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Exploring the politics of urban food strategies in European cities

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Chapter 2 —

Urban Food Strategies. Exploring definitions and diffusion of European cities' latest policy trend

This chapter discusses various theoretical perspectives on UFSs, on the basis of which I propose a working definition of the concept for this thesis. Furthermore, I present empirical data on the historical development and geographical distribution of UFSs in Europe. The empirical material shows that there is a trend amongst European municipalities to develop UFSs. The possible motives behind the UFSs model's diffusion are subsequently explored. An analysis of the emerging narratives used by UFSs protagonists to describe their food governing plans in an urban setting completes the chapter, answering the first research question.

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2 — Urban Food Strategies. Exploring definitions and diffusion of European cities' latest policy trend

Abstract

Food, notably its logistics, security, quality, sustainability and social inclusiveness, is increasingly considered as a crucial element in urban settings, deserving specific institutional and strategic instruments. This is testified by the proliferation of urban food strategies, that is municipal strategic documents that various European cities have adopted during the last decade. This chapter examines the emergence and diffusion of the concept in Europe, contextualizing it in connection with broader thesis on 'alternative' food systems, 'new localism' and 'strategic planning', in order to unpack how the notion has been constructed. The first part of the chapter reviews the existing literature on urban food strategies, by presenting the debate over the definition of the concept and discussing the normative stance of scholars in regard to 'alternative' practices. After providing a working definition of urban food strategies, the second part presents an overview of their diffusion in Europe and briefly maps the historical diffusion of the model since the first appearance in Toronto in 2000. The fast adoption of urban food strategies in different urban contexts suggests the necessity of further investigations on the motivations behind the cities' drive towards food governance. In this sense, the chapter argues in favour of a more cautious assessment of food strategies on behalf of scholars, beyond the positive enthusiasm that has been so far connected to them. In particular, the chapter calls for a critique on the political implications of food strategies, which urgently need to be assessed within strategies of city branding, and to be tested on their actual consequences on urban regeneration and development processes.

Original book chapter: Agnese Cretella, (2016), Urban Food Strategies. Exploring Definitions and Diffusion of European Cities' Latest Policy Trend, in Kjell Andersson, Stefan Sjöblom , Leo Granberg , Peter Ehrström , Terry Marsden (ed.) *Metropolitan Ruralities (Research in Rural Sociology and Development, Volume 23)* Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.303 – 323.

2.1 Relevance

On the 15th of October 2015, 113 mayors of cities all around the world gathered in an official ceremony in Milan to sign the *Milan Urban Food Policy Pact*. The document is an international protocol advocating the development of food systems (i.e. the activities necessary to feed a certain population) at the city level, based on the principles of sustainability and social justice. These goals will be achieved by a variety of "recommended actions" ranging from promoting "decent jobs" and "urban agriculture" till the improvement of infrastructures and trade policies around food. However, although the pact has also been approved by the UN chief Ban Ki-Moon, it has no legal value. The actions described in the document are "voluntary. Its purpose is to provide strategic options to those cities aiming to achieve more sustainable food systems" (Milan Food Policy). In this sense, the document operates more on the symbolic level than it does on the practical one. The pact has been thought of as the legacy of the much criticised[5] EXPO 2015, the Universal Exposition that took place in Milan between May and October 2015 under the theme "Feeding the planet, energy for life" (Milan Food Policy 2015a).

The launch of the Food Policy Pact is illustrative of the recent trend –especially in cities of the Global North – in designing and implementing documents aiming at problematizing the social and environmental aspects of food. Cities in fact, are facing many environmental hazards such as high fossil fuel dependency, high levels of pollution and waste. Reframing food in a sustainable manner is considered one of the paths to decrease a city's ecological footprint and greenhouse gas emissions on a local and global scale (Steel 2009). Alongside environmental concerns, actions for changing people's dietary attitudes in urban settings are also seen as a way forward to solve social problems that have a direct link to food access and consumption. For instance, health consequences related to nutrition typical in the Global North such as diabetes and obesity due to the high sugar and fat content of processed foods, are well known and explored in literature (Rozin, Fischler et al. 1999).

Basically, cities seems to problematize the impacts of the 'conventional food system'[6], with potential actions related to the logistics of food and the nature of the distribution

[5] Exploitation of free or otherwise precarious labour, agri-food multinational as main sponsors or exhibitors (openly against the advertised sustainability/social justice aims), mafia infiltrations within contractors, lack of any plan for the re-use of the exhibition areas are some of the criticism moved against EXPO by local opposition groups (NOEXPO 2015).

