, experts, volunteers, or informal support. However, some LFIs suggested that the university was not actively engaging with the community:

> "What are UCLan doing? When you think of the social capacity of UCLan, whether it is the staff or the students, or the building, or your central premises in Preston, in terms of the life of the city […] You are the second biggest employer in the city […] You don't, you don't appear […] But actually, you could be, I don't know a central part of… Or you could say to some of the students, 'Does anyone need new volunteers? Come and volunteer for two hours a week'. That's not too much?" (CCG)

PMF, another LFI running a soup pantry and recently engaging in food provision during the Covid-19 pandemic, also raised that it had trouble reaching the university: "UCLan, I think it has good intentions, but unfortunately, I've found, you know, they are not really delivered" (PMF). This illustrates that universities, as civic institutions, are expected to engage in the articulation of LFSs. Nevertheless, other LFIs did receive support from the university, with UCLan helping them deliver programmes and connect with each other. This exemplifies how powerful actors circulate resources that only benefit some LFIs, ultimately aiding in the creation of links between *certain* LFIs. For some participants, the lack of broader involvement of the university is related to the many cuts that have been made across the years, which has meant narrowing priorities, constraining the role that the university can play in LFSs. However, the prioritisation of where to allocate limited resources is not distributed equally within the LFS. After closely analysing who

receives the most support, it was identified that they already have links with the university or are 'recognised' LFIs, marginalising those that do not hold this status. Therefore, links with influential players help can leverage resources. However, LFIs cannot equally navigate these dynamics due to having uneven positions within the LFS (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014).

Given the limited resources of LFIs and the influence of PCC in LFSs, as seen through its support of the informal poverty network, many *expect* PCC to create coherent networks within the LFS. However, while many LFIs acknowledged that PCC had done 'phenomenal' work in doing so, others stated that PCC was not leading any coalition between LFIs; they decided to come together independently. Bringing a more critical perspective on the role of local authorities, CCG, a LFI managing a Holiday Hunger Market, mentioned that PCC did not listen or engage with LFIs in a non-authoritarian way, "building an equal relationship" (CCG). Significantly, many LFIs that supported this view were Proximity LFIs. Some of these LFIs raised issues of PCC having a rather technical approach without any further support. For example, in talking about PCC's role in Preston's Market, Banana King, a local food retailer, mentioned that "everything they did was only because they had to do it" (Banana King). Similarly, Ashton Farmers Market explained that PCC only works with them to ensure food safety and legal requirements, sometimes even holding activities that negatively affect them, such as open streets markets on the same day as theirs. In the opinion of the Larder, this relates to a reluctance of PCC to do more than they are doing already, which is food poverty and emergency food provision:

> "I think it's a kind of a typical council attitude that […] They kind of feel that they've got to lead on things rather than it's almost like by working with small organisations is relinquishing some power […] I think when councils accept that there are experts on the ground and work with them rather than, you know, feeling that they have to be in the lead. Because they don't have the expertise and […] I've had many conversations over recent weeks with PCC […], and there is nobody with any food poverty or food systems experience at all in the whole of the gamble." (The Larder)

This perception starkly contrasts with PCC's view that it uses a 'community-led' approach to food poverty. Going back to PCC's approach to food policy, it is unsurprising that these types of LFIs share this experience, as most of the work of PCC is on supporting food poverty schemes. The fact that there is a contested perception of the role of PCC in the LFS reflects the *expectations* on the role of local authorities to form LFSs that promote food sovereignty. By fostering a particular agenda and supporting some initiatives more than others because of limited resources and political prioritisation, PCC eventually articulates a LFS that is not necessarily diverse in values, priorities, and approaches, influencing the kind of connections and relationships built between LFIs. For example, after ongoing attempts for PCC to acknowledge the need for strategic planning for sustainable food systems, the Larder has frustratedly decided to search for other support beyond the city, not wanting to engage with the work being built around food poverty.

The reality is that LFIs and their ability to form connected LFSs are in part dictated or influenced by influential players beyond LFIs. Although differing in the degree of influence, as illustrated by

participants, all these actors influence in one way or another the work of LFIs and their potential to connect with each other. The decision of these organisations to support some and not others creates an uneven distribution of possibilities for LFIs, and might also create tensions between them. Dealing with these existing power dynamics means that LFIs must adapt to the agendas of local and trans-local 'elites' (those holding the resources). This reinforces the complexity of fostering LFSs that follow food sovereignty principles while simultaneously dealing with individual resource constraints.

### 5.5.2 Insular Strategies vs Mutual Benefits

The mobilisation of social, material, and capital flows between LFIs is contextualised by an asymmetrical distribution of resources within LFSs, as seen in the previous theme. This theme further unpacks how individual resource limitations of LFIs influence the development of inclusive networks that foster mutual support with the possibility to contribute to food sovereignty. Due to LFIs limited capacity, assembling collaborative networks becomes a complicated process in which own priorities compete with the search for mutual benefits. This power geometry positions some LFIs in an advantaged position to shape collaborations and spaces of convergence.

Given that many LFIs rely on funding and must manage the difficulties of working within the conventional food system and market-based dynamics, there is limited capacity to work out infrastructures to build integrated strategies. Throughout almost all interviews, the issue of finite resources, in terms of workforce, time, or money, was mentioned as a constraint to being able to reach out or work with others:

> "I have a full-time job in the church. I have so much time that I can give, and I think how much time should I give to this? I have so many other roles and expectations upon me. So, that is true for me and for everybody else as a volunteer." (CCG)

The concern of balancing work and volunteer roles reflects again the disadvantaged position of LFIs in building LFSs embedded in food sovereignty in a broader context of austerity. Many LFIs described that, although there might be a willingness to weave integrated networks, many opportunities are lost because of individual financial or funding targets. This assimilates Levkoe's (2015) findings that participation in connected LFSs depends on the individual material, social and economic resources of organisations, potentially creating inequitable spaces. Limited funding opportunities can indeed create a reluctance to build reciprocal relationships, as LFIs first and foremost must think about how to survive in a disadvantageous environment:

> "I don't really know other than the fact that I think because everybody is just fighting to try and get their own things funded or trying to get a foothold in in things that there isn't always, maybe that openness to collaboration or there can be a feeling of competition." (SCRAN)

This ‘feeling of competition’ adds to the complexity underlying building collaborative endeavours. The limited financial resources and staffing can lead to insular individual strategies without looking at the broader system (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014). During a conversation of their connections with LGP, the network of community gardens, FOFS commented:

> “You know, you kind of signed up with them on a network but there is no massive interaction with them. Well, there wasn’t for us. We were just doing our own thing really. It was good to be in touch with them. But, I mean, we had the [national group] with the money, if we needed any money for the garden, we could get it. So, we didn’t need them at the time really.” (FOFS)

The fact that closer connections are not seen as needed reflects a feeling that if *my* needs are met through funding or other external resource flows, there is no need to build connections. Two situations were identified that could break this competitive and insular thinking. First, many collective projects discussed during the interviews were possible because of a funding bid that fostered collaborations. Second, most LFIs liaise with others if they see a benefit in that collaboration. For example, if there is a need for external help from an ‘expert’ LFI. Thus, collaborations are only worthwhile if they create mutual benefits for the involved parts. This involves a sense of understanding that a more considerable success will be reached by collectively sharing the available resources. However, due to limited resources and lack of ongoing funding, many interactions are one-offs rather than ongoing collaborative projects. In this vein, most interviewees mentioned the need for somebody or an organisation to devote time to building connections. Building connections and collaborative activities means figuring out practical ways of working together that aligns with LFIs’ work, which is time-consuming and not always possible.

In this context, this kind of reciprocal relationship is more accessible for those who have available social and material resources to engage with or help others. In the case of Preston, these actors are PCC and the Larder, due to their role in facilitating the most important networks of LFIs in Preston: The Preston Food Partnership, led by the Larder to develop a collective strategy in Preston, and the informal food poverty network facilitated by PCC. As Iles and Montenegro de Wit (2015) argue, food sovereignty fosters connectivity *and* autonomy within different spaces and institutions such as those mentioned before. Thus, the importance of food sovereignty in this regard lies in how such collaborative spaces are being conducted or mobilised so that they foster interdependence without LFIs surrendering their agency. In other words, balancing individual priorities with mutual benefits.

Although named Preston Food Partnership, participant observation revealed that it is mainly a space where the Larder shares their vision for food system change and discusses their work with a small group of other organisations. It is not a space for other LFIs or organisations to share their situation and current activities in the same way. The Larder decides whom to include, and some initiatives are not involved. This has an impact on the creation (or not) of inclusive spaces for collective action. By looking at the invitation list for the partnership's meeting, it could be identified that those invited were mainly ‘influential’ players within the LFS. This contrasts with how the informal food poverty network is being managed. During its joint meetings, members of

this network demonstrated a desire to exchange resources and experiences. In this network, PCC works as a facilitator with a strong motivation to ensure that it builds a collective sense across those involved, making tools accessible to support LFIs' work. Members can also comment on these tools and discuss their distinct food poverty strategies. PCC and other participants mentioned that the network is successful because it is not led by a single LFI advocating for a specific mode. Instead, it acknowledges diversity. These examples demonstrate that individualist approaches can permeate collaborative platforms, raising issues of which views and perspectives are integrated into articulating LFSs.

The analysis presented here shows that working within limited resources means a loss of opportunities to build on each other's work and eventually a loss of co-transforming the LFS. This translates to a search for interactions that create mutual benefits. However, even in these interactions, insular strategies can still be present depending on how those that hold the social or material resources that create these spaces mobilise collective actions. In terms of food sovereignty, these social and power relations mean fewer opportunities for people and LFIs to engage in food system transformation because of sporadic collaborative activities and the creation of exclusionary spaces where power is not shared. This draws attention to driving mutual collaborations in a way that does not skew the power towards only one organisation but also that resources are available for this to happen. These power choreographies that affect the potential of LFSs for food sovereignty are further complicated by the *building of ecosystems* around shared values and informal links, as will be explained in the next theme.

### 5.5.3 Building Ecosystems

The influence of social processes and power relations between LFIs and other organisations on the food sovereignty processes of LFSs is not only confined to the uneven playing field in terms of material, capital or human resources. The previous themes have touched upon the importance of social resources (knowledge on a specific topic or social relations) in articulating LFSs. This theme deepens this engagement by focusing on how the circulation of these resources, particularly discursive constructions and values, orchestrate the organisation of LFSs. This is materialised in the construction of small ecosystems within the LFS, which can help the sharing of information and awareness of each other's work and create adverse environments for inclusive collective spaces.

The analysis points to the fact that connections between LFIs are pre-determined by a degree of 'closeness' amongst them, which has different layers. When asking LFIs with whom they mostly collaborated, they constantly mentioned those catering for the same community or locality or being part of the same organisation:

> "And I quite like to build the relationship as well between our other projects that the Student Union. So, we've got a garden on campus and we have used some of the produce going there in the past […] So, we have a relationship with them and also because we've got Zero Waste shop in the building downstairs." (SCRAN)

'Closeness' is also something that derives from informal and previous links and personal relationships. During fieldwork, it became clear that many members of LFIs were involved in more than one LFI, creating informal links. Having these informal links is essential for LFIs as this can then lead to small interactions that benefit each other. For example, the lead volunteer of Our Food Co-op also volunteered at LGP, being able to sometimes 'top-up' bags with more vegetables. In the same vein, the Larder has personal relationships with different local farmers and retailers, who are always keen to help them if it is in line with what they can do, such as providing free or low-cost produce. Furthermore, 'closeness' is built around having conducted previous collaborative projects. Positive previous experiences and knowing each other's work makes LFIs think of or prioritise those organisations when thinking about whom to collaborate with next. This creates a network of LFIs that know each other through different avenues, building an insider 'ecosystem' within the LFS.

In addition, interactions between LFIs are assembled around "similar visions and values" (Intact). Value here is understood as the importance, worth, or usefulness of something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, different LFIs, for example, Food Access-LFIs and Middle-Ground LFIs, will come together around a shared priority of addressing food poverty or similar ways of working. This is exemplified through the informal food poverty network, particularly under the Covid-19 pandemic, which integrates diverse models under the same understanding of food security – that of access to food:

> "I have to say there's been some really good things come out Covid, and that one of them is people working towards that same goal, whereas I'm not sure if a lot of people out there could really appreciate you know the problem with food insecurity, particularly, you know if it's on their back door." (Intact)

Notwithstanding, although creating a space of convergence in the diversity of Food-Access LFIs and organisations as explained by participants, this still creates an ecosystem with similar underlying values, with little contestation within the network. This could be observed in one of their meetings, where there was an overall sense of a conflict-free system. During this meeting, a person external to the network started questioning the operational approach adopted thus far by the network, which did not acknowledge health and sustainability aspects, raising the issue that perhaps this lack of conflict is due to a lack of engagement with more diverse LFIs. As explained before, the Larder, a more progressive LFI, has made clear that they do not engage with the network beyond informal links, as it is not dealing with 'the bigger picture' (the Larder). Food sovereignty involves the coming together of different (and contrasting) ways of knowing (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). In this case, the informal food poverty network is not necessarily a place where deliberation and dissent take place to mobilise frames for transformative action. However, this is not a purposeful undertaking. It is much more related to the finer-grained priorities that local authorities set in the context of austerity and the discourses advanced by LFIs, which are influenced by the conventional food system (see Sections 5.3 and 5.4).

The perception that the priorities of the Larder are separate from the informal food poverty network is not only perceived by them. PCC and some Food-Access LFIs mentioned that the Larder does much more extensive work than what the network is trying to do. In the end, this leads to the creation of dispersed ecosystems, although with unrecognised shared goals. This is clearly seen in the parallel existence of two networks and their different functioning models (see Sub-section 5.5.2). Significantly, most members of the food poverty network are not invited to the Preston Food Partnership meeting, and the Larder is not invited to the informal food poverty network meetings. Through these dynamics, the differentiation between access and supply (see Sub-section 5.3.1) is perpetuated by not providing opportunities for these perspectives to coalesce. One example is how Burscough Community Farm, close to the Larder, argued that change would only come when 'like-minded people', those who prioritise sustainable food, come together. This idea indirectly excludes Food-Access LFIs, as they do not explicitly challenge the current food supply chains and production systems.

Although creating a self-organised network with diverse connections, as seen in previous themes, this does not necessarily create equal relationships within the LFS and a deeper engagement with food sovereignty. Informal links affect who will collaborate with whom, potentially leading to the exclusion of some LFIs. While these links can help increase information sharing between those already connected, those without these links can be left aside. LGP mentioned that it is always "the usual ones" that you see in activities, creating an inner circle of people that get to share ideas and interact with each other. In creating tight ecosystems but disconnected from others, LFIs that are not part of these systems are missing opportunities to scale up their activities. Indeed, in a conversation with Grimshaw Food Hub, they explained that another reason to close was that they did not know where to get support. Moreover, this disconnection can constrain opportunities for LFIs that may be thinking of moving beyond food access. The Larder holds significant social resources such as close relationships with local retailers and farmers. This potentially leads to a further distinction between access and supply approaches, with the loss of the possibility to go beyond food donations towards a process of real collective action for food sovereignty.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered how the LFS in Preston contributes to food sovereignty by paying attention to the diversity of LFI found within it, their commonalities and cross-cutting challenges, their interactions and how diverse social processes and power dynamics mediate them. Drawing on the conceptual framework perspective in Chapter 3, food sovereignty has been treated as a matter that pervades the whole study, drawing from an understanding that food sovereignty outcomes cannot be separated from the processes that articulate them. Recognising that food sovereignty requires a reorganisation of current structures to engage in a broader process of social change, a cross-cutting conclusion is that interconnected LFSs can indeed contribute to food system transformation through informal and formal networks that build on each other's strengths and resources. However, their full potential will only be realised by moving from self-organised networks focusing on particular issues towards more collective approaches, involving diverse people, communities, LFIs, anchor institutions, agencies, and organisations to forge

holistic and integrated solutions, including political ones, to food-related concerns. Preston's case suggests that this process means addressing the uneven landscape where LFIs operate in which powerful actors (including certain LFIs) mobilise resources towards particular goals and informal links risk the creation of exclusive ecosystems.

In the first instance, Preston's case indicates that LFSs are affected by the socio-ecological dynamics of a city, providing the foundation from which the heterogeneity of LFIs arises. Notably, there is a disconnection between efforts for local/sustainable food and equitable food access, which is also found in academic spheres (see Chapter 2). In Preston's case, this relates to an underlying perception of food security either understood as a matter of multi-layered food access or a food supply, permeated by a context in which the conventional food system and market-driven processes set the rules. However, some LFIs aimed to bridge this gap, creating possibilities to surpass this division if efforts are directed towards building spaces of deliberation and encounter between these practices. Preston's case demonstrates that it is in these spaces where food sovereignty starts to emerge. The Covid-19 crisis elucidates the importance of pooling resources to ensure the right to food. Even if not radically political, diverse networks in which knowledge and reskilling tools are circulated represent a form of organising that helps reconfigure food systems relations and fosters communities to practice their right to consume and grow food. Nevertheless, Preston's case also highlights the risk of continuing to perpetuate a siloed focus if efforts do not include the analysis of current food provision models. The unevenness of Preston's LFS and broader metabolic processes involving anchor institutions further affects this, reducing the capacity of the LFS to build a broader mobilisation that tackles problems at the local scale in symphony with food sovereignty principles.

Examining Preston's case through the lens of a food systems approach informed by urban political ecology enriches the understanding of LFSs, expanding the focus from the interactions of LFIs towards these systems' political and uneven nature. LFSs, as exemplified in Preston, are socio-ecological constructions in which power is mobilised through associations and social connections, producing and re-producing uneven processes that construct benefit some organisations and communities more than others. Given the dynamic interaction between LFIs and global and national processes, LFIs are in dialectical relation with the current entrenched market-driven philosophy across different governance levels, mainly through central government policies and a standard prioritisation of free globalised markets. In this context, many LFIs rely on funding and thus, those holding most of the resources (material, social or discursive) become influential players in articulating interconnected LFSs. In the case of Preston, these actors are local authorities, the university, funders, and certain LFIs. These actors explicitly or implicitly set the pace for food system transformation by specifying priorities to be addressed and focusing resources on specific agendas. While the problem of austerity policies in reducing the capacity of these institutions, particularly local authorities, should not be downplayed, creative approaches for local development, such as the 'Preston Model', question whether having a strong commitment to food change is more a matter of political will and imagination than only capacity and remit.

Eventually, this fosters a competitive environment, whereby collective projects are only prioritised if they create unique benefits, missing the broader picture of change. More importantly, even if spaces for mutual benefits are created, there can still be a tendency for individualistic strategies, skewing the processes of LFSs towards already established 'elites' or connections. This highlights the importance of creating egalitarian collective spaces that consider diverse voices and not just focusing on bringing different actors together for the sake of it if food sovereignty is to be achieved. The centrality of the articulation of just LFSs for food sovereignty also involves moving beyond siloed ecosystems built around common discourses and informal links. As seen in Preston's case, LFIs do not hold the same social resources to navigate these interactions, creating dispersed spaces that include some and exclude others.

Overall, these complex processes have led the LFS in Preston to have strong prioritisation of efforts characterised under 'poverty' and 'hunger' alleviation. Preston's case indicates that for LFSs to foster food sovereignty, there needs to be a democratisation of the processes to achieve change, not just an objective to democratise food systems in terms of production, consumption, or distribution. This means that interactions need to move beyond sharing and diverse networks based on solidarity and affinity towards a truly transformative process that acknowledges different voices and ways of knowing at the same level of importance. For this to happen, collaborative spaces for deliberation are required in which dissent is accepted as part of the collective change process. In this context, LFIs cannot be the only actors responsible for the necessary changes, given the unfavourable environment in which they currently operate. Local authorities and other influential players ought to put food on the agenda through an egalitarian distribution of resources without diminishing LFIs' agencies or prioritising those that align with their priorities or hold a special status in the system. The analysis presented here starts to map out some of the processes needed for this. One of these necessary steps directly relates to the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz: participatory multi-actor processes closely linked to policy change.

## Chapter 6 – THE CONSTRUCTION OF VITORIA-GASTEIZ'S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the results of the within-case thematic analysis of the data collected in Vitoria-Gasteiz. It aims to provide a narrative about the construction of LFSs in terms of food sovereignty based on the meta-themes derived from the analysis and illustrated in Figure 6.1. As with Preston's case results, food sovereignty has been treated as a transversal theme that pervades the different dynamics of the LFS. As with Chapter 5, the discussion of results of Vitoria-Gasteiz's case is organised following the meta-themes derived from the within-case thematic analysis explained, which are illustrated in Figure 6.1. Before starting with the discussion of the meta-themes of Vitoria-Gasteiz's case, Section 6.2 provides a contextual background of the LFS in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

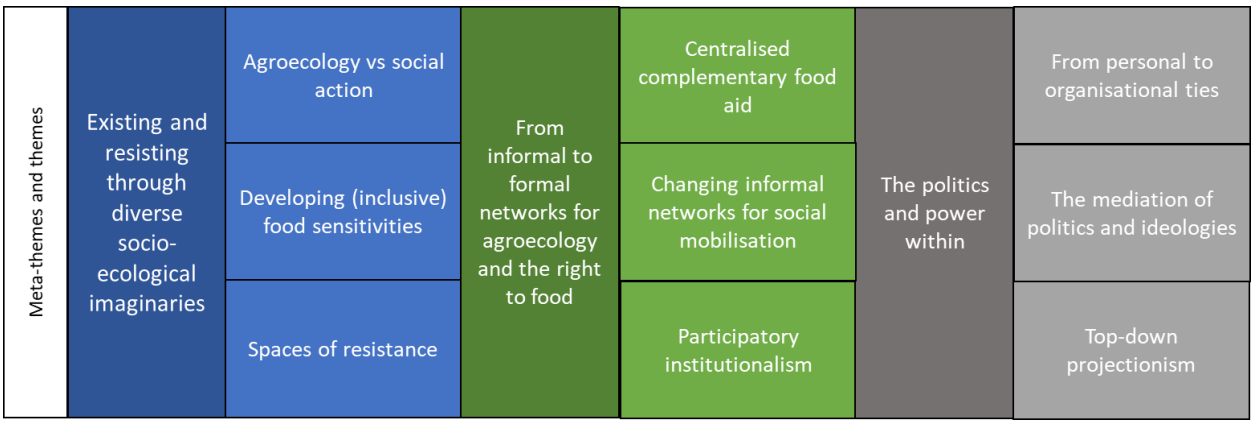


Figure 6.1: Vitoria-Gasteiz's case meta-themes and themes

Three within-case meta-themes coloured blue, green, and grey in Figure 6.1 have been identified with three themes each. Section 6.1 begins the analysis of the findings by presenting the approaches and discourses and possible spaces of converge of LFIs that permeate Vitoria-Gasteiz's LFS through the meta-theme *existing and resisting through diverse socio-ecological imaginaries* (blue box). Based on these accounts, section 6.4 discusses the meta-theme from *informal to formal networks for agroecology and the right to food* (green box), which delineates different metabolic processes of the LFS through three themes: *centralised complementary food aid* (Sub-section 6.4.1), *changing informal networks for social mobilisation* (Sub-section 6.4.2) and *participatory institutionalism* (Sub-section 6.4.3). Section 6.5 then presents the meta-theme *the politics and power within* (grey box), which deals with the social processes and power relations that influence food sovereignty dynamics within the LFS. This final meta-theme discusses the themes *from personal to organisational ties* (Sub-section 6.5.1), *the mediation of politics and ideologies* (Sub-section 6.5.2), and *top-down projectionism* (Sub-section 6.5.3). Finally, section 6.6 summarises the main lessons learnt from Vitoria-Gasteiz's case to inform the cross-case analysis in Chapter 7.

## 6.2 CONTEXTUALISING VITORIA-GASTEIZ'S CASE

Vitoria-Gasteiz is the de-facto capital of the Basque Country and is located in the province of Álava-Araba. In addition to differences in political structure and self-governance explained in Chapter 1, the Basque Country differentiates itself from the rest of Spain in terms of culture. For example, the Basque language, Euskera, is one of the oldest languages in Europe, and to date, there is no evidence of common linguistic origins with other languages (Urla, 2012). Moreover, the construction of a separate ethnic identity has led to the Basques maintaining a strong sense of nationalism and pursuit of autonomy from the Spanish territory throughout the years (Muro Ruiz, 2004). In 1959, Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA – Basque Homeland and Freedom) was founded as part of a broader opposition to the Franco dictatorship that orchestrated a violent nationalist and pro-Basque-independence campaign against the Spanish state (Hamilton, 2007). Although ETA dissolved in 2018 (Zernova, 2019), attempts to maintain a Basque identity continues, albeit in non-violent forms, such as actively promoting the Basque language (Naylor, 2019; Urla, 2012).

Sitting under this intricate system, Vitoria-Gasteiz is ranked among the 50 wealthiest cities and ten cities with lowest unemployment in Spain (INEI, 2020). The life expectancy at birth (LE) for men is 81.7 years and for women 87.8, above the Spanish average of 79.6 and 85.1 respectively (Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2021; INEI, 2021). It comprises one of the largest industrial areas in northern Spain, with companies such as Mercedes-Benz playing a significant part in its economy (Beatly, 2012). The city has had a relatively steady growth in population over the years, reaching approximately 250,000 people. Notably, migration has increasingly gained weight in the city's demographics, with the non-Spanish population accounting for 10.5% (Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2020). In spite of the relatively prosperous state of Vitoria-Gasteiz, 7.7% of the population was living in real poverty (material deprivation) in 2020 (Gobierno Vasco, 2021). This is higher than the average figures in the Basque Country (5.6%), but lower than Spanish national figures (21%) (EAPN, 2020). This could be related to Vitoria-Gasteiz having a history of highly controlled and well-planned growth (Beatly, 2012), which has been preceded by a strong environmental, health, and social strategy to urban planning. Moreover, the Basque Country has a robust social welfare net, with income and social benefits targeted at socio-economic exclusion (Gobierno Vasco, 2021).

Vitoria-Gasteiz is now governed by the Basque nationalist party (PNV - Partido Nacional Vasco), which also holds most of the administration of the Provincial Council. It has a Christian-democratic orientation, with social-democratic and conservative-liberal strands (Vazquez, 2010). The PNV is considered a centre-right party that advocates increased regional economic development, albeit in combination with the implementation of environmental and social policies. This policy approach has been exemplified in Vitoria-Gasteiz in the years it has been in charge. Significantly, in the late 1980s, Vitoria's City Council (VCC), under the leadership of PNV, created a public autonomous municipal body, the Environmental Studies Centre (CEA), that is in charge of research and education on environmental innovation and change (Beatly, 2012). The CEA has been pivotal in advancing a sustainable urban planning agenda by promoting a green peri-urban system and other initiatives, such as promoting organic community gardens. As a result of these efforts, the city was named European Green Capital in 2012 and Global Green City

Award in 2019. Through contractual agreements with various LFIs, the city also supports urban agriculture and local and traditional food consumption (Zerbian et al., 2022b). Influenced and pressured by a social mobilisation of LFIs (the specifics of which will be discussed in later sections), VCC carried out a participatory process to develop an urban food strategy in 2016 and subsequently developed a municipal plan to implement it in 2017.

The importance of food in policies and the city's development could be related to the geographical composition of the city and its surroundings. The city of Vitoria-Gasteiz is located within a municipality – also called Vitoria-Gasteiz – that is made up of 40% farmland, complemented by a series of 63 small peri-urban 'groupings' or villages that account for almost 5,000 inhabitants (UAGA, 2011). Although part of VCC's remit, many of the agricultural and forestry landscapes, as in most of the region, are owned by rural communities distributed over the territory and historically have been managed by the Provincial Council (Beatly, 2012)[8]. Food production in the region is centred on market-oriented food and agricultural industries, mainly dedicated to cereal, beet, vineyards, and potato production. Notably, the food sector is viewed as having particular strengths, such as a considerable amount of agricultural land and a wide range of agricultural education, research and development facilities supported by the Provincial Council and the Basque Government.

However, Álava's food system is heavily industrialised, with an over-reliance in external inputs, and extensive use of machinery, strongly influenced by the subsidies of the CAP and European grants distributed by public institutions (Calvário, 2017; UAGA, 2011). Yet, a notable aspect is that the provincial food production is largely organised through a cooperative model (Bakaikoa & Morandeira, 2012), with Álava's Farmers Union (UAGA) acting as a central player in its assemblage. UAGA developed during the transition towards democracy around the 1980s alongside other provincial unions with the vision of fostering a more progressive and advocacy-focused agrarian mobilisation. Compared to other sectoral unions in the Basque Country, UAGA has a focus on technical-economic and juristic support (Ugaldi Zaratiegui, 1998).

In this context of strong environmental consciousness, protection of the Basque identity and economic development are intimately tied to food. Many LFIs stimulate artisanal, local, and traditional small-scale food consumption and production (Zerbian et al., 2022b). While this food system has been traditionally viewed as distinct from the corporate food system, there has been a progressive hybridisation process. Local and traditional food is being marketed through conventional distribution chains, mainly controlled by regional cooperative enterprises. However, although having a more 'democratic' governance system, regional cooperatives still perform as regular supermarkets and big retailers. In addition, several civil society organisations aim to improve sustainable and healthy food in the territory. These mainly include municipal organic gardens and organic self-managed community gardens, aiming to foster local consumption and production. Despite low levels of overall food insecurity (3.7%), non-state activities provide emergency food in conjunction with municipal and regional economic and social benefits (Gobierno Vasco, 2021). In this system, the Banco de Alimentos of Álava (Banco)

[8] The Provincial Council has an Agriculture Department that is responsible for administering Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies, and promoting rural and agriculture development and innovation.

is central, acting as a regionwide food surplus redistribution charity, connecting food companies and charities.

