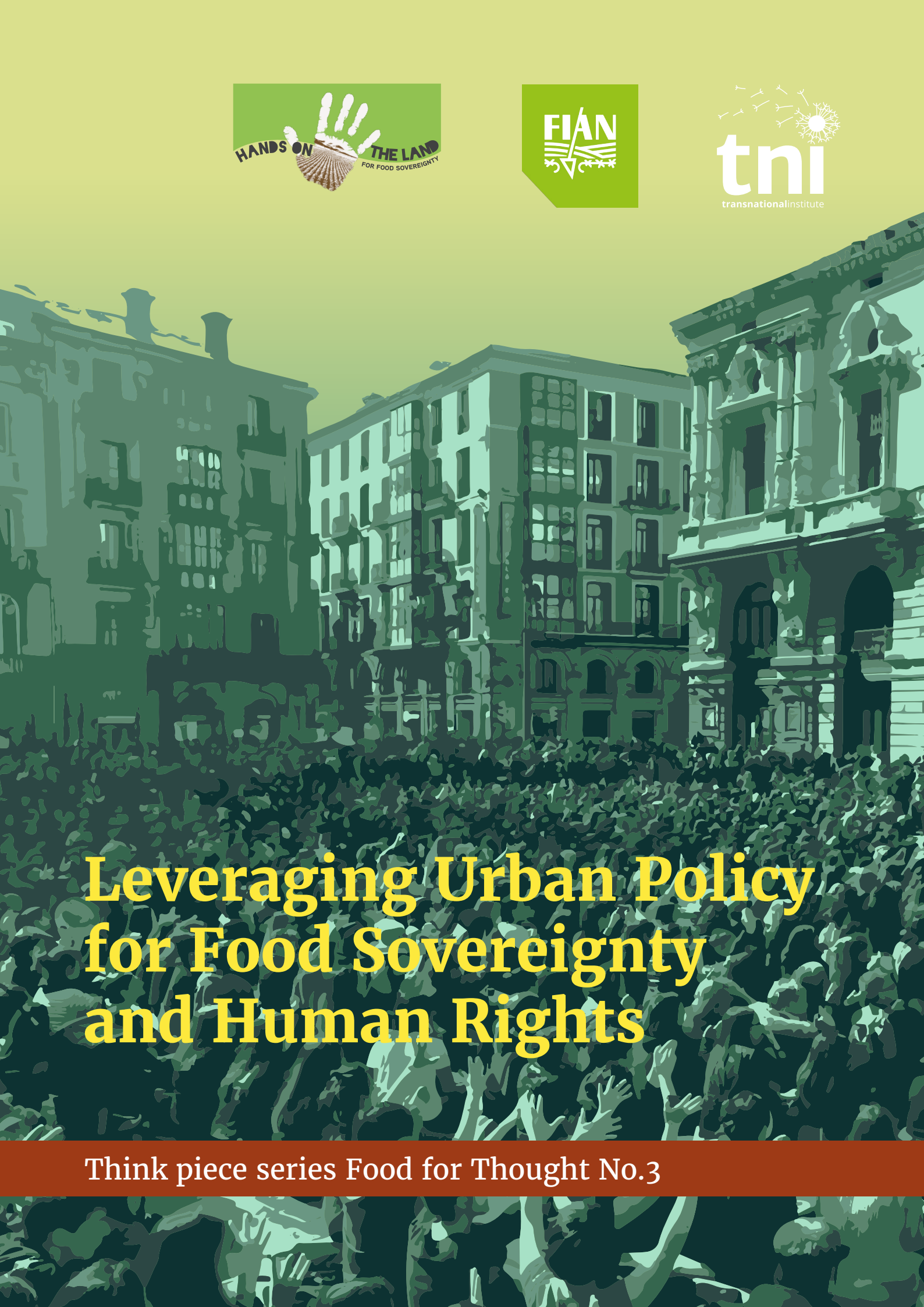

Leveraging Urban Policy for Food Sovereignty and Human Rights

Think piece series Food for Thought No.3

Authors: Paula Fernandez-Wulff and Christopher Yap

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Introduction

The future of food systems is closely bound to cities and urban processes. As these relationships are progressively recognised and unpacked cities are becoming the new front lines in the struggle for more just and sustainable food systems. One of the primary ways that cities shape food and agricultural systems is through the direct and indirect outcomes of policy processes that take place in urban contexts, but which have potentially far-reaching impacts.

This paper has been produced in response to the growing interest in urban policy processes by the European food sovereignty movement. The paper considers how urban policy processes might be leveraged to contribute to the realisation of food sovereignty, "understood as the right of peoples to define their own food and agricultural systems".[1]

Specifically, we consider how rights-based social movements and community-based organisations have negotiated space, materially and politically, within urban policy processes in European cities, and what lessons might be drawn for social movements and activists working on food and agriculture-related issues.

