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Chapter 3 —

Beyond the Alternative Complex. The London Urban Food Strategy and Neoliberal Governance

The analysis of the narratives used by policy makers when arguing in favour of designing and implementing UFSs presented in the previous chapter suggested that UFSs' supposed 'alternativeness' may contribute to their increasing popularity and spread. In this chapter, I explore this hypothesis by discussing the case of the London Food Strategy. The empirical focus enables me to include in the analysis the broader context in which a UFS is developed. Interestingly, the London case shows that its specific food policy was designed in a context characterized by urban developments and policy arrangements, which are, arguably, ideologically divergent from the UFS's declared objectives. An explanation is sought in the pertinence of advocacy networks of food and planning scholars that tend to frame UFSs as a desirable 'alternative' to exiting food practices. The chapter provides an answer to the second research question by delineating two labels, 'alternative' and 'neoliberal', in UFS-related publications and by subsequently comparing these with the London UFS's policy content. The analysis presented begs the question how a concrete set of urban agendas influences the development of an UFS in a specific context. This question will be address in the next chapter.

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3 — Beyond the Alternative Complex. The London Urban Food Strategy and Neoliberal Governance

Abstract

In this paper we will introduce the concept of Urban Food Strategies (UFSs) and describe the specific case of the city of London, the first European municipality to develop a governance experiment specifically on food. In particular, we will discuss the positioning of the London Food Strategy (LFS) within the *alternative* idea of urban development strategies and the mainstream, *neoliberal* entrepreneurial model by way of discourse analysis. This paper questions the nature of the LFS in relation to the introduction of the sustainable development dogma in London urban governance from the early 2000s to the recent 2012 Summer Olympics, declared as the "greenest games ever". By way of conclusion, we will argue that alternative projects are not free of neoliberal influences, and even if they are, they will likely be the subject of strategic manipulation to counter balance other reckless institutional entrepreneurial projects.

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3.1 Introduction

In the past two decades, cities and city-regions have become spaces for the development of avant-garde policies focused on food systems in order to improve sustainability and social justice. This process is occurring partly because of contingent urban specificities. For instance, phenomena such as waste and carbon emissions related to food transportation, and increased health risks related to food consumption have come to be recognised as pressing matters for cities (Lang 2006, Steel 2009). Also, within the fast growing urban population, fostering urban and peri-urban agriculture has become a vital tool in building sustainable, socially and environmentally just cities, especially in Europe and North America (Moragues, Morgan et al. 2013).

Furthermore, health and ethical issues related directly to the way food is cultivated, processed and delivered are raising political questions that challenge the current Corporate Food Regime (CFR), defined as a corporate-driven system (Friedmann 2005) in which food has been transformed from a common good into an industrialised, depersonalised, commodified trade. The CFR represents the mainstream model of food production and distribution because of its hegemonic position, supported by major international development donors such as WTO and World Bank, agri-food monopolies such as Monsanto, Carrefour and Tesco, and G8 agricultural policies such as the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (Holt-Gimenez 2011). The neoliberal nature of the CFR relies on an economic model built on the doctrine of free market, to the point that trade and liberalism have contributed to a plethora of social and environmental hazards in both urban and rural settings, as extensively argued by numerous scholars: social and gender inequalities, dire straits for small farmers, unsustainable development, loss of biodiversity, hunger and pollution are only few of the issues generated from the neoliberalisation of the food system (McMichael 1994, Carlsson-Kanyama and González 2009).

These questions have slowly gained attention in political arenas, especially in cities in the Global North where food policies are implemented in various ways. To a certain extent, the drive to food governance for policymakers romanticises the will to reconnect cities with their productive agricultural areas, in an attempt to move beyond the urban-rural gap. There is a strong focus on establishing more direct urban-rural links (e.g. Community Supported Agriculture, farmers' markets, labelling of traditional products, etc.) (Dahlberg 1994) and on re-localising the food system via urban agriculture.

More specifically, urban agriculture is re-emerging in the Global North as a tool to foster urban food security, community building, social justice, sustainability and health altogether (Bellows, Brown et al. 2004, Specht, Siebert et al. 2014). While acknowledging these positive contributions to urban life, critical scholars (McClintock 2013, Tonkiss 2013, Galt, Gray et al. 2014) are yet doubting the "alternative" nature of urban agriculture in relation to the CFR, and more definitely of Food Movements as drivers of structural change within the food system. It is within this theoretical framework that we position the present analysis.