Even though there is a strong enthusiasm to promote a more localised food system, with traditional and local food production and consumption taking a central role, there is a clash between rapid urbanisation and industrial expansion and sustainable transformation within the City Council's policies (Beatly, 2012). In addition, the presence of non-state initiatives to address food insecurity signals a problem that might unveil contradictions in the city. Therefore, despite food being closely tied to Vitoria-Gasteiz's policies and impetus to improve food sovereignty, there might be challenges in implementing collective processes and public interventions for change. This chapter explores this and analyses how the different relationships and connections between LFIs and public institutions help move away from the industrial, agricultural and development focus of the city and region towards a more just and sustainable food system.

## 6.3 EXISTING AND RESISTING THROUGH DIVERSE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES

This section captures the constitution of Vitoria-Gasteiz's LFS based on the different discourses and approaches that LFIs have in the locality – the diverse socio-ecological imaginaries present in the LFS. As explained in Chapter 3, the term socio-ecological refers to what lies underneath the activities, practices, and interactions of LFIs, which is influenced by their social and natural environment. Sub-section 6.3.1 begins with the characterisation of LFIs based on their organisational mission and social focus and introduces the specific narratives they use in this context. Subsequently, Sub-section 6.3.2 notes a recurring cross-cutting objective of LFIs regardless of their type: changing Vitoria-Gasteiz's food culture by developing new food sensibilities. In doing so, it also acknowledges the possible exclusionary ways in which related activities are carried out. Finally, Sub-section 6.3.3. emphasises the contextual challenges of LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz and how this leads to them having to exist in a rigid and conventional, almost omnipresent, food and public administrative system. Sub-section 6.3.3 also highlights how LFs respond to this system through this analysis, showcasing a 'collective' resistance, albeit through individual actions and persistence.

### 6.3.1 Agroecology vs Social Action

The theme *agroecology vs. social action* illustrates the different types of LFIs that compose the LFS in Vitoria-Gasteiz. As explained in Chapter 2 and 3, understanding LFIs in the context of food sovereignty means identifying the *motivations* within LFSs, the *meanings* attached these motivations, particularly in relation to sustainability and food security, and how these relate to the actions promoted by LFIs. However, the differentiation of the approaches of LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz does not necessarily come from divergent understandings on sustainability and food security. Many participants did not identify with the term food security, and most LFIs shared the same understanding of sustainability; a just management of resources – for the environment and people – so that a system lasts into the future. In this sustainability conceptualisation, participants acknowledged the drawbacks of the economic logic of the food industry for farmers, territories, people, and the environment. It was identified that the mission statement of LFIs is what differentiates the strategies and actions of the organisations involved in Vitoria-Gasteiz's

LFS. In this sense, LFIs assemble around two types: Agroecological LFIs and Social-Action LFIs, as will be explained further in the following paragraphs. Agroecological LFIs, use agroecology as a leitmotiv and usually concentrate on scaling up local and traditional production and short food supply chains. On the other hand, Social-Action LFIs use agriculture and food as an avenue to reach broader social goals, commonly social justice and inclusion. Given Vitoria-Gasteiz's context (see Section 6.2), those that focus on agroecology are those most active within the city.

Agroecological LFIs view agroecology as broadening the notion of sustainability, contextualising and politicising it, and embedding it with social meaning. Notably, most participants referred to it as a change of model that prioritises local food and traditional production and knowledge systems, similar to la Via Campesina's use of it (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014; Rosset & Martínez-Torres, 2011) . The 'social' in this narrative draws out the importance of just relations within the food system, focusing on addressing the marginalised position of farmers and farmworkers. For example, Natuaraba commented: "Socially, these producers can continue living in rural areas, continue working for the development of their peoples, for social development, right?" (Natuaraba). Under this view, family farms (or 'baserris') and local and traditional food are promoted as critical agroecology avenues, usually perceived as increasing quality standards and fewer industrial methods. Many participants related this to a strong sense of pride in the Basque identity, where local food is a foundation of the culture:

> "Here in the Basque Country, we are so from the Earth, we are so proud of being Basque that when we add the Basque flag [ikurriña] to any product […] the best potatoes are ours…" (Local food expert 3 – VG)

This narrative, at times, comes close to romanticising the local and traditional food, potentially falling into the 'local trap', which has been critiqued for naively equating such framings with quality and sustainability (Born & Purcell, 2006). These ideals lead to a need to protect farmers and ensure that efforts are directed toward their benefit. For instance, they make sure that farmers get a fair return in any transaction by placing them in an advantageous position in negotiations and actions. The aim to support farmers has translated into the development of second tier LFIs, usually in the form of associations of farmers and consumers, that support farmers with commercialisation, promotion, and dissemination of their activities. In particular, these organisations highly appreciate the collectivisation of efforts, advocating for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange and cooperative working models. This focus is thus oriented towards rural contexts and actors, mirroring agroecological and food sovereignty movements (Lopez-Garcia & González de Molina, 2021; Tornaghi & Dehaene, 2021).

On the other hand, Social-Action LFIs focus on the necessities of urban and peri-urban citizens. Their aim is mainly on meeting particular social needs, not necessarily changing the food system. Two subtypes can be identified within this category: Food-Access LFIs and Social-Inclusion LFIs. Food-Access LFIs aim to remediate the immediate consequences of poverty using surplus food (local, sustainable or conventional) and food donations from the private sector and civil society. These organisations usually work alongside local authorities through formal agreements or work independently to fill gaps in the social security system to ensure the right to food (Ayuntamiento

de Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2022). Solidarity is often mentioned as a critical strategy to address these challenges:

> "Well, what is needed? Now, what is needed is solidarity. What should be needed is that solidarity is no longer needed, and the institutions take charge of guaranteeing that right […]. So today solidarity, that we are aware that there are families who have nothing, and we are aware of the amount of food that we are throwing away, must be the answer, although I think the answer would have to come from another side." (Berakah)

Here solidarity is framed under the notion that inequalities result from an unfair resource distribution, leading to an incoherence in society, where food is wasted. However, at the same time, people are hungry. However, solidarity is usually conflated with 'charity' in participants' narratives and paradoxically is used within a hierarchal food redistribution system monopolised by the Banco (see Sub-section 6.4.1), as in other communities in Spain (Pérez de Armiño, 2014). However, this does not mean that some organisations are uncritical of their work. Food-Access LFIs acknowledge their role as a patch within a broken system. Some are recently trying to implement new programs such as solidarity supermarkets, where some pay a higher fee to make food affordable for others.

In contrast, Social-Inclusion LFIs denote a different socio-ecological imaginary about the main inequality concerns of the city and its responses. For Cáritas, for example, issues of poverty should be addressed by looking at its determinants rather than merely providing food, as it creates a two-tier system. As such, they prefer to focus on providing employability opportunities, in this case through urban and peri-urban agriculture. Besides this, organic community gardens focus on building a community integration and development space. In this sense, these organisations use food through organic urban agriculture as a tool to open doors and to begin to integrate people and include them in systems of society.

Despite this differentiation, most Social-Action LFIs share Agroecological LFIs criticism of the conventional food system. During a discussion around what food sovereignty meant, the Banco stated: "multinational companies are imposing *their* food sovereignty on us […] they sell real shit for their own interest […] they do not have the concept of feeding; they only have the concept of making money." (Banco). This reiterates the differentiation based on mission statement rather than a particular socio-ecological imaginary about addressing food security and sustainability or about changing the food system. Significantly, although not explicitly contesting the conventional food system or sometimes even working within it by redistributing surplus food, this critical reflection starts to point towards a new politics of food within Food-Access and Social-Inclusion LFIs (Vitiello et al., 2015), potentially signalling a starting point for developing a new narrative that includes issues of both farmers and urban citizens.

From this initial theme, three questions arise that are crucial to understanding the potential of LFSs for food sovereignty. First, how inclusive is 'agroecology' and the socio-ecological imaginary constructed around it by some LFIs, given that it is deeply connected to the Basque identity and rural struggles? Second, how does this relate to their connection with Social-Action LFIs, given

their shared criticism of the conventional food system? Third, is sharing a similar criticism of the conventional food system and mission enough to create collaborative spaces where dialogue and confrontation occur, fostering inclusive narratives for transformative LFSs (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014)? These questions will be explored in the following themes and meta-themes.

### 6.3.2 Developing (Inclusive) Food Sensibilities

Although there are different purposes across the LFIs, separating them into two main types (see Sub-section 6.3.1), the analysis identifies a commonality within the LFS: developing food sensibilities within current economic and conventional food system structures. This theme deals with this point of convergence. It highlights how this relates to a feeling of the city progressively losing its food culture due to these dynamics and the subsequent conceptualisation of consumption as a political act in the search for food sovereignty. However, this theme also questions the inclusiveness of this approach, highlighting its relationship to different framings of the right to food, with some missing opportunities for a more inclusive food system.

Participants recurrently mentioned their concern about the decline of Vitoria-Gasteiz's food culture over the years, with food education rapidly decreasing and thus leading to a society "blindly consuming whatever is offered in supermarkets" (Slow Food). Despite this, there is still a recognition of Vitoria-Gasteiz as a city with a relatively mature environmental consciousness. Environmental awareness in the city is a starting point for the work of LFIs, harnessing the preoccupation of civil society around sustainability to tap into other issues related to food through awareness raising. This cuts across LFIs, even those Food-Access LFIs who redistribute food like the Banco. Most activities are directed towards changing consumption habits so that people can see the 'true' value of food (cultural, material, nourishing, and environmental):

> "When we see, for example, a lettuce, well, let's not see ... That is, let's see the whole project behind it and not just the product, not just the lettuce, rather the person, let's see the positive social and environmental impacts it has on the territory, right? Let's see the whole project." (BioAlai)

LFIs thus aim to showcase the materialisation of this 'lettuce' and the exploitative realities of the food system through awareness-raising activities. This focus evokes previous literature that emphasises the potential of LFIs to provide food with new meanings through a commitment to a transition towards sustainable food systems (Jarosz, 2008; Marsden et al., 2000). Significantly, the core idea is to have consumption as a political act with the expectation that this will pressure the food supply chain to change its practices. Previous scholars argue that political consumption follows an individualised responsibilisation of change and a focus on free choice that reflects market-driven paradigms (DeLind, 2011; Guthman, 2008b; Johnston, 2008). Nevertheless, LFIs, particularly Agroecological LFIs, treat consumption as collective learning to raise exploitative realities:

> "So, well, each one arrives for different reasons and then well, it is a way to sensibilise and to learn other concepts, well, a very nice collective learning process, really." (Bionekazaritza)

Here, opting for local and agroecological products is not an individualised act. In contrast, the sentiment centres on building a collective transformation for the territory and the broader community, thus emphasising the notion of food citizenship. That is, promoting citizens' rights, responsibilities and practices to achieve positive environmental, economic and social commons rather than individual consumer choice and benefits (Renting et al., 2012; Welsh & MacRae, 1998); a 'politics of collectivity' (Moragues-Faus, 2017b, p. 457). This collectivisation of consumption is connected to these participants' closeness to food sovereignty, constructed as the autonomy – "liberty" (Huerta de Bolivia) – to collectively create self-sufficient territories and agroecological food systems. This notion was more prominent in Agroecological LFIs, highlighting the interconnectedness of food sovereignty and the right to food. Through this lens, Agroecological LFIs conceptualise the right to food as being achieved through an agroecological system where local, ecological, and fair food is available to all citizens, and people can access these products with an increased political awareness of the impacts of food choices.

Following previous literature that highlights the possible creation of exclusionary niches through these activities (Levkoe, 2011), LFIs were prompted to reflect if this strategy for the right to food could create a barrier for marginalised people to access certain foods. LFIs working on agroecology mentioned that organic consumption is very diverse, not necessarily 'elitist' but rather a matter of (collective) behavioural change. From their perspective, these products are not necessarily more expensive if they are bought in more 'alternative' spaces and based on seasonality. While collective political consumption or, more specific, food citizenship might create an ethics of care towards oneself, others, and the territory (Beacham, 2018), framing change around consumption can still be problematic. Unsurprisingly, given the intense focus on farmers and rural struggles, a homogenisation of consumers could be identified in agroecological discourses. This might be connected to some participants' relative affluent, middle-class construction of the city, even by Food-Access LFIs. For example, the Banco stated: "the poor here are not very poor" (Banco). However, interviews with other Social-Action LFIs revealed another reality, picturing a city full of contrasts and incoherence, where hunger and poverty tend to be rendered invisible:

> "In theory many times you live with your back to this reality […] thinking that in Vitoria there are no poor and well, until you get into this, you do not realise that yes, that there are." (Berakah)

Who is then being cared for and included in this collective effort for food citizenship? LFIs revealing the contrasting realities of the city usually worked with migrant communities (Latin Americans, Muslims, Africans), which are not actively present in the agroecological 'scene' of Vitoria-Gasteiz observed during fieldwork. Significantly, however, the exclusiveness of food citizenship stretches beyond these spaces, challenging what is meant by 'collectivising' food consumption and for whom is social change trying to be achieved. For example, when discussing awareness raising programmes that some Social-Action LFIs conduct, there was an overall feeling and depiction of 'having to teach' migrant communities how to eat healthily, with environmental consciousness programmes directed towards other groups. Even in organic community gardens,

there seem to be barriers to entry (e.g., bureaucracy, language) to vulnerable and marginalised communities, with gardens populated by white-middle class Basque citizens.

The previously discussed realities and discourses render a LFS where vulnerable groups' voices become excluded and stuck merely in receiving food, corroborating criticisms of LFIs in the literature (Allen, 2004; Andrée et al., 2015; Cody, 2015). A local food expert confirmed that social inequalities of food access have been neglected across the years in the haste of chasing food sovereignty. The 'who' in agroecological systems is thus narrowed down to those with the socio-economic resources to participate. Indeed, in informal conversations with Agroecological LFIs, these LFIs acknowledged that food inequalities had been mainly discussed and accompanied by a 'third world view' without a broader thought of local realities. However, interviews seemed to elicit reflection within the LFS. For example, two participants from this type of LFI highlighted that food sovereignty should not be for a small group of those who can afford it but for all, acknowledging that food access should be raised on the agenda. While scrutiny of LFIs is crucial, it should also be recognised that food transformation is an ongoing process of reflexive learning through everyday practices. Possibilities of change should not be immediately dismissed by encapsulating all practices as unfavourable (Ballamingie & Walker, 2013).

It should be noted that there are two initiatives, Cáritas and the Casa de Iniciativas, that attempt to bring the right to food, understood as a matter of individual capacities to access food, closer to agroecological practices. These organisations foster a people-centred focus, whereby rural questions are not central but individual needs of marginalised urban citizens are addressed through agriculture initiatives: "tomatoes can rot, but people cannot" (Cáritas). Organisations focusing on urban food struggles beyond production and previously discussed reflection of Agroecological LFIs signal the possibility of developing a more inclusive discourse of agroecology. A key point in Vitoria-Gasteiz's case is to see if collective spaces, such as creating the city's urban food strategy, promote an alliance embedded in intra- and inter-social diversity that facilitates this development (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2015).

### 6.3.3 Spaces of Resistance

Having explored the different approaches of LFIs and their limitations, this theme deals with the contextual and place-based challenges they face and how these shape their objectives. As organisations in Vitoria-Gasteiz have limited resources, there is a slower process of implementing projects and difficulties scaling up. Significantly, this is related to the consolidation of the conventional food system and economic prioritisation in the territory explained in Section 6.2, perceived by participants as creating a system permeated by an unfair distribution of resources and marginalisation of agroecological practices. Vitoria-Gasteiz's case presents a high degree of complexity in this consolidation, accompanied by a rigid rules-based public system in which bureaucracy and normative values overthrow many possibilities to create innovative actions in the pursuit of change. In this context, LFIs create diverse resistances to deal with external obstacles.

The consolidation of the corporate food system and food industry in the area mirrors the embeddedness of economic and efficiency narratives in food systems worldwide, particularly in

Western European countries (Espluga-Trenc et al., 2021). However, the acceptance of this paradigm contrasts with a robust perception across participants that the agriculture sector in Álava is still very much family-owned rather than corporate-owned. Nevertheless, this does not mean that farmers or LFIs have a strong voice in determining the dynamics of the food system, as economic and efficiency narratives are deeply entrenched in between those that circulate most material, social, and capital resources:

> "[…] I believe that we must allocate more resources to the agricultural sector and promote the local product and whatever you want. But it is a machinery that is in motion and when the machinery, both the institutional machinery and that of all the sectoral organisations, […] do not see this as meeting their interests, it is difficult to put them later in a common interest…" (Huerta Esmeralda)

This power geometry is further accentuated by informal alliances across political and technical spaces, heavily influenced by the CAP. According to many participants, this alliance is entrenched through various links between regional and local governments, the Farmers Union (UAGA), and local farmers' cooperatives. Significantly, farmers' cooperatives, where most farmers sell their products and get inputs, are mentioned as one of the main drivers of introducing corporate ideals within the food sector. Conversations during participant observation also revealed that UAGA was perceived as being politicised under the guidance of the current right-wing government, prioritising economic objectives rather than social or environmental. In this context, there is little space for alternatives, with conventional farming being almost the only option and alternatives boycotted to maintain the status quo. A participant who tried to set up an organic dairy farm explained:

> "So, that frustration will stay with me for life, of course, but I have the feeling that it is the system itself, politically speaking too, there are political interests that indicate that you have to give your raw material, your cereal to the cooperative, because that cooperative has to be maintained." (Local food expert 3 – VG)

However, the challenges of LFIs do not end there. A prominent barrier, potentially related to the embeddedness of economic and corporate logic in public spaces, was the issue of having to work within a static public and societal structure, particularly in terms of the requirements needed to conduct activities in the city:

> "The difficulties are the institutional, what is normalised, I mean, structured under rules. The requirements when you must function not as life asks for it, but as the system asks for it." (Casa de Iniciativas)

The messy, everyday complexity of dealing with this system, especially through bureaucratic and static processes – certifications, municipal planning rules, rigid compromises to request CAP subsidies – creates a situation in which LFIs must convince others that there are other ways of organising change. For example, the first self-managed community garden, Zabalortu, explained that it took almost five years for the local authority to accept the idea of community ownership and management rather than public administration of public spaces. This signals a juxtaposition

of formality/normality vs reality in an inflexible rules-based system that installs a universalisation and standardisation of social and collective life (Young, 1990), restricting many transformative actions. For example, these dynamics have led to a pessimistic state of mind, particularly in farmers, expressing a feeling of being "a puppet in a system that seems to have a life of its own" (Huerta de Bolivia). This explains why many Agroecological LFIs focus on protecting local farmers. Indeed, navigating these socio-political spaces creates several tensions within the LFS. At the same time, many LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz directly engage with public institutions, for example, via an external contract to provide services. This means that although they do not necessarily share the same objectives with these institutions, they still rely on them.

In this context, it could be argued that LFIs do not have much space to change policies or engage in transformative actions. However, despite these challenges, they still manage to find creative ways to continue working and create individual and collective pathways for change. Some LFIs, such as la Huerta de Bolivia and Slow Food, mentioned their aim to 'show by example' by implementing transformative projects across the city, focusing on changing everyday practices and disseminating their success. Significantly, even if LFIs are reliant on public institutions, they still strive for independence in actions and do not hesitate in raising their voices:

> "I do not owe them homage and if they do it wrong, I will tell them, 'I do not like what you are doing' and I am not going to get on my knees and I am going to say to them: 'Thank you so much for leaving me the urban garden'. No, I do not owe them homage. So, for me is that, can they limit me? I don't know to what extent. If they take out a public tender and only I show up, they have to award it to me." (Zabalortu)

This narrative draws on the strong sense of self-determination and agency within LFIs, perhaps related to the contextual struggles of the Basque region. Notably, despite the uneven landscape in which they must operate, LFIs are creating spaces of resistance against conventional forces, albeit with limitations and questionable exclusionary practices. These organisations thus exercise power through the renegotiation of food and socio-ecological relations within the city, taking up space in political platforms (Fraser, 2016). LFIs counter various aspects of the dominant system, such as repoliticising food, as seen in previous sections. While this demonstrates the creation of spaces of partial resistance by LFIs (Holloway et al., 2007), the more critical discussion in this research is to assess if and how these drops of resistance can be collectivised to create more substantial pressure on this 'eminent' system. As will be argued in the following themes, building alliances can indeed move LFIs from progressive toward more transformative visions of change.

### 6.4 FROM INFORMAL TO FORMAL NETWORKS FOR AGROECOLOGY AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The previous section focused on the socio-ecological imaginaries that LFIs construct based on their different discourses and approaches to agroecology, the right to food, and food sovereignty and if these create an inclusive or exclusive LFS. At the same time, Section 6.3 signals the resistance of LFIs to current bureaucratic and conventional systems. The second meta-theme *from informal to formal networks for agroecology and right to food* starts to answer the questions that this discussion has brought about concerning the assemblage of LFS. That is, how

its composition and contextual conditions influence the mobilisation of social, material, and capital flows that shape it. Crucially, it presents the formation of two sub-systems that signal a division between agroecology and social action. Sub-section 6.4.1 focuses on the sub-system assembled around the right to food and alleviation of poverty led by the Banco de Álimentos de Álava and Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council (VCC). Sub-section 6.4.2 concentrates on an informal agroecological network that focuses on the joint development of food sensibilities and social mobilisation to contest the corporate and bureaucratic system. Both sub-sections draw attention to creating connections around informal ties and formal structures within the LFS, highlighting the trade-offs of each for the right to food and food democracy. Building on this, Sub-section 6.4.3 reflects on institutionalising informal networks through participatory governance mechanisms, focusing on how these spaces enable collective debates for food sovereignty.

### 6.4.1 Centralised Complementary Food Aid

This theme starts to unravel the different metabolic processes of the city's LFS. To do so, it concentrates on the network of social support constituted by Food-Access LFIs, mainly Bekarah and the Banco, alongside VCC and its coordination and struggles to meet the right to food. Notably, it highlights that while the sub-system is heavily coordinated and organised, many challenges remain to reach those most in need. In addition, it illustrates how the connection between Agroecological LFIs, and this sub-system is based on food surplus redistribution and charity. As will be seen next, this is related to the ease of using this coordinated social support system led by the Banco without reconsidering what alternatives might be present.

The social support network works within a multi-level governance and provision structure, whereby the income support scheme led by the Basque Government is the first benefit considered to alleviate poverty. VCC interviewees commented that meeting the right to food is mainly considered under this basic income assurance. The City Council acts as a complement to this if needs are missed in this structure, such as people not meeting its requirements or needing additional support for housing or food. In this system, the City Council has three main mechanisms to support the right to food: a supermarket food card, food parcels distributed by the Banco, and social soup kitchens (mainly for retired adults and a recently closed externalised church-based kitchen for vulnerable groups). Through this complex system of social provision, VCC aims to provide a personalised comprehensive service:

> "In other words, that it is something personalised, that it is not something of fulfilling or not requirements […] it goes from the need of the family and the promotion of autonomy and self-determination. And, well, integrate it a little into that work plan so that you live it as something that will allow you to advance in your life process." (VCC)

Although not recognised in the municipal ordinance, the right to food is conceived as the capacity to acquire food with dignity and without discrimination (De Schutter, 2014). However, this system is filled with contradictions. Although different food provision mechanisms exist, food parcels are usually the most common approach to addressing food needs. This system is highly centralised by the Banco, which sets the amount and type of food given to each person in

coordination with social services and delivery organisations – those who distribute the food to those receiving food parcels. However, beneficiaries do not really have a choice or voice in this system. At the same time, delivery organisations do not provide input into the coordination of services: "it's a relationship, I'd say, although we wouldn't all like to call it, a bit paternalistic. We give what we have" (Banco). The form of action of the Banco thus clashes with some of the ideals of VCC, mirroring documented negative characteristics of emergency food aid such as instability, indignity, and inadequacy (McIntyre et al., 2016), raising questions as to how much is the right to food embedded in municipal policies. VCC participants justified this based on the highly 'punctual and complementary' use of the Banco. From this perspective, the Banco is viewed as ensuring immediate needs through a very professionalised and coordinated response that also reduces food waste. Agroecological LFIs share this sentiment:

> "I donate around a ton of surplus product to the food bank […] here we have that tool that is easy, comfortable, the Banco. I say easy, comfortable, because the volunteers who work at the Banco are very valid, they coordinate very well and the moment you called them they come to pick up the product, […] it is very comfortable." (Huerta de Bolivar)

The connection between Agroecological LFIs and the right to food in terms of access is thus mainly seen through food surplus allocation. This signals how entrenched and thus normalised the Banco is as a legitimate component of the LFS to address hunger in the form of a professionalised institution, with their elimination impractical (McIntyre et al., 2016). However, the food provision system is filled with issues of inaccessibility, as there is a high level of control and requirement limitations. The main avenue to access social support services is by demonstrating the effective residence in the city through a municipal register. For most services, like the food card and outside exceptional cases for the Banco, there is a requirement to be registered in the city for a minimum of six months. In addition, to obtain food from the Banco, people must be registered with a civil society organisation and be assessed by social services. Significantly, this system has a thorough 'policing' of who uses subsidiary food access services: "it seems that half of their work, rather than being a social worker, is being a police officer. Find out if you lie to me, don't lie to me" (Soup Kitchen). VCC interviewees attributed this to a need to optimise resources and ensure the sustainability of services.

Although the City Council perceived that it is challenging not to obtain food from one way or another through this multi-level social support system, these entry limitations create an uneven distribution of food. According to Berakah and the Soup Kitchen, VCC practically only attends those citizens who hold a municipal register. As a result, Berakah has surfaced to cater to those on the 'margin', attending to people who do not have a register or get municipal help. Significantly, Berakah combines supplementary support with the right to food advocacy under a faith-based coalition, politicising emergency food aid (Lambie-Mumford, 2013). The main critique is that VCC is not taking responsibility for ensuring the right to food, relying on the Banco to provide food. This work has spurred tensions regarding the institutionalised presence of the Banco, even within the Banco itself and the VCC:

> "So, it is a service that always generates an ethical dilemma. So, it is not enough, but it does serve a function. It is true that food banks are now fulfilling the function for which they were born, right? with the issue of surplus." (VCC)

The above statement illustrates the ambivalence of using the Banco but within a justification of its use. This ambivalence has led VCC to search for new strategies to address food insecurity. It has begun to open municipal soup canteens that provide community services and has decided to stop its contract with the Soup Kitchen, a previous externalised service for meal provision. However, according to Berakah and a previous employee of the Soup Kitchen, the issue of accessibility will remain despite these efforts. Entry requirements such as the municipal register will still be needed, leaving transitioning citizens to continue to rely on the Banco and with Berakah stepping up to address those excluded from the system.

Overall, the metabolic flows in Vitoria-Gasteiz have created an institutionalised sub-system around ensuring the right to food that does not necessarily reach all in need. Its hierarchical and formal structure filled with entry requirements means that issues of accessibility are a recurring theme, raising a critical issue of who deserves access to food through social policy (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015). The institutionalisation of these mechanisms within Agroecological LFIs accentuates this further. The 'deservedness' of food revolves thus around two issues. First, 'deservedness' is constructed as providing proof of being a 'citizen' through registration. However, what this means can be debatable, as unregistered populations also contribute to the city's construction and can face many barriers to registration, such as fear of deportation. Second, the only participation of Agroecological LFIs in this system around just surplus food provision creates a two-tier system; where 'deservedness' depends on having the adequate money to purchase agroecological food products, distancing itself from urban inequalities.

### 6.4.2 Changing Informal Networks for Social Mobilisation

The previous sub-section has discussed one of the sub-systems constituting the LFS in Vitoria-Gasteiz – the one concentrating on the right to food – and its limitations in the universalisation of this right and interpretation of the concept and limited engagement with other LFIs. This section engages with the other sub-system, composed of most Agroecological LFIs minus Natuaraba – an organic producer association that focuses on extensive production – that assemble around the search for food sovereignty. The reasons for Natuaraba not engaging with this network will be further discussed in Section 6.5.2. This section mainly concentrates on the key characteristics and limitations around informal and loose connections of a closely related sub-group of Agroecological LFIs to promote food democracy. As explained in the theoretical framework, food democracy under a food sovereignty frame is understood both as reclaiming the voices of those marginalised within the food system through collective action and as promoting the active participation and empowerment of citizens through knowledge exchange and the creation of new value-laden relationships with food (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Hassanein, 2008). Ultimately, this theme aims to discuss how the collectivisation of individual efforts can facilitate the right to act politically in egalitarian spaces of diverse groups and individuals (Moragues-Faus, 2017b), creating new narratives through dialogue and deliberation.

