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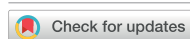
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Situated transformations: how regional and translocal contexts shape urban food policy networks

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Abstract

This paper analyses the regional characteristics of food policy networks (FPNs)—multi-sector stakeholder groups that are responding to social, political and ecological challenges facing food systems. As FPNs have grown in number around the globe, there is an absence of comparative research to understand their diversity across regions. In addition, there is scant understanding of how their placed-based characteristics might complicate the picture of an ‘urban food policy council’, raising questions about translocal influences—interventions, coalitions and crises—that impact the emergence of FPNs in regional settings. Drawing on interviews with 67 FPNs from across the world, the paper examines the significance of place and socio-cultural framing on transformative agendas for food systems. Applying a place-based and translocal conceptual lens, the paper asks: how do the regional contexts of FPNs shape their purpose, approach and impact? Can the analysis of diverse regional FPNs from one location contribute new understandings of others towards food systems transformation? How can regional perspectives inform urban food governance research? And how can translocal networks help rescale food system governance? This paper shows that not only are FPNs creating innovative governance structures to identify and tackle regionally contextualised food challenges, but they are also modelling forms of translocal collaboration across silos and sectors while striving for inclusivity beyond an urban-rural dichotomy.

1. Introduction

With rising global hunger and increasing economic, social and environmental risks being experienced in the current food system, many global institutions are calling for food systems transformation (FST)—radical measures that can instigate ‘deep, rapid and radical global systems change’ (Kraak and Niewolny 2024: 787). For example, the United Nations has stated: ‘Transformative changes are needed, policies need to be modified and promotion of the goals needs to be adhered to’ (United Nations 2020: np). To meet these targets, FST is increasingly tied not only to global governance, but also to local action and leadership (Scoones *et al* 2020).

Within this emerging transformative agenda, much attention has so far been given to ‘Food Policy Councils’⁹ (FPCs), multi-sector collaborations that emerged in the United States (US) in the 1980s

⁹ Recognised as one type of FPN in this paper.

(Schiff *et al* 2022) to address food systems issues. FPCs are implicit within a wider urban turn in food policy thinking (Morgan and Sonnino 2010, Moragues-Faus and Battersby 2021), which liken FPCs to regime actors whose strategies ‘destabilise’ policies from city-level government (Mattioni *et al* 2022). This perspective represents a notable departure from traditional policy that focuses on rural agricultural production, export-oriented trade and commodity crops (Range *et al* 2023, Agora Agriculture and IDDRI 2025).

While an urban food systems focus reorients and provides novel perspectives and approaches towards FST, we, alongside others, acknowledge that urban food systems are not discrete bounded units that can be researched in isolation. Instead, actors who operate within urban contexts often cut across overlapping jurisdictions and governance scales (Coulson and Sonnino 2019, Candel 2020, Sonnino 2023). This assertion raises the need for a research approach that focuses on ‘place’ as an ‘active meso-level mediator’ between the multiple tensions and contestations that surround processes of change (Sonnino *et al* 2016: 484).

The call to ‘destabilise’ policies through a dynamic understanding of the urban boundaries of food systems is paralleled by a shift to identify and analyse FPCs in more diverse forms and geographical contexts across the world. Referred to here using the umbrella term of ‘Food Policy Networks’ (FPNs), these multi-actor arrangements are increasingly identified global-wide as coalitions of committed individuals and organisations that seek to bring about FST (Schiff *et al* 2022, Sonnino *et al* 2026). From the start of this concept documented as FPCs in the US, FPNs—a generic term to encompass the diversity of approaches, scales and strategies—next appeared in Canada, Europe and Australia (De Schutter 2018, Schiff *et al* 2022). Recent reports now document FPNs in more than 60 countries (Edwards *et al* 2023). Recognising that compositional and other changes have emerged due to this proliferation across global and regional contexts, we argue for a need to consider the regional influences across this global distribution of FPNs.