As a matter of fact, food has become a sort of a trend in the Global North. There has been an increasing interest in it, more specifically on quality, by urban dwellers themselves who are demanding more local, healthy, and sustainable options. This demand has been responsible for the inception of a variety of movements and lifestyles, for instance "alternative agro-food networks" (see Goodman 2004), the "grow-your-own" or "locavorism"[10] among many others. While many of these initiatives influence a readjustment of supply chains in the market, these same groups also share an aesthetic built on an open opposition to the neoliberal-corporate mainstream system (Miele, Murdoch et al. 2004). Local institutions responded to this interest, taking up the lead by reshaping their agendas towards the ideas of a growing urban population becoming more and more concerned about the food they eat.

Scholars are discussing these topics among various disciplines, conveying the important role played by cities in the food system. However, there is a tendency, especially among agro-food scholars, to theorise the CFR merely as a set of impacts and to construe local food and local scales as their natural opponents (Guthman 2008). This attitude has contributed to the assimilation of most urban food governance projects within the scholarly "alternative" paradigm of food provision, implicitly assuming an opposition to the mainstream neoliberal model; we can encapsulate this tendency with the expression *alternative complex*.

Yet, critical urban research interprets the new attention on food governance in cities within a more conservative thus neoliberal narrative. For Jonas (2012), discourse on social justice and environmentalism is now forming the political agenda of Western city-regions as the result of a larger restructuring of the economic system. This is leading towards low-carbon economies, a shift which is seen as necessary in order to

[10] The "grow-your-own" philosophy consists of the direct production of food by consumers, while "locavorists" are interested in purchasing locally produced food. See also (Elton 2010).

attract capitals, enhance place-marketing, and bolster citizen consensus. Agyeman and Evans (2004) synthetise with the term "just-sustainability" the peculiar trend in both US and UK political debates of combining discourse of social and environmental justice with the concept of sustainable development. Hence, this new common language has the effect of composing the otherwise contrasting political agendas of governments and activists, NGOs and private corporations (see Djalali and Vollaard 2009).

We believe that the use of environmental narrative as a consensus device could also be found in the development of Urban Food Strategies (UFSs). In this paper we will therefore make use of these critical perspectives to discuss the positioning of the London Food Strategy within the "alternative" idea of urban development strategies and the mainstream, "neoliberal" entrepreneurial model by way of discourse analysis.

3.2 Urban Food Strategies: Is an alternative model emerging?

In the European context, UFSs are expressions of the increasing centrality of food in economic and political debates. We define UFSs as either municipally-led, or municipal-partnership initiatives, legislating within the limit of the city or city-region. In our definition, the institutional dimension as a theoretical limit is necessary to distinguish UFSs from other urban food projects driven only by other organisations, individuals, or collectives. In this way, the intention is to exclude from the definition (but not necessarily from our analysis) the plethora of spontaneous and informal food initiatives flourishing nowadays in cities. We recognise that many UFSs are wanted, driven, or managed by actors other than municipalities. However, we define UFSs as singly the initiatives counting on some sort of government support and legitimisation.

UFSs have been, so far, an understudied phenomena in the sense that most of the material available on this topic is constituted by grey literature or by empirical case studies on different cities' initiatives without a theoretical underpinning. Our attempt to produce a definition is therefore based on the observation of specific cases (consequently on the analysis of policy documents) in the European context, considering that diversity is also one of their identifying features of UFSs, as the issues related to the food system are also very diverse. In fact, UFSs are difficult to group under common characteristics due to their local nature: some cities call their initiatives Urban Food Strategies, others use different names such as Food Charts or Food Plans to describe municipal programmes, but in the end, institutional commitment is shared by all of them.

Within the academic literature, there is still a lot of confusion on what UFSs actually are to the point that there is not yet an agreement upon a widespread definition. UFSs are often incorporated into the wider concept of food planning, and even this is the object of discussion as it constitutes a "strange exception" in the planning discipline (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). Indeed, while other types of planning are well defined and developed, food planning is still a work in progress and scholars can barely agree on what it is and who designs it.