Irregular information exchange and punctual projects are the main ways the material, social, and capital flows are organised in the agroecological sub-system. Given the transversal objective of developing food sensibilities explained in Sub-section 6.3.2, the main aim of connections is to raise awareness of and sensitise societies to social issues and inequalities in the food system and discuss the impacts of consumption through talks and conferences. In this case, Agroecological LFIs sometimes liaise with Social-Action LFIs, presenting and visiting each other's work. For example, in talking about what has brought different LFIs together, including community gardens, Slow Food explained:

> "Well, education. We have realised it, all the organisations have realised that the fundamental key is to educate […] Talks, taste laboratories, meetings." (Slow Food)

This emphasis might indicate a desire to impose specific values on people who are not 'educated' enough according to certain universal standards of a perfect society (Goodman et at., 2012). However, these collective projects are not conceived in this way, given the common approach to developing food sensibilities. Based on the discussion of Sub-section 6.3.2, it can be argued that actions are referred to as collective socialisation and learning, where food is used to connect and induce social action to develop a politically active society. Nevertheless, as argued by other scholars, focusing on changing consumer behaviour might constrain political action if not treated cautiously, with LFSs concentrating only on the marketplace to induce change (DeLind, 2011; Johnston, 2008). However, as will be seen next, alliances among LFIs can lead to calls and mobilisation for structural transformation, illustrating the fluid nature of LFIs and LFSs.

The different relations through sensitisation projects have created a dynamic 'embryonic' – due to its lack of structure and organisation – movement for change in Vitoria-Gasteiz that has opted for a horizontal and assembly-based organisation. For almost 20 years, LFIs, mainly Agroecological LFIs with minimal engagement of Social-Action LFIs like community gardens, have articulated around ongoing informal connections, which have enabled the creation of new imaginaries and construct new paradigms for Vitoria-Gasteiz's food system:

> "And I think that we have been adding to the narrative itself. In other words, you no longer come only from production or only from environmentalism or only from academia […] we are contaminating each other a bit and we are incorporating into our own discourse what we hear from the rest. I think it must be like that, that is, agroecology is based precisely on the fact that it has different dimensions and that it is dynamic." (Local food expert 4 – VG)

The previous comment draws attention to the agroecological paradigm as an avenue to co-construct a new vision of the food system through synergies between dissenting voices. Indeed, many participants referred to agroecology as more than just a method of changing production systems, but rather a means of creating collective change in an understanding of difference. This sub-system has created a shared understanding of food sovereignty and agroecology through collective reflection/dialogue (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014) and how these new narratives fit within the vision of change of Agroecological LFIs (see section 6.3.1 for a discussion of their central discourse). Although not without "bangs on the table" (Slow Food), informal engagement

and deliberation have helped reach a common paradigm throughout the years. Specifically, the informal assembly-based organisation underpins a principle of equality and direct participation, demonstrating that networks of LFIs can enact a 'transformative' form of food democracy. This form of organising reflects food sovereignty's principles of building avenues for democratic deliberation (Agarwal, 2014). This process of ongoing joint construction has eventually led to LFIs acquiring a joint political project underpinned by the notion of transitioning towards a more sustainable and agroecological 'territory' and protecting it from external forces[9].

This politicisation of the network across the years has had two main events that demonstrate how the articulation of diverse LFIs, albeit with similar objectives, can lead to more radical demands and thus build a pathway towards the realisation of food sovereignty. The first event was a collective reflection through open assemblies between LFIs and other social actors about what actions needed to be adopted to drive the food system in Álava towards sustainability. This culminated in a Manifesto in 2013 requesting urgent action by local governments to bring food back onto the political agenda. The second event, the most recent one, has been building a 'sustainable food movement' to open public debate and uncover the opacity of a macro-project of hydroponic tomatoes in the region. Here, the result was the momentary paralysis of the project and the ability to discuss its adverse effects in the Basque Parliament[10]. This alignment against the project has also made LFIs connect with other organisations against larger urbanisation and macro-economic development projects in the territory. In both instances, LFIs strived to open political spaces to those unheard voices and uncover exploitative realities. This demonstrates that cross-fertilisation of organisations can lead to transformative strategic alliances to promote the 'right to act' and bring injustices into the political debate (Patel, 2009). However, this network does not necessarily include many organisations working on social action, particularly Food-Access LFIs, leading to the further distancing of agroecological narratives in the city with food access issues. The reasons for this will be explicitly discussed further in Sub-section 6.5.2.

The analysis presented here shows some benefits of informal connections between LFIs around a shared purpose. LFIs corroborated that informality helps to collectively respond to common threats, such as the macro-tomato project, and fluid structures foster recurrent mutual reflection and the creation of new discourses. Nevertheless, LFIs also raised ongoing concerns about the negative aspects of informality. Namely, their stability across time was a concern due to their reliance on voluntary work and increased workload for members. Indeed, this has been one of the reasons why there is an increasing argument for local authorities to take on the construction of multi-stakeholder food platforms and strategies (Baldy & Kruse, 2019; Van de Griend et al., 2019). In this case, the increasing pressure on the core group of the Manifesto led to LFIs to seek

[9]Territory or 'territorio' in Spanish was used by participants to refer to an abstract idea of Álava and Vitoria-Gasteiz, not necessarily defined by geographical and political boundaries but constructed by the local culture, tradition, and biophysical systems in the city and rural landscapes.

[10] Criticism of this project revolves around its use of available agricultural land to construct greenhouses that do not help regenerate soils in the region and the increased water demand for hydroponics. Moreover, another project from the same company has been accused of diminishing farm workers' rights, and the project in Álava has not been subject to environmental impact assessment.

the institutionalisation of this collective process by VCC. As will be seen in the sub-next section and Sub-section 6.5.3, the formalisation of these processes and implementation of actions that derive from them hold many challenges. Nevertheless, the increased resources also offer the opportunity to broaden collective debates and discussions.

### 6.4.3 Participatory Institutionalism

Following the previous theme that discussed a desire to formalise and professionalise the process of network-building and collective change in the LFS, this theme concentrates on the role of local authorities in constructing governance spaces to do so. It focuses on the process of developing Vitoria-Gasteiz's urban food strategy. For this, it builds on the increasing body of critical literature on food policy councils and urban food strategies to assess the benefits of urban food governance mechanisms. This section thus emphasises the importance of horizontal formalised spaces for debate, how this leads to the construction of new visions for the city, and the relevance of having the resources to guide these governance arrangements. However, the analysis also points to the possible siloed focus of urban food strategies if led by one sectoral municipal organisation, thereby missing crucial aspects of food sovereignty and leaving critical actors behind. The section also starts to illustrate how the institutionalisation of governance processes can lead to a rupture of collective change because of unclear participatory process objectives, which will be addressed in Sub-section 6.5.3.

Facing the challenges of moderating informal spaces for change with limited resources, the members of the agroecological sub-system decided to take the Manifesto to VCC. As a result, in 2014, the municipal plenary agreed to carry out the participatory development of an urban food strategy. Led by the Environmental Studies Centre (CEA), acknowledging the importance of food in sustainable planning, the urban food strategy was produced in 2017. Most interviewees mentioned the relevance of having the CEA as the leader of the strategy development process due to its relative autonomy from VCC. Indeed, the CEA is mainly tasked to foster innovation and environmental awareness programmes and holds certain political neutrality in its actions because of its technical nature. These characteristics translate into the participatory process, with most participants holding a positive perspective of how it was managed:

> "This process seemed a model to me of how the rest should be done because […] this second part was to fit the pieces, from what we have and where we want to go. And in fact, to me the food strategy document that came out of there seems quite powerful, that included very well, all the agents and scale of the food chain." (Local food expert 4 – VG)

One of the crucial characteristics of the strategy development process was the effort to include all different actors within the food supply chain. This commitment to inclusivity helped gather much more interests than just the Agroecological LFIs that started the Manifesto, helping ground the already partially developed ideas. This exemplifies the significance of public institutions in facilitating collective change processes, given their broader resource base and systemic perspective of the issues to be addressed (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Sonnino, 2016). However, as outlined by other scholars (Andrée et al., 2019; Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2021), having one

organisation like the CEA – or a collective of organisations like in the Manifesto with a shared understanding – initiate urban food governance mechanisms affects the overall focus and who is included in the process. According to the CEA, there was an issue of overrepresentation of those 'already' convinced and underrepresentation of some groups, particularly farmers, given the urban perspective that most agents brought to discussions. More importantly, analysis of the strategy documents indicated that the right to food as a matter of access and capabilities was not a significant theme in recruiting participants nor one of the goals of the strategy development, which mainly concentrated on relocalising food supply chains. CEA interviewees corroborated this:

> "Well, I think because we have a bit of a first world view and we don't take into account the issue of food poverty […] I also think that it is a biased view from the CEA, that we see it […] more from the environmental part and the promotion of local organic agriculture and not equally so much from the part of the disadvantaged consumption of food poverty." (CEA)

This narrative draws attention again to the inclusiveness of the socio-ecological imaginary constructed by the dominant narrative in the city. In particular, it highlights that this narrative does not consider socio-economic challenges in accessing healthy and sustainable food. Nonetheless, even among those who shared the same vision and strategy, the possibility to openly discuss the actions and goals for food system change resulted in reformulating the city's most urgent concerns. Although groups focusing on social action such as the Banco or Berakah were not represented, ongoing debates led to food poverty becoming a critical objective of the 21 goals of the city's food strategy, with the view of adding actors from this sector in the future.

The preceding discussion demonstrates the ability of urban food governance mechanisms to encourage LFIs' reflective capacity and, as a result, create more egalitarian associations (Sonnino & Beynon, 2015; Sonnino & Mendes, 2018). Indeed, workshop proceedings highlighted the need for participatory values and continuous collaboration between LFIs, VCC, and other private actors, to become the central pillar of the follow-up strategy implementation. In other words, the food strategy was constructed by participants as more than just a document. It aligned with Moragues-faus et al.'s (2013) definition of urban food strategies as dynamic bottom-up *processes* to develop "how cities envision change in its food system, and how they strive towards this change" (p. 6). However, after reading the initial documents developed by VCC, it became clear that the main aim from VCC's perspective was to create a 'pathway' to be followed by individual actors. In this context, the City Council's role was framed as developing a plan of actions within their competencies and helping others create their own plan to operationalise the strategy. From the City Council's perspective, the output was to be an official plan, a policy document to integrate food issues within the municipal policy framework. Eventually, this mismatch between expectations led to a rupture of the collective process. The ongoing joint debate was not continued in any form or platform, nor were several objectives taken up in the municipal action plan of VCC. Sub-section 6.5.3 will develop this public-civil society tension further, relating it to a broader issue of diverse framings of participation and the roles and expectations of local authorities.

Following this 'rupture', VCC moved on to implement its municipal plan. However, according to the CEA, there has not been enough advancement in many actions due to food not being a top priority in the political agenda, lack of powers in agriculture, multilevel governance barriers, and the compartmentalised nature of municipal departments[11]. Given this research's focus on the relationships between the articulation of LFSs and food sovereignty, the most critical points of characterising the strategy's development are two-fold. First, how the mobilisation of urban food governance mechanisms, particularly the execution of power obtained through associations and position in the city (Agroecological LFIs through the recognition of the Manifesto and VCC through its resources and CEA), affects the overall direction of LFSs. In the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz, this led to the articulation of an urban food strategy mainly focused on food sovereignty understood from a supply chain perspective. Second, the analysis presented here showcases the importance of an 'open politics of reflexivity' within governance spaces and collective processes to move away from narrow conceptualisations of change (Goodman et al., 2012).

## 6.5 THE POLITICS AND POWER WITHIN

Building on the previous meta-theme that discussed the articulation of two sub-systems around the city's right to food and agroecology, this meta-theme concentrates on the facilitators and challenges of collaborative work. Sub-section 6.5.1 begins by examining the causes by which informal networks could potentially lead to stronger connections and more cooperative work, highlighting a distinction between personal and organisational ties in the assemblage of LFSs. Building on this, Sub-section 6.5.2 introduces the main barriers to building coherence in the LFS. It draws attention to how ideologies and political views still constrain coalitions even if organisations share a similar purpose or activities. Significantly, these sections illustrate many contradictions in the way LFSs are articulated. Sub-section 6.5.3 then engages with the final empirical analysis of Vitoria-Gasteiz's case, which deals with the relationships between LFIs and local authorities, bringing governance dynamics (the reason for choosing Vitoria-Gasteiz as a case) to the fore. In discussing these processes, Sub-section 6.5.3 argues how the diverse expectations of local authorities and LFIs, including vested interests and the current approach of local authorities to change and civil society participation, clash with a structural transformation of the city's food politics.

### 6.5.1 From Personal to Organisational Ties

Having discussed the overall dynamics of the LFS and identified the different sub-systems in place, this theme deals with the facilitators of collaborations, mainly how to move from informal to more robust connections. Participants referred to Vitoria as a 'big town', with almost everybody knowing each other through different avenues, such as kinship, previous studies, or an associate of more than one LFIs. Here, LFIs start to bridge activities and develop loose articulations. However, knowing each other or being engaged personally in other organisations

[11] These findings conform with previous studies of the challenges of urban food governance tools (see, e.g., Hebinck & Page, 2017; Mansfield & Mendes, 2013; Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2021). As these have been discussed in the Preston's case in Section 5.4.3 of Chapter 5 and vastly documented in the literature, they will not be discussed in detail here.

does not automatically lead to organisational relations: “one thing is the relationship between the people who are in the projects, another thing is the relationship between projects” (Cáritas). In recognising this, the analysis highlights three main facilitators that help form more robust networks: personalities, physical spaces, and aligning efforts to address a transversal topic.

Due to the permeability between personal and organisational relationships, people become essential in fostering collaborations. Many LFIs mentioned that the initial contact between LFIs comes down to people getting along; “having a feeling” (Banco). In general, this is related to the fact that much collaborative work is voluntary; thus, creating a sympathetic atmosphere amongst those participating is crucial. Because people become a central part of articulating LFSs, personalities and the centrality of individuals can support connections:

> “The first thing comes to mind is a person who would be a bit of a moderator or a facilitator, really. A dynamic person could be something that […] because they know everyone, and everyone knows them too.” (Local food expert 1 – VG)

Previous research has also highlighted the critical role of individuals (‘policy entrepreneurs’ or ‘food champions’) in LFS, particularly in bridging public-civil society relations (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). However, the above passage signals the relevance of individuals to act as a glue not only in policymaking areas but also in the collective structure of LFSs. Building on the notion that LFSs are socio-ecological constructs, this also means that individual interests and values influence the overall assemblage of LFSs. For example, when asked why the Soup Kitchen had not searched for joint projects to avoid its closure, it was mentioned that it was not because of lack of effort:

> “But my bosses didn't want to move. They already told us when I had, between quotation marks, the discussion of modernising the dining room, ‘no, that is not what we do and that what needs to happen is for a donor to come and give money’.” (Soup Kitchen)

This statement illustrates that as much as LFSs are constructed by LFIs, LFIs are also social arrangements that intimately depend on the people – and thus personalities – that lead them, affecting the dynamics of the LFS. While creating stronger relations for collective actions was discussed in some cases as revolving around primarily strengthening personal connections, other participants recognised spaces for interactions as offering opportunities for convergence: “having a physical space, […] like a social space to relate to all movements” (Local food expert 2 – VG). In an informal conversation, Bionekazaritza corroborated this sentiment and mentioned that it was easier to approach other LFIs if they had a physical office, relating it to the openness of organisations to engage with others. This means that the assemblage of LFIs is as much social as material, as it also depends on the physical construction of spaces to allow for social interactions. As such, objects and physical spaces, through their materiality and physicality, play a vital role in the metabolic processes of LFSs, forming hybrid configurations (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003). The Covid-19 pandemic thus became a hindrance in coalitions, given the lack of opportunities to engage in face-to-face interactions. Indeed, many collaborative projects stalled because of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, physical spaces alone cannot induce strong relations between LFIs. Cáritas and some producers of Bionekazaritza have sold in the same local market, yet no recurring collaborations have emerged from these interactions other than exchanging food products when needed. As seen in Sub-section 6.4.3, shared spaces need to foster debate and dialogue to move beyond practical exchanges and allow new discourses and alliances to emerge, as in the case of the urban food strategy. Notably, the case of the urban food strategy signals the importance of building these discussions around a shared goal, such as the relocalisation of the city's food system. Indeed, relocalisation is broad enough so that many LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz could identify with it, even community gardens. In bringing together these different perspectives towards a common goal, however, acceptance of divergent views is critical:

> "[…] because for me I have my opinions, but sometimes my opinions are kept in a drawer and I come to another objective, that is, to create a network. And although we do not all agree and the minimums are very minimal, […] but from there we can build something." (Bionekazaritza)

This narrative draws attention to building consensus to reach shared and broader goals. Engaging in collective projects or discussions means being pragmatic and strategic when liaising with others. For example, in raising awareness of the hydroponic tomatoes macro-project, LFIs have had to create alliances with more conventional players to bring the issue into political spaces. This idea of accepting compromise to change the food system aligns with Hassanein's (2003) conceptualisation of food democracy. However, pragmatism and consensus politics have been criticised for not effecting enough transformation because they can easily lead to co-option and miss changing structural issues of the food system (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019; Di Masso et al., 2014). Nevertheless, in Vitoria-Gasteiz's case, being pragmatic or building consensus does not mean compromising values and dismissing the overall objective, as debates and discussions should offer the opportunity to build something collectively from divergence:

> "You have to create a minimum of confidence […] so that you can speak from divergence. It is about removing the wound and not saying ´for peace, avoid conflicts' [por la paz, un Ave María]. There has to be time to collectively bring up the shit on the first day and then continue meeting so that the necessary climate is generated." (Bionekazaritza)

> "[…] it is to soften things and say okay, you may be right in part in this, but there is another part that you have to also consider." (Slow Food)

Building stronger connections is thus also about being open to other worldviews and respecting individual opinions without imposing one's own, embedding notions of divergence and disagreement (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). In other words, this means building food sovereignty and the democratisation of food systems through a notion of pluralism to allow for a constructive interchange between heterogeneous groups (Agarwal, 2014). According to some LFIs, for this to happen, should be "to politicise inter-organisational relations" (Zabalortu). This notion reflects the need to fill LFSs with political reflection and content and understanding that individual and collective projects are part of a more comprehensive change towards sustainable and just food

systems. In the context of food sovereignty, this means that progressive efforts for transformation can bring about more significant change if engaged in a broader process of mobilisation. However, this does not necessarily mean striving for a shared collective identity, as stressed by some authors (Friedland, 2010).

The complexity of the interactions of LFIs suggests that food sovereignty involves creating new meanings through everyday engagement and contestation (Dwiartama & Piatti, 2016; Mars & Schau, 2019). Nevertheless, specific issues need to be raised in this political project, such as the pragmatism in searching for coalitions. The importance is thus to recognise and reflect on the compromises made towards change without losing individual values. It is about gathering similar, complementary, and even indifferent – yet not antagonistic (those that create injustices) – views to contest the bureaucratic and conventional system explained in Sub-section 6.3.3. However, as will be discussed in the next sub-section, there is still discrimination concerning who gets to participate even in searching for synergies.

### 6.5.2 The Mediation of Politics and Ideologies

As mentioned in the previous theme, looking for synergies and past differences does not necessarily mean that relationships are created across the whole LFSs. This theme deals with this lack of coalition and the formation of a closed agroecological sub-system, with some LFIs working on similar issues not necessarily being engaged in developing a shared narrative or food politics in the city. In doing so, this section illustrates how the formation of LFSs can be influenced by the political and social ideologies of LFIs and their understanding of the purpose of food system change.

LFIs hold limited resources in terms of staff and time and distribution of resources, which means that collaborative activities often involve extra work. For example, the agroecological university fair, an initiative started by the university but now collectively managed by a group of Agroecological LFIs, is solely based on voluntary work. As such, LFIs emphasised that "if you have no obligation to do something, then […] you let yourself be carried away by where you are most comfortable" (Agroecological University Fair). Being comfortable primarily refers to vision alignment:

> "[…] the vision, ideology, and so on, right? Well, that, if you see that you find it interesting, something that an association does, well you try to collaborate and join, but if you see that an idea joins you, but you have 20 things that don't, there is no future in that…" (Agroecological University Fair)

The concern surrounding sharing the same ideology and vision reflects that even if the different factors discussed previously are in place – personal connections, physical space, and transversal topics, there is still a prioritisation of coalitions based on underlying values (Manganelli et al., 2019). Significantly, values around the meaning and objective of change determine the nature and strength of connections and whether these lead to common discourse and movement development. One of the central ideological tensions amongst Social-Action LFIs is whether poverty should be alleviated by addressing immediate needs or its determinants. One example

is the incommensurability of the Banco and Berakah's approach in providing emergency food and those organisations that prefer to address the determinants of poverty as Cáritas:

> “Then it can be the problem of the concept […] If you teach a man to fish or give them fish […] It seems to us that teaching him to fish is wonderful, but the most important thing of all is to give him fish […] Because if you don't give him fish, he dies and if he dies, you obviously can’t teach him anything. But it seems to them that it is the other way around.” (Banco)

In following this conversation, the Banco explained that this divergence in views had led them to miss opportunities to develop joint projects beyond just giving food, such as developing a social supermarket where people can exercise greater agency. Discrepancies around addressing structural issues are also present in Agroecological LFIs, which constricts collaborations beyond practical exchanges. For example, while Bionekazaritza advocates for changing the agriculture model from extensive land management and production to peasant and small-scale agriculture, Natuaraba strives for a more inclusive change that accepts big-scale farm holdings if they are organic. When discussing this issue during participant observation, some mentioned that this feeling is so strong that they might never see eye to eye. This highlights the issue of the conventionalisation of ‘alternative’ practices (Maye & Kirwan, 2010). Indeed, the main criticism among Agroecological LFIs is that some reproduce political, socio-economic structures rather than explicitly oppose them. According to some participants, this limits the formation of a stronger coalition to gain greater political support:

> “So that is what they are missing, well, a lot of synergies, because if they spoke together and transferred their demands to the Provincial Council, the Provincial Council would listen to them, which it does not do today. It does not, because it sees a very disaggregated area, […] because each one makes war on their own.” (Local food expert 1 – VG)

Indeed, a prominent theme is whether the LFS in Vitoria-Gasteiz should strive toward the diversity in agricultural systems and purposes present in different LFIs. Some organisations felt that focusing solely on organic restricts their engagement and entry into specific spaces, “by definition itself" (Cáritas). These organisations argued that the certification should not be a point of departure; rather, the focus should be on relocalising food supply chains following sustainable practices. Moreover, when talking about the lack of collaborations of Social-Action LFIs with Agroecological LFIs, some LFIs commented:

> "It has nothing to do to produce to sell than to produce as is our case. Our goal is not the sale […] We can, that, be very in favour […] of ecological exchanges […] But it has nothing to do with it." (Casa de Iniciativas)

This sentiment draws attention to the fact that the process of assembling and enrolling in stronger coalitions also depends on the mission of LFIs and the purpose of food. Furthermore, for several LFIs navigating the dynamics of LFSs is also dependent on religious and political views. For example, the Banco took pride in being "apolitical and areligious" and stated that they "don't

get along with the religious bodies here, bishop and company", which means they do not search for opportunities converge with organisations such as Berakah or Cáritas. Indeed, there was an overall feeling of scepticism across the interviews against religious groups. Informal conversations during participant observation corroborated this, with some participants expressing that the "church is involved with politicians" and "goes their own way and takes advantage of the tax and land ownership benefits they have". Some even explicitly expressed being more "in tune with left-wing associations" (Casa de Iniciativas). In this context, even if there are some personal and practical ties across the LFS, joint construction of narratives and visions is not present due to political and ideological differences.

The analysis presented here confirms previous research arguing that the divergence of principles and values in achieving political and social change limits the capacity to form coherent LFSs (Constance et al., 2014). As seen in the previous theme, LFIs call for a 'convergence in diversity' (Ashe & Sonnino, 2013), sometimes leading to compromises. However, the messy and everyday complexities of sustaining collaborations when strong unifying values are not present might mean that convergence between diverse LFIs might be confined to practical exchanges and informal ties. Preceding themes have pointed out that this could be addressed by opening dialogue and debate within the LFS, whereby collective reflection and unifying aims are fostered. Following the arguments presented in this section, it could be argued that, in some cases, collective reflection does not inherently lead to a more cohesive and inclusive narrative. Nevertheless, impactful actions can still derive from informal connections, as seen in Sub-section 6.4.2. As will be seen in the next theme, the impact of collective actions is not only dependant on value alignment between LFIs, but highly dependent on having a favourable governance environment.

### 6.5.3 Top-down Projectionism

Having discussed the development of the food strategy of Vitoria-Gasteiz in Sub-section 6.4.3, this theme aims to explain the reasons for the setback of the public-civil society collective project of changing the city's food system. It focuses on the working culture of local authorities, both VCC and Provincial Council, in the region from the perception of LFIs and how this clashes with the expectations of civil society. Doing so highlights how there is a feeling that local authorities and politicians are not genuinely committed to change and engaging in a public-civil society co-construction process. In this regard, many projects fail because they are formulated from a top-down perspective. Eventually, this leads to disenchantment from civil society and LFIs from public spaces and public-civil society relationships based on mistrust.

There was a general feeling that local authorities were keen on listening to LFIs, exemplified through the urban food strategy development. Indeed, LFIs mentioned that the city has a culture of public participation and holds various channels of participation where actors can express their concerns and challenge institutional projects. However, there is scepticism how much "they have believed that food can be a tractor to move other pieces" (Huerta Esmeralda) rather than having vested interests in their policies. This sentiment was mainly expressed concerning the local PNV,

the right-wing political party now governing Vitoria-Gasteiz and Álava, particularly in relation to the Provincial Council:

> "That is, you as an administration say that a lot, blah, blah, blah and you support the ecological […] What is happening, that the Provincial Council uses agri-environmental subsidies to pay deficit crops […] with exceptions to use […] more pollutants that are not allowed in our sector. And they use environmental money for that kind of thing." (Bionekazaritza)

This statement relates to the dominance of conventional food system values in technical and public spaces and the marginalisation of organic explained in Sub-section 6.3.3. Moreover, it reflects short-term approaches to policies and projects that align with sustainability issues, which showcase a promotional aim rather than a real commitment to change (Cretella, 2019). Indeed, throughout the conversation with the Provincial Council, there was a certain scepticism of how much transitioning towards organic agriculture was possible, even though they attributed full support to sustainable food systems:

> "Our climate and our soils have limitations to make organic and if the market does not compensate you or the CAP compensates you, we are condemning many farmers." (Provincial Council)

In this sense, the Provincial Council advocates for a system in which different production models exist, combining organic, integrated and conventional food production. This could be related to the economic development focus of current agricultural policies in Álava. Significantly, while most Agroecological LFIs were against the macro-project of hydroponic tomatoes, the Provincial Council has advocated for it, justifying its instalment as helping develop jobs in the region. In this regard, those opposed to the macro-project and promoting small-scale agroecological systems are seen as radical or extreme, signalling an exclusion of dissenting perspectives from the consensual policymaking that follows consolidated food logics in technical and public spheres (Swyngedouw, 2014).