However, comparative analysis of FPNs in regions beyond North America and Europe remains scant in academic literature. Research on FPNs has tended to either document a singular network in one urban area or city-region (Minotti *et al* 2022) or compared multiple networks within the same national or regional contexts (Michel *et al* 2019, Sieveking 2019, den Boer *et al* 2023). These initiatives are then often presented as ‘best practices or case studies developed in specific local contexts’ (Mazzocchi *et al* 2023: 9), which explore shared characteristics or comparable experiences, ‘rather than analysing in depth the socioeconomic and agri-food contextual background from which they stemmed’ (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, within academic literature, there is less understanding of urban FPNs *out* and *across* regions. As Enthoven and Van den Broeck (2021: 1) state, there is ‘a critical lack of cross-country comparable data’. When available, many comparative studies are often limited to FPNs from two or three local food systems (Michel and Soulard 2019, Prové *et al* 2019). Empirical studies have demonstrated that there are diverging approaches to stakeholder participation within FPNs (Santo and Moragues-Faus 2019). Yet research is lacking on which stakeholders are represented (and how) within governance structures of FPNs in different regions (for a European perspective, see Hoffman 2019). For example, researchers and academics are identified for contributing to the creation of science-policy-society interfaces for FPNs towards FST (Duncan *et al* 2022; den Boer *et al* 2023), but there is little knowledge about the regional diversity of researchers involved with FPNs across the world. Similarly, although research has identified the significance of government and private sector actors’ participation in shaping FPNs (Gupta *et al* 2018, Schiff *et al* 2022), the variations of stakeholder participation are less understood across regional contexts.

In addition, the separation between ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ in food policy has potentially led to research overlooking other important aspects of FPNs on a regional level. For example, the unique characteristics of rural FPNs remain a blind spot in research and are rarely covered in literature (Nunes and Lamine 2025). Mazzocchi *et al* (2023) warn against the danger of exclusion of farming from FPNs and food policy discourses, where, consequently, there is a risk that agriculture and production are marginalised and ‘left solely in the hands of the market’ (p. 17), undermining democratic governance and increasing corporate control (Clapp 2021). Alternatively, there remains a predisposition to link urban characteristics and stakeholders with the urban metropolises in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. This narrow focus, in turn, overlooks issues such as access to land through public or private ownership—a persistent fundamental barrier for urban and peri-urban growers (Zimmerer *et al* 2021, Parzonko *et al* 2025).

To progress a ‘place-based’ approach to urban food systems, in this paper we focus on the interplay between the urban and regional contexts of FPNs and their global impact on FST agendas. As expressed in the title, we draw on Haraway’s (1988) concept of ‘situated knowledges’, which recognises that knowledge is ‘always situated, partial, mutable, and hybrid, as it is always conditioned by location, position,

shifting subjectivities, and the multiple material agents involved in its production (1988, 579, 589)' (Quintero González 2025: 584). With respect to transformation, this approach implies that, rather than assuming that one site—urban or rural or other—is better than another, or that one policy approach should dominate all; multiple views, positionings and locations are required to enhance understanding of regional food systems change. Specifically, we ask: how do the regional contexts of FPNs shape their purpose, approach and impact? Can the analysis of diverse regional FPNs from one location contribute to new understandings to others towards FST? How can regional perspectives inform urban food governance research? How can translocal networks help rescale food system governance? The next section provides some background on the tension in the literature between the scale of urban and regional FPNs, while offering a framework that bridges place-based and translocal conceptual approaches to address this.