Another definition indicates UFSs as a "process consisting of how a city envisions change in its food system, and how it strives towards this change" (Moragues, Morgan et al. 2013, p.6). As a matter of fact, one of the main goals of UFSs is to reconnect citizens and food products through a set of integrated policies originally belonging to different governance domains (e.g. health, planning, economy, education) (ibid.). At the same time, although employing widely different institutional structures, the underpinned willingness of UFSs is to be based on participatory, collaborative work around food issues with residents (Sonnino and Spayde 2014). With the double goal of facing both environmental and social concerns, these policies have ambitious visions for cities' food futures.

Because of these allegedly positive attributes, scholars claim that there is an urgent need for comparative research between cities to allow them to learn from one another:

"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).

Even if still wrapped in a theoretical nebula, food strategies have received the attention of many scholars indicating that cities are the locus of the emergence of an "alternative food geography": a process in which cities and metropolitan regions are becoming new actors in designing food policies and their implementation (Wiskerke 2009).

Hence, in most scholars' work on the topic UFSs and urban food governance projects are inherently defined as either "alternative" or as "good practices". Kevin Morgan moves this hypothesis even further claiming that:

"food planning in its broadest sense is arguably one of the most important social movements of the early twenty-first century" (Morgan 2009, p.343).

We have defined this scholarly tendency as the alternative complex. This can be explained because UFSs are often not designed in a top-down manner and are focused

on a variety of environmental and health issues related to food that arguably aim to counter balance negative externalities which market policies ignore. Moreover, UFSs are often shaped together with the residents of a city and are aimed at creating better living conditions through the integration of previously disconnected policies (see Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006). UFSs define food as "more than a commodity or substance [...] that needs to be eaten to survive'' (Renting and Wiskerke 2010, p.1909) with the overarching goal of re-designing the system of food provision in a more just and sustainable manner. Also, UFSs are not openly designed to serve the "visitor class" (Eisinger 2000) or the more affluent social groups, but are rather targeting low-income residents. For instance, we already mentioned that urban agriculture projects are a big component in the design of these policies. This is a trend adopted especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where Urban Agriculture has been seen as an opportunity to support community food security (Pothukuchi 2004).

At the same time, when labelling initiatives as "alternative" scholars should consider that the new institutional space taken by cities does not stop at the food governance sphere. Broadly speaking, the flourish of avant-garde policy experiments in urban settings stays for Brenner and Theodore (2002) in a condition of ambivalence: cities are spaces of economic and political activities permeated by neoliberal ideologies, whilst still being the natural environment for the germination of new forms of resistance and opposition. Thus, these two forces are actually driving together today's urban development strategies precisely by combining the mainstream (neoliberal/economic) and the alternative (redistributive/social).

Here, we want to explore and challenge the definition of the alternativeness of UFSs, drawing from the story of the first UFS developed in Europe: the London Food Strategy (LFS). We will describe how London took up the idea of developing an urban food policy initiative, partly inspired by a successful story coming from Canada. At the same time, the strategy was inserted among the initiatives forming a political project started in the early 2000s, when the physical growth of the city started being submitted to a brand new perspective: sustainable development.

3.3 Methodology

The argument underpinning this paper is based on mixed methodologies. Direct observations and participation in events linked to the LFS and its projects were undertaken over a period of five months between April and July 2009. That period was key in developing our research angle: understanding the ideological nature of the LFS. A qualitative study on governance, as presented here, flowing into discourse analysis

seemed like the most natural path. Parallel to observation, we undertook the study on discourse to literature, documents, and media, directly, or indirectly, linked with the LFS. Interviews were also conducted with key-figures of the LFS in order to identify discursive patterns and particular narratives. By using text units as a source of data we developed interpretative frames willing to unpack social and political constructions. At the same time, we wanted to move beyond the mere analysis of language by using the theorisation of 'Discourse' developed by Hajer and Veersteeg who define it as "'an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer and Versteeg 2005, p.175).

In particular, we wanted to explore the coherence of certain discourse with others, in order to unveil the political strategies behind the maintenance of neoliberal ideologies and practices. That also meant stepping into critical discourse analysis, necessary to investigate "what structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events played a role in these modes of reproduction" (Van Dijk 1993, p.250).

We will look at the texts of two different, allegedly opposed, discourses. On one hand the *alternative*, defined here as redistributive, neo-Keynesian, dedicated to social and environmental problems. On the other hand the *neoliberal*, characterised for its strong entrepreneurial, corporate and economic objectives. In the next section we will trace a storyline seeking to reveal the inherited nature of being *alternative* attached to the LFS. This is important in order to reveal the fluent nature of certain political strategies that are able to travel between different geographical contexts.