The dominance of this economic perspective is present across governance levels, albeit with an acceptance of the need to transition towards agroecological food systems in VCC. Basaldea, a municipal project to provide access to land to local producers, has been developed as a seedbed of agriculture companies, focusing on employment development through agriculture. However, farmers have not received it well, with only 4 out of 11 parcels currently being occupied. Developing projects from this basis is, according to participants, one of the main reasons why many projects fail:

> "When it cannot be the same, that is, a 4.0 technology company is not the same as an organic vegetable production company. The truth is that the way they approach the project […] it cannot grow […] It has to grow, putting together a lot of things and also putting together the issue of food systems, putting together partnerships." (Local food expert 1 – VG)

This is deeply related to what civil society and LFIs expect from local authorities and their role, alongside them, within the LFS. Discussions documented during the urban food strategy development revealed that LFIs perceive that councils should foster alliances, support initiatives but not direct them, be receptive and co-construct solutions. In this sense, local authorities should not only "manage public money" but jointly defend the interests of its citizens (Huerta de Bolivia). This idea of collective change with councils as allies does not align, however, with the current 'inertia' of public institutions:

> "I'm bored that when it is promoted from the public institutions the fundamental discussion is […] who presides over it, who is the vice president, who is the secretary and once that has been achieved, they decide what salary they have. And from there, they start telling others what to do. And since they have no idea, what they do is ridiculous, and they sink. So, I think we must start to stimulate the fact that the people […] are the engines of these stories." (Cáritas)

Therefore, public projects fail because they do not comply with the realities or objectives of LFIs, farmers, and civil society, those that eventually participate in rolling out the projects. However, local authorities' interviewees felt that "sometimes citizens or groups use these spaces to ask things […] but for VCC to do it" (CEA). Indeed, similar to LFIs' perspective, local authorities feel that their role should be facilitating the efforts of LFIs. Nevertheless, how much civil society is heard is a contested matter:

> "In those participations that exist, I participated in some of them […] many of them are a bit absurd. So, I mean, not absurd, but many of the things that we say and that are said, that is, that you are supposed to be participating, practically almost all of them do not care. So, it is a participation system for my taste, very fictitious. 'I make you go to 320 meetings; I entertain you, but then I don't take you into account'." (Zabalortu)

This is present across governance levels and types of LFIs. Interviewed farmers and Agroecological LFIs mentioned that their opinions are not truly valued in participatory spaces. They only get a minimal amount of time to discuss their concerns, and often these are dismissed because of a lack of 'expertise'. Notably, this top-down approach is why the municipal plan derived from the urban food strategy was not accepted by civil society. According to LFIs, the plan could have been done without participation; it does not reflect the collective process. For LFIs, the strategy's purpose was to focus on the *how* not the *what*; not about projects, but on discussion and debate to formulate joint and structural solutions. The participation of LFIs then becomes a 'token', masking the development of strategies as being 'participatory'(Coplen & Cuneo, 2015; Koski et al., 2018). As this signalises a lack of transparent commitment from local authorities from the perspective of LFIs, LFIs have gradually lost trust from public institutions. VCC and the Provincial Council are thus viewed as following a 'hidden' agenda, eventually disassembling the LFS:

> "In the end it has worn down the associative movement, we put a lot of effort and strength from those meetings […] And in the end they boss you around that way,

> right? The lack of respect of ... I mean, I take all your ideas and then […] institutions capture what they want and then sell it not in essence, but a copy, a bad copy, or something that imitates that original." (Agroecological University Fair)

Overall, this theme draws attention to how the circulation of material and social elements in food governance processes influences the assemblage of LFSs. In contrast to other studies that highlight the positive influence of participatory spaces in creating new possibilities for change (e.g., see Sonnino & Mendes, 2018; Roberta Sonnino & Spayde, 2014), these findings demonstrate the limited transformative capacity of such spaces when no clear political commitment is in place. Indeed, Guthman (2008b) illustrates how the emphasis on relocalising food systems in policymaking does not always imply compliance with LFI goals. Significantly, public authorities' co-optation of 'alternative' values to follow vested agendas creates a disenchantment between public institutions and LFIs, missing opportunities to continue developing multi-stakeholder governance processes. The restructuring of the municipal plan with feedback from civil society has recently been discussed in Vitoria-Gasteiz. However, when talking with LFIs about this upcoming project, many mentioned not wanting to participate. In addition, these dynamics lead to a 'burn-out' from LFIs to pursue collective processes for just and sustainable food systems. For example, the disintegration of some networks following up the urban food strategy development and the stalling of collective reflection towards more inclusive food systems (see Sub-section 6.4.3)

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered the composition of Vitoria-Gasteiz's LFS, its multi-level place-based dynamics, the formation of internal formal and informal networks, and how individual and collective values and governance arrangements mediate them. As with Preston's case, food sovereignty has been treated as a transversal theme across the case study, following the understanding that micro-and meso-level mechanisms jointly construct food sovereignty outcomes. The analysis shows that enacting food sovereignty through LFSs is a long-term dynamic process of structuring and restructuring diverse networks through various material, social, and capital flows. In this ongoing search for food transformation, inevitable trade-offs need to be considered in organising the interactions between LFIs, given the drawbacks and benefits of informal and formal arrangements. Significantly, Vitoria-Gasteiz's case signals that the potential for convergence within LFSs for structural change is better achieved when divergent goals align under a joint political project. For this to be achieved, there is a need to create spaces where the politicisation of collective struggles can be formed through ongoing deliberation and dissenting discussions to move from consensus politics toward creating inclusive narratives. However, an unfavourable socio-institutional environment can halt collective political mobilisation considerably. Notably, public-civil society alliances that follow true participatory values are crucial for the co-construction of structural solutions.

Vitoria-Gasteiz's case highlights that place-based conditions can create uneven socio-ecological imaginaries. The strife for food sovereignty and agroecology can be narrowly framed under rural struggles and behavioural change. Urban food access concerns are overlooked, accentuating the

rural-urban divide for which the conventional food system has been criticised. In this context, there are inherent contradictions within the constructed agroecological discourses, given their explicit criticism of conventional food system values and, at the same time, primary focus on consumerism, a key characteristic of conventional logics, to achieve change. In addition, the limited interaction of agroecological practices within vertical networks to address food poverty through food donations is not enough to pave integrated strategies for the collective realisation of the right to food. Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of consumption as a part of a collective process to care for others and the territory rather than for personal benefits signals a departure from individual responsibilisation. Furthermore, the reflexive feature of LFIs creates the potential to build more inclusive approaches that reconceptualise the right to food as a matter of both food supply chain transformation and universal access to healthy and sustainable food. Indeed, the findings highlight how long-term informal connections and interactions can create a politics of possibility where the democratisation of food policy can facilitate collective reflection. However, ideological divergences, place-based governance culture and the entrenchment of conventional and bureaucratic system values can influence the success of this process.

Examining LFSs through the political food systems approach for food sovereignty helps identify the socio-political processes that articulate these dynamics. This analysis shows that LFSs are value-laden and highly mediated by specific purposes. In this regard, the articulation of cohesive LFSs goes beyond aligning the objectives of LFIs; political, religious, and personal ideologies are also crucial determinants. Surpassing these ideological barriers can be achieved by constructing material and social spaces where a collective debate between dissenting voices can occur, leading to an alignment of efforts toward a particular political project, such as in the urban food strategy of Vitoria-Gasteiz. Nevertheless, the complexity of aligning values and ideologies can exclude important partners if there is not enough consideration of who leads and initiates collective change. LFSs need to strive for pluralism and diversity if their full food sovereignty potential is to be achieved. This case demonstrates that, eventually, this can lead to an ongoing process of constructing joint goals and discourses through ongoing dialogue, where dynamic discussions are more important than building minimal consensus. Nevertheless, this raises issues as to how much this acceptance of divergence should be stretched, given the risk of the conventionalisation of 'alternative' values and practices and losing track of structural change.

Indeed, this case study illustrates how the co-option of the efforts of LFIs by public institutions can endanger the articulation of stronger connections for food system change. The meso-level analysis of LFSs brings about an understanding of how sometimes collective mobilisation is not enough if socio-institutional environments do not favour a restructuration of food systems' power dynamics and governance. The analysis of Vitoria-Gasteiz's urban food strategy development throughout the years shows that changing a city's food politics is a long-term process filled with peaks and troughs. Notably, the lack of real commitment from VCC and the Provincial Council questions the notion that local authorities are best placed to lead food system transformation and collaborations within LFSs. Nevertheless, the limited capacity of LFIs in terms of resources means that public institutions should not be excluded from efforts for food sovereignty. Significantly, the results of this case study show that local authorities need to move away from top-down project-based strategies that strive for quick wins. Even if these contribute

to greater political support and international recognition, their eventual failed implementation means that no real change is achieved, and thus civil society mistrust is generated.

In sum, Vitoria-Gasteiz's case responds to the main concern raised through Preston's case study; how to create inclusive, collaborative spaces for deliberation to move toward common goals. Participatory multi-actor processes can help create more egalitarian spaces where inclusive food sovereignty strategies start to be developed, particularly related to the democratisation of food politics. Nevertheless, the process for LFSs to collectively restructure food systems' dynamics is filled with many challenges related to diverse ideologies and contradictory governance influences. In this context, the argument presented in Preston's findings remains; food sovereignty can only be reached through a democratisation of the processes to achieve change and not just by democratising food consumption, production, or distribution. An ongoing reflective process is needed to question the outcomes of the reconfiguration of food systems and individual strategies. However, this chapter signals that there are forms of urban food governance that do not help this process. In questioning whose voice and vision food policy change encapsulates, this case shows that participation should not be conflated with consultation in public spheres, as the former involves a co-construction of transformative solutions for change.

# Chapter 7 – CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS: BUILDING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

With both cases' findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter presents the final analytical stage of the study: the cross-case analysis. As explained in Chapter 4, cross-case analysis explores the findings of individual case studies at a higher level of theoretical conceptualisation by identifying cross-case themes and sub-themes that help meet the research study's objectives. With this in mind, this chapter aims to expand on the critical discussions of the individual cases by further drawing on the conceptual framework and reviewed literature presented (Chapters 2 and 3). In doing so, the cross-case analysis showcases different connections and disconnections for the articulation of LFSs that contribute to food sovereignty. It illustrates a range of processes derived from the contested circulation of material, social and capital resources within LFSs, mediated by multiple forms of power asymmetries and divergent values between LFIs and with other actors. Building on the negative consequences of these metabolic processes (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003) and lessons learnt from each case, the cross-case analysis also points to crucial transformative qualities that could alter these dynamics and support the delivery of food sovereignty in cities.

The chapter is structured based on cross-case themes and sub-themes identified through the analysis, as shown in Figure 7.1. In total, three cross-case themes – coloured in blue, green and grey – have been identified, with two sub-themes each (coloured a lighter shade of their corresponding themes). These themes are inherently interconnected, with changes in one dimension affecting the dynamics of others. Given the conceptualisation of LFSs as socio-ecological constructs nested in a relational network of spatial scales, the two dark blue boxes above the cross-case themes labelled 'Transversal dynamics' indicate the partial determination of the complex assemblages of LFSs by multilevel dynamics embedded in diverse socio-economic, political, and natural environments, albeit sharing similar global challenges and influences. This helps consider the constant interplay of LFSs with translocal connections and multilevel governance dynamics that set the playing field, such as global market-driven ideologies, in their characterisation. As such, these dynamics inevitably affect the identified cross-case themes and sub-themes transversally. Finally, following this study's instrumental collective case study methodology, the purple boxes present vital lessons learnt from each cross-case theme to contribute to broader academic debates for constructing food sovereignty in cities through LFSs. Given the relationships of the identified cross-case themes, the implications of each theme also interconnect, signalling the need for cumulative changes in different dimensions of LFSs.

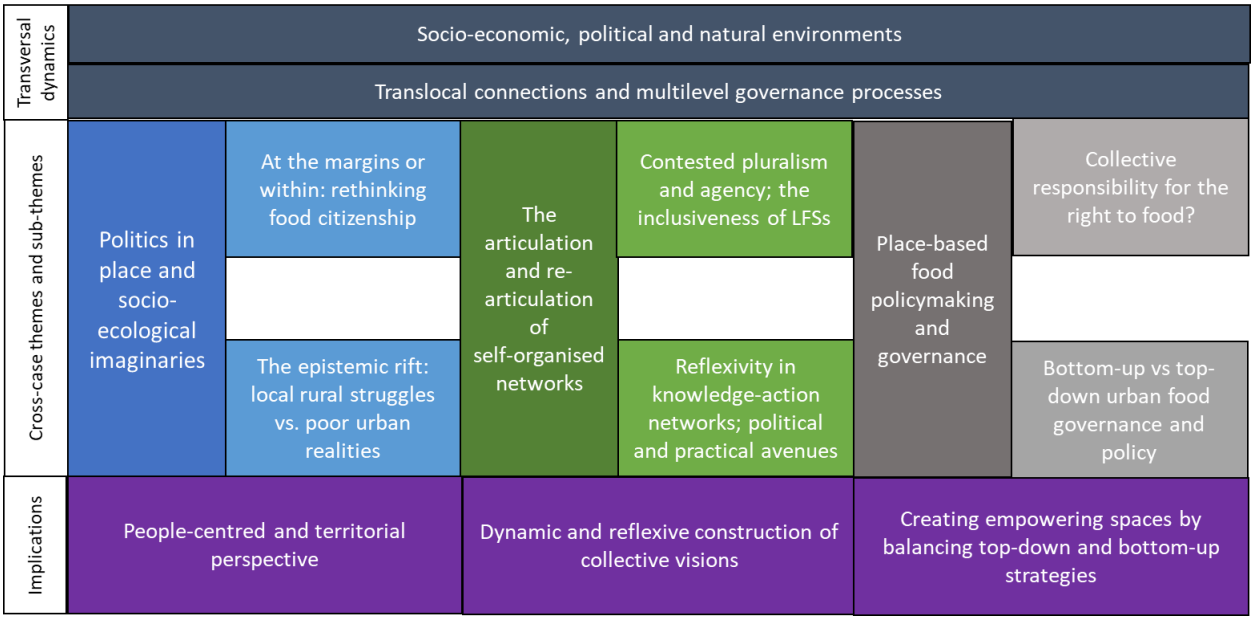


Figure 7.1: Cross-case themes, sub-themes and interactions

Section 7.2 presents the first cross-case theme *politics in place and socio-ecological imaginaries* (blue box), which engages with the socio-ecological construction of LFSs and the problematisation of narrow socio-ecological imaginaries. As such, the sub-themes *at the margins or within: rethinking food citizenship* (Sub-section 7.2.1) and *the epistemic rift: local rural struggles vs poor urban realities* (Sub-section 7.2.2) focus on providing a basis to reimagine individual narratives of LFIs and in doing so embark LFSs upon a more transformative and inclusive path by proposing the notion of a *people-centred and territorial perspective*. Building on this, Section 7.3 presents the cross-case theme *the articulation and re-articulation of self-organised networks* (green box), focusing on how collective approaches are developed. In this regard, the sub-theme *contested pluralism and agency: the inclusiveness of LFSs* (Sub-section 7.3.1) discusses the challenges that inter-and intra-ideological discrepancies within LFSs pose for food system transformation. Following this, the sub-theme *reflexivity in knowledge-action networks: practical and political avenues* (section 7.3.2) shows specific instances where LFIs manage to collectivise food system struggles by comparing specific stages LFIs' coalition within each case. Drawing on this discussion, this section calls for a *dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions* within LFSs.

Subsequently, Section 7.4 critically explores the cross-case theme *place-based food policymaking and governance* (grey box), which evaluates how governance dynamics articulate the potential of LFSs for food sovereignty. The sub-theme *collective responsibility for the right to food?* (Sub-section 7.4.1) analyses the different approaches in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston to ensure food access, their effects on the LFSs and what this means for achieving food sovereignty. The sub-theme *bottom-up vs top-down urban food governance and policy* (Sub-section 7.4.2) then assesses the roles and responsibilities of LFIs and public authorities in driving change and fostering reflexive processes of LFSs. After comparing both case studies, this section calls for the *creation of empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies*. Section 7.5

pulls together the different arguments and implications addressed in each theme to build a foundation for the concluding chapter of the thesis.

## 7.2 POLITICS IN PLACE AND SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES

The first cross-case theme *politics in place and socio-ecological imaginaries* engages with the socio-ecological construction of LFSs and the influence of contested and diverse place-making processes on their direction and overarching strategies. Chapter 2 argued that the examination of LFSs should build from what DuPuis and Goodman (2005) refer to as the 'politics in place', which imagines LFSs as juxtaposed with various politics extending particular territories, which was considered in the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3). This conceptualises LFSs as socially constructed through multiscalar and internal processes, which influence the approaches of LFIs. However, Chapter 3 also pointed to the contested realities of LFSs, where meanings are constructed differently depending on individual experiences and interactions, not only with social but also natural surroundings. In recognising these dynamics, the notion of socio-ecological imaginaries indicates the underlying thought systems of LFIs that influence their activities, practices, and interactions (see Chapter 3). This framing draws attention to the motivations of LFIs, constructed through imperfect, and at times compartmentalised, place-based processes. This section aims to use these theoretical constructs to distinguish the different worlds within LFSs that constrain or enhance their potential for food sovereignty to propose possible paths towards the achievement of more just and sustainable food systems.

Drawing from these notions, Section 7.2.1 deals with the diverse ways the components of LFSs engage and respond differently to these processes, particularly market-driven logics in multilevel governance dynamics. Comparing Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz highlights the hybridity of these practices and acknowledges similar strategies across places. However, Sub-section 7.2.1 also points to relevant differences that might provide a starting point to escape the influence of conventional paradigms. To further unpack the contested construction of LFSs, Sub-section 7.2.2 focuses on two particular socio-ecological imaginaries of LFIs present in both cases despite place-based particularities, highlighting an epistemic division within LFSs based on problem representation and knowledge construction. By considering what this means for the possible achievement of food sovereignty in LFSs, this section raises the importance of building more inclusive narratives.

### 7.2.1 At the Margins or Within: Rethinking Food Citizenship

The sub-theme *at the margins or within: rethinking food citizenship* illustrates how LFSs are assembled according to multilevel socio-ecological processes, highlighting similar constraints imposed by market-driven and profit maximisation logics. The cross-case analysis also identifies considerable differences in the overarching orientation between the LFSs of Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston, highlighting the diverse histories, ecologies, needs and issues of urban spaces. However, this comparison also indicates a transversal focus within both cities as a response to the conventional food systems' adverse outcomes; to increase food citizenship – people's belonging and participation in different dimensions of the food system (Renting et al., 2012) – contributing to the democratisation principle of food sovereignty (see Chapter 3). However, in recognising the

limitations of the strategies used by LFIs for this purpose regarding inclusive change, this sub-section argues that food citizenship needs to be reconceptualised within LFSs to move beyond progressive or reformist approaches and thus engage with transformative processes.

A closer look at the LFSs in both cities calls for an explicit consideration of their socio-ecological nature to help identify crucial vulnerabilities and drivers in articulating food sovereignty in cities. In particular, different urbanisation and urban processes influence varying degrees of disconnection between urban and rural spaces, affecting the directions of LFSs and prioritisation of issues. For example, the stronger focus of Preston's LFS on food poverty can be explained by the higher levels of deprivation found in the city compared to Vitoria-Gasteiz and the influence of several national austerity and market-driven policies on local authorities' capacity to address these challenges in the UK. Moreover, the low number of farm holdings and farmland around the city might also explain why developing localised food supply chains has not been considered. In this context, championing local/sustainable food is a struggle, or even a luxury, due to more pressing priorities, even if some LFIs concentrate on these aspects. There is an overall focus on addressing immediate needs within a pragmatic framework focused on factors that influence communities' wellbeing. This translates into a depoliticised and relative uncritical engagement with food-related activities. Although there was evidence that LFIs recognised several food inequalities in Preston, most LFIs focus on developing individual projects without contesting the causes of the injustices that permeate LFSs through their actions. Consequently, following Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) categorisation of LFIs, it could be argued that Preston's LFS remains under a rather reformist-progressive realm.

Vitoria-Gasteiz, on the other hand, is a relatively prosperous city with an explicit commitment to sustainability and social welfare that is more easily implemented due to the Basque country's higher degree of autonomy. As such, there is more room for manoeuvre to develop and support projects related to food, providing higher economic stability to LFIs – with many in a contractual relationship with the City Council. However, this does not mean that LFIs are free from market-driven and productivist logics. They are embedded within a consolidated 'alliance' across technical, private and public spaces, which dictates much of what can or cannot be done in the city and surroundings. Nevertheless, efforts continue to be channelled towards promoting localised consumption and small-scale production, usually relating it to a call back to Basque culture. In particular, there is a preference for self-determination and for adopting a political stance against injustices in the food system, perhaps related to the history of political insurgence in the region. Nevertheless, many efforts still prioritise market-based mechanisms to induce change, although there is a more substantial criticism of conventional food logics. Vitoria-Gasteiz' LFS thus falls under a more progressive-radical realm (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011).

The account provided in previous paragraphs concurs with previous research suggesting that the food sovereignty potential of LFIs, and as a result LFSs, is very much dependent on the socio-ecological characteristics of their locations, particularly the transversal entrenchment of market-driven frameworks (Allen, 2008). However, relying only on this explanation for the potential of LFSs contribution to food sovereignty is a deterministic reading of their potential, restricting the possibility to identify specific dimensions that could aid LFIs to engage in more significant change

(Sarmiento, 2017a). Comparing both case studies indicates that LFSs can create new symbolic and material food spaces through diverse notions of food citizenship. In Preston's case, this relates to what others term *latent* food change (Kneafsey et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2015). Although not explicitly contending conventional food system injustices, it still repoliticises food through everyday practices, such as capacity building, resocialising food spaces and awareness-raising. However, even if framed as a political act as in the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz or acknowledging cultural differences as in the case of Preston, there is a tendency to focus on 'educating' citizens to change individual behaviours in both cases. As already explained in Chapters 5 and 6, this could be problematic if contrasted with the notion of justice promoted by food sovereignty, whereby having the opportunity to change practices or participate does not mean that one can assert the agency to do so (see Chapter 3). Adopting an individualised action theoretical frame can lead to exclusionary strategies and top-down instalment of values (Di Masso & Zografos, 2015; Guthman, 2008a). In particular, it hampers LFIs to fully recognise their responsibilities and obligations in taking into account the rights of others, which should extend those directly affected by their actions (Saxena et al., 2021b). Thus, it can mirror conventional ideas of individual responsibility for change – the neoliberal trap (see Chapter 2) – questioning whether relying on this framing of food citizenship helps move from progressive ideals towards more transformative imaginaries.

Examining both cases through an instrumental collective case study methodology enriches understanding in this matter. By identifying lessons that bring about further understandings of phenomena, this methodology has aided the identification of a crucial point for reimagining food citizenship in a more transformative manner. As mentioned earlier, many LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz frame consumption as a collective process of change, embedded in diverse, interconnected strategies that create territorial communities of care (Beacham, 2018; Moragues-Faus, 2017b). Compared to Preston, a critical characteristic of Vitoria-Gasteiz's case is the interconnections of LFIs with translocal movements and discourses. Throughout the years, LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz have engaged in international exchanges that advance agroecology and food sovereignty as joint political mobilisation and collective practice to change the underlying structures of the food system. In their criticism of injustices and attention to the principles needed for a new food model, also discussed in Chapter 2, these notions have the potential to politicise the actions of LFIs. As such, any activity is embedded within a collective and more fundamental transformative framework. This has helped progressively drift away from competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and individualisation by discussing power and wealth distribution within the food system in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

The previous discussion emphasises the need to integrate political narratives within LFSs, such as agroecology and food sovereignty, to elevate food citizenship onto a more transformative or radical path, which supports previous literature (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). Through these narratives, food is treated as a 'commons' (Rundgren, 2016; Tomaso et al., 2021). As such, actions fall under a more extensive umbrella that acknowledges non-monetary food values and the collective responsibility for managing and establishing fair, sustainable food systems (Gómez-Benito & Lozano, 2014; Saxena et al., 2021b). According to Moragues-Faus (2017b), food citizenship can move beyond consumerism logic through this explicit quest for just

socio-ecological relations under collectivised efforts. However, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz, using political concepts should avoid imposing 'universalistic or perfectionist' ideas of food (Goodman et al., 2012). Preston's case offers helpful possibilities; in recognising that a city is composed of multicultural communities, collective and mutually beneficial strategies can be shaped within LFSs. Integrating such paradigms thus involves the collectivisation of strategies under the notion that food is a means to reconnect communities and territories in the search for a fair restructuration of food system relations. This conceptualisation of food citizenship helps position individual acts as part of a collective contestation against conventional structures and thus might create a path for more radical claims that question the presence of exploitative realities in current dynamics.

Given the place-based nature of LFSs, it would be unrealistic to expect the literal translation of food sovereignty and agroecological practices (Lutz & Schachinger, 2013). As explained in Chapter 2, promoting typified versions is problematic, as it disregards the challenges of LFIs. The importance lies in adapting these value-laden concepts to individual realities to position the practices of LFIs as a response to injustices of current models and structures, thus developing critical assessments of actions. Furthermore, by engaging with these trans-local concepts, the restructuration of food systems is situated beyond specific places towards justice and ecological sustainability in food systems as a matter of global solidarity. However, as examined in the next section, the adoption of these discourses will only prove successful if the epistemic urban-rural division found within LFSs in both case studies is addressed.

### 7.2.2 The Epistemic Rift: Local Rural Struggles vs. Poor Urban Realities

Having explored the socio-ecological construction of LFSs, and proposed integrating narratives that develop more political LFIs, this sub-theme discusses the presence of two similar sub-systems in both cities despite place-based individualities. The first focuses on supply chain concerns and promotes localised food consumption to support rural farmers. The second concentrates on urban poverty and food access in cities. Going forward, this division will be referred to as *the epistemic rift* within LFSs. This term is founded on the notion of 'metabolic rift' following Marxist theories, which UPE and food sovereignty literature integrate to illustrate the separation between society and nature in food systems, specifically between rural and urban spaces (Swyngedouw, 2006; Wittman, 2009). Whereas metabolic rift mainly refers to a material separation due to capital relations, this study uses epistemic rift, as proposed by Schneider and McMichael (2010), to indicate how value-relations mediate this based on specific knowledge systems and discourses – i.e., socio-ecological imaginaries. This eventually leads to different conceptualisations of urban food questions, hindering possibilities for significant transformative change, even if political narratives are adopted.

In determining a typology of LFIs in Preston, it became clear that LFIs differentiate themselves depending on the discourse attached to local food and food security, informing the focus of LFIs. This helped identify a spectrum of Food-Access and Proximity LFIs in Preston. Compared to Preston, the differentiation in Vitoria-Gasteiz does not come from divergent discourses on food security or the local, but around the primary mission and vision of LFIs. This helped identify a

spectrum of Agroecological LFIs and Social-Action LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz. However, despite this contrast with Preston's case and the use of more political discourses by some LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz, as seen in the previous sub-theme, the core of this distinction relies on analogous socio-ecological imaginaries. Like Proximity LFIs in Preston, Agroecological LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz promote relocalising supply chains and consumption to address the disadvantaged position of small-scale farmers. Social-Action LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz, like Food-Access LFIs in Preston, mainly concentrate on food access and its determinants in urban settings without questioning food sources. While this separation per se is not problematic, as, realistically, LFIs will not have universal focuses (Constance et al., 2014), the main issue is that LFIs position these problems in different, incommensurable realities, missing a systemic perspective of food-related concerns. Eventually, this obstructs a joint development of more inclusive and political narratives to foster LFSs based on food sovereignty ideals and thus creates similar disconnections in LFSs to those found in the conventional food system.

One issue to be addressed in this context is the selective understanding of urban food questions in sustainable and local food spaces, which other scholars have also identified (González de Molina & Lopez-Garcia, 2021; Tornaghi & Dehaene, 2021). By uncritically fostering food relocalisation and emphasising consumption change in cities, these practices homogenise and reify urban citizens based on economic terms – a feature of the conventional food system (Goodman et al., 2012). As explained by Tornaghi and Dehaene (2020), the city is then imagined merely as a consumption place that can support the countryside without recognising urbanisation and place-based processes that actively create urban inequalities. Agroecology, food sovereignty, and local food in this context do not speak to many urban citizens and related LFIs, as consideration of internal power asymmetries in the constitution of cities and thus everyday decision-making are usually lacking (Deh-Tor, 2017). At the same time, even though many LFIs focusing on food access operate in non-market spaces, their lack of problematisation of food sources also constructs cities as receivers of food, with the countryside as a distant and everlasting supplier. Urban questions are again disconnected from food production and rural spaces, albeit from a different perspective. Ultimately, these discursive interpretations of food and urban concerns mainly relate to what justice is being fought and for whom: urban consumers or rural farmers. However, in this selective framing of justice, LFIs undermine the reality that the marginalised position of both farmers and urban consumers derive from uneven urbanisation processes and subsequent challenges (Deh-Tor, 2021). As seen in both case studies, this rift influences the inclusion and exclusion of LFIs and ideas, constraining the interaction between these epistemic 'worlds' to circumstantial food donations, constructing a two-tier system of deservedness which drives away from the achievement of the right to food for all.

The previous sub-theme has argued that LFIs should adopt place-based translations of more political discourses such as food sovereignty and agroecology to engage in more transformative change by reimagining food citizenship. Yet, Vitoria-Gasteiz's case demonstrates that the use of political narratives also depends on the socio-ecological imaginaries of LFIs (Larder et al., 2014), with the danger of further accentuating the epistemic rift within LFSs. The presence of LFIs that actively bridge this gap in both cases provides valuable insights, suggesting that inclusive perspectives could be developed by adopting a systemic view of food-related challenges. In

Preston, for example, a LFI promotes the notion of food affordability to signal trade-offs of individual strategies for both farmers and urban citizens, fostering the search for mutual benefits across the food system. This systemic approach means extending the notion of justice at both ends of the epistemic rift as an alternative way to organise and conceptualise their mutual interdependencies. Without disregarding the discussion of politicising LFIs, the argument in this sub-theme suggests this should be accompanied by reconfiguring problematic representations in individual discourses and integrating a systemic vision of food systems change.

The cross-case analysis indicates that this could be done by fostering a people-centred approach to food, which, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz, can embed strategies with more inclusive notions (see Chapter 6). Doing so means turning discussions towards people's everyday experiences of injustices and relationships with food rather than the food itself. The displacement of food as the main focal point relates to how a narrow focus on food might prioritise questions of material relations (e.g., consumption), which, although highly relevant, risk engendering the epistemic rift within LFSs. People in this sense would encompass the plurality of actors involved in the food system, diffusing the dichotomy between farmers and urban citizens, and thus merging their struggles. This assimilates Figueroa's (2015) people-centred proposal to investigate food sovereignty practices, which focuses on social dynamics and histories that produce place-based experiences of (and injustices related to) food. However, although this provides a starting point to extend the narratives of LFIs, solely focusing on people follows a problematic anthropocentric view that disregards the role of nature in socio-ecological processes, thereby potentially obviating the need to also re-think practices that negatively affect the environment. González de Molina and Lopez-Garcia (2021) propose a useful framework that provides criteria, such as rupturing rural-urban divisions and recognising plural subjects, to construct fairer food systems for both nature and people: agroecology-based local (territorial) agri-food systems. Although this approach is helpful to integrate ecology into people-centred perspectives, its explicit focus on food relocalisation might disregard certain practices, as seen in both cases (see Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the potential exclusionary dimension of the local).