[6] The conventional food system operates through a productive and functional approach based on global trade: markets and prices are established internationally on the principle of lowering costs and maximising production (Friedmann and McMichael 1989).

and retail infrastructures that support urban food demand. An example of this approach is the incorporation in urban policies of 'local food systems' practices (e.g. urban agriculture, community supported agriculture, farmers markets, etc.), aiming at supporting local farmers, traditional foods and communities and which are increasingly seen as pathways towards sustainability, social equity and wellbeing (Feenstra 1997).

The move towards a green, fair and sustainable food system has become particularly popular in cities of Western Europe, where food suddenly became an important policy priority only during the last decade (see section 3). Although cities used different names and formats to indicate these municipal food initiatives, the term *Urban Food Strategies* has been of particularly common use by most cities themselves (Livingstone 2006, Steel 2010) and from a growing body of dedicated academic literature. This is confirmed by the 7th Sustainable Food Planning conference of the Association of European School of Planning (AESOP), which took place between 7-8 October 2015 in Turin under the title "Localizing urban food strategies. Farming cities and performing rurality". The call for papers explained that "Performing rurality considers urban food strategies as a tool to define a cooperating relationship between the urban and the rural" whilst "localizing urban food strategies implies firstly to connect the Sustainable food planning issues in place and in time within each specific local context. Moreover, by targeting planners, agronomists, designers, geographers, administrators, activist etc. engaged in the urban food debate, Farming cities and performing rurality aims at representing a platform for the development of fruitful perspectives over policies and practices for Sustainable Food Planning" (AESOP 2015).

The interest on "urban food strategies" however, goes beyond singular city administrations or specific academic agendas. The European Union considers food an important element for urban development and renewal strategies, for instance by funding initiatives such as the URBACT project "Sustainable Food in Urban Communities" in 2012. Cities administrators of eleven European cities were guided to produce a policy document intended to promote sustainable food initiatives (URBACT 2015).

These examples testifies an actual interest in food policymaking within cities, but open up numerous questions on the significance and extension of the phenomena. For instance what "urban food strategies" actually are, and why they are attracting so much interest? This chapter examines the emergence and diffusion of the concept in the literature and in the European context, and proposes an agenda for research. The first part of the chapter present the relevance and reviews the existing literature on

urban food strategies, calling for clarity over the definition of the concept. The second part provides a working definition of urban food strategies and test their diffusion, by presenting data on their presence and historical development in Europe.

2.2 Urban Food Strategies. Emerging narratives

Despite the widespread adoption among policymakers and the academic interest that food strategies have provoked, a clear definition of what they actually are is not yet available. As a matter of fact, within the literature most contributions consists of descriptive studies of different cities initiatives, without a clear theoretical underpinning. Nevertheless some scholars claim that there is an urgent need for a comparative research on food strategies, so that cities could learn from one another, best practices can be identified and problems and limitations around food can be prevented:

"By providing comparative data on urban food strategies social scientists have the unique contribution to make to the creation of global policy networks that can disseminate best practices" (Sonnino 2009, p.433).

"The fact that until now little is known about the impact of urban food policies and about the most effective ways of organizing and implementing urban food strategies calls for comparative research on these strategies, addressing questions about the impact on public health, on the creation of employment opportunities, on reducing social exclusion, on greening the city" (Wiskerke 2009, p.383).

On a certain extent specialised scholars have been so far more concerned with promoting urban food strategies as carriers of progressive ideas around food, rather than focusing on their actual meaning or effectiveness:

"The concrete impacts of the urban food strategies described above have not been assessed yet. But it is easy to capture their potential just by taking into account the number of people involved in some of these reforms processes" (Sonnino 2009, p.421)

"What is surprising, instead, is the lack of attention from social scientists and planners alike for the enormous sustainable development potential of these initiatives" (ibid., p.426).

Thus, it looks like urban food strategies already occupy a specific positive space in the literature, whilst most authors seems to hold the assumption that everyone knows what they are. In this section we will attempt to unpack the specific discursive framework that is used to describe urban food strategies, in order to propose an

operational definition which takes this very same framework into account. For instance, in the introduction we presented few examples to show how urban food strategies/policies are a growing phenomenon. This is a narrative widely used by scholars, which are claiming that cities are and should be on the forefront with food policymaking. However these claims are not based on empirical data:

"Food strategies are elevating urban food issues to new level of importance. Most major cities in the UK now have an urban food strategy" (Machell G. 2012, p.128).