This paper has been developed as part of the Hands on the Land Alliance's Young Researchers programme, developed jointly by FIAN International, the Transnational Institute (TNI) and Friends of the Earth International. The programme comprised two stages. In the first stage, Researchers attended the Nyéléni Pan-European Forum[2] held in Cluj-Napoca (Romania), in October 2016, and the Feeding Public Policies international seminar in Donostia/San Sebastián (Basque Country) held in November 2016.[3] An earlier draft of this paper, in which we reflected on conversations at each event from critical human rights and critical urbanism perspectives, was presented at the International Colloquium in Critical Agrarian Studies, in Vitoria (Basque Country) in April 2017.

During the second stage of the programme, in response to comments from reviewers on an earlier draft, we focused these reflections towards specific examples from European cities. Experiences were chosen within four policy areas (housing, water, urban planning, and food) and were developed through analysis of available literature and interviews with participants from each experience.

We argue, firstly, that the greatest opportunities to contribute to the realisation of food sovereignty through urban policy processes can be found in engaging broadly with diverse sectors and policy areas, rather than focusing on urban food policies or food strategies specifically. Secondly, we suggest that much can be learned from the experiences of urban movements who integrate heterogeneous critical human rights perspectives into their actions and who work on a variety of issues beyond food.

In the first section of this paper we outline some of the reasons that cities and urban processes are of great significance in the struggle to transform food systems. In the second section, we describe the importance of human rights frameworks and narratives for urban struggles, and propose two lenses for understanding the strategies of urban social movements and community-based organisations in urban policy processes: human rights and processes of participation.

In the third section, we draw on four experiences from European cities wherein urban social movements or community-based organisations have negotiated space within an urban policy process. In the final section, we attempt to draw out aspects from the four experiences that could be useful for social movements and activists working on issues relating to food and agricultural systems.

Note on Language:

This report uses the term 'food sovereignty movement' to refer to the various, diverse peoples, groups, and organisations struggling for food sovereignty around the world. The authors recognise that there exist multiple food sovereignties, and that groups mobilised towards an idea of food sovereignty hold diverse thematic interests and political outlooks.

To refer to these struggles as a unified movement is not to overlook the specificity of challenges facing small-scale farmers and other food actors living in different contexts, nor the specificity of their claims. Rather, the authors hope to emphasise commonalities, shared experiences, and shared opportunities between groups struggling for food sovereignty, particularly as they relate to urban policy processes.

The Significance of Urban Policy Processes for Food Systems

The urban is easy to identify, but difficult to define. Some scholars have characterised cities in terms of their (non-legitimate) political power over their surrounding regions,[4] while others have highlighted their historical role as tools of the nation-state.[5] While cities could be understood as built environments with high population densities, the complex political, social, and economic drivers of urbanisation mean that a purely spatial definition is insufficient.

Urban centres can be understood as spatial manifestations and inevitable consequences of macro-economic processes. Cities are spatial concentrations of surplus capital, produced within the global capitalist system,[6] which play critical roles both in driving the global economy, and absorbing surplus wealth. In this way, urbanisation is a contradictory process, "...predicated upon ever longer, often globally structured, socio-ecological metabolic flows that not only fuses together things, natures, and peoples, but does so in socially and ecologically and geographically articulated, but depressingly uneven, manners".[7] The issue then becomes less about the growth of cities (a material process), and more about the urbanisation of society (a political, socio-economic process).

Nowhere are these contradictions clearer than in the complex relationships between cities and food systems. Food systems are elaborate and multi-sectoral, created and sustained through a diversity of political, cultural, and economic processes. As the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition have written, "A food system gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes."[8]

The past two decades have seen the rise of both governmental and non-governmental actors at the local and regional level demanding to have a voice in what their food system looks like. The concentration of political and economic power in cities, where more than half the world's population has lived since 2008, means that many such important decisions are taken in urban contexts, through urban policy processes.

These policy processes can be explicitly related to food, such as the rise of urban food strategies, urban agriculture, and food policy councils, or they can be indirect, such as the impact of urban planning decisions on available farmland,[9] or the impact of public procurement decisions on eating habits.[10]

Urban policy processes vary enormously across Europe in terms of how democratic and transparent they are, as well as how they are initiated and managed. Critically, urban policy processes rarely engage non-urban actors, in spite of the impacts that such decisions may have on non-urban populations. This has generated new frontiers in the struggle for participation, transparency, and accountability in policy processes and outcomes in urban contexts.

Over the past decade, 'the urban' has gained much attention in regional and international development agendas; cities have been widely characterised as both the problem and the solution for the sustainability of human societies. This trend can be seen in prominent urban-centric events such as Habitat III, in the emphasis on 'the urban' in the Sustainable Development Goals, and in the emergence of a diversity of initiatives such as the Committee on Food Security (CFS) work stream on Urbanization and Rural Transformation.