2. Background

2.1. Interrogating urban and regional approaches to FPNs in the literature

Following the urban turn in food policy debates, scholarship on FPNs has tended to focus on their role in cities and urban agendas, especially in relation to urban agriculture, food banks, food sharing and consumer-centric programs (Filippini *et al* 2019, Schiff and Wilkinson 2023). FPNs in urban settings have been described as entry points for city-dwellers to healthy and sustainable food environments. Their actions are sometimes interpreted as realising urban FST by building the right to the city in terms of the production of space (Shillington 2013; Purcell and Tyman 2015). Often seen as transition intermediaries that 'promote an explicit transition agenda and take the lead in aiming for change on the whole system level' (Kivimaa *et al* 2019: 1068), FPNs seek to establish a democratic and often participatory governance structure to instigate and channel long-term engagement with FST (Behringer 2025). Existing scholarship often views FPNs as conduits to strengthen local food networks from the 'ground-up' (Thow *et al* 2022) by integrating local knowledge, science and practices within policy (den Boer *et al* 2023)—which, in turn, can help overcome dominant siloed and fragmented approaches towards tackling societal crises (Edwards *et al* 2023). By empowering urban actors with the mandate, resources and tools to foster FST through strategies such as urban agriculture, local food networks, circular economy principles and resilient food economies, FPNs can provide empirical examples to learn and develop strategies for FST on the ground (Hering and Kohrs 2025, Ndhlovu 2025).

Similar to a shifting understanding of space at the urban scale, FPNs (as a policy version of alternative food networks) are also often linked to the promotion of the 'local'—e.g. short food supply chains, terroir, food miles, foodsheds, locality, bioregionalism and local food networks (Edwards 2016). These terms emphasise that 'urban' and 'local' interact with regional aspects in larger city-region food systems (Carucci *et al* 2019), with potential to improve urban-rural linkages. For example, 'terroir' connects the quality of food products to place, espousing their ecological and cultural relationships to a distinct territorial location; 'foodshed' represents a naturally and spatially defined area that includes both the biological resources and the people who work in the region to produce food (Renting *et al* 2003); and 'bioregionalism' is used to embed and revalue regional produce in competition with products from the conventional market (Edwards 2016).

In the growing research field associated with the emerging paradigm of FST, there has been a push to complicate these scales and, more directly, a growing critique of the 'local' aspect. Here it is recognised that 'local' can be also interpreted as a form of 'defensive localism' (Winter 2003) that may promote political urban boundaries to the detriment of others. In this context, the assumed localised nature of FPNs has come under critical scrutiny, particularly in relation to their level of inclusivity and their overall capacity to represent diverse perspectives and demands within FST agendas (Halliday and Veenhuizen, 2019). In response, there has been a push to develop strategies that can overcome assumed embeddedness implied by 'unreflexive localism' (DuPuis and Goodman 2005: 365). This shift has grown alongside a deeper question on how to break down local versus global dualisms that are often embedded in food systems discourses (Lever *et al* 2019).

Alternatively, a shared regional food context can act as an essential bedrock for shaping perspectives on FST beyond local or urban boundaries. For example, social cohesion and wellbeing can be enhanced by supporting residents to engage in local food systems' activities and connect to a regional significance of food; alternative food economies can be developed by preserving traditional food knowledges, by revaluing local space and skills, and by supporting innovative, ethics-led food entrepreneurship; and environmental features of local regions can be enriched by supporting sustainable food activities—all while contributing to greater regional socio-economic resilience (Vieira *et al* 2018; Edwards *et al* 2026).

Hence, place-based, and in turn, regional, food systems can form unique grounded identities that ensure FST is owned, and thus sustained, by local communities. Yet we also note that the scales of FPNs can have their differences—where empirical studies have demonstrated different regional interpretations and challenges to stakeholder inclusion (Coulson and Milbourne 2022).

2.2. Bridging place-based and translocal conceptual approaches to FST

Place-based and translocal conceptual approaches both offer excellent frameworks to recognise distinctions and interactions between urban and regional features within the global movement of FPNs. A place-based approach recognises that tangible FST may only occur through a radical change in structural, functional and relational aspects towards more just socio-ecological relationships, patterns of interactions and outcomes (Sonnino and Milbourne 2022). For this to happen, stakeholders need to commit to transformative pathways and ambitions. In this regard, the literature has praised the emergence of place-based coalitions for their capacity to offer a grounded alternative to more abstract research being conducted at the global scale about universal goals of food and nutrition security and the Right to Food (Webb *et al* 2020, HLPE 2024). In addition to building inclusive science-policy-practice interfaces at the local (city/municipal or county), state and regional levels, FPNs have been described as a node to support the alignment of ideas and activities across a region but also across different governance levels (den Boer *et al* 2023).