Consequently, the focus should be on a framework that helps bring LFIs to the principles of food sovereignty and agroecology's political struggle while being cautious of reductive discourses through this engagement. In this regard, Vitoria-Gasteiz's case demonstrates that a comprehensive notion of 'territory', including its natural dynamics, might help integrate diverse perspectives towards the search for more just and sustainable food systems. Building on this discussion, a *people-centred and territorial perspective* is proposed to embed LFIs' individual struggles within a broader paradigm of political and inclusive change. Drawing on previous literature on LFIs and territory (Lamine et al., 2019; Reina-Usuga et al., 2022) and UPE's non-binary conception of LFSs (see Chapter 3), this research conceptualises the territorial dimension as encompassing complex material and non-material relations between a diversity of actors involved in food-related activities within a place and their natural surroundings, developing multiple interconnected identities and recognising the importance of ecology in its construction. The people-centred and territorial perspective could serve to guide and question LFIs approaches. In this way, its inclusion might mean expanding political discourses such as agroecology and food sovereignty or developing new concepts that apply to the contextual

characteristics of LFSs while maintaining a political content. This is not to say that the responsibility to integrate this perspective should rest on dispersed individual LFIs, the territorial aspect means a collectivisation of change, as all efforts accumulate into a greater transformation process. The following themes engage with the challenges and drivers of collectively developing this people-centred and territorial perspective within LFSs through lessons learnt from both cases.

## 7.3. THE ARTICULATION AND RE-ARTICULATION OF SELF-ORGANISED NETWORKS

So far, the cross-case analysis has engaged with the different socio-ecological imaginaries of LFIs that develop based on the place-based characteristics of cities. Significantly, a vital implication of this initial layer of the cross-case analysis has been to propose a *people-centred and territorial perspective* to this process, shifting the lens towards histories of injustices and lived experiences with food, recognising nature's significance and collectivisation of transformation processes. The second cross-case theme, *the articulation and re-articulation of self-organised networks,* aims to unpack the intricate dynamics of advancing this perspective. Following the conceptual framework explained in Chapter 3, this theme engages with how the combination of the practices and interactions of LFIs displays patterns of self-organisation and properties beyond individualities. Even if not all components are explicitly connected, a whole entity is still constituted, whereby changes in one dimension affect other dynamics. As such, LFSs are understood through the contested processes to develop collective approaches (Dwiartama & Piatti, 2016; Levkoe & Wakefield, 2013). This brings about greater understanding of their contribution to food sovereignty and what food sovereignty means in the context of LFSs.

Based on this notion, Sub-section 7.3.1 outlines the politically contingent nature of LFSs, as it involves the clash of diverse understandings, ideologies, and discourses. It draws attention to the construction of dispersed ecosystems because of these dynamics and argues that a higher degree of acceptance of pluralism is needed in collective processes within LFSs. Sub-section 7.3.2 then engages with possible avenues to disrupt siloed value-based work, arguing that a *dynamic and reflexive process of constructing collective visions* is needed to advance change in this context. This entails a long-term process of constant deliberation that might sometimes call for pragmatic and consensual responses, creating tensions for food sovereignty. Through these discussions, both sections draw attention to the idea that the level of cohesiveness of LFSs should not define them, nor should this be the goal of LFS, as it decreases the plurality within LFSs – a critical component in promoting food sovereignty.

### 7.3.1 Contested Pluralism and Agency: The Inclusiveness of Local Food Systems

This sub-theme aims to discuss how the dynamics of LFSs are not only permeated by the epistemic rift presented in Sub-section 7.2.2, but also by a diversity of social and power relations not confined by different perceptions of urban food questions. To do so, it concentrates on the challenges – material, social and natural – faced by LFIs to create more collective responses to food system concerns. This section calls attention to the inter-and intra-value and ideological discrepancies that are present between LFIs with different and similar aims and memberships. It deals with the notion that LFSs are not politically neutral given the different (collective and

individual) ideologies present in their assemblage by focusing not only on how they articulate in different ways but also why. In doing so, this section illustrates the challenges of forming networks and associations within LFSs based on the construction of dispersed value-based ecosystems and what this means for food sovereignty, calling for an acceptance of divergence whilst maintaining critical boundaries to avoid losing transformative power.

The cross-case analysis confirms that one of the main barriers to creating associations between LFIs is the uneven distribution of resources within LFSs. In this context, LFIs must reconcile their priorities with searching for collaborations because of their limited capacity. Indeed, as seen in the literature (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014), the development of interconnected LFSs depends on the ability of LFIs to navigate structures and form powerful alliances. For example, Preston's case demonstrates that influential organisations such as the university and City Council are key in leveraging resources to support links between LFIs, particularly those holding a higher status within the LFSs and aligning with their values. As not all LFIs are equally able to position themselves within these structures (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014), a competitive environment is created in the search for resources. The comparison of case studies confirms that in such contexts, and significantly if this is accompanied by a lack of engagement with political discourses as in Preston, collaborations are mainly sought for mutual practical gains, leading to short-term alignments (Friedland, 2010). However, what emerges from the cross-case analysis is that, although resource constraints are a crucial determinant in the interactions of LFIs, ideological and value alignment is what fundamentally drives the articulation of the networks of LFSs. In both cases, even though many LFIs must operate within challenging and resource-constraining environments, many small networks still emerge. As pointed out by other researchers (Di Masso et al., 2014; Rivera-Ferre et al., 2014), the divergent underlying assumptions of LFIs – their socio-ecological imaginaries – challenge the search for more inclusive transformation, and thus the collective construction of food sovereignty through a people-centred and territorial perspective.

The implications of this in both cases are the formation of small clusters – ecosystems – of LFIs that share the same understanding, with little contestation, of the fundamental problems to be addressed (and how to address them) in the food system and society. At first glance, this relates to the principal mission and type of LFIs. For example, in Preston, this has created two alliances: one focusing on food poverty through a multidimensional approach and another seeking to juxtapose local/sustainable food with marginalised communities. However, the cross-case analysis indicates that the value- and ideology-based mediation of the metabolisms of LFSs and resource circulation is multilayered and not confined to LFIs. Vitoria-Gasteiz's case highlights the social construction of LFIs themselves, not only LFSs. Thus, individual personalities, values and ideologies of people influential within these organisations can also constrain the articulation of LFSs. This was also raised in Preston, where some LFIs were more affected by their leaders than by the collective value-based system of the organisations. Moreover, value-based disagreements are also present within LFIs that share similar discourses (e.g., agroecology) depending on their vision of change and opposition to specific socio-economic structures such as corporate food system logics. Although many of these discrepancies revolve around the vision of LFIs of the food system, the cross-case analysis indicates that religious and political ideologies are also at the core of the dynamics of LFSs. This means that LFSs are deeply politicised (Moragues-Faus, 2017b;

Swyngedouw, 2014), integrating an amalgam interplay of social, political, and other power-relations, which are beyond the overarching mission and type of LFIs.

The contested formation of LFSs based on multi-layered value-based ecosystems has several implications for the construction of inclusive LFSs for food sovereignty. Because of the impregnation of values and ideologies within the dynamics of LFSs, stronger collaborations between LFIs are formed through a selective process. Here, a crucial criterion is having similar thought systems, be it individual or collective. This selection inevitably excludes many LFIs from already established spaces. For instance, in Vitoria-Gasteiz, the agroecological sub-system is deeply connected based on similar political and ideological views, which do not necessarily accept charity- and religious-based solutions and big-scale production of organic foods. This discussion eventually leads to the issue of plurality or similarity within LFSs to change exploitative characteristics of food systems, given that many LFIs continue to operate within the dynamics of conventional economic and social structures. This debate has also been strongly present in food sovereignty literature (Agarwal, 2014; Edelman et al., 2014), particularly regarding to what extent a political movement can dictate the practices of farmers across diverse socio-economic and cultural realities. In the case of LFSs, if boundaries are set on more 'transformative' values and ideologies, what happens if associations use a narrow selective approach to engage with other LFIs? As seen in both cases, the creation of restrictive boundaries is not necessarily positive. Given the dynamic mobilisation of resources and interconnectedness of components, inaction in LFSs (e.g., by disregarding connections) means that trade-offs for LFIs are present, diminishing their potential for change, even though these have not been accounted for when collaborations have been dismissed. Moreover, the cross-case analysis indicates the harmful effects of circulating resources to create spaces based on restrictive ideological values, such as a feeling of not belonging or inferiority by certain LFIs and thus eventual exclusion.

Some scholars and movements, such as La Vía Campesina, (Desmarais, 2007; Di Masso & Zografos, 2015; Friedland, 2010) argue that the separation of LFSs into clusters is not necessarily negative. This argument is based on the fact that the alignment of diverse LFIs might be problematic because it merges divergent – even incommensurable – epistemologies and strategies, potentially eroding political discourses that explicitly contest injustices. However, as stated in Chapter 3, the enactment of food sovereignty in LFSs is the right to collectively act in heterogeneous spaces. Indeed, Iles & Montenegro de Wit (2015) stress food sovereignty's core principle as "the capacity to act authoritatively (or asserting agency); the ability to influence political and economic processes; and the rights to participate and to be consulted" (p. 485). In the context of LFSs, constituted by relational actors that constantly interact in recursive and mutually constituted diverse networks (Goodman et al., 2012), specific values and ideologies should not be imposed over others because of their acceptance as 'just' by some. This diminishes the agency of the components of LFSs and disregards food sovereignty's notion of cultural diversity and thus is a critical issue to considered. Neglecting others might mean that certain LFIs struggle to move beyond progressive strategies because of lost opportunities to develop collective power and thus expand resources.

As suggested by Lopez-Garcia and González de Molina (2021) and seen in both cases, the interventions needed to address the adverse effects of the conventional food system are so challenging that fighting amongst those already marginalised within LFSs makes little sense. In this regard, Stevenson et al. (2008) argue that food transformation needs a multifaceted approach in which LFIs adopt diverse interconnected roles: warriors (contesting power structures), builders (developing pragmatic alternatives), and weavers (developing strategic and conceptual linkages across LFIs). However, a crucial question is: will the inclusion of more conventional actors lead to contradictory strategies, as seen in other studies (Guthman, 2008b; Maye & Kirwan, 2010)? The cross-case analysis indicates that this is not necessarily the case, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz's urban food strategy. The importance lies in recognising variations and distinguishing them from oppositional stances when engaging in collaborative processes, rejecting co-option as being a necessary condition to advance collective change. The following sub-theme illustrates how the cross-analysis of cases provides essential insights to advance towards this acceptance of diversity within LFSs by focusing on the facilitators of building inter- and intra-alliances, highlighting the role of reflexive processes.

### 7.3.2 Reflexivity in Knowledge-Action Networks: Political and Practical Avenues

As mentioned in the previous theme, one of the central barriers to constructing cohesive LFSs pertains to underlying collective and individual values and ideologies. This theme deals with specific instances in which LFIs move beyond individual interests to collectively create new material and symbolic food spaces. It highlights that divergent LFIs can align through practical avenues by sharing resources and promoting food citizenship, helping overcome individualised efforts. In doing so, it calls attention to the challenges of these metabolic flows to embed a people-centred and territorial perspective. This section thus emphasises the relevance of reflexive processes to develop more empowered LFIs and networks, articulating horizontal knowledge-action transformative associations. For this purpose, the analysis compares the different stages of the LFSs of Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz in assembling collaborative LFSs that engage in food sovereignty processes. Ultimately, this section argues that practical connections should not be disregarded as less relevant than political mobilisation. They form part of the articulation and re-articulation of LFSs that can potentially assert the right to act politically in the long term.

The cross-case analysis indicates that LFIs can indeed deliberately surpass ideological and value-based discrepancies to create pragmatic alignments for specific issues that require the exchange of resources –social and material – because of their magnitude. For example, in Preston, the Covid-19 pandemic, besides signalling the multi-scale socio-ecological dependency of LFSs, created an opportunity for LFIs to jointly reclaim the right to food of several marginalised populations during the pandemic. At the same time, previous connections between LFIs in Preston illustrate the alignment of LFSs around developing people's food sensibilities and capacities, building on a transversal aim of food citizenship. Similarly, the assemblage of links between LFIs in Vitoria-Gasteiz hinges upon the collective commitment to educate citizens in non-monetary values of food, albeit with a more political foreground as discussed in Sub-section 7.2.1. The assemblage of connected LFSs through practical avenues, despite issues of discourses

and strategies, in both cases suggests that focusing on the collective identity of LFSs is not necessarily a useful starting point to understand how to build stronger LFSs ties, as joint efforts might be missed in this search. On-the-ground alliances help go beyond individual efforts and reach various segments of the public and gain greater support to effect change (Borrelli et al., 2022; Hassanein, 2003). Moreover, practical avenues of convergence create new ways to develop trust between LFIs, which are critical in developing stronger connections (Bauermeister, 2016).

However, the construction of LFSs should not be confined to this scale of action, as practical connections can be ephemeral and project-based, and structural changes may not be advanced. Previous studies have suggested that informal self-organised networks can cope with, adapt to and transform to change beyond reactive projects (Borrelli et al., 2022). However, this needs to be accompanied by regular interactions under a long-term planning framework. If interactions remain sporadic, no real integration of strategies or efforts is advanced that promotes greater change beyond those individual projects, as seen in Preston's case. LFIs might still maintain their individual ideological and value-based biases despite joining forces, leading again to siloed approaches and thus diminishing their food sovereignty's collective contribution. More specifically, if interactions remain within one-off resource exchanges, LFIs could miss opportunities to jointly reflect on the exploitative relations of current food system structures and how individual initiatives support or contest these. As seen in previous sections, food citizenship and the socio-ecological imaginaries of LFIs must be reconfigured to depart from progressive and reformist approaches that risk the exclusion of certain groups and individualise change.

The cross-case analysis illustrates significant breaking points to nurture a greater collective mobilisation for food system change beyond practical avenues. In Preston, the food insecurity crisis in the city fostered the creation of alliances between LFIs with divergent views on ensuring the right to food, prompting the need to think about structural solutions for food inequalities. However, at the time of data collection this had not led to a stronger coalition aimed at changing unjust food system structures as in Vitoria-Gasteiz. This could be related to the place-based characteristics of LFSs explained in Sub-section 7.2.1 and the alignment of LFIs from only one side of the epistemic rift present in LFSs (urban poverty and food access in cities). Nevertheless, this lack of convergence into more transformative paths does not mean that Preston's LFS will not re-envision itself or change. Indeed, Vitoria-Gasteiz's agroecological network started through practical resource exchanges and joint consumer awareness projects, with these recurrent interactions helping to develop a common political project and a 'radical' food movement following Holt-Giménez and Shattuck's (2011) categorisation. Practical interactions might thus be a starting point in a long-term process of creating interconnected LFSs that create windows of opportunity to disrupt food systems' structures (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2013). What is important for this process, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz's case and starting in Preston, is creating opportunities for collective dialog and deliberation and expansion of networks, fostering processes that begin to reimagine food systems structures and create collective narratives.

The previous paragraph indicates that fostering reflexivity within LFSs might be a significant catalyst to generating broader collectivisation of efforts towards transformative change. Although not necessarily in the context of LFSs, several scholars have outlined this component

for food system restructuring, even within food sovereignty movements (Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2014). The literature emphasises the creation of spaces where food system actors can discuss, define, and redefine a shared language and collective vision of the food system, acknowledging politics, differences, and injustices (Goodman et al., 2012; Sonnino et al., 2014). The findings of both cases also illustrate the relevance of developing enabling and empowering spaces where individual interests are put aside for collective visioning. For example, the participatory process for Vitoria-Gasteiz's food strategy brought together many LFIs, eventually expanding agroecological narratives.

However, the cross-case analysis suggests that specific considerations should be addressed for reflexivity to be successfully fostered if LFSs carry strong ideological divergences and conflicts. The collectivisation of strategies should allow LFIs to voice conflicting views and develop a collective agency that renegotiates and reshapes socio-ecological relations. As stressed by previous literature (Rivera-Ferre et al., 2014; Rossi, 2017; Stevenson et al., 2008), this entails an alignment of LFIs at the conceptual level – beyond practical – under a common goal or 'master frame' with a unifying message. Indeed, in Vitoria-Gasteiz, a people-centred and territorial perspective was introduced through a reflexive process in the urban food strategy development, leading to a collective social pact by deliberating on the drawbacks of the city's food model. Ongoing discussions of the injustices within food systems are crucial elements in democratising the processes to achieve change (Rivera-Ferre et al., 2014). This ultimately might involve negotiations and compromise, which previous literature has criticised as remaining within limited transformative actions (Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017). However, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz, this is not about dismissing the values of LFIs and the overall objective of change. It is about weighing the trade-offs of these processes with a view to long-term transformation. In this sense, contradictions are not a reason to disregard collective work but a way to call for reflexivity in any strategy advanced, which should foster a comprehensive understanding of unequal power relations and diverse worldviews within LFSs.

Food sovereignty is then achieved through this process of articulation and re-articulation of LFSs for the *dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions*, potentially embedding a people-centred and territorial perspective. This means engaging in contested learning and unlearning processes and challenging taken-for-granted paradigms at all scales – individual and collective (Pereira et al., 2020; Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). This reflexive process is not defined by having a cohesive movement with a collective identity constantly mobilising to reclaim injustices. This can be time-consuming and probably not efficient given LFIs' constraints. It means working at different levels – pragmatically, strategically, and politically – in specific instances, whereby LFIs come together to open public debate when food injustices are identified, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz's case. These dynamics have the potential to create foundations for the collectivisation of food systems change, with an acknowledgement that short-term actions are part of an incremental process of transformation. This development of knowledge-action networks can empower LFIs to become a mobilising force with the capacity to contest dominant discourses by generating power within LFSs or 'collective leadership' (Clark et al., 2021; Giambartolomei et al., 2021; Sarabia et al., 2021), potentially initiating innovations to induce change.

As seen in the cases, this process is accelerated when key organisations with high degree of influence and resource availability act as a glue for the structuration of LFSs. The findings of both cases suggest that local authorities are usually regarded as crucial in articulating interconnected LFSs. Therefore, urban (food) governance becomes determinant in developing opportunities to cross-fertilise LFIs and promote food system change's reflexive undertakings. The following section analyses the urban food governance processes in both cities and how these have affected or constrained the development of a reflexive LFSs articulation for food sovereignty, thereby jointly addressing poverty and sustainable food concerns.

## 7.4 PLACE-BASED FOOD POLICYMAKING AND GOVERNANCE

Having discussed the challenges of building interconnected LFSs and the possibility of these limitations through the dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions, third cross-case theme *place-based food policymaking and governance* accentuates the role of urban food governance and policy in articulating these processes. It focuses on untangling the specific role of local authorities and LFIs to construct empowering spaces of socio-political action without skewing power towards a few. In doing so, Sub-section 7.4.1 deals with how different governance approaches lead to different outcomes in term of food sovereignty, particularly regarding the right to food, highlighting the co-responsibility of local authorities in facilitating change without co-opting or fully externalising obligations to LFSs. Sub-section 7.4.2 then illustrates how certain governance approaches can reinforce food system inequalities and diminish collective change through contested institutionalisation processes when bottom-up approaches are distorted for image promotion, project-based gains, and roll-out of government responsibilities. Ultimately, the section argues that the *creation of empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies* is needed to advance change in this context. Both sections raise the question of whether the responsibility for creating interconnected LFSs and thus effecting change should be shared collectively by public-civil society coalitions or if local authorities or LFIs should assume the lead.

### 7.4.1 Collective Responsibility for the Right to Food?

Before discussing how food policymaking at the local level, particularly urban food strategies, influences the construction of reflexive LFSs through participatory spaces, this sub-theme engages with how broader urban food governance processes affect the articulation of LFSs for food sovereignty. In particular, it concentrates on how local authorities' approach to ensuring the right to food in cities affects the connections and disconnections within LFSs, acknowledging the influence of broader governance dynamics beyond just creating spaces for LFIs' interactions (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021). This provides a deeper characterisation of LFSs and their potential for food sovereignty. It specifically puts the lens on food injustices in vulnerable communities, sometimes missed in food sovereignty discussions, as seen in Sub-section 7.2.2. Fundamentally, this sub-section evaluates where the responsibility for the right to food should be placed – within local authorities or collectively – and to what extent, following the conceptualisation of the right to food as a social good under a food sovereignty paradigm.

To begin with, both cases demonstrate that national social policy in the UK and Spain does not provide an accountable social safety system to ensure basic needs to all citizens (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015; Pérez de Armiño, 2014). In this context, local authorities are crucial actors to provide additional support when social security schemes are not enough. However, the cross-case analysis indicates that the differences in local authorities' strategies to deal with this challenge determines if food sovereignty principles are included. On the one hand, in Vitoria-Gasteiz´s case a centralised complementary system led by the local food redistributor and the local government has been prioritised. As seen in this case, this system is filled with contradictions, particularly because of its vertical and exclusionary structure that goes against principles of non-discrimination and self-determination of the right to food (see Chapter 3). Significantly, a key challenge in this context is the restriction of new approaches to food insecurity because of its high centralisation and rules-based infrastructure. Indeed, several LFIs focusing on agroecology and local/sustainable food take access to food for granted because of this institutionalisation of food aid. Moreover, by focusing on individual needs through redistribution measures, even if economic benefits are provided, structural elements of food access, such as participation, are not necessarily addressed (Claeys, 2015b; Mazhar et al., 2007) nor is there a collective reflection of what it means to take this approach.

On the other hand, Preston's approach to food access has its foundation in community empowerment, decentralisation and bottom-up processes, whereby the voluntary, community and faith sectors are crucial in addressing food needs, albeit with limited direct funding from local authorities. As discussed in Chapter 5 and recognised by scholars (Dowler & Lambie-Mumford, 2015), this reflects austerity policies and a relatively uncritical acceptance of conventional food logics to solve societal problems. However, communities' increased involvement has also meant developing a more collective and multidimensional approach to the right to food. This might be related to the City Council acting as a coordinator of services and promoter of dignified and universal strategies, influencing LFSs towards a particular approach but still open to innovations. This has led many LFIs in Preston to address food insecurity from this standpoint. However, new approaches have also been introduced that go even further in combining food access with employability and social security issues. The diversity of actors involved means that food access is rethought from different standpoints and cultural needs, leading to multidimensional solutions, where the inclusion of vulnerable communities' voices for the right to food is more strongly recognised. However, as seen in Chapter 5, many LFIs still prioritise a pragmatic stance of changing immediate realities despite these advances due to their reliance on ongoing funding.

Both cases provide valuable insights to reimagine how the right to food should be treated from a food sovereignty perspective within the parameters that contextual challenges provide. Given the risk of dismissing the state's duty in addressing essential needs, local, regional and national governments should take responsibility for addressing the right to food (Lambie-Mumford, 2013). However, this does not mean that LFIs are not part of helping achieve it. As explained in Chapter 3, the right to food considers that all the components of LFSs should construct fairer and just food systems collectively. Local authorities and LFIs should thus develop the right to food strategies jointly, combining bottom-up with top-down approaches. In this context, local authorities should aim to construct fairer responses to the right to food as much as their powers

permit. This means working collaboratively with LFIs by providing resources (where possible) and deeply coordinating the services. Deep coordination does not mean necessarily imposing strategies but directing LFSs towards more empowering and dignified options to address the right to food and ensuring that LFIs can feed into policies to rethink current strategies.

However, even if LFIs become involved in the progressive realisation of the right to food, there should be caution in accepting this paradigm. As seen in previous studies (Allen, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2016), this could lead to a complete externalisation of the right to food, where governments are not accountable for the strategies used and do not monitor advances to ensure more dignified approaches. This roll-out of responsibilities risks institutionalising charity-based approaches, whereby food access is taken for granted without questioning solutions or merging food questions with broader social and economic determinants (Claeys, 2015b), as in the Vitoria-Gasteiz case. The right to food involves distributing resources, representation/participation, and cultural diversity within the food system and other systems (see Chapter 3), aspects that should be considered in any intervention. Although Preston does account for some of these concerns, the multi-level influences of the austerity and market-driven policies in the UK mean that LFIs still very much focus on material resources for immediate solutions. Compared to Vitoria-Gasteiz, there is no political claim to reassert city councils' and national responsibility for the right to food. For LFSs to contribute to food sovereignty with a people-centred and territorial perspective, the detrimental effects of current policies should be recognised and reflected upon (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Lambie-Mumford, 2013). Here is where one of the responsibilities of LFIs should also lie; in providing an avenue for collective advocacy, campaigning and political action to criticise the inaction by governments across levels.

As seen in previous sections, the possibility for building collective power within LFSs eventually depends on the metabolic processes and circulations within LFSs and their potential to build reflexive LFSs, empowering LFIs to become political entities. In both cases, there is a strong presence of the epistemic rift and strong ideological discrepancies, which has led to a separation of LFIs that specifically address the right to food from those focusing on local/sustainable food. In the context of building a collective approach to food access, this means that mobilisation for the right to food can lose strength, mainly because many LFIs see the right to food struggles – in terms of food access – as distant. As such, a notion of food sovereignty that merges ecological and social justice issues is not present. However, LFIs focusing on poverty and food access are valuable to constructing sustainable and agroecological food systems because of their in-depth understanding of on-the-ground realities to access food in marginalised contexts. Including them in developing more inclusive narratives and approaches could provide the ground for assembling an inclusive people-centred and territorial perspective. Concurring with Manganelli et al. (2019) there is a need to broaden knowledge on the landscape of actors that constitute LFSs, the intricacies of their interactions, and, as a result, the governance dynamics (public and private) that influence their disconnections. As discussed in section 7.3, the facilitation of the construction of more inclusive narratives is recognised by LFSs as the role of local authorities, as they hold the potential resources to create empowering spaces for deliberation. However, as will be highlighted in the following sub-section, there are many contradictions and challenges in ensuring this transition.

### 7.4.2 Bottom-up vs Top-down Urban Food Governance and Policy

Having discussed how urban food governance processes related to the right to food affect the construction of food sovereignty, this sub-theme deals explicitly with the challenges and contradictions of specific approaches to participatory urban food policymaking. In doing so, it focuses on the dynamics of the institutionalisation of collective food transformation processes by comparing Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz. Institutionalisation in this regard refers to the process by which food is positioned as a central concern within the city and relevant public establishments, particularly local authorities through urban food strategies. As explained in Chapter 2, this study conceptualises urban food strategies as a multi-actor process by which the vision of a city's food system is created. This moves the focus beyond governmental documents and policies to the dynamics of urban food policymaking and how this affects the creation of interconnected LFSs for food sovereignty. Based on this premise, this section argues that while urban food strategies and governance can create bridges between LFIs and cultivate deliberation spaces, their application impacts the long-term construction of LFSs. Furthermore, it also illustrates other crucial processes that affect the creation of public and civil society connections, such as policy entrepreneurs/food champions and political will.

The cross-case analysis indicates that the institutionalisation of collective food transformation is critical for LFSs to drive change forward. Preston's case shows how a bottom-up approach to building collaborative food programs can have a positive impact on the interactions of LFSs. Focusing on developing community capacity and integrating LFIs in the strategies employed, the City Council facilitated action instead of directing it, fostering the creation of diverse and reflexive spaces where LFIs took ownership of the initiatives developed. However, a critical challenge of this model is its operational and informal structure, in which no formal commitments exist, and reactive actions are favoured. The literature argues that for urban food governance processes to be impactful and actionable past pilot schemes, continuity must be ensured (Doernberg et al., 2016). The informality of the current governance arrangement in Preston is a significant disadvantage. It is easily dissolvable, putting an end to future work that includes comprehensive and systemic proposals. In this case, it is essential to institutionalise collective efforts, such as developing a municipal food plan with formal approval (e.g., Vitoria-Gasteiz), as it directly links policy change. As argued by Allen (2004), if interconnected LFSs "are to be more than ephemeral, they must become part of the fabric that organises and mediates social relationships" (p.51). Indeed, Vitoria-Gasteiz's case demonstrates that after developing a collective mission within LFSs the next step is to bring the process to established public institutions such as the City Council to ensure continuous collective development. This echoes previous literature that highlights the role of local authorities in initiating, shaping and implementing food policy change (Baldy & Kruse, 2019; Sonnino, 2016).

However, the institutionalisation of collective food change is a dynamic and very contested process, where continuity is not necessarily secured, and de-politicising processes could be fostered. As shown in both cases, a key component of promoting change within policy spaces are 'policy entrepreneurs' or 'food champions', who build trustful public-civil society relations to change policy (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). However, while their presence might help start

collective undertakings and build public-civil society alliances, relying on them for change is problematic. People can quickly leave LFSs because of diverse socio-ecological dynamics and individual personalities may create discord within LFSs (see Sub-section 7.3.1) and thus actions can stall.