"Urban food strategies- the rise of municipalities and city-regions as food policy makers, pointing to new relations between the (local/regional) government and civil society" (Wiskerke and Viljoen 2012, p.25).

On one hand, local government/municipalities are indicated as leading actors in the production of urban food strategies, but together with the effort of civil society organizations and other entities which should be involved altogether to bring up change in the urban food system:

"We refer to the term 'urban food strategy' as a process consisting of how a city envisions change in its food system, and how it strives towards this change. Food strategies aim to place food on the urban agenda, capitalizing on efforts made by existing actors and creating synergistic effects by linking different stakeholder groups. Written milestones in this process can be charters, actions plans or full strategies; however an UFS does not directly imply a strategic document" (Moragues, Morgan et al. 2013, p.6).

In this last definition, the authors are pointing the focus on the participatory processes that should guide the "change" of the urban food system. An institutional framework here does not seem to be particularly relevant, so much that a written document (policy) does not imply the existence of an urban food strategy. On the other hand, both Morgan and Wiskerke argue that is precisely in their institutional efforts that food strategies have political relevance, because of their willingness to cross sectors, domains and antagonist powers:

"During the past decade a number of city governments in the UK have begun to design urban food strategies, a totally novel experience for all of them. While each strategy has its own local nuances, the common thread is the political desire to address the socio-ecological problems associated with or generated by the industrial food system, including some or all of the following: planning barriers to urban agriculture, diet

related diseases, carbon footprints, land conservation, food poverty, junk food clusters, urban–rural linkages and supermarket power" (Morgan 2015, p.10).

"Although urban food strategies differ from city to city, the common denominator is the intention to connect and create synergies between different public domains, such as public health, education, social cohesion, environmental protection, employment and quality of life" (Wiskerke 2009, p.379).

In the attempt of producing a definition of urban food strategies, we would rather take the institutional dimension into account, in the effort of exploring how food is integrated with governance and planning by European municipalities. In the same direction, the literature surrounding urban food strategies seems to be focusing on three principal narratives:

Urban: Cities are seen as "progressive" policymaking hotspots. Suddenly cities became privileged spaces to legislate around food issues, because of their ability to coordinate the activities of various actors around food, including the private sector and civil society.

Food: Food systems are framed as dualistic opposites: The "conventional food system" needs to be challenged and changed. Opposite to this, the adoption of an "alternative food system" is presented as a solution for society and the environment.

Strategy: Normative actions are urgently required in regard to the "problematisation", of the food system meaning that cities should implement specific institutional and strategic instruments.

Although these narratives are composed together to form very specific research agendas, they represent the background to the actual emergence of food strategies. It is therefore important to explore these different matters in order to unpack the ideas behind the emergence of the urban food strategies "trend" within the literature.

Urban

In the last few decades cities have undertaken a new geo-economic role due to the process of globalization, responsible for generating a destabilization of older hierarchy of powers, as argued by Saskia Sassen (2003). In a process which the Dutch-American scholar describes as *denationalization*, very limited space of action has been left to nation-states models, whereas cities are instead acquiring new centrality both economically and in building models of identity and citizenship. Cities are

increasingly seen as the physical space where antagonist instances are mediated. Hence, whilst cities represent the natural environment for germination of new forms of resistance and opposition, they are theatre of economic and political activities permeated by neoliberal ideologies. For Brenner, it is especially for this characteristic that cities have become privileged spaces for policy experiments: "Local (and regional) spaces are key institutional arenas of political strategies [..] Localities are increasingly being viewed as the only remaining institutional arenas in which a negotiated form of capitalistic regulation might be forged" (Brenner 2002, p.V).

In opposition to the authority represented by the nation-state model, this *new localism,* as defined by Brenner, seems to constitute a change of direction towards a more participative use of power. Consequently, many food scholars see localities as a place for empowerment, whilst the "global" as the place where neoliberal activities are conceived and imposed (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). This duality can really well explain the scholarly interest in urban scales since food strategies seems to address important issues of both urban and regional governance. On the one hand they interlink –or at least they attempt to do so– various urban and regional policy domains that are directly, or indirectly related to food. On the other hand, food strategies are inspired by ideas of solidarity and participation with little mention of economic instances such as promoting urban competiveness and growth.