Alternatively, the perspective of translocal governance acknowledges local characteristics alongside the structural and institutional influences of translocal learning (Moragues Faus *et al* 2020). In the context of food studies, translocality—or ‘the socio-spatial dynamics and processes of simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries—including, but also extending beyond, those of nation states’ (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 1) has been utilised as a lens to explore connections, parallel developments, alliances and common imaginaries across FPNs at different scales (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino 2019). Importantly, a translocal perspective responds to criticisms of monopolar or Eurocentric theories of globalisation—the tendency to identify ‘global’ developments as blanket phenomena that encompass the whole world in the same way. In contrast, the translocality concept can be utilised to recognise that there are cross-territorial linkages and flows that indicate commonalities, alongside regional unevenness and distinct endemic responses to change in the different contexts of culture, politics and power (Freitag and von Oppen 2010). In transnational urbanism for example, Smith describes the ‘global city’ as a localisation of global economic, political and cultural dynamics (Smith 2001: 2). From this perspective, cities are primary sites for comparative analysis of how local narratives, networks, practices and power relations can be explored as expressions of ‘nested’ global dynamics (p. 3).

Drawing on interviews with 67 FPNs from across five continents, this paper examines the shared regional features that emerge between place-based and translocal approaches for FST. As a prism, ‘place’ helps to acknowledge the value of diverse, dynamic relationships and how different contexts or localities influence each other across scales and shape FPNs. A translocal approach, in turn, orientates analytical attention around the ways in which place-based groups and food initiatives connect to share knowledge, resources and linkages across governance scales to impact FST (Santo and Moragues-Faus 2019). The integration between a place-based and a translocal approach ultimately highlights the tensions between local adaptations and broader, often global, forces, suggesting that FPNs can both mitigate and challenge these forces through context-specific governance strategies.

3. Methods

3.1. Data collection

This study represents an independent paper amongst others (i.e. see Sonnino *et al* 2026, López Cifuentes *et al* 2025; Edwards *et al* under review) that draw from the same large project data set to explore the regional implications of the findings. FPNs were initially identified through a scientific and grey literature review using databases of Google Scholar, Web of Science and Scopus. Recognising that not all FPNs were represented in academic or project report form, an extensive online mapping of FPNs was conducted across diverse geographical, governance and cultural contexts, ensuring the inclusion of FPNs that featured across broad compositional types, policy engagement, locations and scales. The online mapping was conducted by a research team in multiple languages (English, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, Portuguese and French) to encompass a global reach. Recognising that terminology varies by language, regional team members contributed localised expressions to further define and refine core FPN categories and terminologies.

The research team consisted of experts in food systems research that were either from or had worked extensively in four continents, demonstrating extensive embedded local food systems' experience. The researchers also bridged academia and practice, including one author who is also a practitioner. Following data collection, the researchers reflected on the findings together through a series of peer-to-peer discussions.

Rather than select FPNs that were 'regional' as such, this research focussed on FPNs existing at a variety of scales¹⁰ to explore their connection with the region. This criterion stemmed first from the understanding that 'regional' can vary greatly in its definition, such as with respect to scale, inclusivity, resources, geography and social identity. For example, in classical geography, 'regions are defined by two interconnected conditions: they (1) differ from adjoining regions by (2) having a certain unique combination of features' (Cabral *et al* 2024: 4), later broadening to consider 'regions as assemblages of people and biophysical environments mutually adjusting over time' (*ibid.*). Alternatively, La Via Campesina identified ten regions to subdivide the world¹¹, from which national organisations are expected to work well together and find resources to strengthen the region (Desmarais, 2008). Even within the data sample, the 11 FPNs that self-defined themselves as 'regional' described the 'region' differently—from being understood as a city-region, metropolitan, county and peri-urban areas (see appendix 1).