3.4 The shift to sustainable development in London's governance

The British capital has historically suffered from many problems derived from its global city status. For decades, the most pressing calls for policymakers were identified in reducing the gap between housing shortage and overpopulation. Hence, since the Second World War, the focus of planners and policymakers was mainly directed to the limitation of the capital's physical growth. Even with the delivery of both of the New Towns Acts, in 1946 and 1964 respectively, the intention was to find a remedy to the congestion in London by deflecting people towards cities designed for a middle-class concerned with the decline of their quality of life in the capital (Alexander 2009). Indeed the New Towns were designed and developed paying attention to the social and recreational needs of their dwellers, openly inspired by the garden-city utopia of Ebenezer Howard (1898). Hence, the narrative of urban control for London can be

found in all the cities' plans produced after the war, starting with the Greater London Plan by Patrick Abercrombie (1944), the Greater London Development Plan (1969) and some traces of this 'obsession for containment' can still be found in the Planning Acts of 1990 (Hardy 2006).

The restoration of the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2000 (it was abolished by Margaret Thatcher in 1986)[11] and the election of Ken Livingstone as the new Mayor of London brought up a new vision for the capital's future. The modern plan for the city, The London Plan (2002-2004), can be considered as a historical shift when compared with the previous tradition in the sense that urban growth was indicated as a positive feature, and not simply as something to be controlled or contained. Livingstone's vision was no longer linked to the old planning school expressing a need to restrict the expansion of London, but rather to be seen as as "an exemplary, sustainable world city" (GLA 2002). At the same time, Livingstone was able to produce an impressive amount of cross-sector policies where economic growth mingled with sustainability:

"There is an energy strategy, a food strategy, a walking plan for the city, a set of proposals for the rivers and lakes- with an emphasis on democratic access. This is a set of documents that deserves a wider readership than it will probably ever get. However, the main economic aim that underlines it all is to support the continuation of the existing growth of financial and business services. [...] This then, accepts and works with the now established neoliberal hegemony" (Massey 2013, p.85-86).

The innovation brought up by Livingstone's government lies in the re-introduction of a "growth first" logic in the political discourse (Cochrane 2007), but is fashioned on the idea of sustainable development. The mayoral strategies launched throughout the 2000s sought to support London's expansion while legislating against the threats to the environment and social equality associated with such growth.

3.5 Introducing food in urban policy

The idea of linking up food consumption with urban policies originated in the late 1960s in Canada, in the city of Toronto. From then on different individuals and civil society organisations started a dialogue with the City Council to discuss health related risks associated with food production and distribution. In the following decades the advocacy coalitions for a more just, healthy and sustainable food system were

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[11] The then named Greater London Council was abolished due to the growing interference of the then president Ken Livingstone in national political debates.

successfully responsible for the foundation of the Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC) in 1990. Even if the structure of food policy councils and UFSs differs (the former are more stable institutional bodies, whereas the latter are end-oriented programmes), their objectives are similar. For instance, the TFPC has been active in areas such as development of food and hunger action plans and strategies, planning, urban agriculture, education and advocacy, and economic development.

The model of the TFPC has been taken up by many other North-American cities to develop similar food-related policies and has been presented worldwide as a pioneer in urban food policy. The positive outputs generated by the TFPC are acknowledged by many scholars (Friedmann 2007, Koc, Macrae et al. 2008, Kaill-Vinish 2009), and the council has rightfully been described as “an organisation at the interstices of planning, health and social change, provides an example of how urban spaces — in physical and policy terms — can be used for progressive ends to create “the just city” (Blay-Palmer 2009, p. 2).

A celebrated example of how policy can make the difference in changing people's attitudes and habits and improve food security among urban dwellers, the TFPC keeps an outstanding role in the field of urban food policy. Such a role is something of which the TFPC itself seems to be aware:

”Today, the Toronto Food Policy Council’s views, experiences and publications are followed internationally” (TFPC 2013).

That said, Toronto and its Food Council are without a doubt internationally recognised as an established example, defined as a “best practice” on food governance (Welsh and MacRae 1998). Nevertheless some scholars have raised doubts on the way best practices are constructed, represented, and especially disseminated, as every policy transfer always presupposes the creation of new knowledge by means of a different frame of the policy problem (Bulkeley 2006).