In recent years, urban food policies in particular have been more widely adopted, and represent an increasingly attractive initiative for local governments. Most directly, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact instilled considerable élan into the discussion regarding the critical role cities can play in transforming food systems. Critically, however, depending on how urban policies are designed and translated into practice, they could either herald an opportunity to transform food systems or reproduce and reinforce the prevailing systems, characterised by unsustainable farming practices, market dominance by large food retailers, and the marginalisation of small-scale food producers.[11]

In both rural and urban communities, the local level is the most visible and potentially accessible level of government. However, power differentials between groups of actors can make accessing those policy spaces particularly challenging. Moreover, the governance of food systems, in the city and beyond, is a complex and often

fragmented process, leading to a high degree of variability across cities and their surrounding regions. Untangling the myriad decision-making processes and policies designed in urban contexts that impact food systems, and learning to navigate the tensions within them, remains one of the most pressing challenges for activists working in food and agriculture today.

Learning from struggles that employ human rights language and tools implicitly or explicitly can provide insights as to how different groups have navigated urban policy spaces, acknowledging the inherent contradictions that such strategies may entail. More importantly, building common discourses and strategies rooted in human rights may provide opportunities to engage with these spaces while building bridges between rural and urban social movements.

Human Rights and Processes of Participation: Negotiating Space in Urban Policy Processes

In this section, we present two lenses for understanding how some urban social movements, specifically those engaging with social rights, have negotiated space within urban policy processes. The first relates to how rights can be understood and utilised; the second relates to the processes and spaces of participation in urban policy-making.

Social movements can use human rights to thrust themselves into international discourses,[12] universalising and legitimising their positions, and demanding accountability from government actors. Human rights can be used to frame struggles and provide a common language to seemingly dissimilar issues, particularly for agrarian struggles.[13] However, social movements have also had to engage with the many inherent limits of current human rights approaches.[14] Among these limits, critical theorists have pointed out that human rights can express, and therefore reproduce, liberal thought on economic liberty,[15] individualism,[16] and Western views of what democracy should be.[17]

At the same time, human rights can also be understood in terms of collective political claims that emerge from context-specific struggles, activism, and mobilisations. Understood in this way, human rights do not necessarily require an institutional guarantor, but rather exist to catalyse and enhance the claims of organisations, groups, and movements. In Europe, for example, social movements are demanding the remunicipalisation of public services after decades of privatisation.[18] Such actions can be interpreted not only as calls for governments meet their legal obligations to provide for basic needs, but also as collective mobilisations to make social rights a reality through organised citizen action.

We consider a rights-based movement or struggle as one that is rooted in a grassroots, collective process, but which engages strategically with international and national human rights language and frameworks either explicitly or implicitly. This includes, for example, social movements and networks of community-based organisations mobilised around issues including social justice, identity, and inclusion. Rights-based struggles may relate to specific issues or constitute one part of a broader political mobilisation.

Therefore, the realisation of human rights does not and cannot depend on their justiciability alone, but instead on a combination of factors such as the ability to understand the unspoken rules behind policy processes, including power differentials and political agendas, in order to participate in and influence these processes with full knowledge of their stakes. For this, it is important to critically consider both the processes of participation and the spaces in which this participation occurs.

For our second lens, we distinguish between 'claimed' and 'invited' spaces, and between 'organic' and 'induced' participation, whilst recognising that the nature of participation both shapes and is shaped by the nature of the space.

Organic participation refers to when groups of citizens act independently of government to hold dialogue and make decisions. Organic participation enables self-organised citizens the opportunity to 'set the agenda'. It is associated with social movements, horizontality, and grassroots mobilisation. Organic participation is often associated with claimed spaces; spaces created by and for citizens. These can be material spaces, claimed through occupation or demonstration; political spaces,

such as citizen forums; or virtual spaces, such as citizen-managed social media networks.

By contrast, induced participation refers to processes that involve citizens, but are managed and controlled by State actors. Induced participation is associated with invited spaces – spaces created and controlled by governments, such as planning consultations. In these spaces, citizens have limited agency to make change, and the power to shape agendas or make decisions rests primarily with State actors.

The reality is that most spaces of participation in urban policy processes exist somewhere between these extremes. However, understanding the interests and positions of other participants, and deciding where a group will situate itself during the urban policy process in relation to these two elements can be critical when deciding how to engage in them.

Learning from Four European Experiences

The following section outlines four experiences whereby urban social movements or community-based organisations have negotiated space in urban policy processes. The aim is to explore how different groups have utilised various conceptions of rights, and how they have negotiated spaces and processes of participation.

These experiences were chosen not necessarily because the groups mobilised around food issues, but rather because of the various ways they have navigated urban policy processes. Additionally, the experiences were chosen for the availability of documentation and the availability of interviewees.

Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) Barcelona, Spain

Housing

Section developed with Santi Mas de Xaxàs and other members of PAH.