Acknowledging this ambiguity, we posit a working definition to start a conversation about the relationship between FPNs and their regions on a global scale. Hence, we loosely define 'regional FPNs' as those sharing cultural practices, political governance systems and geographical areas (see table 1).

An initial search retrieved more than 100 cases, which was reduced to 67 cases by excluding FPNs that were limited in scope, sector-specific, focused on overly narrow objectives (such as food security, obesity, environmental concerns, land rights and others) or for which there were not enough information. Once FPNs were selected, key representatives of each FPN were contacted by email with a request for an interview. Snowball sampling was conducted in the interviews by asking participants to recommend other FPNs. This approach enabled FPNs that may have different names or were less accessible due to political and cultural factors to be included in the study (Bernard 2006).

A total of 67 interviews were conducted using Zoom or MS Teams between September 2023 and March 2024 with representatives from FPNs worldwide, prioritising individuals with key roles in their organisation, such as founders, paid staff or long-term members. Each interview was conducted by the team member in their preferred language (either English, French, Portuguese, German, Italian or Spanish) using a template of semi-structured questions that aimed to elicit information on FPNs' core characteristics, their key activities, issues of participation and representation and their engagement with FST. The interviews lasted 45 minutes on average, were audio-recorded upon permission, translated by the interviewer (when necessary) into English, and transcribed using the recording feature on MS Teams or Zoom or professional transcription services.

It is important to acknowledge that this research design had its own limitations. Notably, it did not provide a comprehensive account of FPNs globally. The FPNs are analysed as individual nodes that, taken together create a broad sample of organisations from different global regions. We recognise that these regional categorisations may not be shared by others due to specific cultural, political or other factors. We also acknowledge that it was beyond the capacity of this research to produce a representative sample of FPNs everywhere (omissions include eastern Europe and scant data from Asia¹²). However, through the use of the comprehensive methodology described here, which include a research team conducting reviews and interviews in seven languages, we believe that the resulting data set represents a highly diverse sample of FPNs from around the world.

3.2. Data analysis

The interviews were analysed in relation to the research questions using the software, NVivo. Content analysis—'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff 2004: 18)—was chosen for this study since it 'provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena' (Downe-Wamboldt 1992: 314).

Data analysis used both deductive and inductive coding approaches (Saldana 2009). Deductive coding provided an initial structured, integrated and comparative framework for examining regional aspects

¹⁰ For example, scales of the selected FPNs include international (4), national (17), regional (2), city-regional (43) and urban (1).

¹¹ See <https://viacampesina.org/en/members-list/>

¹² The scarcity of data on FPNs based in Asia stemmed from the lack of literature in academic databases or accessible via web-based search in English; additional inquiry was made through contacts in regional research organisations and non-government organisations, and the resulting list of representatives of documented FPNs were contacted for interviews.

Table 1. Acknowledging regional interpretations of the categorisation of the data.

Selected geographical region	Reasoning for regional identity
North America and Canada	Geographic—North America as a continent, of which Canada is one of the countries located within it.
Africa	Geographic—The continent of Africa has been chosen as a broad region. However, it is important to acknowledge that Africa is not a singular, monolithic entity, but a continent of immense diversity, including in its cultures, languages, political systems, geography and more.
Asia	Geographic—Asia is classified geographically into East, Southeast, and South Asia, including the Middle East. This region includes highly diverse languages, cultures and more.
Australia and New Zealand	Geographic—Australia and New Zealand are often considered together as Australasia or sometimes as part of the broader region of Oceania. While Australia is a continent, New Zealand is not, but both are geographically close and share some cultural and historical ties, making them commonly grouped together.
Central and South America	Cultural history and linguistic similarities—Central and South America are often considered as a region, due to their shared cultural and linguistic characteristics, which are remnants of colonial influence. While Central America is geographically part of North America, its close ties with South America in terms of history, language, and culture lead to it often being grouped together as a single region.
Europe—southern	Geographic, cultural, historical and economic—Geographically, southern Europe is defined by its location in the southern part of Europe, often encompassing the Iberian, Italian, and Balkan peninsulas, and is heavily influenced by the Mediterranean Sea. Culturally, it shares historical experiences, Mediterranean climates, and related traditions and languages. Economically, it is often seen as a distinct region within Europe.
Europe—northern and western	Geographic, historical and economic—Encompassing the countries of Northern Europe (such as the Nordic countries and the UK) and Western Europe (including France, Germany, and others), this region has shared geographical features, including a humid temperate climate, a strong economic focus on innovation and sustainability, and a high level of cultural exchange. Furthermore, this region shares a historical development of FPNs in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. These welfare states all have highly industrialised food systems.
The United Kingdom	Politically and administratively—Politically, as a sovereign state comprising four constituent countries (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), and administratively, with the nine regions of England and the individual countries of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