At the same time, the many and widespread experiences of urban environmental policies have been understood from critical urban scholars as competition strategies rather than a drive towards environmental and social change. For Jonas (2012), discourses on social justice and urban environmental politics in contemporary city-regions are sustaining the progress towards low-carbon economies in late capitalism. In an earlier work (2011) Jonas also argued that the latest 'carbon control' urban initiatives are motivated more by city-marketing and inter-urban competition than by environmental and social sustainability objectives.

Food

From the early 19th century the relationship between human beings and cities has drastically changed. Harvey (2004) described this process as a *time-space compression*, an unprecedented mobility of capital, goods, people and food, which eventually led to the current situation where over half the world's population lives in urban settings (World Bank 2013). In fact, it is within the post-war economy that cities acquired a consistent centrality in the economic system imposing themselves in the political arena

together with the Nation-state model. It is, however, with the emancipation of food from nature (with the use of fertilizer and machineries) and from geography (with abatement of physical distances) that cities could actually grow in terms of population (Steel 2009). In particular this process was triggered by the modernization of the agri-food sector. Through the industrialization of agriculture with the use of chemicals, massive monoculture productions and an intense use of machinery (Horlings and Marsden 2011), cheap and abundant food could finally reach cities. In line with this fast transition towards a productive and functional approach, food was reframed as a trade commodity and food markets and prices started being established internationally.

The incorporation of food into corporate capitalism is at the base of today's "conventional food system", that even if had contributed to better and easier access to food for both urban and rural dwellers, it also brought up many externalities and contradictions for the environment and societies. For instance, the inequality in the distribution of resources is an issue widely discussed in various arenas: in order to count on cheap and abundant food for a small part of the world, the former is generating hunger, social and gender inequalities, dire straits for small farmers, unsustainable development, loss of biodiversity, and environmental and health issues (Pollan 2009, Holt Gimenez and Shattuck 2011).

These correlations are well explained by the concept of Food Regime by Friedmann and McMichael (1989). The two scholars frame the conventional food system in capitalistic terms, in order to emphasize the political dimension and relevance of the agro-food sector:

"The 'food regime' concept historicised the global food system: problematising linear representations of agricultural modernisation, underlining the pivotal role of food in global political-economy, and conceptualising key historical contradictions in particular food regimes that produce crisis, transformation and transition. In this sense, food regime analysis brings a structured perspective to the understanding of agriculture and food's role in capital accumulation across time and space" (McMichael 2009, p.140).

The important contribution of the two scholars is to underline the centrality of food in relation to the development of contemporary world economy. Thus, the conventional food system seems to be deeply embedded to global neoliberal practices since agro-food multinational corporations and supermarkets held a dominant role in shaping and designing today's food production and distribution. Entrepreneurialism,

economic liberalism and growth, free-market regulations are the key-terms to describe the trajectory supported also by major national and international institutions in the Global North. International development donors such as IMF, WTO and the World Bank, but also agri-food monopolies such as Cargill, Monsanto, ADM, Carrefour, Tesco, Wal-Mart, or even agricultural policies of the G-8 like the US Farm Bill or the EU's Common Agricultural Policy are supporting in practice a food system based on the neoliberal politics of profit (Holt Gimenez and Shattuck 2011).

The neoliberal organization of food production has definitely ensured access to more food for more people, but this has come together with the before mentioned negative impacts on the environment and societies. However the fact that cities are problematizing these impacts does not automatically implies that they are also problematizing the neoliberal practices that provoked them. In this sense, scholars have witnessed a form of opposition in "alternative food system" practices or networks, which are primarily concerned with locally create or restore social and economic connections in the way food is cultivated, processed and traded (Sonnino and Marsden 2006, Alkon and Agyeman 2011).

Especially in the European context and from the early 2000's, food social movements have been raising awareness that choosing what food to place in our plates should be more a radical political act rather than an unconscious daily habit. The notion of "alternative food system" broadly draws its contours from the practices outsourced from such political engagement. However the anticapitalistic and anticorporate focus that guided the agendas of many western food movements has been gradually replaced by a more apolitical, moderate tone, since different groups holds different degrees of opposition. For Holt Giminez and Shattuck (2011) nowadays the rise of the largest opposition movement to the conventional food system is emerging precisely in cities of the Global North. Composed by youths belonging to middle and working classes is described as the *Progressive trend*, is a model prioritizing local, just and sustainable food (ivi, p.124). Their agents are concerned with re-localising the food system via urban agriculture or with enhancing more direct urban-rural linkages (e.g. urban agriculture, community supported agriculture, farmer's markets, etc.). An example presented by the two scholars to illustrate the Progressive trend is the Slow Food Movement, which has been also responsible for creating a new food aesthetic in western mass culture. This aesthetic has been constructed in open opposition to the conventional system by introducing the notion of *quality* in alternative discourses (Miele, Murdoch et al. 2004, p.156). Developed on the base of pseudo-Weberian binary tensions like conventional/alternative, global/local, unsustainable/sustainable,

organic/GMO and so on, this new notion of *quality* has permeated the narratives of alternative food practices together with the *local*: its contours have been broaden up to include environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects. This cultural change made more people conscious of the implications linked with their individual food choices.