Openly inspired by Toronto (Reynolds 2009), the then Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, created a brand new municipal body in 2005 — the London Food Board — whose goal was to discuss how to improve Londoners’ food system. Soon after its establishment, the London Food Board started a discussion for a Food Strategy. The document *Healthy and Sustainable Food for London, The Mayor’s Food Strategy* (GLA 2006) was officially launched in May 2006, with the presence of the well-known media character Eric Schlosser, author of the book *Fast Food Nation* (2001).

The initial description of the project claimed that:

“The London Food Strategy seeks to build on our success stories, so that people will be able access better quality food, with minimal impact on our environment” (Livingstone 2006).

Also, in the strategy document itself the Mayor stressed the environmental-social (therefore alternative) dimension of his plan of action as:

”Obesity and diet-related illnesses account for a huge number of premature deaths in London, with many on low incomes suffering disproportionately. In many parts of London, people struggle to access affordable, nutritious food. Many of those involved in the food system are barely benefiting from it economically and the environmental impact of the food system is considerable” (GLA 2006, p. 2).

The initial ambition of the Mayor was therefore to primarily favour environmental and social problems. However the priorities listed in the official document presented a different hierarchy; the goals of the strategy were summarised in the following six areas of action (GLA 2006, p. 2).

1. Ensuring commercial vibrancy

2. Securing consumer engagement

3. Levering the power of procurement

4. Developing regional links

5. Delivering healthy schools

6. Reducing food-related waste and litter

These six pillars point out a holistic view of the possible entry points to address urban food issues, but the overarching goal seems to end in ensuring the commercial vibrancy of the city. This gives a more entrepreneurial, *neoliberal* dimension to the document, confirmed also by differing statements as follows:

“Food tourism is an increasingly vital element of London’s attraction for visitors. It has many of the best restaurants in the world, and an unparalleled choice of cuisine. Ensuring this diversity is enhanced and quality continually improved will add to the attractiveness of London as a place to live and do business” (GLA 2006, p. 2).

This document (the initial of the two different versions) first published in 2006 was more visionary than practical, as it was only with the release of an Implementation Plan in 2007 that a budget of £3.87m was finally distributed to various projects in the following three years (MayorWatch 2006, LDA 2007). Unfortunately, the concrete outputs of the first LFS are difficult to grasp. There is no database or report available on the kinds of projects or outputs generated by the strategy, therefore much of the information we are able to analyse is still on a discursive level. The inability to effectively evaluate London's food projects was also expressed by Caraher and Dowler (2007) who stressed the isolated nature of most food initiatives, based on a then weak food policy framework and sustained only by volunteers' labour and temporary and precarious funding. Morgan and Sonnino (2010), in evaluating a school food reform project inserted in the LFS, agree with Caraher and Dowler: the lack of funding and a governance only circumscribed to the city level constitute two large obstacles to the sustainability ambitions of the Mayor.

Even if the outputs of the first LFS were weak or isolated, the value of Livingstone's attempt lies in the act of introducing food to the policy agenda, thus proposing an avant-garde vision of the consideration of food matters as a political responsibility. Nevertheless, the way priorities are framed in the LFS document is consistent with other strategic plans for the city launched in the same period by the Mayor, characterised by a mix of both alternative and neoliberal discourses. This intuition would later be inherited by Ken Livingstone's successor, Boris Johnson, who would demonstrate even greater ability in supporting ideologically opposite policy projects.

3.6 Bipartisan convergence

The food strategy continued when the new Mayor of London Boris Johnson took office in 2008. This was not necessarily expected, as he could have withdrawn the LFS and its food related projects because of his more conservative agenda. Instead, he welcomed the idea of the strategy with an advertised focus on food security and food growing linked with land re-use and urban development. With the launch of a new document, the *Mayor's Food Strategy: Healthy and Sustainable Food for London. An Implementation Plan 2011-13* (GLA 2011), we can interpret his vision for the city of London's food future. Compared to the previous strategy there are many similarities, especially in the mixing of ideologically opposite visions in an attempt to build an identity for the city that could be both sustainable and entrepreneurial:

“Feeding a city of millions is a mammoth 24-hour operation supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs, nurturing enterprise and pumping billions of pounds into our economy. Our culinary attractions — from street markets to specialist shops to Michelin-starred restaurants — are essential ingredients of the city’s unrivalled cultural scene” (GLA 2011, p.5).