Furthermore, as the case of Vitoria-Gasteiz shows, institutionalisation alone is insufficient to ensure continuous change, as its outcome relies on the approach taken. While institutionalisation can aid the construction of reflexive spaces within LFSs (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019), this does not imply that prioritising co-production will be translated into action. The case of Vitoria-Gasteiz exemplifies how formally established participatory decision-making strategies could indeed struggle to establish empowering collaborative structures (Moragues-Faus, 2019; Swyngedouw, 2014) and dismantle interconnected LFSs if the governing culture favours the formation of certain actions while restricting LFIs' voices. In other words, even if a process is considered 'participatory,' a top-down approach can still be implemented wherein local authorities' goals are given preference, and LFIs' role remains consultative (Coplen & Cuneo, 2015; Zerbian et al., 2022b). Consequently, examining the evolution of strategies or policies alone is insufficient to determine whether the institutionalisation of collective mechanisms corresponds to the construction of LFSs for food sovereignty. The decision-making dynamics – politics – must also be taken into account.

What, then, should be the role of local authorities in steering this collective change pathway, considering their potential biases in building a long-term process for food sovereignty? Indeed, local authorities' particular focuses, including participation, reflect complex socio-ecological properties of the places where LFSs are located (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021). Their ability to perform meaningful processes depends on "the regulatory support, decision-making mechanisms and human capacity available" (Mansfield & Mendes, 2013, p. 40). Preston's socioeconomic deprivation and austerity policies, for example, meant that food poverty was made a priority over the establishment of sustainable food systems. The rigid rules-based public system and the economic growth priority of many multilevel policies in Vitoria-Gasteiz have fashioned the city's follow-up adoption of the urban food strategy.

Food sovereignty might thus be best achieved if the alliances of LFIs lead multi-stakeholder platforms that influence policy (food policy councils), as seen in various cities (Reina-Usuga et al., 2022; Sadler et al., 2015). These efforts should not be isolated from institutional approaches. Previous studies suggest a limited impact of LFIs if not accompanied by local authorities' support (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2020a). According to Schiff (2008), this conforms a hybrid governance model with an autonomous status and decision-making power with formal relationships with local governments. Although there is limited evidence about the best organisational form and location of food policy councils, studies increasingly argue for this type of structure as it maximises its structural autonomy, ensuring flexibility in actions and avoiding co-option by local governments (Gupta et al., 2018; Rossi & Brunori, 2015).

However, both cases indicate that LFIs will only be able to engage in this process if there are financial and material resources for them to do so. Without this assurance, the interactions of

LFIs might remain on practical/market-oriented work, whereby structural solutions and policy change are not necessarily fostered. Local authorities need to encourage the creation of spaces with a clear set of agreed-upon common rules that allow transparent, fair, and reciprocal relations (top-down) to address these constraints (Andrée et al., 2019; Levkoe & Wilson, 2019). Simultaneously, explicit methods should be introduced to enable LFIs to take charge of policy co-construction and participate in their terms to cultivate trust across LFSs (bottom-up) (Lopez-Garcia & González de Molina, 2020). This could be accomplished by incorporating proactive actions into urban food strategies that enhance and solidify the city's social tissue and associations among LFIs, as well as allocating resources for direct involvement and partnership building (Lopez-Garcia et al., 2020a; Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015). In order words, installing an institutional architecture that leads to the *creation of empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies.*

Once city councils commit to formalising collective food processes, this process would necessitate a radical shift in current governance spaces and dominant institutional paradigms to preserve essential participatory principles (Berti et al., 2022). As seen in both cases, this depends on political will and sensibilities within the institutional architecture (Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). Without the required political and administrative support, the institutionalisation of collective efforts could translate into the inadequate allocation of resources concerning the actions required by the complexity of this process. Nevertheless, as seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz, many projects are not efficient or effective without this underlying shift towards integrating co-construction and collective responsibility and management. At the same time, this acceptance of public-civil society co-responsibilities should also be embedded in the reflexive articulation of LFSs. Some LFIs reported local authorities' lack of transformative change in both cases, but simultaneously decided to disengage from urban food policymaking processes. This detachment from policy change can potentially stagnate previous ‘wins’ – the presence of an urban food strategy in Vitoria-Gasteiz signals the first step in a contested process of transformation. Thus, LFIs should recognise that institutional change is incremental and can only be achieved if there is an ongoing claim from the bottom up and capitalisation of available resources to engender change across levels (Buchan et al., 2019). This requires strong collective leadership within LFSs to engage with local authorities in this capacity and skew political priorities towards *processes* and not just outputs. The importance is to develop power through associations and relations (both personal and organisational) and take advantage of opportunities when these arise.

Balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies, however, raises inevitable tensions. As seen in Preston’s case and previous studies (Harper et al., 2009), collective spaces can still be influenced by individual personalities and marginalise certain issues, missing the opportunity to embed a territorial and people-centred perspective. Moreover, as seen in several studies and the studied cases, there is still the issue of including vulnerable populations and farmers, in these governance structures (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021). This means that attention to *practices* rather than just advocating or searching for the achievement of a predetermined goal is needed (Levkoe and Wilson, 2019). This brings about considerations of the value of the networks of LFIs and policy-building mechanisms as expressions – prefigurative politics (Levkoe, 2015) – of the inclusive

socio-ecological imaginaries that follow the people-centred and territorial perspective discussed in Section 2.2. In other words, empowering and reflexive spaces for collective visioning and policymaking in LFSs should enact and experiment with food sovereignty principles themselves (e.g., participatory democracy and justice).

## 7.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on problematising the socio-ecological imaginaries found within LFSs, identifying emerging system characteristics of LFSs, and evaluating the role of local authorities and LFSs in driving change. In doing so, a crucial task has been to identify transformative qualities with the capacity to assist in the delivery of food sovereignty in cities by comparing Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz. This has helped identify three critical aspects for this process. First, there is a need to repoliticise food citizenship within LFSs and address the disconnection between rural and urban struggles. Second, the cross-case analysis highlights the need to accept diversity within LFSs and politicise collective strategies to foster food sovereignty. Finally, the chapter illustrates the relevance of co-responsibility between local authorities and LFIs in facilitating practices and governance processes that are intrinsically transformative by enacting food sovereignty principles.

Findings from the cross-case analysis indicate that food citizenship – a key practice of LFIs – needs to be repoliticised through an engagement with food sovereignty and agroecological principles to avoid the risk of perpetuating conventional logics. However, there are important weaknesses that counterbalance this process. The disconnection between rural and urban realities – the epistemic rift – in LFSs signals that this transition should include a systemic view of food that prioritises people's lived experiences of injustices and the collective construction of territories. A *people-centred and territorial perspective* to food within LFSs is thus proposed, which extends notions of justice in current discourses and acknowledges the importance of multiple interconnected identities and ecologies in the construction of LFSs. However, the politics of LFSs raise a crucial challenge for this to succeed. The cross-case analysis highlights the depth of ideological discrepancies within LFSs, which affect key food sovereignty principles of agency and inclusive participation. Spaces of deliberation in which the *dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions* is cultivated can contribute to surpassing this issue. As described earlier, practical connections are important in this process, as they are part of the ongoing assemblage of LFSs towards strategic alignments. Eventually, these dynamics should foster empowered networks of LFIs that politicise LFSs, articulating horizontal knowledge-action transformative associations and collective actions. It is in these places that a *people-centred and territorial perspective* is developed. This does not mean striving for ideological cohesiveness, but for the alignment around a joint project of change in recognition of the diverse roles of LFIs, their socio-ecological imaginaries, and the implications of accepting pluralism within LFSs.

The analysis indicates that different modes of urban food governance have different effects in the construction of LFSs for food sovereignty. Bottom-up approaches, in which LFIs take the lead, can have positive effects in reconceptualising food issues from different standpoints, influencing the implementation of actions of formal institutions. However, the informality and limited

resources of these spaces means that collective actions have limited capacity to foster structural solutions. Thus, LFSs need to become part of the institutional structure that shape food systems dynamics. This means that the institutionalisation of collective efforts in the form of a formal commitment to changing food policy is needed. Nevertheless, findings from this study disagree with previous literature that position local authorities as the main actors in initiating and shaping food policymaking (Baldy & Kruse, 2019; Sonnino, 2016). The comparison of cases raises issues of top-down approaches due to rigid structures, vested agendas, and political will. In this regard, the study argues for the acceptance of collective responsibility between LFIs and local authorities through the *creation of empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies* that consider implementation processes and co-management of actions. Local authorities should adopt a functional and facilitator role by providing resources and ensuring that the right institutional infrastructure is in place for LFIs to engage in co-constructing policy in their own terms. On the other hand, LFIs should be regarded as a legitimate voice in shaping policy and act as a counterforce to co-option and acceptance of conventional norms. Nevertheless, as seen earlier, this means a change in governing culture from both LFIs and local authorities to really commit to this transformative path.

# Chapter 8 – CONCLUSION

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This PhD research project aimed to examine how local food systems contribute to, and illuminate understandings of, food sovereignty and explore the implications of this for future policy, practice and research. As explained in Chapter 1, this was supported by four specific objectives:

1. To investigate how local food systems are constituted in two contrasting geographical and socio-political contexts by identifying what kinds of local food initiatives and other organisations operate in each case, including their values, discourses and corresponding approaches.
2. To examine how the socio-political, economic and natural environment within which local food systems are located influence their composition and function.
3. To evaluate the circulating material, social and capital flows that shape the dynamics of local food systems and how these affect their assemblage and components.
4. To analyse how the social processes, power relations and discursive constructions within each local food system influence the delivery of food sovereignty processes.

As illustrated in Chapters 1 and 2, the aim and objectives of the research responded to the gap found in the literature review regarding the analysis of the articulation of LFSs in cities with contrasting socio-institutional environments and how internal and external processes affect their outcomes. Chapter 2 argued that, to achieve these aim and objectives, LFSs should be investigated as imperfect processes influenced by multi-scalar dynamics, which have diverse and uneven trajectories to developing more just and sustainable food systems. Chapter 3 presented the conceptual framework of this study to comply with this approach – a political food systems approach to food sovereignty – combining a food systems approach, UPE and food sovereignty. This conceptual framework was informed by the research paradigm of this study – social constructionism and critical interactionism, prioritising a relational and process-based understanding of LFSs.

This conceptual framework was applied through a case study methodology to consider how contextual and place-based characteristics, such as governance dynamics, affect the articulation of LFSs. A qualitative case study methodology was selected, as it allows the investigation of complex social phenomena with attention to context and meaning-making processes; a key concern of the study (Objectives 1-4). This methodology encompassed three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document analysis. As explained in Chapter 4, Stake's (2005) guidance on case study research argues that case study questions should guide the research and, as such, provide the analytical frame to organise the study. For this study, the case study questions were built on the research's objectives, the literature review, and the conceptual framework (see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4). Informed by the case study questions, the thesis has examined two cases, Preston (Chapter 5) and Vitoria-Gasteiz (Chapter 6). Finally, building on a cross-case analysis of the lessons learnt from both cases, it has identified crucial transformative qualities within LFSs that can assist in constructing more just and sustainable food systems (Chapter 7).

This concluding chapter discusses some critical lessons learnt from the analyses provided in the empirical and analytical chapters. Crucially, it focuses on how these analyses expand knowledge on LFSs and food sovereignty and examines their implications for advancing more just and sustainable food systems in cities by building collaborative networks of LFIs. The chapter has four main sections. Section 8.2 reflects on how the PhD research project responds to the research objectives and the gaps found in the literature, highlighting its original contribution to knowledge and ongoing academic debates. In doing so, Sub-section 8.2.1 discusses the main cross-cutting conclusions from the empirical and analytical chapters, which have broader relevance for current debates on LFSs. This is followed by Sub-section 8.2.2, which concentrates on how the theoretical and methodological lens adopted for the study expands knowledge about LFSs. Section 8.3 discusses the strengths and limitations of the study. Section 8.4 draws from this discussion to provide key recommendations for practice and policy. Finally, Section 8.5 points to future research directions identified from the findings and limitations of the study.

## 8.2 MAKING SENSE OF THE ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS: FROM RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS TO RESEARCH FINDINGS

The conceptual framework and its application through the selected methodology were critical in achieving the aim and objectives of this research. The analytical focus derived from them allowed the examination of the discourses and approaches – socio-ecological imaginaries – that LFIs advance in each place and how these are mediated by the broader food system and structural processes (Objectives 1 and 2). In particular, the construction of narratives attached to social change was critical in understanding the different types of LFIs that operate in differing geographical and socio-political cities and assessing their individual potentials for change. Moreover, a key concern was analysing how LFSs produce enabling or disabling conditions for food sovereignty depending on the social and material processes, discourses and power dynamics within them (Objectives 3 and 4). Each case study presented valuable insights regarding this inquiry, particularly regarding the different stages and maturity of LFSs in assembling collaborative LFSs that engage in food sovereignty processes. Notably, the constantly shifting state of LFSs due to multi-level value-based discrepancies and uneven resource distribution found in both cases, in which the role of local authorities is vital, means that constructing interconnected and transformative LFSs involves more than the willingness of LFIs to align.

A central finding that responds to the research aim and objectives is that the complex internal and external processes affecting LFSs can lead to informal networks of LFIs with a shared and relatively uncontested understanding of the main challenges in food systems and strategies to address them. These connections can develop trust in some segments of the LFS and positively affect the right to food and the democratisation of food systems. However, because of their usual focus on reactive and practical projects, they miss a collective reflection on addressing entrenched injustices across food systems (from farm to fork). Significantly, in this context, the answer to whether LFSs can contribute to food sovereignty revolves around developing practices across LFSs, from individual LFIs to governance mechanisms, that enact food sovereignty principles and do not just pursue specific outcomes for food security and sustainability. As such, the dynamic articulation of LFSs is intrinsically transformative (by and through itself), leading to

the construction of new socio-ecological relations and sites of possibility that lead to sought and unexpected positive outcomes.

Consequently, as this section will discuss, a critical contribution of this research relies upon expanding insights of *why*, *when, and how* change occurs in LFSs and the factors – social, economic and political – that influence these processes. Notably, this thesis provides an analytical lens to examine the potential outcomes of the dynamics of LFSs for food system transformation more convincingly. It views the non-static and fluid nature of any collective change process while recognising its possible strategies to move beyond progressive approaches. Sub-section 8.2.1 discusses three main concluding themes that cut across this thesis's analytical and empirical parts: politicising LFSs, embedding reflexivity and coproduction. Sub-section 8.2.2 then engages with this thesis's contribution to theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding and studying LFSs.

### 8.2.1 Empirical Findings: Advancing Knowledge of How Local Food Systems Can Contribute to Food Sovereignty

Three significant conclusions drawn from the findings have broader relevance for current debates on how to align the efforts of LFIs to enact more significant change: politicising LFSs, embedding reflexivity across LFSs and governance spaces, and promoting coproduction across levels. This sub-section discusses each in detail by referring to the discussions advanced in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In this sense, this sub-section focuses on the instances where opportunities for collective action within LFSs arise to achieve food security and sustainability through food sovereignty processes. As such, it illuminates the processes identified by responding to the research's aim and objectives through which values and goals align within LFSs that lead to transformative place-based outcomes.

#### *Politicising LFSs*

The first key finding that cuts across this thesis is the idea of *politicising LFSs*. That is, there is a need for LFSs to engage in political action and practices, and thus develop collective political subjects. The findings of this study indicate that many LFIs share the same aim to increase food citizenship and thus democratise food systems in the context of food sovereignty, despite advancing divergent discourses. However, there could be a risk of individualising change by adopting this approach if not framed under a more political and collective imaginary. Notably, attention needs to be placed on the current bifurcation of urban food questions that construct two sub-systems within LFSs, which, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, miss a systemic perspective of food-related concerns, and thus obstruct the joint development of more inclusive LFSs. These findings have implications for the operationalisation of transformative LFSs, suggesting that politicising LFSs should start at the micro-level with LFIs positioning their efforts within a wider collective frame for the restructuring of food systems and, as a result, imagining new ways of being in common.

LFIs can begin to relate to broader sets of structural issues in the food system by leveraging and acknowledging their social and political capacity to act collectively. This has the potential to lead

to a broader mobilisation for more inclusive change. The examination of how this mobilisation can take place illustrates that the development of a collective political sensibility at the system-level is a dynamic process that starts with the self-organisation of LFSs, albeit facing many constraints, which mainly relate to resource and ideological barriers. Nevertheless, as demonstrated through the analysis of the cross-case findings, the politicisation of LFSs can lead to reclaiming power in food systems and local governance and building democratic capacity. This helps the formation of empowered territorial configurations that foster transformative actions and that are an active part of the institutional structure that shape food systems dynamics.

*Reflexivity*

For the politicisation of LFSs to succeed, *reflexivity* must be present within LFIs, LFSs and coproduced governance spaces. Examining the social process, power relations, and discursive constructions within LFSs showed that collectivising strategies could positively affect food sovereignty if LFSs promote constant deliberation and ongoing debate. The possibility of bringing divergent LFIs into the discussion can bring about the reformulation of dominant narratives within LFSs and thus create more inclusive relations and strategies and, in turn, reshape socio-ecological relations in cities. As seen in Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston, this can help bridge the epistemic rift discussed in Chapter 7 and include more structural solutions to address the right to food. Moreover, it helps form horizontal knowledge-action networks that engage in a joint political project and promote people´s active participation in the food system. Nevertheless, if not framed within a paradigm that explicitly aims to address injustices across food systems, promoting deliberation and debates is not enough.

The evaluation of how this affects the ability of LFSs to contribute to food sovereignty raises the need for a recurrent critical evaluation of collective actions and practices advanced in achieving the right to food and democratisation of food systems through a fair distribution of resources, recognition of cultural diversity, and participation. As such, reflexivity is a vital part of achieving food sovereignty through LFSs, which should be translated into a dynamic process of conceptual alignment and acknowledgement of diversity. By analysing each case individually, the study also illustrates that reflexivity should not only be present in the interactions of LFIs with others, but also, within themselves. That is, not just reclaiming change but also seeing that they, as social institutions, also require constant learning and adaptation to support the construction of fairer and more sustainable futures. This means that reflexivity is not a set of principles or values that should be followed but a process in which LFIs (individually and collectively) acknowledge the imperfection of their actions in pursuing particular goals (Goodman et al., 2012). However, acknowledging the imperfect character of strategies for food systems change does not mean that strategies for improvement are dismissed. As shown in this thesis, this involves embracing complexity and pursuing the achievement of food sovereignty through intrinsically transformative processes.

*Coproduction*

In particular, the critical examination of the dynamics of LFSs in the empirical chapters draws attention to *coproduction* in any collective process. The analysis of LFSs uncovers the contingent

and relational character of LFSs, and their internal processes and outcomes, which can be enhanced or constrained by interconnected contextualised governance mechanisms that generate an uneven landscape of resources and power. The findings highlight how urban food governance mechanisms can perpetuate power geometries within LFSs and negatively influence collaborative working if participatory values are not embedded from conceptualisation to implementation. This highlights the difficulties and uncertainty of multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms resulting from various modes of capacity building in local decision-making and governing. Moreover, as seen in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the role of local authorities in shaping the articulation of LFSs exceeds the development of urban food governance mechanisms; prioritising certain agendas over others and the subsequent allocation of resources affects the dynamics between LFIs within a place. In this context, focusing on the micropolitics of LFSs and their socio-institutional environments signalled the need to balance bottom-up and top-down governance dynamics to empower and enhance the social architecture of LFSs.

Notably, the findings raise the need to extend these ideas beyond civil society-public relations. Constructing collective visions and mobilisation within LFSs should also be coproduced across the diverse LFIs to avoid skewing power towards the most influential or resourceful LFIs. Crucially, this means that the vision of LFSs should reflect the diversity of actors within them, with particular attention to those that are stripped of meaning. The shift in LFSs to include these processes implies a deeper engagement and responsibility – both inside and outside LFSs – to create specific environments that embody food sovereignty principles rather than merely pursuing transformative goals. This means managing the roles and expectations of the different stakeholders within LFSs, including local authorities, LFIs and other influential players, recognising the capacity and positionality of each in pursuing a particular agenda. Ultimately, the coproduction process within LFSs should aim to foster and enhance the social tissue and associations within LFSs through a notion of pluralism to allow for a constructive interchange between heterogeneous groups, recognising that divergence and disagreement are part of this process.

### 8.2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

Beyond the significant contributions to knowledge discussed in Sub-section 8.2.1, the study has also provided new insights into theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding and studying LFSs, particularly concerning what constitutes LFSs, their components, and processes.

The methodological and theoretical lens adopted helped address the weaknesses found in previous studies, which did not necessarily recognise the relational character of LFIs. The use of the political food systems approach to food sovereignty helped identify how the work of LFIs are collectively mediated by their mutual interrelationships and contextual dynamics. Significantly, it allowed for the analysis of power relations and value discrepancies within LFSs and between LFSs and their socio-institutional environments, highlighting that any analysis of LFSs should be concerned with the interactions between contextual characteristics, internal mechanisms and processes, and outcomes. This approach draws empirical attention to the barriers to collectivising change within LFSs, which include: a relatively uncritical use of food citizenship to

change food systems; lack of a systemic view of change; ideological and value-based discrepancies; uneven distribution of resources; and contested governance dynamics for the right to food and collectivisation of change. These findings highlight the importance of characterising and understanding LFSs by tracing the (dis)connections that produce them and thus provide them with their specific properties. This represents a departure from previous studies that have not analysed the internal dynamics of LFSs concerning their self-organisation beyond recognising the lack of or constraints in collaborations (see Chapter 2).

Moreover, using an instrumental collective case study methodology enriches understanding of the pathways needed to advance change within LFSs to contribute to more sustainable and just food systems. By identifying lessons that bring about further understandings of phenomena, this methodology has aided the identification of crucial points for the articulation of LFSs that may have the capacity to assist in the delivery of food sovereignty in cities. As such, the study helps identify feedback loops of diverse configurations of LFSs for the democratisation of food systems and the right to food. As seen in Chapter 7, these include the inclusion of a people-centred and territorial perspective, the dynamic and reflexive construction of collective visions, and the creation of empowering spaces by balancing top-down and bottom-up strategies. In this regard, in comparison to previous research, this study has started to shed light on the conflicts and tensions within LFSs and on what can be learnt from those situations and strategies in which collective actions enable positive models of change. As demonstrated in this thesis, collaborative networks of LFIs can create virtual platforms to build the social, cultural, and political capacities needed to meet a wide range of food-related challenges if they build on informal connections to pursue cross-solidarity and inclusive modes of social change.

With its focus on the components of LFSs and a system-level analysis of their assemblage, the study thus enables an expansion of the existing body of work on LFIs and their collaborative engagements, particularly highlighting their place-based and fluid dimensions. This study advances our understanding of what constitutes LFSs and the factors that influence their articulation by introducing an innovative framework to understand LFSs; it analyses their articulation at two levels – at the level of components (LFIs) and collectively. Ultimately, the conceptual framework helped unpack the relationship between food sovereignty and LFSs, and what food sovereignty means in LFSs, identifying its process-based and relational character across LFSs, from LFIs to LFSs and their socio-institutional environments. Such an approach enables the transformative potential of LFSs to be questioned and, in doing so, counteracts celebratory readings of LFSs – a tendency that has permeated studies on individual LFIs – while also identifying and unpacking potential opportunities for change. Specifically, the theoretical and methodological lens adopted for this study highlights the significance and meaning of bringing a range of groups and institutions to advance more sustainable and just food systems.

Ultimately, the comprehensive view of LFSs that this thesis signals the need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches to the study of LFIs and their interdependencies. The conceptual framework advanced in this thesis calls for attention to the interactions between LFIs, the role of individual LFIs within LFSs, and the influence of governance on LFSs. In having a systemic and multi-level conceptualisation of LFSs, including their outcomes, the study has had to draw on

diverse research areas, ranging from urban food governance, alternative/local food scholarship, and emergency food, among others (see Chapters 2 and 3). This means that to progress knowledge on how to organise food differently, greater attention needs to be paid to how the studied concerns merge with ideas already discussed in different academic spaces. Eventually, this can lead to a much broader understanding of the different cross-cutting issues that influence the reality of collectivising the efforts of LFIs.

## 8.3 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This section discusses the strengths of the research process, which generated deeper insights into the construction of LFSs and their contribution to food sovereignty. The section also outlines limitations of the research for determining particular dynamics of LFSs due to the study's scope. This informs the recommendations for future research presented in Section 8.4.

*Strengths*

This thesis has advanced a relational, process- and place-based analysis of LFSs and the consequences of these dynamics, which has been consistently applied in the study through the research paradigm, conceptual framework, and methodology. This approach emphasises meaning-making processes within LFSs, aiding the analysis of how divergent ideologies, a crucial barrier for interconnected LFSs identified in the literature (Chapter 2), affect the possibility of aligning the efforts of LFIs. This has helped identify a significant disconnection within LFSs – the epistemic rift (Sub-section 7.2.2) – and a possible space of discursive convergence, precisely, the cross-cutting aim to reassert food citizenship (Sub-section 7.2.1). However, as seen in Sub-section 8.2.2, a critical aspect that this thesis puts forward compared to previous studies is the emphasis on how these meaning-making processes affect the everyday spaces of engagement of diverse LFIs. In particular, the use of a food systems approach made possible the identification of the formation and structure of networks of LFIs and assessed how the non-linearity, temporality, and dynamism of them generate positive or negative feedback loops across LFSs. Viewing LFSs as complex *systems* compared to movements then has proven to be essential to this thesis, as it allowed for the identification of interactions that do not necessarily have a clear direction, but still have meaningful impacts. Indeed, the findings of this thesis highlight that practical connections should not be disregarded as less relevant in the formation of transformative LFSs; they form part of the articulation and re-articulation of LFSs that can potentially assert the right to act politically in the long term (Sub-section 7.3.2).

Bringing UPE into this analytical approach has allowed for the identification of the everyday exercises of power and unequal relations within LFSs. This has highlighted, for example, how through the circulation of social, discursive, and material resources LFIs or local authorities can create exclusionary spaces where the agency of certain LFIs is limited (Section 5.5 and Section 6.5). Notably, this has shed light on the influence of the selective process through which collaborations between LFIs arise on the collective mobilisation from progressive strategies to more transformative actions (Sub-section 7.3). Indeed, a crucial concern of the thesis has been how different forms of convergence and divergence between LFIs affect potential food sovereignty processes. Food sovereignty has been used to operationalise a relational assessment

of the food security and sustainability outcomes of LFSs. The usefulness of this approach lies in its affinity with both analysing the processes through which LFIs and LFSs pursue food security and sustainability and the capacity of these processes to collectively construct a transformative basis for wider social change. In particular, the overarching strength of the approach of food sovereignty for this thesis has been in assessing the inclusiveness (who counts) and situated justice practices (what problems and how) across LFSs, from the individual to the collective, identifying which that collective processes are not enough if crucial principles that address power asymmetries and injustices are not considered (Section 7.3).

The methodology used in this study was particularly valuable in operationalising the relational, process- and place-based analysis of LFSs and their outcomes. A key strength of the study has been having Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston as the selected cases because of the different stages of formation and maturity of their LFSs, allowing for the recognition of when LFSs surpass practical and informal connections to interrelated collective actions (Sub-section 7.3.2). Moreover, given the complexity of LFSs, the use of research methods and analysis beyond just the integration of findings towards recognising the discontinuities between them as part of deepening knowledge of LFSs was essential. Indeed, there is no single and superior explanation for the construction of LFSs for food sovereignty that can be derived from each individual case; there are certain forms/combinations of LFSs that lead to specific processes and outcomes. In this way, 'objective' comparison and contrast, as argued, for example, through a traditional version of triangulation (see Leung, 2015) is not useful. The focus should be the identification of the social processes within LFSs that transcend individual specificities, as advanced by case study research. Particularly important for this undertaking was the use of thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006), which moves beyond merely constructing aggregated categories of the collected data to identify meaningful patterns across the cases (Chapter 3). Having categories such as ´Barriers for collaborations´ or 'Understandings of food security and sustainability', would have provided a superficial analysis of the studied LFSs, in which the interactions between discourses, situated practices, and relations are missed because of its focus on summarising findings on restrictive domains.

*Challenges and limitations*

While the study was able to engage with the different discursive, material, social and capital flows that constitute LFSs and how this might affect their outcomes, there have been some limitations and challenges in analysing certain aspects of LFSs due to the scope and approach of the research.

The application of the conceptual framework posed some challenges because of early assumptions drawn from the literature review. A crucial issue of this study has been analysing the motivations LFIs attach to food security and sustainability to evaluate how they relate to food sovereignty processes. These concepts have been argued to be some of the main guiding frames of the actions of LFIs (see Sub-section 2.5.2 and Section 3.3). Thus, it was assumed that analysing how LFIs understand them would provide a window for the socio-ecological imaginaries of LFIs, allowing for the identification of discursive disconnections within LFSs, and how this affects collective change (Chapter 3). Nevertheless, as shown in Vitoria-Gasteiz´s case, LFIs use a variety

of frameworks that do not necessarily include the concepts of food security and sustainability. The utility of the theoretical and methodological approach in this context was its underlying basis in social constructionist epistemology and qualitative design. The research was thus able to adapt to capture the particularities of the studied LFSs, which might divert from the initial assumptions based on the literature, for example, by focusing on the mission statement rather than their understanding of food security and sustainability in Vitoria-Gasteiz (see Sub-section 4.2.2). This does not mean, however, that this shift in focus did not provide a picture of the underpinning views of how to reach food security and sustainability in Vitoria-Gasteiz´s LFS. A core aim of LFIs is arguably to achieve food security and sustainability regardless of the concepts they use; the difference relies on the socio-ecological imaginaries attached to their strategies and, thus, their views of social change. In other words, the importance lies in capturing the meanings behind the actions of LFIs, which underpin all the different concepts – such as food security, sustainability, the local, food poverty, or agroecology – that they might use. As seen in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this thesis was able to capture these underlying thought systems providing the basis for understanding the many worlds within LFSs.