PAH is a grassroots organisation that campaigns for the right to housing by providing legal and emotional support to citizens affected by eviction processes, organising demonstrations and direct actions to stop evictions, as well as undertaking legislative mobilisations and strategic litigation. The platform was created in Barcelona in February 2009, in response to the burst of the Spanish real estate bubble in 2008 and the resulting financial and economic crises.

PAH grew out of an earlier collective, V de Vivienda, which began in 2006 and brought the incipient housing crisis to the media, emphasising the inability for young people to afford a home.[19] After some years publicly denouncing the impact of the unaffordability of housing in Barcelona, PAH moved to other cities; first Murcia, Valencia, and Madrid. Then when the 15M movement began in May 2011, PAH spread exponentially across Spain. Very quickly the platform reframed the market-related crisis as a situation of deliberately created social injustice, where those to blame could be identified and accountability could be demanded.

According to Amnesty International,[20] and based on statistics issued by the Spanish Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ) and the National Statistics Institute (INE), between 2008 and 2014 there were almost 600,000 foreclosure procedures, mainly due to the alarming growth in unemployment rates - from 8% in 2008 to 26% in 2013; by 2015, 1.8 million families had all of their members unemployed.

PAH took on a predominantly urban issue affecting private individuals – housing – and turned it into a structural, collective struggle through the careful redefinition of concepts until then unchallenged. The platform and its members not only openly rejected the use of depoliticised concepts such as 'crisis', but in fact substituted them for words implying direct responsibility, such as 'scam' and 'speculation', which could be attributed to specific individuals and corporations.

This discursive transformation, undertaken by strategically using public appearances of key figures of the movement to denounce the situation, was one of the ways media attention gradually shifted from portraying the movement as simple violent offenders – some elements of the media had gone so far as to equate PAH's actions with terrorism – towards a more complex view of the social movement, particularly as more tragic, personal stories were shared, reaching a wider audience and leading to increased public support.

PAH fought widespread feelings of powerlessness regarding foreclosures and evictions through a discourse of dignity and self-empowerment, by collectively learning about housing rights and regulations, by undertaking direct action (*escraches*) against parliamentarians and counter-action against evictions, and by successfully relocating evicted families into homes that remained empty due to the real estate bubble.

Using housing as an entry point and guiding theme for addressing broader social justice issues, PAH forged an identity based on a collective struggle that could be relevant in both urban and rural contexts, at the local, national, and EU levels. In this way, PAH challenged the 'sense' behind the common sense, including challenging prevailing narratives that regard unemployment as a personal rather than structural failure, and homeownership as a rite of passage. PAH placed these concepts into a broader discussion on social justice and human rights, repolitisising and resignifying them, eventually recreating a new collective identity based on shared values. This identity was further solidified during the broader 15M movement, which created a shared vocabulary for the already existing social imaginary that PAH was able to naturally tap into.

By appealing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Spanish Constitution itself, all of which explicitly contain the right to housing, PAH used human rights language and frameworks in a strategic way, both to empower those whose rights had been violated, and to force politicians and decision-makers to acknowledge that housing is internationally and nationally recognised as a human right – and that it is therefore a right that needs to be respected, protected, and fulfilled. Going beyond its justiciability, PAH used the right to housing as a banner to address wider issues such as social inequality, corruption, and opacity in political processes.

Although their actions have often been misrepresented in the media, and political and legislative initiatives by the platform have been actively boycotted, PAH forced discourses to shift from one of guilt and shame for losing one's home, to one of dignity and empowerment, contributing to a broader change in perceptions of social justice and human rights.

For more information about PAH please visit: http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/.

Just Space
London, UK

Urban Planning

Section developed with Richard Lee, Coordinator of Just Space.

Just Space is a community-led network of voluntary and action groups from across London. The network emerged in 2007 in order to influence the London Plan. Just Space now provides a community voice on a wide range of planning issues at the city-level, and supports community involvement in urban planning processes.

The London Plan is a periodic spatial development strategy for the city, developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and overseen by the London Mayor. There have been five versions of the London Plan since 2004, with the latest published in 2015. The Plan lays out the city's strategic development priorities for the next 20-25 years, including housing, land use, the environment, transport and culture, amongst others.

Just Space grew out of London residents' frustration with lack of transparency in the community consultation processes within the development of the London Plan. Some residents felt that the consultations were being held only to find the best way to proceed with a strategic plan that had already been developed. Moreover, while the process of developing each London Plan involved extensive consultation with urban stakeholders, priority was given to public interests and private developers, with little official recognition of community interests.

Just Space received a grant from the GLA in 2008 to promote grassroots engagement in the London Plan at the city-level, however they successfully made the case to the GLA that it was important to work at multiple scales simultaneously, including at the neighbourhood-level.