of the FPNs. This first level coding is illustrated by appendixes that explore regional and other relevant aspects of FPNs in comparative contexts. Appendix 1 presents an overview of each FPNs' key characteristics¹³, including their origin, regional scope, stakeholder membership, relationship to government, FST agendas and scale of operation. Appendix 2 shows translocal FPNs' aims and place-based variations specific to regions. Appendix 3 documents the translocal knowledge and governance networks influencing FPNs.

Inductive coding was used to draw out the details from the case studies to further contextualise and highlight emerging themes and patterns from the FPNs' geographical and cultural contexts. This approach is illustrated in Appendix 4, which highlights the regional specificities that influence and shape FPNs, considering their histories, cultural preferences, governance approaches, etc. The summary in Appendix 4 was produced by selecting three FPN examples from each region to highlight how their regional context shapes their form, approach and purpose. Acknowledging that some regions had a lower number of interviews, interview data were at times supplemented further by using academic and grey literature.

Significantly, rather than applying a comparative perspective across regions, which would imply that 'a hierarchical relationship is naturally assumed' between cases (Kudo *et al* 2020: 3), this paper instead takes a translocal learning perspective to acknowledge the role of 'learning from difference', which helps

¹³ The characteristics included the region, regional characteristics, origin, regional scope, stakeholders, relationship to government, area of contribution to FST, and if they are a member of a national or international FPN.

to see diversity as a resource, rather than as a problem to be solved (Wyss-Flamm, 2002). While this perspective is based in education literature, its core principles are also applicable to this research setting, where it helped to establish equal relationships across cases 'based on its pluralistic epistemological assumption and the fact that the locality of every community differs from each other' (Kudo *et al* 2020: 3). Hence, rather than expect examples from one location to be applicable or preferential to those in another location, this paper identifies areas of inspiration, novelty and concern that can be applied across contexts to stimulate further dialogue on diverse approaches to transforming food systems.

Findings

1) *The regional diversity of food policy networks*

Governance

Findings from this global study demonstrate differences in how multi-stakeholderism is interpreted across regions. Government-embedded FPNs are financially supported by public resources, which have direct influence on the design and implementation of urban food policy. In the UK, for example, although food partnerships (as FPNs are referred to in the UK) are not often led by governments, they are generally a key stakeholder influencing the direction of policy engagement towards food-health linkages. This is reflected in the focus of FPNs on addressing diet-related health issues such as obesity and food insecurity, promote healthier food systems and tackle inequalities in access to nutritious food. In the cities committed as signatories of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) translocal network, local governments often take a lead role in emphasising initiatives linked to the specific powers and responsibilities of these actors in relation to food; this typically includes public food procurement in public schools and care homes (in Portugal, Senegal, Italy and Spain), food education (Italy) and environmental sustainability (Jordan, Berlin, Amsterdam). In Amman, Jordan, for example, the FPN is embedded within the local government and largely reflects a national policy agenda focused on green cities and climate resilience.