The construction of the conventional/alternative narrative has been widely used to build up the assumption that local food and local scales are by default natural opponents of the global, corporate, or conventional food system (Guthman 2008). This might be an explanation for the recent development and positive reception of food strategies, which have a strong focus on re-localizing resources and food production. However the anti-neoliberal dimension of these experiences is still something that remain to be seen.

Strategy

The word strategy describes a plan of action, a path to follow in order to achieve a specific goal. It is a term that has been widely applied to many disciplinary contexts, including planning, management and military theory. Thus, in each context the word delineates a coherent model thought to respond to a specific challenge. The theories of Henry Mintzberg (1994) on strategies and planning have been specifically applied to urban settings, forming the development school called *Strategic Urban Planning*. Borja and Castells (1997) describe them as a tool to respond to cities challenges and to propose ad hoc re-development projects. But in their view strategic urban planning should not be seen as a mere regulatory plan for the city and its dwellers:

"The participatory process has priority status in the laying down of content [..] is not a regulation or government programme (though when taken on by the State or by local government it should also show itself in regulations, investments, administrative measures, political initiatives and the like), but is rather a political contract between the public institutions and civil society" (ibid., 240).

In this sense urban food strategies can very well be included among the constituents of *Strategic Urban Planning*, as they seem to move away from the conventional food system, focusing on local and alternative food networks, based on sustainable, just and participatory practices. In this way, they seem to align to the agenda of certain civil society groups, presumably sharing the same vision of the food system.

The problem with "strategy" is that the term has been gradually deprived of its operational meaning, and is currently used by leaders, agencies and institutions as a

"motivational slogan". Rumelt (2011), sees this tendency as the result of developing *bad strategies* which "tends to skip over pesky details such as problems, it ignores the power of choice and focus, trying instead to accommodate a multitude of conflicting demands and interests". "Bad strategy cover up its failures to guide by embracing the language of broad goals, ambitions, visions and values" (ibid., 4-5). Conversely, a *good strategy* is "a coherent set of analyses, concepts, policies, arguments, and actions that responds to a high-stakes challenge" (ibid., 6).

In this sense, food strategies do not seem to have always coherent and measurable objectives as their targets are often built on subjective, socially constructed notions like "community", "sustainable", "alternative", "green", "local", or "quality". Moreover, for the sake of coherence the anti-capitalist and anti-global attitude should be considered an important component when building "alternative food systems", but these would inevitably clash with other institutional agendas. It remain important to investigate what is strategically to be achieved by singular food strategies, as it is difficult to imagine actions related to food that can be placed into completely a-political frameworks.

2.3 Filling the gaps: definition and diffusion

Stemming from the analysis on the different narratives around urban, food and strategies, we can build our working definition that it will help us in delimiting our field in order to explore the rise, development and diffusion of urban food strategies in the European context.