Just Space identified one element of the London Plan process in particular that could be leveraged by community groups, the Examination in Public (EiP). In this process, organisations are invited to provide testimony and evidence to assist Government Planning Inspectors and test the soundness of the London Plan. Members of Just Space realised that whilst written testimony needed to be submitted regarding one issue, such as affordable housing, the EiP could be used as a platform to raise a wide range of other issues, such as zoning, infrastructure development, or service provision. Participation in the EiP allowed new testimony to be brought into the

process. This was not only new evidence, but a new type of evidence, emerging as it did from lived, grassroots experiences.

Just Space has attempted to influence not only the content of the EiPs, but the process as well. In particular they wanted community-based organisations to be recognised officially as a third-party in the London Plan process (along with public and private interests). This was achieved through one third representation of the community sector at the 2010 EiP and the recognition of a "hot seat" to bring into the process those community groups who had not made written submissions. During 2015-16 Just Space developed their own document, "Towards a Community-led Plan for London", which explicitly outlines policy priorities that reflect the lived experiences of London communities.

Alongside engaging with the development of the London Plan in 2010, Just Space organised an event called 'London Calling', which brought together various community groups, social movements and non-governmental organisations, including the London Tenants' Federation, Friends of the Earth, and Planning Aid, amongst many others. Here, support was generated for the London Tenants Federation definition of what were termed 'lifetime neighbourhoods', which aim to meet the needs of the local community in all stages in their life. And in 2016, Just Space was part of a steering group that organised an event called 'Land for What?', that sought to raise the issues relating to the political economy of land in the UK, by bringing together urban and rural interests from across the country.

The philosophy and approach of Just Space is framed in terms of a collective right to a just and inclusive planning system. However, whilst the network aims to empower and mobilise London residents, it also appeals to national and international conventions, in order to encourage the GLA to recognise their participation in urban planning processes. These include the Aarhus convention, which was ratified by the UK government, and which establishes the right to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters. Just Space also appeal to the 'community right to neighbourhood planning', as outlined in the UK's 2011 Localism Act. However, while Just Space engages with the GLA, and participates in many GLA-organised events, the network is keen to remain autonomous from the City Hall, recognising the importance of community-managed spaces and processes.

Today, Just Space is continuing to engage with the GLA to give more voice to London citizens in decision making processes. It does this both by building relationships with officers in a wide range of departments, as well as co-developing mechanisms for community based organisations to influence the development of policies at the earliest stages of development. For example, Just Space had success in changing the panel discussion format of GLA Committee Meetings to an 'open mic' format, which enabled a conversation with a diversity of London residents.

Just Space has made progress in several key areas. Firstly, they have collaborated with a wide range of community-based organisations and academic institutions to produce knowledge and evidence that reflects grassroots experiences, and supports inclusive community engagement in key urban policy processes. Secondly, Just Space has engaged in a form of strategic action planning, by which community organisations can connect and develop a more collective, strategic, and long-term vision for urban development in London. Thirdly, the network has formed alliances with others in a way that brings together urban tenants and small-scale rural food producers to look for common struggles, and share potential solutions.

For more information about Just Space and their publication, 'Towards a Community-Led Plan for London', please visit https://justspace.org.uk/.

Valladolid Toma La Palabra and Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua Valladolid, Spain

Water

Section developed with Jaime Nieto, Doctoral Researcher at Universidad de Valladolid; member of Valladolid Toma la Palabra.

In 2016, after twenty years of privatisation, Valladolid City Council approved the remunicipalisation of water services for the city of Valladolid in the Autonomous Region of Castile and León in the north-west of Spain. This achievement marked a victory for the people and social movements of Valladolid, who formed the Valladolid Toma La Palabra (Take the Floor) political platform in 2014, and the Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua (100% Public Water Management Platform) in 2015, which together were able to inform and influence the decision to remunicipalise water in 2017.

In 1996, the City approved the privatisation of the water supply, until then managed by a profitable public company that was providing a satisfactory service. The Citizen's Water Platform was immediately formed to protest the decision. However, by 2005 wastewater treatment and sewerage had also been privatised and contracted, along with water provision, to the same company, Agualid-Aguas de Valladolid S.A. In 2008, Agualid became a subsidiary of the multinational corporation Suez.

During the twenty years of private ownership household water bills increased by 30%. More significantly however, Agualid-Aguas de Valladolid S.A. did not invest sufficiently in infrastructure development, despite making substantial profits through increased revenue, concessions from the local government, and subcontracting services to affiliated companies. The contract between the City Council and Agualid-Aguas de Valladolid S.A. was due to expire in June 2017, however discussions regarding its renewal or replacement began in earnest in 2015, with the election of a new City Council.

The past five years have seen a significant change in Spanish political culture, with a more prominent role played by political parties with strong affiliations with social movements, such as Podemos and 15M. In Valladolid in 2014, with the support of the City Council, social movements and civil society groups organised themselves into a political platform, Valladolid Toma La Palabra, to contest the 2015 local elections. The platform used participatory processes to develop an electoral programme that included a commitment to remunicipalise water management in the city.