Using words such as “enterprise”, “thousands of jobs”, “billions of pounds”, etc. the Mayor applied a straight entrepreneurial-neoliberal discourse to his food strategy. At the same time, many other parts of the document presented a more alternative dimension:

“We face significant challenges to ensure access to decent, nutritious, affordable food is universally available to all Londoners, irrespective of income or location. We must also ensure that the food system treads with utmost care on the environment” (GLA 2011, p.5).

The ambitious plan to tackle health and poverty issues, social exclusion, unequal distribution of land and wealth, and at the same time support a neoliberal-entrepreneurial trajectory therefore continue under Johnson's office. In fact, not only has the LFS persisted despite the change of mayors, but it has also evolved in the direction of an even greater balance between the objectives of sustainable development and economic growth.

For instance, under the Johnson LFS umbrella, one of the most advertised and successful projects delivered in the framework of the LFS was the Capital Growth Campaign (CG). It was launched on November 4, 2008 together with Rosie Boycott, a well know British radical journalist and feminist[12] who was selected to direct the London Food Board – the municipal department responsible to discuss Londoners’ relationship with food. The idea of the campaign was fostered by the London Food Link, a network of organisations and individuals around the capital that are involved in promoting a more sustainable and ethical food system for London. The members of this network are very diverse, there are farmers, writers, restaurant owners, and managers of communities amongst others; enough diversity to make this project, in our opinion, a bottom-up initiative.

[12] The selection of certain radical profiles (Eric Schlosser in the case of Livingstone, Rosie Boycott for Boris Johnson) to promote the LFS could also be seen as an attempt to emphasise the alternative dimension of these projects.

Also, CG was directly inspired by the *Vancouver Food Policy Council's '2010 Challenge' for 2,010 New Community Shared Garden Plots by 2010* (Capital Growth 2012a): the initial aim of the project was to identify and map plots of land around London that could be possibly used by groups of enthusiastic gardeners or organisations to grow vegetables for their own consumption or for their local community. At that time, increasing the amount of vegetables grown locally was described as a good path, especially in economic terms right after the world food price crisis in 2008 (Rosset 2008). Also, some of the benefits were identified in the fact that the practice of local food growing has beneficial impacts on the environment and on health. Consuming locally grown food should also decrease the pollution produced by food miles, the distance travelled by our food to arrive to our plate, and at the same time increase the sense of community, allowing people to meet each other while working on shared gardens (Sustain 2013).

Prior to the launch of the project, the growing of food on urban land was already very strong and heartfelt in London with the phenomenon of allotments (i.e.: urban gardens accessible through council lists). However, to get access to an allotment there are usually long waiting lists, especially in recent years as a result of an increasing interest in the "grow-your-own" philosophy. CG has been helping these activities to expand and encourage the emergence of new ones by offering initial financial and logistical support to diverse individuals or organisations such as offices, schools, hospitals, residential areas and parks. The Mayor himself summarised his vision for the project:

"Linking up currently unloved patches of land with people who want to discover the wonders of growing their own food, delivers massive benefits. It will help to make London a greener, more pleasant place to live whilst providing healthy and affordable food. This will aid people to reconnect with where their fruit and veg comes from and cut the congestion and carbon emissions associated with the transportation of food from miles away. Capital Growth is a win-win scheme - good for our communities and good for our environment" (LFL 2008).

CG has been constructed on the base of a specific narrative which identifies local food as synonymous with sustainability, while working with relatively little funding and the support of volunteers. However, even the general assumptions of the positive effects of food growing and on "going local" respectively on economy, pollution, and community-building have been questioned by a consistent body of research (Born and Purcell 2006, Feagan 2007, Edwards-Jones, Milà i Canals et al. 2008).

The food growing campaign gained consistent coverage in the press, receiving space in major media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *BBC News*, *BBC Radio 4*, *Daily Mail*, and

Evening Standard (Capital Growth 2012b). The reactions were mainly positive, but the green turn of the Mayor (which was unexpected, because of his conservative political orientation) generated comments questioning the ideological nature of his policies:

"The Mayor appears determined to nanny Londoners into eating their greens, which will be distributed according to principles closer to Karl Marx than Adam Smith" (Cohen 2009).

Unlike other food projects delivered under the LFS umbrella, CG produced a detailed report listing the output of the work which was defined as a "growing success" (Sustain 2013). The campaign seemed indeed able to produce a real impact on improving the well-being of many Londoners, making it possible for community food growing to flourish. More than 99,000 people were involved in the project, with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and ages. 22 out of the 33 London boroughs signed to support the initiatives working on a total 124 acres in and around London's schools, housing estates, and otherwise derelict land (ibid.).