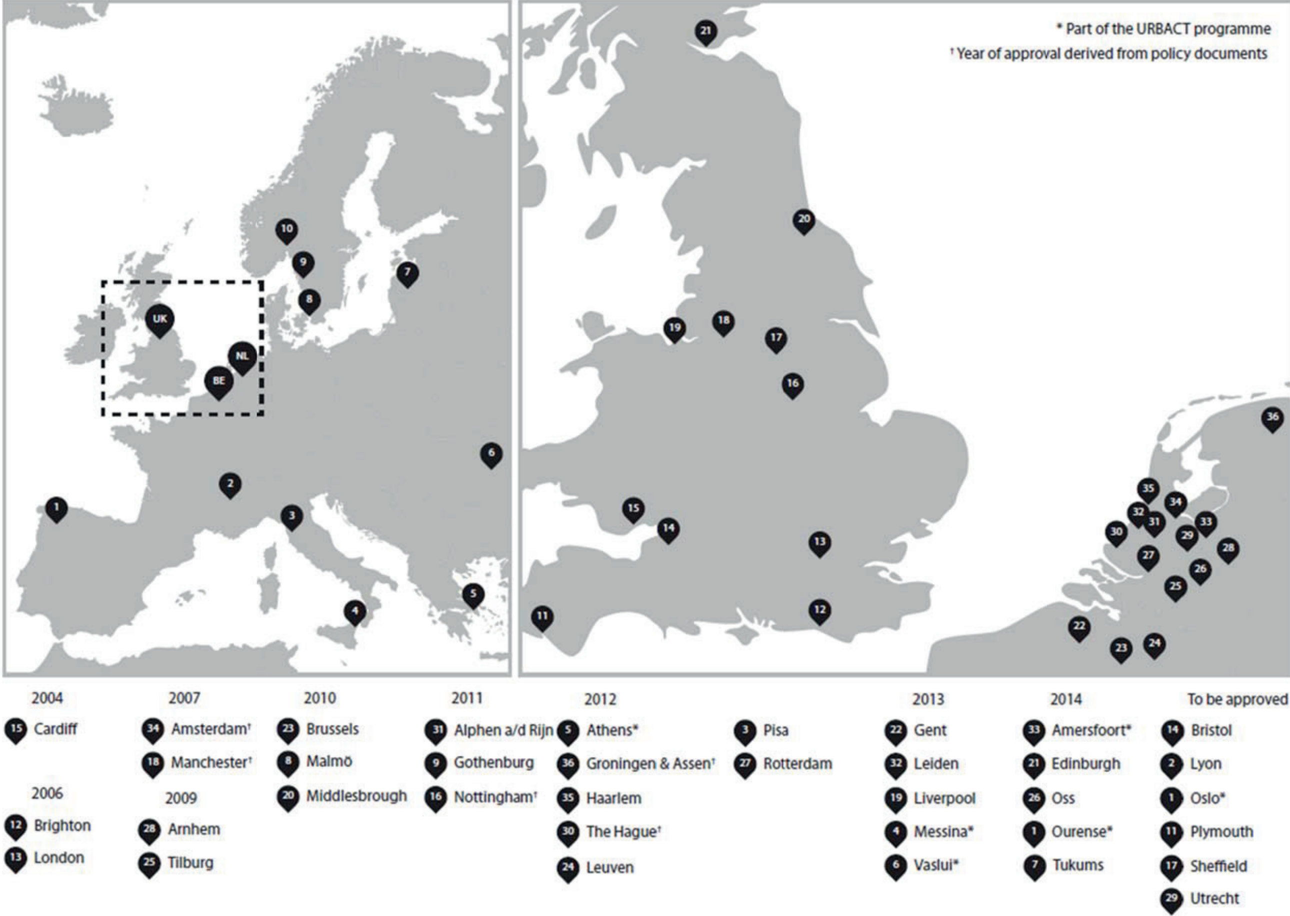
Urban food strategies are municipal policy documents that problematize food in its social, economic and environmental dimensions by reframing it as part of the urban realm, and by acknowledging and organizing the activities of civil society and institutions within specific administrative or geographic limits. Urban food strategies assume the urban not much as a scale of intervention, but as a political unit able to produce change.[7]

[7] This definition of UFSs slightly differs from the one developed in the conclusive chapter (6) of this dissertation. I decided to re-discuss UFSs' definition at the end of this thesis because, although my analytical gaze and approach remained unvaried, re-working the definition in the light of my findings allowed me to capitalize further on my empirical material. In the definition above, developed at the beginning of the research, the weight is clearly on the 'urban' dimension of UFSs. In the conclusive chapter, I contrast this definition with other readings and the empirical insights of chapters 3, 4 and 5. I conclude that UFSs' main characteristic lies in their 'food' focus, especially in its "sustainable", "alternative" forms and on the ability to capitalize on bottom-up local initiatives:

This definition can be applied very well to many policy experiments that have been developed within and outside Europe. Cities like San Francisco, New York, Toronto or London (Morgan 2009) have all developed documents where they are trying to address food issues by either supporting existing initiatives by civil society groups (e.g. urban gardens, farmers markets, community kitchens etc.) or by implementing ad hoc actions (e.g. improve quality of school meals, educational projects, public procurement).