Valladolid Toma La Palabra did not win the election outright, however it won enough seats to enter into a coalition with Partido Socialista Obrero Español, and Valladolid Sí se puede, the local branch of Podemos. Whilst the coalition supported remunicipalisation, the management model still needed to be agreed on, with options being a public enterprise, a public-private company, or state management model.

Valladolid Toma La Palabra conducted a substantial participatory process, which brought together social movements and civil society, to discuss the options. A number of separate working groups emerged during this time, which were able to feed into a general assembly. Finally, a vote was held where a public enterprise was chosen as the preferred model.

The 100% Public Water Management Platform (PWMP) emerged in 2016 to make the case more strongly for a public enterprise to take over the water and waste contracts for the city, particularly by raising public awareness of the issue. Their case was bolstered by a technical report commissioned by the City Council, which concluded that either a public enterprise or public-private company would be the most effective model for water services management. (This took into account the investments necessary to restore and develop the infrastructure network that would require loans that were not available to the City Council under a state management model.)

During the period of negotiations, social movements and civil society played three important roles. The first was through the close engagement between Valladolid Toma La Palabra and the City Council. They were able to input into negotiations, and their presence reminded the City Council that the structures and networks were in place if they were so required to campaign more strongly for a public enterprise model.

The second was in providing a space for discussion and resolution of difficult issues as they arose through the remunicipalisation negotiations. For example, the issue of labour was particularly challenging; what would remunicipalisation mean for the wages and working conditions of those workers in the water sector? This issue was discussed within the Valladolid Toma la Palabra forum, which was able to bring together trade union members with local councillors to ultimately resolve the dispute.

Thirdly, the platform was particularly successful in strategically untangling the social, political, and economic arguments for remunicipalisation. They discussed at length the technical report commissioned by the City Council, and supported its economic arguments made on grounds of cost and efficiency, whilst at the same time framing the issue in terms of the human right to water and sanitation and a common good to raise political awareness. The 100% Public Water Management Platform manifesto, which arose from these discussions and supported by members of Toma La Palabra, states:

"We assume the human right to water and sanitation in the terms defined by the United Nations, which constitutes it as a right guaranteed by public authorities, through a public service, guided by the principles of

equality, equity, progressive realisation and non-discrimination, through sustainable, participatory, transparent management, with access to information and accountability."[21]

Ultimately, the remunicipalisation of water was boosted by social movements, who self-organised to respond to a political opportunity. By consciously making arguments for remunicipalisation on economic, political, and social grounds, the platform was able to strategically navigate the various spaces in which urban policy is made and contested. As the Cities for Public Water meeting held in Madrid in 2016 concluded:

"The citizen struggle against the privatisation of water services has contributed a very relevant experience manifested in the need for mobilisation, collaboration and mutual support, democratic and transparent decision making, reflection, alternatives and the generation of local, regions, national and international networks."[22]

In light of the move to remunicipalise water services, Valladolid City Council was sued unsuccessfully by both Agualid-Aguas de Valladolid S.A and State prosecutors. The City is also under pressure from the central Spanish government, which drafted a provision into the upcoming national budget that could significantly hamper remunicipalisation efforts. Despite these challenges, the public enterprise is fully operational, overseen by a committee that includes politicians, technical staff, workers, and members of neighbourhood associations. Since municipalisation occurred, water tariffs have been frozen and are expected to remain this way even as infrastructure investments get underway.

For more information about Valladolid Toma La Palabra, please visit http://www.valladolidtomalapalabra.org. For more information about Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua and to read their manifesto please visit https://pg100pav.wordpress.com.

Gent en Garde
Ghent, Belgium

Food

Case study developed with Maarten Crivits, member of Gentse Werkgroep Stadslandbouw, organisation part of Gent en Garde.

Gent en garde, launched in 2013, is the comprehensive food strategy developed by the City of Ghent, in Belgium. After the red-green coalition (SP.A-Groen) won the elections in 2013, the Department on Environment, Climate, Energy, and North-South relations of the city of Ghent (led by Tine Heyse) decided to set up a Food Council where local officials, academics, farmers, and civil society organisations would meet to address some of the most pressing issues facing the local food system in Ghent.

In order to set up the Food Council, the City, with the support of EU funding (Food Smart Cities for Development Project),[23] reached out to 25 specifically-chosen organisations, both local and national with local branches, as well as to experts and academics from nearby universities. In 2015 the City organised a series of closed stakeholder consultation meetings as well as an international seminar to bring together experiences from cities around the world.

City officials set five strategic goals around which discussions were held in the consultation meetings: a shorter, more visible food chain; more sustainable food production and consumption; the creation of more social added value for food initiatives; reduce food waste; and optimum reuse of food waste as raw materials. These strategic goals were translated into 20 operational goals through a series of closed meetings that are held every three months.

