

The food system in cities: an exploration of systemic urban food governance. The case of Almere.

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This framework is applied and refined through the case study of Almere, a city of the Netherlands characterized by a vibrant food scenario.

Process of elaboration of the conceptual framework

This research journey departed from a review of how urban food scholars approach the concepts of "food system" and "governance". It pointed out that in urban food literature there is a lack of definitions of systemic urban food governance. Based on an academic and grey literature review on how food is governed in cities in a systemic way, this research created a conceptual framework with criteria that define a systemic urban food governance. The conceptual framework has been tested in the case study of Almere. Research in Almere, conducted through a systematic municipal policy outputs content analysis and 13 semi-structured interviews, has been instrumental in refining some criteria of the conceptual framework. The final version of the conceptual framework, that is the result of the convergence between literature review and insights from the case study, is the following:

The idea

Food has entered the urban agenda. In an era of rapid urbanization, city leaders are worldwide finding solutions to feed their citizens appropriately. Tackling food in the urban agenda is not an easy task for municipalities. Food is complex: it is multi-disciplinary, it involves a diversity of actors and it creates various socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

Food is a system, more than a topic. Considering food as a system entails governance challenges. Municipalities have fragmented governance structures and procedures, they are characterized by rigid departmental boundaries and they tend to treat issues in isolation. To govern food systemically, they have to overcome their traditional siloes approach to policies and issues. But what does it mean to govern food systemically? This research advances the understanding of how food is governed in cities in a systemic way, elaborating a conceptual framework that uncovers "systemic urban food governance" (SUFG).

	CRITERIA
Municipal policy	1. Integration of food across municipal policy outputs
	2. Cross-departmental coordination
	3. Involvement of the mayor in food policy developments
	4. Dedicated food policy staff positions
	5. Municipal financial resources for food
	6. Participation in trans-local food policy collaborations
In and beyond municipal policy	7. Political will
	8. Presence of food champions
	9. Partnerships around food between the municipality and non-governmental actors with food system thinking embedded
Beyond municipal policy	10. Civic food networks with food system thinking embedded
	11. Entrepreneurial driver in civic food networks
	12. Commitment of volunteering in civic food networks

Fig 1. Framework that unfolds systemic urban food governance

A systemic urban food governance in Almere

This thesis analyzed the food governance in Almere through the conceptual framework and concluded that Almere is governing food in a systemic way. The following observations have been elaborated on the systemic food governance of Almere:

- 1) The city shows signs of a fragmented approach to food policy at the municipal level, such as a limited cross-departmental coordination, but it has integrated food beyond city borders: Almere participates in the trans-local food policy network Dutch City Deal Food on the Urban Agenda.
- 2) In terms of content, Almere approaches food from a systemic perspective. Municipal policy outputs integrate food system goals from various domains - from education to economic development - and from multiple food system activities - from food production to food waste. Moreover, in the city, there are three initiatives that embody a food system thinking approach: Flevocampus, Flevofood and Coalition Buitengewoon. The programme Flevocampus, in co-partnership between municipal and academic institutions, promotes research on food system activities and outcomes and it builds bridges in the food system, by connecting education and entrepreneurship. Flevofood, a collective of food entrepreneurs (food producers, food processors, food retailers), assembles representatives of multiple food system activities (food production, food processing, food retailing) under the common mission of shortening the food supply chain. Coalition Buitengewoon, a civil society initiative that transforms food surplus into meals for vulnerable groups, connects multiple food system activities (food processing, food distribution, food waste); it produces socio-economic food system outcomes, by contributing to the circular economy and food security agendas and it fosters relationalities between people inside and outside the food system (food retailers, volunteers, vulnerable citizens).
- 3) In Almere there are signs of an increasing political will to address food issues. The presentation to local politicians on the verge of elections of a Municipal Food Manifesto written by students during a Flevocampus think-tank contributed to foster a political debate on food. The discussion around the inclusion of food in the sustainability portfolio - currently under the political process of decision-making - gives signs of an emerging political will to tackle food system issues at the municipal level.
- 4) The food governance of Almere is characterized by food champions. They are individuals personally interested in food, mainly from academic and farming spheres, who cultivate interpersonal relations to bring the topic in the municipal agenda and foster networks of cooperation and knowledge exchange around food.
- 5) In Almere food is governed by a diverse range of actors in a collaborative way. For example, through partnerships between municipal and academic institutions (Flevocampus) and through the private and civil society food networks Flevofood and Coalition Buitengewoon. This is a sign that in Almere food belongs to a governance arena rather than to a governmental domain.

A food system requires a governance

In conclusion, as the case study of Almere evidenced, this thesis suggests that a food "system" cannot exist without a "governance". The multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of food requires a dialogue among a wide range of actors from the municipal, civil society and private sectors to govern food issues in a collaborative way. Therefore, a systemic approach to food necessarily entails a governance perspective, as the concept of "systemic urban food governance" encapsulates.



CRITERIA			
Municipal policy	1. Integration of food across municipal policy outputs	✓	Food goals mainly integrated in the domains of 1) research, education and innovation; 2) city marketing
	2. Cross-departmental coordination	✗	Food projects split in the portfolios of different aldermen; Lack of structured cooperation among aldermen (e.g. no interdepartmental meetings on food)
	3. Involvement of the mayor in food policy developments	Not investigated	
	4. Dedicated food policy staff positions	✗	Absence of a dedicated food policy staff position
	5. Municipal financial resources for food	✓	Flevocampus financed by the municipality; Provision of funds to civil society initiatives
	6. Participation in trans-local food policy collaborations	✓	Signature of the MUFPP; Participation in the Dutch City Deal Food on the Urban Agenda
In and beyond municipal policy	7. Political will	✓	Potential inclusion of food in the Sustainability Agenda; Flevocampus
	8. Presence of food champions	✓	Mainly in academic and farming spheres; initiators of networks; fostering connection with the municipality
	9. Partnerships around food between the municipality and non-governmental actors with food system thinking embedded	✓	Flevocampus
Beyond municipal policy	10. Civic food networks with food system thinking embedded	✓	Flevofood and Coalition Buitengewoon
	11. Entrepreneurial driver in civic food networks	✓	Flevofood
	12. Commitment of volunteering in civic food networks	✓	Flevofood and Coalition Buitengewoon

Fig 2. Systemic urban food governance in Almere