The first limitation regarding the scope of the research relates to capturing the agency of material and non-human actors in shaping LFSs, which is a relevant feature of the conceptualisation of LFSs as socio-ecological constructs proposed by UPE and a food-systems approach. When appropriate, the findings have highlighted the dialectical social and ecological dimension of the dynamics of the analysed LFSs. For example, the stronger focus of LFIs on food production and agroecology in Vitoria-Gasteiz compared to Preston might be related to the higher number of farm holdings and farmland around the city. Moreover, the study also identified how the materiality of certain non-human elements of LFSs, such as physical spaces or offices, can mediate the interactions between LFIs (Section 7.3). Thus, some essential dynamics of the ecological and material characteristics of LFSs as suggested by UPE were accounted for in the study. However, the research cannot offer an authoritative account of the agency of non-humans in shaping LFSs. This has been because of the scope of the research. A stronger focus on this aspect would have shifted the research's scope toward the mediating role of objects in the relationships between LFIs and LFSs, as proposed by ANT (Latour, 2005), missing specific attention to how the interactions between LFIs (which are shaped by objects) constitute LFSs and their outcomes.

The study's scope was also limited in understanding the experience of people who benefit and engage with LFIs regarding the LFS. That is, the study aimed to evaluate how specific constructions of LFSs might have positive or negative effects concerning food sovereignty and how food sovereignty could be included in them. However, the findings cannot provide an account of how food sovereignty is experienced beyond the scope of LFIs and LFSs to understand how those benefitting from the interactions of LFIs experience these collective outcomes. Beyond capacity constraints imposed upon the research, this is because of the system-level analysis used for this research, which was purposefully selected to address the identified knowledge gap (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, as will be discussed Section 8.5, this and the other limitations open up opportunities for future research.

## 8.4 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE STUDY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

Having discussed this study's strengths and limitations given its particular focus, this section deals with how this and the study's findings point to what might be needed to continue to move LFSs towards the realisation of just and sustainable food systems. In this sense, this section discusses recommendations practice and policy by outlining transformative pathways for LFSs, LFIs and local and national public policy.

### 8.4.1 Recommendations for Practice

The findings from this study also provide practical recommendations for advancing LFSs that contribute to food sovereignty. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have already discussed some of these considerations by examining the data in the context of relevant literature to understand more fully the study's implications. This section engages with these insights by bringing them together to start developing a framework across the different levels of LFSs through which critical steps needed to advance food system change can be identified.

*Inclusive socialisation and accountability mechanisms*

This study has demonstrated that the collectivisation of strategies can reap beneficial outcomes for individual LFIs and enhance the collective capacity of LFSs regarding food sovereignty. This means that LFIs should prioritise time and space (and resources) for cross-sectoral socialisation, aiming to develop an interconnected LFS with a joint long-term vision of the food system in which the diversity of LFIs can feel represented. For this, specific focuses for LFSs be:

- Strengthen and broaden existing networks and alliances through, for example, social events that allow different LFIs to present their work to each other and discuss points of convergence.
- Strategic planning should include short-term collaborative projects that encourage the intermediate- and long-term establishment of interconnected LFSs.
- Embrace the diversity of LFIs within a place, avoiding the discrimination of LFIs based on value-laden discrepancies and engage in unprejudiced and constructive dialogue
- Create empowering processes for discursive engagement across LFSs in the form of governance spaces that bring LFIs together for reflection and vision development.

As seen in the cases, the creation of governance spaces for LFIs to coalesce is difficult because of diverse interests, uneven resource distribution and power dynamics. Thus, there should be specific accountability mechanisms to avoid this limitation to promote the constant scrutiny of actions and governance mechanisms (Coplen & Cuneo, 2015), as exemplified in the global food sovereignty movement. This could include:

- Jointly define the contributions and responsibilities of actors involved (e.g., through a formal cooperation agreement)

- Specify the tasks to be undertaken by an appointed 'leader(s)' LFI, which should concentrate on building collective capacity transversally within LFSs, or level-up participation based on power imbalances (e.g., quotas).
- Evaluate what is being addressed through the vision and projects proposed and what and who is set aside and why.

*Moving beyond ´consumers´ and 'producers'*

Overall, this study demonstrates that most LFIs rely very much on traditional conceptualisations of individuals as 'consumers' and 'producers', which depending on the side of the food chain of their work, restricts their possibility of building a systemic approach to food-related concerns. In this context, there needs to be a change of the paradigm on which LFIs ground their work, leaving behind this limiting and unhelpful language. Work on food citizenship in the UK refers to this to shifting to a 'Citizen Mindset', acknowledging that we all collectively can seek the best outcome for all (New Citizenship Project & Food Ethics Council, 2017). LFIs should thus accept and build on their contribution to changing food systems, recognising that, because of the symbiotic relationships present within LFSs, their actions have direct and indirect impacts on fostering inclusive and sustainable change for all. Essential steps for this involve:

- Shift conversations toward people's everyday experiences of injustices and relationships with food rather than the food itself, recognising the multiple interconnected identities and ecologies of LFSs.
- Search for ways to invest in the organisation of collective-just working models that address access to food, improve farmers' livelihoods and work with nature.
- Rethink governance models to include possibilities of building cooperative and participatory structures (e.g., second tier LFIs or co-ownership) that bring together the efforts of smaller LFIs.

This work might require a redirecting of resources of LFIs and might be unfeasible for more disadvantaged LFIs, such as small-scale farming projects or those heavily reliant on a specific stream of funding. Nevertheless, this shift should not be seen as an individual undertaking and should be based on the collective strength of the LFSs, pooling resources toward this goal. Influential or second tier LFIs, those holding more resources and power within LFSs, can play an active role in shaping local or regional policy development through conversations, campaigning, and advocacy to support this development. Recommendations in relation to this include:

- Focus policy engagement with local and national authorities on establishing explicit expectations for the support of interconnected LFSs that integrate systemic approaches to the right to food, from consumption to production.
- Develop collective projects with a specific strand for evaluation to construct a local evidence-base repertoire of the impact and outcomes of the collectivisation of strategies.

### 8.4.2 Recommendations for Policy

Of course, as seen in the cases, for the previous steps to be possible, there needs to be a supportive socio-institutional environment, raising the importance of public policy. This sub-section offers recommendations based on the research findings and conclusions for local and national policy makers.

*Local level: Focus on building social capital within LFSs*

At a local level, there is the need to redirect policy efforts from specific projects to facilitate activities that support the development of networks and collective processes. That is, provide the infrastructure needed to strengthen the social capital of LFSs with eventual links to policy implementation. This requires local authorities to provide resources so that LFIs and civil society have the capacity to participate in collaborative undertakings. In this sense, local authorities should take on the role of facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration within LFIs, identifying synergies across LFSs, and thus harnessing their collective power. Particular recommendations for local authorities are:

- Acknowledge local authorities' relevance and responsibility in supporting the development of sustainable – economic, social, and environmental – food systems.
- Evaluate what conceptualisation of sustainability is being put forward in current policies and identify if it includes notions of economic, environmental, and social justice.
- Identify the possibilities of public action in developing sustainable and just food systems locally within local authorities' remit.
- Diagnose how current policies influence the interactions between LFIs and how these miss opportunities for more significant outcomes.
- Set up specific working groups within local authorities to identify points of convergence of diverse food-related issues and LFIs working on them.
- Provide adequate public human and financial resources to promote cross-sectoral collaboration within municipal departments and between them and LFIs.
- Include the development of interconnected LFSs as part of work packages of grants and fundings received from central governments, the EU, or other institutions.

Moreover, focusing on the socialisation of LFSs should include specific attention to what values are being brought into this process, specifically once the collectivisation of LFIs´ strategies is institutionalised through urban food governance mechanisms. First steps for this should include:

- Clearly define the role of local authorities in urban food strategies and multi-stakeholder platforms, including being transparent about their expectations of these processes.
- Install binding solutions for the commitments made in coproduced strategies, whereby local authorities can be held accountable if certain values/ agreed matters are not carried out.
- Prioritise public-civil society co-governing programmes, which previous literature has demonstrated that limit incoming governments to dissolve (IPES-Food, 2017).

*National level: Multilevel support*

To support this policy shift at the local level, policy makers nationally should recognise the value of thinking about LFSs as a vector for driving change as a first step. Although marginal, food relocalisation is starting to be recognised both in the Basque Country and England as a possible avenue to develop more just and sustainable food systems. In England, for example, the National Food Strategy recognises the need for urban food governance mechanisms to advance toward more just and sustainable food systems. However, the focus is still narrow, prioritising individual projects or initiatives that benefit specific community groups. Bringing into higher policy levels the idea of harnessing the power of LFIs as a collaborative network would shift general discourse and support the work of local authorities for this process. This would mean that national government bodies work collaboratively with local authorities to support the development of LFSs, setting up a multilevel governance framework that would focus on building the foundations for collective and integrated action.

The first steps toward this focus should:

- Integrate the right to food as a key pillar of national food strategies, in which food sovereignty and the role of LFSs is recognised. This could be informed by successful examples in other countries, for example, the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy initiated in Brazil by President Lula da Silva in 2003 (Graziano da Silva et al., 2011).
- Initiate a consultation on the role of interconnected LFSs in developing just and sustainable food systems and the role of national policy to support their development.
- Make national funding available to promote projects that bring together different types of LFIs locally to build the social infrastructure for long-term alignments.
- Promote city-to-city exchanges, for example, by funding translocal networks where best practices can be shared such as in the case of the Network of Municipalities for Agroecology in Spain or the Sustainable Food Places network in the UK.

## 8.5 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While the study was able to engage with the critical dynamics of LFSs in advancing change, some relevant questions remain unanswered. The complexity of investigating LFSs to capture the possibilities and future trajectories calls for a variety of research agendas. This study thus highlights four main areas for future research: partnership governance models, translocal connections, lived experience and more-than-human studies.

*Partnership governance models*

A key finding of the study has been the need to balance top-down and bottom-up strategies in local food policymaking and governance to foster the development of transparent, fair, and reciprocal spaces within LFSs to enhance the collective potential for change. Significantly, this thesis has argued that LFIs might be in the best position to lead collaborative governance spaces. However, who should lead, organisation and position of these processes within local governance

structures is still a debated matter. As increasingly exemplified by studies, particularly in the US, (Ambrose et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2018; Siddiki et al., 2015), the organisational type, rules and design of food policy councils affect stakeholder representation, responsibilities and potentials. Therefore, it is crucial to examine further the benefits and limitations of different governance structures (top-down, bottom-up or hybrid forms) for food system transformation and the necessary mechanisms to construct empowering collective spaces. This encourages analysis of the organisational form and location of food policy councils and other multi-stakeholder platforms so that coproduction is present across all collective undertakings, which would aid the achievement of food sovereignty more broadly.

*Translocal connections*

The cross-case analysis identified that most individual efforts of LFIs should become more political by engaging with more transformative concepts like food sovereignty and agroecology. Significantly, the engagement with more political discourses in Vitoria-Gasteiz was due to international exchanges with other food movements and participation in national exchange networks. This points to the importance of understanding LFIs as the reflection of translocal social processes and networks – from local to global. Studies on translocal governance and communities of practice signal that cross-scalar networks can promote collective and distributive agencies by creating flows of knowledge and resources and form place-based, but not place-bound, solidarities (Dubois, 2019; Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2019). Greater engagement with how LFSs are shaped by regional, national, and global coalitions and movements of LFIs would deepen knowledge of how collective narratives that reflect a greater degree of solidarity are developed that engage with different injustices in the food system at higher scales.

*Lived experience*

The examination of LFSs in this study has shown how LFSs can help advance positive change by reconfiguring civil society, aligning diverse points towards a common goal. However, to fully understand the role of LFSs in the construction of fairer food systems, a critical research agenda would be to extend the analysis to the people benefitting from the interactions of LFIs and their *experience* concerning the LFS. This moves the analysis from the social processes between LFIs to deal with questions of the place of citizens and particular community groups in LFSs. Through a lived experience lens, this research agenda would extend the findings of this research, opening up the intersections between LFSs and broader societal issues such as gender, social exclusion, or labour.

Previous studies focusing on the lived experience of people participating in individual LFIs have highlighted that they can also open new arenas for exploitation and injustices, and thus have contradictory effects on building more just and sustainable food systems (Mares, 2017; Mincyte & Dobernig, 2016). Gathering evidence in this matter could provide knowledge that can challenge current understandings of how to address relevant place-based food challenges through LFSs and thus stimulate new ideas of how to solve them. It would also help further knowledge on how food citizenship and democracy is experienced by those participating in LFIs and LFSs, identifying strategies and practices that go beyond individualised consumer change.

*More-than-human research*

While the role of the ecological and material characteristics of LFSs was touched upon, a deeper engagement with the materiality of LFSs and the agency of non-humans would benefit identifying the processes needed to enhance LFSs´ collective potential. As exemplified in previous studies of individual LFIs, the dynamics of LFIs include a range of more-than-human actors, ranging from animals, plants, microorganisms and ecological relationships (Goodman, 2015). Indeed, studies drawing from a more-than-human philosophy have brought about understanding of how the interactions between socio-ecological imaginaries, built infrastructures and technologies mediate the formation of food systems, and enhance or constrain the capacity of LFIs (Sarmiento, 2017). More substantial analysis of how non-humans affect the relationships between LFIs could have the capacity to expand the understanding of dynamics of LFSs discussed in this thesis.

This research agenda should build on the role of physical spaces as having a mediating role in LFIs´ willingness to collaborate with each other derived from the analysis presented here. In this way, the analysis would focus on how technical and material infrastructures, or artifacts, that support or enhance collective change. For example, a research question could engage with the role and future of digitalisation in promoting the alignment of diverse LFIs, which was seen in Preston's case during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Covid-19 Statement

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the research in many ways, leading to a re-thinking of the focus of the research, but also opening up opportunities to increase knowledge about local food systems. The most important consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the change of comparative case study. Initially, the research set out to compare the local food system of Patna, India, and Preston, the UK because of a gap in the literature concerning local food systems in the global south. Given the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on travel restrictions, the possibility for me to travel became impossible. Because of the previous work already undertaken to enable the possibility to do a global south-north comparison, alternatives to still do the research in India were explored. These included doing online research, as it was the approach taken for Preston's case and to provide an in-depth understating of local food systems. After having conversations with our partner in India, it became clear that moving to online research in the context of Patna was not going to be such a smooth transition as for Preston. As I do not speak Hindi, doing online interviews and participant observation would have meant hiring somebody in Patna to act as a translator and them being in the same room with the person being interviewed to be able to still have a flexible conversation with participants, rather than a set of pre-defined closed questions. After careful consideration of this option, it seemed unethical to put somebody at risk of contracting coronavirus for collecting data for my PhD. The other option was having both the translator and participants engage in an online videocall with me. The partner in India explained that collecting data in this way would be deeply constraint by connectivity, double the interview time because of translation, and the possibility of hesitation of respondents in giving online interviews to a foreigner. Having explored all the options, it became clear that the research had to take a different path in order to still produce a research worth of a PhD.

After long discussions with the supervisory team and going back to the literature again, it was acknowledged that the need for comparative research of local food systems was not confined to a global south-global north gap. One of the most important features of local food system as place-based phenomena is their heterogeneity, which is something that has not been explored in detail. Vitoria-Gasteiz was explored as an option due to previous connections because of my previous work in Spain. The selection of Vitoria-Gasteiz should not be diminished as a second best-option to undertake the PhD. Instead, before deciding any other city to undertake work, several considerations were made. For example, what are the differences between Vitoria-Gasteiz and Preston that make it interesting to study local food systems? Do they also share similarities, so that there is still possible to do a comparison (e.g. size, being within an agricultural hub, etc.)? Ultimately, Vitoria-Gasteiz became attractive because of the socio-institutional context of its local food system (including the Basque identity and food culture) and the particular commitment of the local authority to develop a green network of urban food production and promotion of 'local' food, exemplified through the development of an urban food strategy for the city. As the feasibility study started to reveal the importance of governance in the direction that local food systems take and the interactions between local food initiatives, a comparative city that has a political commitment to develop an integrated local food system can provide in-depth insights of

how different socio-institutional environments shape local food systems and with what outcomes. The change to Vitoria-Gasteiz thus means that the global north-global south comparison aspect of the research is lost. Nevertheless, it also means that new insights are gained beyond just a comparison of the global north and global south; one that can uncover if enabling socio-institutional environments actually foster more integrated local food systems as championed in the literature.

Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic has had other impacts besides a re-focus of the work that, although it may seem was a straightforward process, was a long and tedious undertaking involving revisiting the literature and looking for several options for the direction of the PhD. Another consequence of Covid-19 has been the delay in data collection. Ethical approval was only provided at the end of May due to delays because of the need of university departments to adjust to the new working conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant that data collection for the main study in Preston was slightly delayed. Nevertheless, given that the initial timeline had considered some potential delays in data collection, it was still possible to finish data collection in Preston within the expected timeframe to be able to start data collection in Vitoria-Gasteiz. However, this involved working more hours during the week and even having interviews at 9:00 p.m. because it was the only time that participants were available before December. Moreover, the implications of changing to online methods meant that participant observation was extremely restricted. Although local food initiatives were organising online meetings, these were not the main path for communication or collaboration between them, limiting my ability to participate in local food initiatives' interactions. Thus, a greater effort was made to have regular updates with participants via phone-calls about their work with others and actively searching for any online meeting that was taking place.

In sum, although being able to restructure the PhD so that the quality and contribution to knowledge remains, the Covid-19 pandemic has had several effects in my PhD journey. The focus of the research has changed from a global north-global south comparison to a comparison focused on cities with different socio-institutional contexts, particularly in relation to local food policy and levels of deprivation, whilst maintaining the same methodology and an online adaptation of methods.

Appendix 2: Updated Interview Guides

**Local food experts**

**Background (max. 5 min)**

1. What is your professional occupation?

2. How does your work relate to local organisations working on food issues?

**Constitution of Preston's local food system (10 min)**

3. Could you please describe the initiatives that address food-related issues in Preston?
    a. similar or different motivations, type of beneficiaries

4. How do you think that these initiatives address equal access to food?

5. How do you think that these initiatives address sustainability?

**Strength of Preston's local food system (25 min)**

6. Could you describe the local connections between initiatives working on food issues in Preston?
    a. type of collaboration, purpose of collaboration, strength of connections
    b. from your point of view, how do the collaborations usually go?
    c. do you think that there are any local food organisations that are missing? why?

7. What do you think are the motivations to collaborate? and the barriers?

8. From, your point of view, how do these collaborations between local food organisations appear to affect Preston´s food related issues? I am thinking in terms of participation, access to sustainable food, fairer opportunities, environmental issues…
    a. What about access to sustainable food?
    b. And in terms of people's participation? e.g. knowledge, sharing, choice
    c. Does it help include more diverse groups? how so?
    d. Relationships with nature/ecological practices?
    e. Relationships among people?
    f. Fairer opportunities?

9. How do you think the lack of connections between organisations affects Preston's local community and people? I am thinking in terms of participation, access to sustainable food, fairer opportunities, environmental issues…

10. What do you think is needed to have stronger connections between the different organisations in Preston?

11. In what ways has this changed due to coronavirus?

**External influences in the local food system (10 min)**

12. How do you understand the relationship between the local food network and regional/national/global levels?

13. LFIs conduct their work in the context of diverse policies, economic systems, cultural norms, and natural environment. Can you tell me how some of these things have impacted LFIs' work?

**Reflections (5 min)**

14. I am going to ask you about what do some concepts that we have discussed throughout the interview mean to you: food security, sustainability, food sovereignty

15. Are there any points you would like to raise in relation to local connections around food?

**LFIs/other organisations:**

**Background (max. 5 min)**

1. What is your title and professional role?

2. Could you please provide me with an overview of the organisation?

3. What would you say is the main mission and motivation of the organisation?

**Organisation's activities (10 min)**

4. What does the concept food security mean to you?
    a. How do you think your organisation relates to it?

5. What does the concept sustainability mean to you?
    a. How do you think your organisation relates to it?

6. Does your organisation identify with the concept of food sovereignty? How so?

**External influences on activities and resources (max. 10 min)**

7. You conduct your work in the context of diverse policies, economic systems, cultural norms, and natural environment. Can you tell me how some of these things have impacted your work?

**Relationships with other people and organisations (25 min)**

8. Could you describe your local connections with other organisations working on food in Preston?
    a. With what organisations do you most closely work with?
    b. What is it about these organisations that motivates you to collaborate with them and not others?
    c. What kind of relationships are these? For what purposes?
    d. How do these collaborations usually go? Could you describe any negative experiences or conflicts?
    e. What do you think is the role of your organisation in the local food network?

9. How important are these collaborations to your organisation's work?
    a. To what extent do these collaborations enhance your work?
    b. What, if anything, has changed through these collaborations?

10. From, your point of view, how do the collaborations that you have appear to affect Preston´s food related issues? I am thinking in terms of participation, access to sustainable food, fairer opportunities, environmental issues…

a. What about access to sustainable food?
b. And in terms of people's participation? (e.g. knowledge, sharing)?
c. Does it help include more diverse groups? how so?
d. Relationships with nature/ecological practices?
e. Relationships among people?
f. Fairer opportunities?

11. Are you aware of other organisations that work around food in Preston, but you don't work with? Could you tell me a little bit about them?
    a. What do you think are the barriers for collaborations with them?
    b. Would collaborating with them make a difference?

12. What do you think are the consequences of the lack of connections on food-related issues? I am thinking in terms of participation, access to sustainable food, fairer opportunities, environmental issues…

13. In what ways has this been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?

**Reflections and future (5 min)**

14. What do you think is needed to continue to change Preston's local connections between local food organisations around food?

15. Are there any points you would like to raise about organisations' relations and with other people?

16. From your point of view, who would you say are the top three organisations that I need to contact?

## Appendix 3: Final Interview Guide

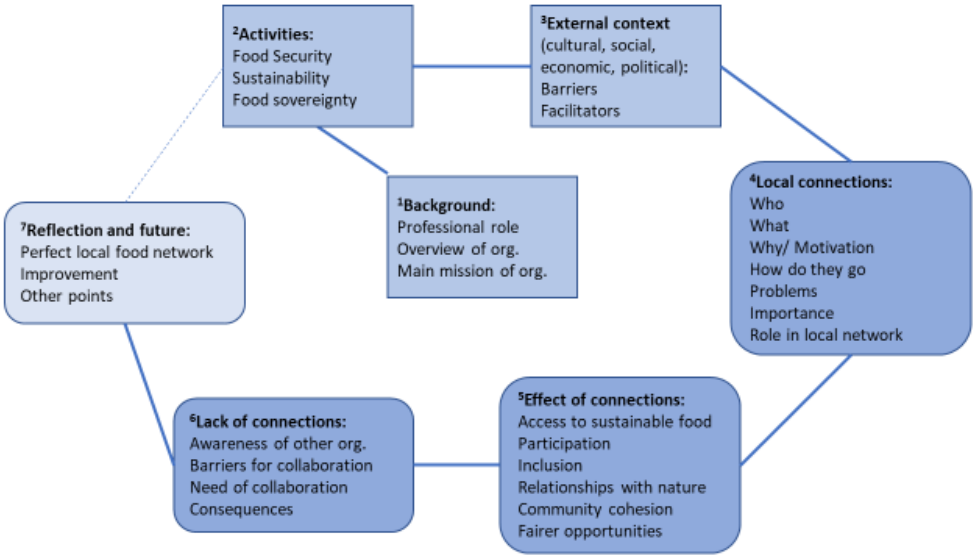



Figure A.1: Final interview guide

## Appendix 4: Ethics Approval Letters

29 May 2020

Mags Adams/Tanya Zerbian
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Mags and Tanya

**Re: BAHSS Ethics Committee Application**
**Unique Reference Number: BAHSS2 0069**

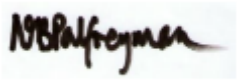
The BAHSS ethics committee has granted approval of your proposal application 'Local food systems: a framework for delivering food security and sustainability?'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date.

It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved, by Committee
- you notify roffice@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to Committee
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (Existing paperwork can be used for this purposes e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available use e-Ethics Closure Report Proforma).

COVID - Please note that approval is given on the understanding that data gathering will be via remote access (in line with your application) until such a time as the University confirms that face-to-face data gathering may resume.

Yours sincerely



Nick Palfreyman
Deputy Vice-Chair
**BAHSS Ethics Committee**

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date
*NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed, and necessary approvals gained.*

University of Central Lancashire
UCLan

University of Central Lancashire
Preston PR1 2HE
01772 201201
uclan.ac.uk

20 January 2021

Mags Adams / Tanya Zerbian
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Mags / Tanya

**Re: BAHSS Ethics Review Panel Application**
**Unique Reference Number**: BAHSS2 0069 Stage 2

The BAHSS Ethics Review Panel has granted **CONDITIONAL** approval of your proposed application 'Local food systems: a framework for delivering food security and sustainability?'.

The CONDITIONS are:

1. Confirmation is received from the Insurance Manager that insurance arrangements are in place for your project. This condition applies to both remote methods and face-to-face methods.

2. Any face-to-face elements of the research can only take place once restrictions due to COVID-19 are lifted.

Once either (or both) of these conditions are addressed an amended approval letter will be issued.

Yours sincerely

NPalfreyman

Nick Palfreyman
Deputy Vice-Chair
**BAHSS Ethics Review Panel**

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

*NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed and necessary approvals gained as a result.*

University of Central Lancashire
Preston PR1 2HE
01772 201201
uclan.ac.uk

08 June 2021

Mags Adams / Tanya Zerbian
School of Social Work, Care and Community
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Mags / Tanya

**Re: BAHSS Ethics Review Panel Application**
**Unique Reference Number**: BAHSS2 0069 Stage 2

The BAHSS Ethics Review Panel has granted approval of Stage 2 your proposal application 'Local food systems: a framework for delivering food security and sustainability?'. Approval is granted up to the end of project date. *

It is your responsibility to ensure that

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved by, the Ethics Review Panel
- you notify EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to the Ethics Review Panel
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (existing paperwork can be used for this purpose e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available, use the e-Ethics Closure Report pro forma).

Yours sincerely

Daniel Bürkle
Deputy Vice-Chair
**BAHSS Ethics Review Panel**

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

*NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed and necessary approvals gained as a result.*

Appendix 5: Example Participant Information Sheet

# Information Sheet

Version number & date: V4 – 09.11.2020
Research ethics approval number:
Title of the research project: Local food systems: a framework for delivering food security and sustainability? – PhD project of the University of Central Lancashire
Name of researcher(s): Tanya Zerbian

Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Just ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

Local food systems are networks of local food organizations that try to improve environmental, economic and social aspects of a place. This study aims to bring about understanding of how the relationships between these local food organizations affect equal food access and sustainability. The focus of this study is on the local food systems of two cities in the UK and Spain; Preston in the United Kingdom and Vitoria-Gasteiz in Spain.

The study has the following specific objectives:

- To understand what kinds of local food organizations are in Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz
- To research how local food systems are influenced by their contexts
- To evaluate how the interactions/ collaborations within each local food system affect equal food access and sustainability
- To analyse how local food organizations complement each other and how this influences equal food access and sustainability

**What does the study entail?**

To meet the aim of the study different methods will be used: participant observation at collective events where local food initiatives and other collaborators come together and interact, interviews with local food organizations' representatives, and document analysis. The project takes place over a three-year period with the research activities taking place in Spain between March and September 2020.

I would be very grateful if you could help in this important research project aimed at contributing to the understanding of local food systems by examining the lessons learned in Preston and Vitoria-Gasteiz, the comparison of the results between the different places, and their relevance to broader national and global contexts.

**What am I being asked to do?**

As a participant you may agree to participate in one or more ways:

- To agree to a short interview in your professional or expert capacity related to the internal relationships of Preston's local food system and your local food organizations' activities. The interview will take up to an hour. If you are in Vitoria-Gasteiz area the researcher can come to your workplace. Otherwise, the interview can also be conducted remotely via Teams or any other virtual platform or phone. You will also be asked to provide some details about your background.

- To agree to my observation of specific meetings, activities and discussions that you lead that could form part of the participant observation aspect of the research, including virtual spaces of interaction. Observations will be foremost in activities that include interaction or collaboration with other local food initiatives or collaborators based in Vitoria-Gasteiz. In granting permission for my observation of these activities, you would assume responsibility for informing activities' participants of my involvement and facilitating their consent to my observation and to be named in the research or not.
- To agree to provide me with access to documents, based on your judgement, that give information about the collective activities/ events/ meetings that your organization leads in collaboration with other initiatives or actors (e.g. marketing material, agreements, etc.).

You will be asked to read and sign an Informed Consent form for the interview and/or for granting permission for observations clearly agreeing to participate and setting out in what ways you agree to be involved.

**What about confidentiality?**

In any published materials your name will be anonymised unless you give permission for your real name, job title, and/or organisation's name to be used. When anonymised you will be given a pseudonym rather than using your real name. However, your actual words may be used in text form. Additionally, your job title or role will be used if you give permission. The organization name may also be used if permission is given.