In 2013, the Ghent Working Group on Urban Agriculture (Gentse Werkgroep Stadslandbouw), a civil society volunteer-led organisation, proposed working groups based on the strategic goals, of which two were formed: a working group on short supply chains, and another on social aspects of urban agriculture. The idea behind this was to get more people and organisations who were willing to work on specific issues involved in the Ghent Local Food Plan.

One of the differences between Ghent's and other Food Policy Councils, such as Toronto's, is that in Ghent the Food Council is organised around projects, and not yet around policies. While the Food Council does not decide on specific policies, and it is not fully autonomous from the government, it serves as a platform to discuss different projects that are proposed within the group. It has also helped different actors connect and share perspectives. Precisely because the Food Council is project-focused, it is also very action-oriented. The Food Council can therefore operate within the political space more freely because it is not an official advisory council and it has a flexible structure. However, this could also turn it into am obsolete platform depending on political will and future political developments.

From the perspective of civil society, challenges have arisen within Gent en garde, as with any policy process where different interests are represented. These challenges provide learning points for how social movements can engage with invited spaces where participation is very much induced, but where positive outcomes can also be obtained if this engagement is carefully planned.

Furthermore, challenges in communication between government cabinets and other organisations have deterred some and hindered the involvement of other actors. This may also be related to the disparity between organisations with paid staff and those run by volunteers; participation may be lower by those organisations that cannot afford to spend time in meetings and consultations as often.

Some stakeholders have also stressed the need to more actively provide information to the general public regarding the local food strategy and the Food Council itself. For instance, the operational goals developed by the council were not well communicated to the Ghent population, which can explain actual low levels of engagement. Similarly, communicating how perspectives from civil society will be integrated and translated into actions can be extremely important to ensure trust and sustained participation both within the council and in the general population.

Gent en Garde has become a space for communication among different actors in the city, and a safe space where groups can raise issues to government officials. As such, it has become an important space where they can build relationships of trust among organisations and with the local government. However, Food Policy Councils are a relatively recent mechanism in European cities; Ghent and others are still discovering what these structures mean in each context and social reality.

The setting up of the Food Council, in itself, has also led to a critical shift in political discourses, as it has sent a clear message to potential candidates for future elections that there is a growing interest in food system-related issues. Changing the middle ground for the sustainable food and urban agriculture discourses can be considered a victory of the Food Council, given that it can potentially ensure continuity beyond the electoral cycle.

However, the way in which the Food Council was established and continues to be managed means that community-based organisations and social movements in the city have limited capacity to influence food-related policies in the city. Whilst Gent en garde should be lauded for its progressive attempt to bring food to the fore, the Food Council is still determining its role in policy change. Moreover, the tight management of the policy space constrains its potential as a vehicle to realise social movements' agendas.

The Gent en garde strategy document explicitly recognises both the right to food and food sovereignty.[24] However, the Food Council does not currently have the means or mandate to pass legislation or policy that supports their realisation. When compared with social movements and community-led networks from the other experiences presented here, community-based organisations in Ghent have not mobilised around food as a rights issue; the issue of food is largely depoliticised. While it is important to recognise the important achievements of the Food Council and strategy, the experience demonstrates the limits of a policy process that is entirely induced by the City, and conducted in invited space. Moreover, the absence of an explicit or implicit rights discourse diminishes and constrains the potential of social movements to demand lasting changes to policy or the policy process.

Gent en garde currently has an online forum part of Gent Climate City where citizens can share their ideas, needs, and concerns regarding food in the city, join different groups, ask for gardening advice, etc. More information can be found at https://gentengarde.stad.gent/

Leveraging Urban Policy Processes for Food Sovereignty

The experiences above are examples of the ways in which urban social movements and community-based organisations have negotiated urban policy processes. Reflecting on these experiences and on conversations held at the different food sovereignty fora attended by the researchers, a number of aspects can be drawn out that may be of particular relevance as different movements struggling for food sovereignty seek to engage with urban policy processes.

Holistic Thinking, Strategic Action

Both governmental and non-governmental actors need to marshal limited resources. Local governments are increasingly close or over their capacity to respond to the countless issues facing cities and urban inhabitants, let alone broader societal challenges. At the same time, social movements and community-based organisations are usually dependent on volunteers that are vulnerable to fatigue.

The case of Just Space demonstrates how significant political gains can be made by strategically targeting specific mechanisms in the policy formulation process, to maximise both the impact of limited resources and the voice of local residents. Just Space also demonstrates the effectiveness of using issue-specific platforms to voice broader concerns, and present a community-led vision for urban planning in London.

The case of PAH in Barcelona showcases how human rights narratives and social justice discourses can be combined with strategic legal mobilisation and direct action on the streets. PAH successfully used mainstream media to change political discourses around what is just and unjust, while in parallel creating local community spaces of empowerment, in order to engage with policy processes at the city and national levels. On the other hand, the case of Gent en garde reveals how short-term political opportunities need to be carefully balanced with long-term goals, particularly to avoid overdependence on electoral cycles.