Despite having reached the goal of 2,012 new food growing spaces, if we move the analysis of the report on the discursive level we can identify both alternative and neoliberal dimensions. For instance, there is a strong attention to enable community-building, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in order to tackle phenomena such as social exclusion and marginalisation. This could lead to distinguishing between "good" and "bad" citizens, as for instance:

"Our gardens at Rocky Park have grown out of spaces that were plagued by anti-social behaviour. We have reclaimed the open spaces on our estate by joining and journeying together, realising through events and talking to each other, we can make changes that have a positive impact on our lives and the place where we live" (Sustain 2013, p.3).

On the other hand, some statements show the intention of adjusting certain behaviour to the norm; and of disciplining citizens:

"Or it's when a troubled person on the margins of society discovers the garden, becomes involved, and it improves their life" (Sustain 2013, p.17).

"Taking responsibility for other living things has helped some of our most disruptive pupils to turn their behaviour around" (Sustain 2013, p.18).

This particular form of understanding social problems has also being described as "Neoliberal Paternalism" (Soss, Fording et al. 2011). This occurs when certain directions are given in terms of actions, morals and behaviours in an effort to produce

disciplined and docile citizens.[13] For instance, Shannon (2013) described how this process has affected the food desert governance narrative in the US, in an effort to convince low-income populations to adopt healthier eating choices. In his analysis, citizens are transformed merely into consumers, in the sense that life improvement is accountable only to personal individual choices — moving welfare away from institutional responsibility.[14] Instead of demanding better and more affordable food, decent salary wages, or concrete forms of assistance to guarantee food access, it results in citizens themselves proactively embracing these authoritative directives.

3.7 "The greenest games ever"

The neoliberal rationale in Johnson's food politics emerges more clearly in his management of the Summer Olympics, that were held in London in 2012.

For instance, even if not officially linked with the Olympic games, the subtitle of the CG project was "2,012 new community food growing spaces for London by 2012" (Capital Growth 2012b), with the goal to champion sustainable food within the games context. For the London Food Board's chair, Rosie Boycott, the 2,012 new plots should have been completed just in time for the Olympic Games in order to feed some of the athletes with the food grown in the capital:

"The eyes of the world will be on London [during the Olympics] and it is very important that it is as sustainable as it can be" (Rosie Boycott, in Hamilton 2008).

The Olympic games, as well as other mega-events, are a pump for the local economy, but at the same time they can create uneven social and environmental outputs. As a matter of fact, mega-events are mainly designed to attract global investments and to enhance place-marketing, often at the expense of local communities. Such events are therefore often accompanied by strong opposition movements as large amounts of capital are invested to produce temporary economic influxes. One recent example of opposition to a mega-event is the 2013 riots in Brazil. These were due to Brazil's holding of both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic games, and thus the need

[13] For instance the 2011 London riots generated a counter movement, the "Brooms army", which fostered a juxtaposition between "good" and "bad citizens" (Peacock 2014).

[14] Another example to illustrate this process in the UK context is the national campaign "Big Society" launched by Prime Minister David Cameron, which could be considered one of the most advanced instances of the neoliberal welfare dismantling process. See also: (Kisby 2010).

for the government to make large investments for these projects which exacerbated the discontent of the population (Dodd 2013).

This situation makes more than necessary an effort in communication by the stakeholders imposing such projects as “mega-events typically tend to be produced and imposed by urban elites who nonetheless need to attract the support of local citizens to legitimate, attend, work on, and help pay for them” (Roche 2002, p.157).

From this point of view, it is possible to see the political rationality behind the Capital Growth project, especially given the legacy linked to the Olympic games, elected by the independent Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 as the “greenest games ever” (BBC 2012). Indeed, in London too, opposition groups strongly criticised the management of the Games considering different aspects, which included (C.O.N. 2012):

the corporate driven takeover of the Games.

the eviction of local people from their homes and businesses to make way for the Olympic sites, and prioritising the interests of global corporations at the expense of small businesses

the privatisation of public spaces and gentrification of the Olympic areas

the multi-billion-pound expenditure, much of it on temporary facilities, and most of it unnecessary at a time of supposed austerity