For further information about how we will use your data, including information about your right to access your data and who to contact if you have any further queries, please see the University's online Research Participant Privacy Notice at the following address: https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php.

**How will the data be used?**

Data will be transcribed and analysed and used in research and teaching activities. The research will be written up and presented at key academic conferences, local seminars and events, and will be published in peer-reviewed academic journals, briefings and online. Names will only be used if permission has been granted on the Informed Consent form.

The data you provide as part of this study will be retained by UCLan for 5 years.

**Data sharing and re-use**

It is increasingly a condition of research publishing that research data should be shared with other researchers and made open for re-use (within legal and ethical frameworks). You will be asked for consent for suitably anonymised research data to be shared for research purposes beyond the immediate research team.

The PhD project is part of a collaboration with a partner institution in Vitoria-Gasteiz; HEGOA Institute of the Univesity of the Basque Country (see http://www.hegoa.ehu.eus/). This means that your personal information will be shared between the UK and Spain. UCLan has entered into an agreement with the HEGOA Institute containing Standard Contractual Clauses approved by the UK government and the European Union which protect your information and ensure it remains secure. If you would like to see a copy of the relevant parts of this agreement, please contact me on the email address below.

**Withdrawal from the study**

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the project by emailing me on tzerbian1@uclan.ac.uk or phoning 01772 896294 requesting that your data be removed from the project. You can withdraw up to 2 weeks after your interview and the involvement of the researcher in your

organizations activities and your data will be destroyed and not used. If you withdraw after this point the data will remain in the study, but you will not be contacted again about the study.

***How does the Covid-19 pandemic affect this research and my participation in it?***

*In view of the current situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic and government advice in relation to social distancing, face-to-face interactions during research projects have been restricted by UCLan until further notice. Accordingly, some short-term measures will be taken in order to be able to continue the project without compromising its objectives and your participation in it. In this sense, all interviews will be held remotely via Skype or another virtual platform of your choice or phone until further university guidelines and UK government guidelines are available. Moreover, the participant observation aspect of the research will also be moved into virtual settings. This means that my participation in your activities – with your previous consent – will move to virtual spaces – if applicable – that have been set up to continue with your activities and collaborations with other local organisations. All the previously discussed matters related to confidentiality, data usage, sharing and re-use, and withdrawal from the study also apply to these extraordinary short-term measures.*

**Please note that:**

- You need not answer questions that you do not wish to and do not need to invite me to participate in the organization's activities.
- If you withdraw from the study up to two weeks after your interview/participation all data will be withdrawn and destroyed if you so wish
- This research has obtained ethical approval from The University of Central Lancashire's ethics committee. If you have a complaint about the way in which the researcher has carried out the research, you can contact the Ethics Committee by emailing EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk or phoning the University Ethics and Integrity Unit on 01772 892397.
- For more information regarding participant privacy notices please visit the following link: https://www.uclan.ac.uk/data_protection/privacy-notice-research-participants.php

**Thank you for reading this information**

**Tanya Zerbian, PhD Fellow,** University of Central Lancashire, tzerbian1@uclan.ac.uk, 01772 896294

**Supervisory team: Dr Mags Adams (Director of Studies), Prof Mark Dooris, Dr Ursula Pool**

Appendix 6: Example Consent Form – Interview

# Participant consent form - interview

Version number & date: V4 – 09.11.2020
Research ethics approval number:
Title of the research project: Local food systems: a framework for delivering food security and sustainability? – PhD project of the University of Central Lancashire
Name of researcher(s): Tanya Zerbian

Please check as appropriate

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 09.11.2020 for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves an audio recorded interview and that the interview will take up to an hour. In addition, I understand that the interview will be held either at my workplace, or remotely via Teams or another virtual platform or phone*. ☐
3. I agree to take part in the research by providing the researcher access to documents that give information about the collective activities/ events that the organization has undertaken with other initiatives or actors (e.g. marketing material, agreements, etc.) ☐
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free can stop the interview at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions. ☐
5. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide, and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish up to two weeks after being interviewed. I understand that following this point I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide. ☐
6. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Central Lancashire. ☐
7. I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in digital format in password protected and encrypted servers and devices, and physically in a locked office until September 2022 and retained by
   UCLan for at least 5 years. After this time the data will be reviewed to determine if it is necessary to retain it for analysis for longer. ☐
8. I agree for my personal data to be transferred between Spain and the UK and I have been informed of the safeguards in place to protect my personal data when it is transferred. ☐

9. I understand that other authorised researchers may use my words in publications, reports, webpages, and other research outputs, if their study has been approved by a research ethics committee, and they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. In addition, I understand that my data may be used for teaching purposes. ☐

10. In terms of confidentiality I consent to (please circle all you agree to):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| a. I consent to my job title being used in publications | **Yes** | **No** |
| b. I consent to my real name being used in publications | **Yes** | **No** |
| c. I consent to the name of my organization to be used in publications | **Yes** | **No** |
| d. I wish to remain anonymous in any publications | **Yes** | **No** |
| e. I understand that what I have said in interviews will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs | **Yes** | **No** |

11. I am willing to be contacted about further research on this topic but understand that this forms no obligation on my part to participate in further research ☐

12. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____ _____ _____

Participant name Date Signature

_____ _____ _____

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

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## Appendix 7: Example of Memos for Researcher's Reflexivity and Individual Interview

### 3/22/2021 3:11 PM – Example of researcher's reflections

The interview went well. We were able to discuss their connections with other organizations and some of the difficulties in engaging in collaborative work - discourses, resources - but also how to overcome them - open-mindedness. I think I will struggle to see which are the 'powerful' actors in Vitoria compared to Preston. It seems here that organisations work in a more horizontal way, but I might be biased because people here are more approachable. This is something that I have to cross-check with others. Although the interview went well, there were some points where I felt that the participant was treating me as 'ignorant' in several matters, explaining me all the different things they were trying to say. In reality, this was not bad because in my 'naiveness' it seemed that they were opening up and telling me their 'real' feelings about what they thought, particularly in relation to other LFIs.

### 12/3/2020 12:41 PM – Memo for individual interview

Methodological notes:
There are three questions that are not understood very well by the interviewees, especially with this interviewee:
- external factors that support LFIs and the external barriers that challenge LFIs work?
Would it be better to say:
Now think about contextual factors that influence your work, such as policies, the natural environment, people's culture, the economic situation

Analytical notes:
Covid made many organizations change to full food provision, as seen with others. This showcases the dynamism of LFSs, particularly in times of crises and the need for adaptation.
Covid and the closer engagement with food, makes LFIs realize that another approach is needed, and that emergency food is not only the solution, e.g. the development of the food pantry (a more dignified approach).
Although they have been supplied by LGP, it is not enough for the amount of food that they need to supply making them again reliant on FareShare (donations from big companies) and the willingness of businesses to donate. The fact that they are also reliant on funding also constrains them and makes them have to look for help elsewhere
There is always the concentration on immediate needs during Covid, so people need food, ok here it is, but there is also the recognition that more is needed, nutrition education, cooking skills, a multi-agency approach.
The interesting thing is that whilst this part of this organisation was delivering food, another part was also working with the Larder for cooking skills and those were not necessarily connected.
Also, whilst PCC helped increase communication, this did not necessarily led to coordination, so sharing yes but avoiding duplications or a coherent approach that includes also broader services is not. From PCC interview and this, this is something that has been reflected on. And according to this interviewee, there is a need for a central coordination that takes all people in need and then refers to others.
LFIs because of limited resources have always to struggle with funding.

Main ideas:
- Even within org. initiatives work on distinct topics, not necessarily cross-fertilising approaches.
- LFIs can also sit within a broader community org that does not concentrate on food

- Covid has tested the ability for LFIs to adapt.
- Role of the council is support, here is money and stuff and then communities do it on their own
- Sharing is based on LFIs asking for it
- Increased communication and sharing do not mean better coordination and coherent approach, or even working together in joint projects.
- Central organization is needed to identify needs and then refer people. Food hubs that only provide food voluntarily are not enough, professionals should be the ones acting, org. that know the bigger picture.
- Main challenge for collaboration is people's education and making them engage. People are seen as uneducated in terms of food.
- Having previous rel. and knowing org. could foster future collab.
- Funding reliance makes them be reliant on food donations and redistributor

## Appendix 8: Example Coding – Perception of Others

Table A.1: Coding example with excerpts

| Code | Excerpt from Transcript/ Participant Observation /Document |
|---|---|
| **Demeaning** | Because we argue against the food banks. Oh well, I do, because basically is food waste from the food manufactures if you look it's the excess bread, the biscuits, the tins and these. There is no fresh food. And you... |
| | There is a, kind of, uh… I don't know a disempowerment in in in, you know in just feeding people and it's like that kind of being seen to be feeding people and uhm… |
| **Crucial** | …Uhm, to do what they do has become exponential, 'cause they have become really crucial parts of the community. And even though they are so crucial, they aren't funded in any way that kind of recognizes that importance that they have in terms of just maintaining people's ability to live… |
| | Now, what we really need to do is make sure that people. People can make better decisions on the full belly. So, the first thing is if people go hungry, that you get food to them in whatever way that you can. And if that's the food bank or whatever. Anything, then you need to do that, then people can make better decisions. |
| **Diverse** | Some of them are managed better than others, so some of them see that and have ways have been able to deal with it and do things like courses and things and try to work around empowering people and supporting them in other ways. |
| | … so, I think there's some you know that those different methods will have an impact on the relations built in those in those spaces…where you create universal spaces where can come together, enjoy food, and take part in food that can create a different sense of, uhm…, how can I explain this. I mean, a sense of community… |
| **Needed but not enough** | In some ways it can create more problems than it solves, so you need to look at it in the wider context…So, food banks, unfortunately there is a need for them because some people that you could starve to death if you didn't have food. |
| | And there is… It's not enough to give food. There's gotta be something that lifts them. Do you remember when you will learn enough to ride your bike? Do you remember your parents putting your hand on the small of your back and just |

| | |
|---|---|
| | help him to push you along? If you've just got somebody who's got their hand on the small of your back and he is just come on, you can do this. You can do this and that's… That's what we need. |
| **Not food projects** | And obviously there aren't any there aren't actually any other. There is the food banks, and I think [another LFI] might be growing a little bit of food, but I don't think that's really what they do anymore. Uhm… there aren't really very many food projects, or I'm not really aware of any other food projects in Preston. |
| | Yea… So, other food projects. I don't think, apart from [another LFI] that has got their own garden they cook, uhm… I'm not aware of anybody else in Preston that does what we do on this sort of scale…So, as a as a charity growing food, I'm ignorant of any other organisations. Isn't that awful? I'm hoping that it's because there aren't any. You could put the right on that, but… |

## Appendix 9: Initial Codebook Theme Development During Feasibility Study

Table A.2: Initial code book feasibility study

| Name | Description |
|---|---|
| **Effects of interactions** | This node refers to the effects that the interactions (collaborations, lack of collaborations, competitions, etc.) have on LFIs or food sovereignty from the perception of LFIs interviewed or experts interviewed |
| for LFIs | |
| awareness | This refers to the effect that collaborations have on people's awareness of the work of LFIs |
| collective power | This node is when collaborations lead to LFIs become more than just a part of something to a collective powerful entity that can overcome individual barriers, e.g. funding, powerful actors. |
| efficiency | Effect of collaborations related to individual LFIs being more efficient in delivering services; i.e. meeting their own objectives |
| transformation | This relates to the effect that local interactions have on the positive transformation of LFSs through influencing each other, learning from each other. |
| in relation to food sovereignty | This relates to the positive effect that collaborations have on food sovereignty attributes |
| diverse local cohesion | balance socio-nature bidirectional relations, build social relations within their communities and LFIs that acknowledge diversity, in harmony with nature |
| food democracy | Meaningful participation of people and LFIs without skewing the discursive power of elites and promote a food system that is determined by the communities that are part of it |
| right to food | Promote processes that ensure that all individuals can feed themselves through nutritious, culturally appropriate and adequate food without discrimination and humiliation |
| social justice | Creates a system that does not replicate injustices and power dynamics in current food systems in an inclusive and culturally sensitive way. |
| **Approach-LFIs** | This refers to the overarching approach that LFIs adopt in their daily activities and that guides their work |
| beyond food | Approach adopted by LFIs that do not necessarily relate to "alternative" food practices, but that contributes to the community |
| empowerment | Approach adopted by LFIs that aims to improve individuals' autonomy and agency with regards to food and their own lives |
| food as a connector | This relates to using food as a vector to connect different LFIs, groups and people |
| food fairness dimensions | This is something that goes beyond just providing food - in a dignified or other way - because it considers fairness for different actors. There is kind of a range for this, from providing food in a dignified and fair manner to consumers to providing food that considers all aspects of the food supply chain |
| multiplier effect | This means that through their activities, LFIs aim to have more than one positive outcome. |
| **Challenges-collab** | Things that hinder collaboration between local food organisations |
| diverse values | difference in regard of something being important. When collaborations are challenged because for some LFIs a particular thing, consideration is not important and for the other it is. |

| | |
|---|---|
| ego-centric | sense of own worth above other's work, in this case in the worth of the work of LFIs. It relates to a behaviour of ownership, suspicion and personal umbrage |
| finite resources | limited resources in terms of time, money, capacity that impede collaborations as perceived by participants |
| lack of leadership | Perceived lack of initiative to start things or change the way things are done |
| reaching others | When collaborations are not possible because other LFIs or groups are difficult to reach |
| **Concepts** | This relates to what participants mean in relation to different concepts that relate to the research project: food security, food sovereignty, sustainability, local food |
| food security | What participants mean in relation to food security, includes participants' own concepts as well |
| food affordability | Goes beyond just having access to food, it includes considerations along the food supply chain |
| food poverty | It means the same as food poverty |
| multidimensional | More than just economic access, involves challenges that may be social, physical, etc. |
| food sovereignty | What participants understand in relation to food sovereignty |
| food citizens | It is about treating people as citizens that also have a voice in the food system |
| local food | It is about sourcing local food and building local food supply chains |
| more to it | It is a concept that is very helpful that in order to reach it, more steps are needed |
| sustainability | What participants understand in relation to sustainability |
| capacity | This relates to the sustainability of LFIs' themselves. It is about their financial sustainability and being able to maintain their work. |
| environment | This node refers to when sustainability is perceived as being just environmental sustainability |
| wider impact | Perception of sustainability as being about the overall effect that LFIs' have on communities and society |
| **Facilitator-collab** | This node relates to the things or approaches taken by LFIs that facilitate collaborations between LFIs |
| close relationship | Having strong connections between LFIs |
| council leadership | Local authorities drive collaborations through their role as leaders |
| humbleness | This refers to the approach taken by LFIs that acknowledges the bigger picture of what is being done and therefore is about working without imposing their own viewpoints, making compromises. |
| need of connected approach | This relates when collaborations are initiated or driven by merging the different resources or expertise between LFIs. |
| value alignment | Having the same things as relevant |
| **LFS metabolisms** | The interactions between LFIs and the overall functioning of the LFS. Interactions can range from disconnection, to only having conversations to building more integrated approaches that can even lead to partnerships or networks. |
| connection | This is when LFIs interact with each other |
| communication | Indicates when interactions are only based on sharing ideas and getting together to discuss |
| mediation | Is when the interaction between LFIs is about referring/connecting somebody to them |
| partnerships-networks | This a much stronger way of interacting, it is not supporting the work of another, but to work collaboratively towards a common goal or being under a shared structure |
| supply | This interaction relates to supplying a service for another LFIs, so it can be running courses or providing training, it is mostly remunerated |
| support | This node relates to when LFIs support each other's work by sharing resources or information, but do not necessarily developing something together |
| continuous change | This relates to quotes that imply a dynamism of LFSs, adaptability, changes |
| disconnection | Detachment in LFIs' work |
| **Perception of other LFIs** | This node refers to perception of other LFIs from the perspective of LFIs interviewed or experts interviewed |

| | |
|---|---|
| crucial | Other LFIs are crucial to improve the wellbeing of the community |
| demeaning | The approach taken by other LFIs is detrimental to people and does not work on the long-term |
| diverse | Other LFIs have diverse approaches, some better than others |
| needed but not enough | Other LFIs and their activities are needed but not enough to change the current system |
| not food projects | Perception that even though other LFIs exist, these are not food projects because they are not similar to their own work |
| **Strategies for collab** | This relates to the considerations that LFIs make in order to collaborate with each other |
| working without excepting | Working without excepting means not having any criteria to work with other organisations. LFIs work with any LFIs or organisation that is based in Preston |
| working through excepting | This means having a set of criteria in order to work with other LFIs. For example, LFIs may work with some other LFIs that they perceive as demeaning if they want to move to a more empowering approach. |

## Appendix 11: Descriptive/Structural Codebook that Supported Theme Development

Table A.3: Supportive codebook feasibility study

| Codes | Description |
|---|---|
| **Barriers for individual LFIs** | Factors that impact LFIs activities in a negative way |
| **Contextual factors** | These relate to the contextual information political, economic, cultural, etc. - that participants mention during interviews, documents or PO, that impact LFSs function |
| Covid | |
| cultural | |
| economic | |
| logistics | |
| natural | |
| policies | |
| **Facilitators-individual** | These are contextual factors that enable the participants work |
| **Actors** | People, groups or organisations to whom reference is made |
| external organisation or groups | This node will be used when participants refer to organisations and groups that are outside my definition of local food systems: supermarkets, migrant communities, etc. |
| local authorities | |
| local farmers | |
| other LFIs | |
| partners | When participants refer to other LFIs as partners or part of their network |

## Appendix 12: Preliminary Themes for Preston's Case

Table A.4: Preliminary themes Preston's case

| Meta-theme | Themes |
|---|---|
| **Approach LFIs** | Beyond food<br>Food as a connector<br>Food fairness and its dimensions<br>Empowerment<br>Multiplier effect |
| **Value-based perception of other LFIs** | Crucial<br>Demeaning<br>Diverse<br>Needed but not enough<br>Not food projects |
| The ins and outs of collaboration | Humbleness VS Ego<br>Need of connected approach VS The challenge of finite resources<br>Reaching others VS Close relationships<br>Value alignment VS Diverse Values<br>Lack of leadership VS Strong leadership |
| **LFSs' metabolism** | Connection<br>Continuous Change<br>Disconnection |
| **Metabolism effects – LFIs** | Collective power<br>Efficiency<br>Transformation |
| **Metabolism effects – food sovereignty** | Diverse local cohesion<br>Food democracy<br>Right to food<br>Social justice |

## Appendix 13: Example Memo – Value-based Perception of Others

30/06/2020 10:43

This pattern or theme became clear after conducting the second interview with a local food expert expert. The first two interviews had a very strong opinion about food banks that they have to go and that they are somehow entrenched in our systems although they in the long-term create negative impacts. After looking at their definitions of sustainability or the objectives that they are trying to achieve, I started thinking that maybe because of that they have such a strong stance against food banks. For example, both relate in that they want to create a fair food system or AFFORDABLE food system that REGENERATES[12] the local food economy and other aspects and considers the WIDER IMPACT of activities. So, it is not just about providing food but making sure that the strategies used for it are not detrimental for anyone within the food chain.

However, there is another side of the story. The local food expert working around community development did not have such a strong position about food banks. Rather he viewed them as organisations that contributed to the community beyond food-related issues and that are somehow marginalized by not providing them with funding. So, for him sustainability was a way of MAINTAINING a family's health and wellbeing. Thus, the activities or signposting that food provision LFIs provide are crucial and a way of empowering people. So, these kinds of initiatives from these values or beliefs are positive and relevant and therefore should be supported. This also became clear with the interview of LGP. So, in her perception food security is multidimensional, so the work of food hubs is very important for people, doing "phenomenal work", but providing food is not enough, there is something more to it, it is about facilitating a pathway so that people can get out of the current situation they are in.

Overall, then the own assumptions and values of particular LFIs and experts influences how they view other LFIs, if food poverty or food security is understood as just helping people out of poverty so they can manage their life themselves, then food banks or related initiatives are achieving this goal because they either provide services beyond food or provide food in a dignified manner. However, if food poverty and security is to be combined with a broader concept of sustainability (a holistic food sovereignty) then LFIs need to go beyond food provision to kind of FAIR FOOD PROVISION that also acknowledges the issues of sourcing any kind of food and develops people's capacities.

But this makes me think, do all LFIs need to have such a fair food provision mission or objective? The changing dynamics within LFSs can make this happen and by negating LFIs that do not necessarily conform to the values of certain people might disregard their potential to also make a change. This might also be why some LFIs only create stronger bonds if they are similiar, because other LFIs do not share their same values (this is something that I still need to investigate more).

[12] This was deleted but I might need to bring it back

## Appendix 14: Example Memo 'Abstract' Theme – Issues of Continuity

1/12/2021 3:36 PM - updated 2/11/2021 3:43 PM

As already explained in the access vs supply meta-theme, there is kind of a discontinuity between the initiatives found in Preston in terms of their discourses around the reasons and priorities of food security. Nevertheless, although community LFIs and 'business'-like LFIs see themselves perhaps as separate from each other, with few exceptions, LFIs share the same struggles in terms of how to navigate the rules imposed by the corporate food system and neoliberalist society, with many LFIs priorising strategies for financial sustainability. With Preston being a deprived city in the North of England this becomes further accentuated. Two cross-cutting main struggles were identified after doing the thematic analysis that negatively affect the continuity of LFIs: resources and food culture.

These challenges affect the continuity of change and being able to transform the food system. Because of lack of resources and the 'food culture' in Preston determined in some way through the conventional food system and neoliberalist political economy, LFI are deeply constrained in what they can actually contribute to the relocalisation of food and scaling up efforts. This indicates that LFIs, in my opinion, should not be seen as alternative to the conventional food system, but in constant interaction with it, having to navigate the rules that this system imposes before even thinking of changing it. Through a system of overproduction, where waste is a by-product of profit-maximisation, LFIs working on access become reliant on the availability of this food, which is the only one compatible with their resource constraints due to its free or 'reduced' nature. On the other hand, 'business-like' LFIs cannot compete with this intensity of production and the domination of supermarket in terms of prices and quality, thus having to engage in those very methods that they criticise in the first place. -- binary is creating with the conventional food system and principles at the centre of how issues are addressed.

Extra:
There needs to be ways to sustain and stop having ephemeral interventions. But I think that it will require a massive change in mindset and also from the system itself, so moving away from community work (I think) and then thing for viable opportunities to scale-up. So, there needs to be a model that does not rely on funding, has paid work, but is also able to be affordable for people... difficult because the system does not allow it. Is it that everything is coming to the roots and problems of the food system? How do we change the system, while also having to work in it? The one about dignified and stuff gives a glimpse of hope.

Appendix 15: Example Case Study Report Preston

**Sypnosis: (identify case, site, activity, key information sources and context information):**
Despite the Preston Model, Preston continues to be a city with high degrees of deprivation and food insecurity. Policy, and food policy, are very centralised, yet national government has promoted throughout the years a decentralisation of public services towards communities and local authorities. Yet, funding has decreased and leaves local authorities little leeway to do things. PCC has promoted Holiday Hunger Projects alongside community initiatives to address food insecurity in the city, but it does not have any policy for sustainable food systems and has limited influence on agriculture, like LCC. There used to be a Lancashire Food Charter developed by the Larder, but it is no longer active. Agriculture around Preston is mainly intensive, yet it has lower farmland than other cities. LFIs in Preston mainly focus on food insecurity and its determinants. Preston's local and national context makes the work of LFIs were difficult, yet the majority still manage to create new material and symbolic spaces for food by providing opportunities to engage with food. The main interactions between LFIs is sharing food and resources to ensure food access (increased during Covid-19) and engage in collaborative projects to increase food literacy in the city (including among LFIs) with little participation of vulnerable groups beyond consultation. In these interactions, sustainable and food access LFIs do not necessarily connect. PCC distances itself from sustainable food despite the Preston Model and has a more top-down approach with 'local' org., main focus is hunger through a bottom-up process for community development. This differentiates from previous policies, influenced by previous officers, which included sustainability in conceptualisations. Organisations holding most of the resources are not LFIs, but public institutions. There are two 'food partnerships' one led by the Larder for sustainable food systems, following the charter, and the other by PCC that focuses on hunger.
**Situational constraints:** Funding, national policy, lack of focus on sustainable food
**Difference from Vitoria-Gasteiz:** Higher concentration of Food Access-LFIs, strong focus on vulnerable communities (deprived city). No food policy at the local level that is currently being implemented; when political consumerism is talked about, it is not a collective project like in Vitoria; Vitoria has more alignment between consumers & producers

Findings:

1. LFIs in Preston oscillate between a continuum between those that focus on food access with a people-centred approach to those that focus on food supply, mostly business-based. This is based on diverse food security priorities.
2. Food security is understood as multi-layered by Food Access-LFIs not just food, acknowledged by Business-Sector LFIs but not prioritised
3. Financial sustainability and market-based solutions is sometimes prioritised given the challenges of the dominance of the conventional food system and welfare externalisation of services with limited funding.
4. Preston is a perceived as disadvantaged place for local food to thrive
5. Consolidation of corporate food and neoliberal policies – disconnection between access and supply
6. LFIs in Preston have a high focus on helping address the causes of food insecurity through a dignified and multicultural approach, & empowerment
7. Cross-cutting idea between LFIs: food as a vector for change; particularly education-related activities and access
8. Presence of an informal right to food network (healthy & culturally appropriate and determinants) – solidarity including 'local food' through donations

9. Re-metabolisation of resources inside the LFS and extending beyond LFS helps ensure food access
10. Building respectful relationships was a key of success during Covid-19
11. LFS are reflexive and in constant change, depends on who joins, external forces, but deliberation & discussion is key to question current approaches
12. The LFS is highly structured based on a knowledge-network to empower people (particularly marginalised), but not real community participation, yet it still reconfigures food system rel.
13. Local governance discussions emphasise communities taking the lead in addressing issues and change
14. CC´s prioritisation influences the composition of LFS – in this case food poverty because of austerity & no clear political will to sustainable food system.
15. Food policy champions can make a significant change
16. Inclusive growth in PCC´s conceptualisation overlooks rural communities and sustainability
17. Funding reliance can constrain LFI´s agency in developing projects based on their values
18. Circulation of resources by universities and local authorities create an uneven landscape for LFS formation
19. Contrasting views of PCC – authoritarian vs. leader
20. PCC´s approach to the LFS has affected the diversity of organisations involved
21. Limited resources in Preston´s context (LFIs having to deliver many services) leads to competition and search for individual benefits in collaborations
22. Individualist approaches can be present in collective spaces
23. Local authorities might be the ones to lead collaborative processes, given their 'neutrality'
24. LFIs connections are influenced by personal, geographical and historical relations
25. Values play a key role in articulating LFSs, similar views tend to gather in same spaces
26. There is an existence of two partnerships within Preston based on the dynamics around values, status, governance priorities that sustains sustainable/'local' and access division

**Commentary:**
Even if there is a clear focus overall in the local food system on food poverty, there might be possibilities for convergence between the 'local' and food access if the LFS surpasses its values bias.
Preston's case is important because it shows a picture of a city that does not have a mature 'local' food movement and provides some insights to see why (contextual, PCC, etc.)
The fact that PCC is no taking leadership in promoting sustainable food is important, as most things are left to community initiatives
LCC has not been analysed directly, because from interviews it became clear that PCC is the one that influences more the LFS

## Appendix 16: Example of Matrix for Generating Cross-case Themes from Clustered Findings Rated Importance

Table A.5: Example cross-case theme matrix

| | | Research objectives | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cluster Findings | Most significant case | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Uncritical notion of ´local´, connected to local places & identities and perceived as addressing conventional food negative outcomes if demand increases for it, can homogenise consumer struggles | Both, more so in Vitoria | H | H | L | L |
| Different perceptions of the problems of the food system & purpose of food influence LFIs' approaches, creating LFSs divisions (sust./agroecology vs. poverty/access) | Preston | H | H | L | L |
| LFIs can display characteristics of the conventional food system & neoliberal discourses possibly diminishing their transformative potential | Preston | H | H | L | L |
| LFIs adopting food sovereignty and agroecology discourses include a greater effort to change the structure of food systems and values (more political) | Vitoria | H | M | L | L |
| Division between sustainable & local food (agrarian & agro) and issues of poverty (urban) creates two sub-systems within LFSs | Both | (H) | M | L | M |
| People-centred approaches to food activities help adopt multidimensional approach to inequalities | Both | H | M | L | L |
| Include a broader understanding/systemic view of food systems can bridge sustainable or local poverty disconnection | Preston | H | M | L | L |
| Informal connections (sharing resources, information) can be powerful to increase individual efforts | Both | L | L | L | H |
| The organisational structure & approach of LFIs might influence their food sovereignty potential (horizontal vs vertical) + (urban-rural mix or not) | Both (contrast between places) | H | H | L | L |
| Food champions (inside and beyond LFS) are key in mediating LFIs' connections | Both | L | L | M | H |
| Informal connections can lead to the development of a common political project & narrative, strengthening connections | Vitoria | L | M | M | H |
| Entrenchment of neoliberal and corporate logics in LFSs environment affects possibilities for change | Both | H | (H) | L | L |