In order to explore the diffusion of urban food strategies in European cities, data on their existence, distribution and year of delivering have been collected between September 2011 and April 2014. By employing mixed methodologies (literature review, snowball sampling and desk research) we identified a total of 36 urban food strategies. More specifically, 11 were found in the United Kingdom, 12 in The Netherlands, 3 in Belgium, 2 in Sweden, 2 in Italy and one in each of the following countries: Norway, France, Greece, Romania, Spain and Latvia. The result of this scoping has been translated into the map below, where distribution is presented together with a timeline built on the base of the year of production of the documents. The latter was deducted by either by contacting a respondent for each city or by looking directly at the strategies' documents (in the last case, cities are indicated with the symbol †). Additionally, the study includes cities whose strategies have already ended (e.g.: Amsterdam) or cities in the process of drafting policy documents at the time of data collection (these are displayed under *to be approved* on the map). Also, the documents produced in partnership with the EU project URBACT that were discussed in the introduction, are indicated with the symbol *.

"*Urban food strategies are urban policies that problematize food in its social, economic or environmental dimensions by promoting "sustainable", "alternative" forms of food consumption, distribution and production. UFSs aims at implementing specific administrative solutions to contrast conventional food market drives by capitalizing on bottom-up local initiatives and by employing participatory forms of policymaking*" (chapter 6, section 6.1).



Map 1: European distribution of UFSs

2.4 The origin of a trend

As we can see from the timeline below the map, the first city to develop a food strategy was Cardiff in 2004 with the document *Cardiff Food and Health Strategy*, available online (Cardiff Heath Alliance 2004). The document focuses on the link between food and health and presented seven action areas to tackle food related issues, including public food procurement, rewarding excellence, education and training for targeted age-groups. Beyond the actions of the documents, the benefits of the strategy were ultimately identified in the creation of the working group itself, a new network of groups and individuals able to operate as a 'multidisciplinary public health in action' (Fairchild and Morgan 2007). In this sense, it is important to recognise that accounts for policy change should not only be researched within institutional patterns, but in the contribution of researchers, activists, journalists and wide different groups, individuals and organizations which contribute to raise awareness. The importance of external actors to policy development has been recognized by a consistent body of work on *policy networks* (Rhodes 2006), *advocacy coalitions* (Sabatier 1998) and *policy entrepreneurs* (Mintrom 1997). This is confirmed by food strategies too, where certain cities employ the work of research institutions, which in some cases are directly responsible for advocating the strategies. This is for instance the case in Pisa and Tukums, where a big part of the promotion in setting up the documents was done respectively by the Universities of Pisa and Latvia. The same happened in the city of Bristol, with the involvement of professor Kevin Morgan from Cardiff University (Foodlinks 2013); or Groningen, where the policy document itself was actually written by Carolyn Steel , a well-known writer and academic. This enlightens the importance of researchers in policy design, advocacy and diffusion and can explain the academic enthusiasm in regard to food strategies.

The London Food Strategy was launched two years after Cardiff, in 2006. In comparison with the welsh city London's document (GLA 2006) takes food as central objective, with health as a component of the strategy but not as driving goal. But how happened that food suddenly became the object of attention within municipal policymaking? In the case of London, it seems (Reynolds 2009) that inspiration for the policy design was gained by looking at similar experiences such as the north American Food Policy Councils, which have similar objectives but a different structure. Food Policy Councils are bodies usually composed of diverse stakeholders (civil society, researchers, members of the private sector, etc.) whose role is to analyze issues within

the food system in order to provide recommendations for food policies improvement.[8] They differ from food strategies as with the latter we describe the policy document itself and not the process or the team involved in their creation.

Although the objectives and inspirations of food councils are not that different from the experiments that are rising in Europe, they remain a strict U.S./Canadian phenomenon. The only recent exception is represented by the city of Bristol that launched its own council in 2012.[9] An interesting reflection on the reasons why food councils were taken as inspiration but not as a policy model to be replicated in the European context is offered by Plantinga and Derkzen's (2012) research. This shows how the attempt at creating a food council for the city of Tilburg (NL) failed because "Food policy councils itself are a 'foreign' [concept] and therefore hard to engage. It is not in use in the Netherlands yet, and comparable concepts, like urban food strategies, are still a developing practice" (2012, p.88).

However, there are probably more reasons than simply the 'foreign' nature of food councils for not having developed this model as successfully as food strategies. There are many types of influences and events that might accelerate the adoption of certain policies, and each case should therefore be evaluated independently. As a matter of fact, the idea behind the development of European food strategies is likely coming from the *Toronto's Food Charter*, launched in May 2000 in the Canadian city (Just Just Food 2012). The Food Charter was developed as a direct consequence of the city's Food Policy Council, which was established more than 10 years earlier and was likewise the first ever developed (in 1990, see also Blay-Palmer 2009). We can consider Toronto as the first example of food strategy, both for its content and structure.