Building on these efforts to maximise the impact of limited resources, while maintaining a holistic approach to the magnitude of the challenges facing food systems today, may be the greatest way to leverage urban policy spaces for food sovereignty.

Thinking Beyond Urban Food Policy for Food Sovereignty

Urban food policy is an opportunity, but by no means the only opportunity, or even the best opportunity to realise food sovereignty through urban policy processes. In each of the case studies, we can not only see significant areas of political alignment between urban social movements and the European food sovereignty movement, but also how each of the struggles can be directly relevant to the struggle for food sovereignty: water, land, livelihoods, and above all, a struggle for a more democratic, participatory, and transparent policy process.

Whilst urban food policy is receiving ever-greater recognition in national and international policy debates, it is important that social movements and community-based organisation determine the scope for the struggle for food sovereignty, not policy-makers, and not according to policy fashions. The case of Gent en garde demonstrates that interest in food issues by the local government can lead to the creation of a space where broader issues can be addressed, but this political opportunity needs to be carefully assessed in order for outcomes to be truly transformative.

Food policy may provide a useful entry point to influence the role of cities on food systems, but many issues and actors that are directly relevant to the struggle for food sovereignty are often missing from the conversation. Issues such as access to land, women's and peasants' rights, and emancipation from capitalistic markets, as well as actors such as smallholder farmers, marginalised groups, and low-income populations, are most often left out of urban policy processes, despite sharing their impacts.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the opportunity presented by the rise of urban food policy processes, with the caveat that it is only through a food sovereignty agenda, that brings to the fore otherwise marginalised issues and actors, that these processes can contribute to the transformation of food systems.

Moreover, by looking critically at how a wide range of actors, departments, and processes can affect food systems, we can address the potential contradictions

that arise between a holistic understanding of food systems and institutional and policy silos. For example, while a healthy eating initiative by a government could be driven by its health or nutrition department, the cases presented here teach us that advocacy and mobilisation could be used to target, for instance, planning and land management policies in order to support the rights of producers to access land, seeds, and equal market opportunities in order to support the production of healthy food. Similarly, dedicating resources to influence local procurement initiatives, which may be considered a logistics issue by the government, might support the development of a participatory and democratic policy process, beyond jurisdictional boundaries, where both social and environmental considerations are taken into account.

Critically Engaging with Human Rights to Shift Prevailing Narratives

Strategically broadening the discourse from context-specific issues to human rights and social justice allows social movements and community-based organisations to stimulate change on two levels.

On the one hand, opening the discourse to raise human rights issues can create an overarching conceptual umbrella capable of appealing to various grassroots mobilisations. This strategy is also critical in raising awareness in the general public and gaining social legitimacy. On the other hand, engaging with international and national human rights language and frameworks also allows organised groups to demand institutional change through the implementation of human rights principles, such as transparency, participation on equal footing, and accountability from government actors.

In the case of Valladolid, we see how a double discursive strategy was used to raise awareness for the remunicipalisation of water: a social rights narrative (the right to water) was used to appeal to the broader population, together with cost-benefit arguments that were instrumental in communicating with the City Hall.

In the case of PAH, it becomes clear that this strategic engagement with human rights language and instruments can in turn force a change in the prevailing narrative, politicising issues that were being presented as apolitical. This strategy was not only effective in terms of successfully broadening the understanding of housing as a human rights struggle, thereby drawing attention to the issue and raising public support, but also in demanding clear action from the government through parallel, strategic legal mobilisations.

Critically engaging with the human rights system, understanding its contradictions and flaws, and building on its benefits and opportunities can also yield unexpected outcomes. PAH critically engaged with the right to adequate housing; for instance, the group changed the way this right is commonly referred to, from 'adequate' to 'dignified'. This shifted the conversation away from the lowest possible requirements for shelter towards more progressive visions for secure, decent homes.

The food sovereignty movement has also transformed understandings of concepts including 'food sovereignty' itself (from national food security to the right to remain on the land); 'peasant' (creating class consciousness by fighting negative connotations and building solidarity between producers in the global South and the global North); and human rights more broadly (from State-centric obligations towards individuals, to community-centred collective entitlements).

Such subtle changes can have profound impacts on the ways political narratives are built and in realising the empowering potential of human rights. Urban social movements working from a social rights perspective, such as the ones described here, are driving change at the local level by engaging with policy processes through discursive, legislative, and political strategies, coupled with social mobilisation and direct action on the streets. Using a social rights political narrative that subverts prevailing discourses is therefore an1 important step towards articulating the magnitude of the challenges facing the food system, and the scope of the transformation necessary to achieve food sovereignty.

The experiences presented in the paper occurred in diverse political, economic and social contexts, however we believe that they contain important elements that can inform the development of strategic action towards the realisation of food sovereignty. Our hope is that this paper will stimulate further discussion on how to leverage urban policy processes for food sovereignty.

Endnotes

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