The sponsors supporting the games were also questionable in connection with promoting a sustainable Olympics. For instance, the London 2012 “sustainability partner” was BP (British Petroleum), the enterprise responsible for the Gulf of Mexico catastrophe in 2010 and for many other environmental and social hazards including, of course, fostering fossil fuel dependency. In addition, other major partnerships included McDonald's, Coca Cola, Cadbury and Heineken. McDonald's was also the official restaurant at the Olympic sites, and has been criticised for delivering and serving unhealthy food and drinks, in contrast with the principles promoted by the Olympic games themselves for a healthy lifestyle (Hyde 2012, Sweney 2012). Radical opposition groups argued that “the world’s most disreputable corporations are using the Olympics as a smokescreen for environmental and human rights abuses the world over” (Magnay 2012).

The partnership with McDonald's appeared particularly contradictory, in the light of the promoted CG campaign and the LFS. In that regard Mayor Johnson made his

position clear on the matter of the contested quality of the food served at the Olympics site by McDonald's restaurants: "It's classic liberal hysteria about very nutritious, delicious, food – extremely good for you I'm told – not that I eat a lot of it myself," he said. "Apparently this stuff is absolutely bursting with nutrients" " (Boris Johnson, in Sweney 2012).

In order to counterbalance the exposure of the environmental and social negativities generated by the games, London was forced to produce ad hoc strategies. In fact, parallel to the CG campaign, another policy document was delivered especially for the Olympics caterers: *Food vision for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games* (London 2012 2009). In this document, case studies, presented as examples of sustainability by the partners McDonald's and Coca-Cola, had the effect of casting a shadow on the actual credibility of the operation. The Capital Growth Campaign was instead more capable of promoting an environmental and social friendly image of the city, and right in time for the Olympics. London certainly tried greening the games as a result of the lessons learnt by previous experiences, but also in an attempt to engage with the local community, essential especially in terms of volunteer labour force. For Girginov and Hills (2009), the London sustainable Olympics legacy deserved special attention as it could constitute an emerging model in constructing the future narrative of major sport development projects. Hence, if that were the case, deconstruction of that same narrative would be required in order to unveil the social, political and economic trajectories of future mega-events.

3.8 Conclusions

In this paper we discussed the emergence of UFSs initiatives in Europe by describing the birth and contradictions of the LFS. The uncritical assumption we presented in the introduction, that seeks all food governance projects as potentially alternative, should be challenged in two different ways.

First, from the case of London an internal contradiction emerged. The discourse analysis applied to the LFS documents of both Mayors Livingstone and Johnson displayed clear and straight economic and neoliberal elements, which could invalidate their alternative objectives. Not only are these elements presented and discussed extensively in the policy documents, but they also seem to guide in practice the food vision over both mayors' mandates.

The second challenge to the definition of the LFS as an alternative comes from external, contextual factors. The fact that the adoption of the LFS initially occurred within a "grow first" logic of development during Livingstone's mandate, brings into question the positioning of such a project as either neoliberal or alternative. This unbalance is further illustrated by Johnson's Capital Growth campaign. Even if the project managed to actually keep a strong focus on environmental and social objectives, with very little incursion of neoliberal influences, its alternative potential was strategically used to 'green' the image of the city in preparation for the Olympics. That does not render the work of the people involved in such a project of less value, but it does show how the "alternative" holds a certain allure, which is proficiently incorporated to support cities' entrepreneurial ends. Perhaps, it is precisely with the ability of co-opting, displacing and depoliticising alternatives that neoliberal governance has been so far a successful political tool.

This effect has been achieved precisely through a specific discursive framework based on the production of universally or inherently "good" narratives. "Local" "green" "community" "care" "sustainable" "bottom-up" are terms which have been deprived of their original alternative power— thus their power to produce division — and are instead used as tools to compose opposing social drives in today's neoliberal governance practices.

To conclude, we would argue that not all UFSs should be considered inherently alternative only because of their novelty, and that each case should be analysed in terms of coherence and concrete outputs. In this paper, we have focused on discourse and little analysis has been devoted to the impact analysis. In that regard, we hope to see more efforts in building ways of displaying results by policymakers. However, the concrete outputs of the UFS should be measured not only in terms of external products or revenues that could be represented through statistical data. The success of the LFS does not really lie in tons of grown vegetables or in the amount of people actually involved in urban farming. The inherent success of the LFS lies rather in its performative power, in its capacity to mobilise various strata of civil society, contrasting economic interests and even representatives of opposed political parties.