It is possible that the food strategy model have been "exported" in Europe after Toronto, and that the blooming of other initiatives after the Cardiff and London pioneering experiments happened in turn. Indeed, although London was not the very first to develop a food strategy, it was certainly the first to receive international media coverage and recognition for its pioneer food policy work (Reynolds 2009). Therefore the British capital certainly played the role of dragger not only for other cities in the UK, but also for the city of Amsterdam, which "copied" the idea only one year later (Dingemans 2012). It is probably due by the boost given by Amsterdam and London, that so many cities in their respective countries developed the same scheme or designed a similar policy document. This can also be explained with the important role

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8 See also: http://www.statefoodpolicy.org/

9 See: http://bristolfoodpolicycouncil.org/

that capital cities have in relation to others in their countries. As often happens, avant-garde ideas appears first in cities, and especially capital cities, where urban elites and social movements push for structural changes in society and politics (Marcuse and Van Kempen 2011).

As displayed in the map, between 2004 and 2014, 36 cities launched or developed a municipal policy document with food at its core. The fact that so many cities adopted a food strategy in a relatively short time by fashioning the original structure to their different requirements and concerns is in itself an interesting pattern. In this sense, the selection of priorities and approaches to the issues to be addressed varies widely among different socio-spatial contexts. Diversity is one of the identifying features of food strategies, as diverse are the issues to be tackled related to the food system. Thus, we attempted here to give consistency to food strategies by developing a definition and building up a database on their existence and diffusion.

The result of the mapping exercise seems to confirm a positive trend over time especially in western European cities. The fast adoption of urban food strategies in different urban contexts raises questions about the motivations behind the cities' drive towards food governance beyond the conventional\alternative food paradigm. In this sense, in this chapter we wanted to address the political significance of food discourses in order to propose future research questions. Urban food strategies should be examined on their role within strategies of city branding, and understood via their actual connections with urban regeneration and development processes.

2.5 Discussion and concluding remarks

In this chapter we attempted to define the meaning, scope and diffusion of urban food strategies in European cities. We started with introducing the relevance of these documents in terms of interest from both institutional and academic realms, to then present an overview of the narratives currently used in the growing literature on urban food strategies. We have seen how the normative auspices advanced by scholars are built on the assumption that food strategies can constitute a potential alternative to the "conventional food system", and that the spatial locus where these should be implemented are cities.

We hope to see more in depth research to demonstrate if urban food strategies are actually designed for the benefit of all urban communities or if are instead creating further divisions among different groups. If concepts like "bottom-up" "green" "local"

"sustainable" are socially constructed we might question if these are always and inherently "good". By celebrating specific food typologies, modes of production or consumption rather than others scholars and policymakers reiterate a too simplistic good/bad vision of the food system. It is important to investigate what are the social targets of urban food strategies since food is still an highly politicized topic and could be strategically used to foster spatial exclusion, competition and city-branding. The content, priorities, partnerships, stakeholders and main actors participating to the development of urban food strategies should be carefully investigated in order to assess the real political impact of these documents.

By presenting various perspectives on the food system, we wanted to suggest that urban food strategies are phenomena that cannot be simply read through one analytical framework. The spread of these initiatives can be explained by geographical and cultural proximity, emulation of certain examples or supra national support. Certainly urban elites and academics play a central role in the transfer of new concepts, and they do so by creating networks and arenas which goes beyond geographical limits. In this sense the transfer of the concept of urban food strategies constitute an excellent platform to investigate the behaviour of European cities and city-regions, both in the light of inter-urban competition and on their relations with national and supra-national bodies. Food governance seems to be part of a specific discursive frameworks able to connect the local to the supra-national while by-passing central national institutions. This goes well with the theories presented on the new centrality of urban settings: the *New Localism* and intra urban competition might be useful tools to understand the motivations of cites behind the creation of food strategies.

Yet, if the new decisional space taken by cities are giving them more freedom in explicitly using their power we also need to question the political implications of this power. More research is needed to penetrate on which extent food strategies are either challenging the contradictions created by the conventional food system, or weaken the struggles of alternative food practices by co-opting their ideas. Surely, the ideas contained in these documents are creating the possibility for an institutional legitimation for "alternative" food struggles. This is an important shift which denotes the recognition of certain set of problems related to food consumption, while asserting the institutional responsibility (and willingness) to address them.