In other regions, FPNs' multi-stakeholder governance is centralised and top-down, but not necessarily government-led. By operating autonomously from government as independent, grassroots organisations (in Berlin, Belgium and the Netherlands), NGO-led FPNs serve as (critical) sounding boards to enhance state accountability to policy goals. In other regions, independent FPNs work with governments to fill gaps in public engagement and technical expertise. For instance, China's coalition of environmental and animal rights groups has generated advocacy work with chefs, wet market traders and university students to reduce meat consumption and acceptance of sustainable diets. The FPN in Mbale City, Uganda, established by the international NGO Rikolto is a technical committee to support the implementation of urban food systems interventions.

Researchers and academics are among the members of FPNs across all global regions. Their role spans from 'knowledge disseminators' through international conferences and academic networks (for example, Thailand, Mexico), to 'catalyst/enablers' when food initiatives have originated from research projects (e.g. Australia, the UK, Belgium), to 'agenda-setters' when they have been advocating for the formalisation of a certain initiative (e.g. Italy) or creating momentum over specific issues (e.g. Sheffield, UK).

In all FPNs included in our sample, the private sector membership was intentionally targeted to local economic partners, small businesses and producers. Even in cases where private sector actors play an integral role in FPNs (China, Amman) or are fee-paying members (Switzerland), FPNs create selective criteria for the involvement of food and agricultural businesses with like-minded principles and visions of FST.

There is also a regional diversity in terms of how decision-making is organised in FPNs, which typically involves horizontal, parliamentary structure represented across regions. In Europe, decision-making is generally based on open discussion and debate amongst members across the FPN, taking the form of member congresses and political roundtables (Berlin), idea incubators (Belgium) and neighbourhood parliaments (Uganda). In these cases, the stakeholders and members of the FoodLab co-creatively build the city's food strategy.

In cases where FPNs adopt governance approaches that diverge from the traditional regional political processes, this divergence may represent an obstacle to recognising and integrating FPNs' recommendations. For example in a Swiss FPN, a citizens' assembly has been tested to enable democratic decision-making by citizen vote on different actions and priorities for FST, which challenges a tradition of direct democracy to elect national parliamentary representatives. The outcome of this process was a list of 126 recommendations on the future of food and agriculture, which were handed over to the Swiss government in 2023 and await further integration in policy (Buergerrat 2022).

Identity

FPNs must negotiate a desire for establishing difference whilst also acknowledging the need to link to and integrate with a broader environment. One example of this tension between local and translocal identities is that of regional interpretations of the Planetary Health Diet, which accords with many FPNs who seek to support healthy and sustainable diets and consumption habits. Here, many FPNs present 'localisation' of the diet as a discriminator that is used to build place-based identity. Exemplary in this light is the case of the China Good Food Fund, whose representative stated in the interview that: 'In Asia, the rise in rates of people with metabolically unhealthy overweight and obesity has been attributed primarily to a Westernisation of traditional diets'. Attempts at adopting a protein transition or reducing meat consumption are perceived yet again as examples of Westernisation of the traditional diet; as stated by the interviewee, '[w]orking through relatable and influential spokespeople—home cooks, small farmers, chefs and community leaders—the network aims to align what are perceived as Western constructs with culturally appropriate and publicly-acceptable Eastern versions to advance sustainable diets'. In the Mediterranean region, similar attempts are made to create a narrative around diets for human and planetary health, focusing on the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle. To this end, a FPN in Cordoba focuses on: 'Safeguarding the Mediterranean diet, reinforcing cultural identity while promoting scientific and technological innovation throughout the food system'.

A feminist approach to FST presents another identity. In Brazil, for example, feminist FPNs started as a movement to emancipate women but also to help people find a way to be more active against the political system. For instance, in São Paulo, the Network of Agroecological and Peripheral Female Urban Farmers exemplifies how both formal and informal FPNs have long supported social movements addressing food justice and gender inequality. This grassroots movement, rooted in the feminist organisation, *Sempreviva Organização Feminista*, uses peri-urban farming as a tool for female empowerment. Operating in underserved, high-violence areas, the FPN brings together women farmers, civil servants, researchers and agroecological technicians to promote food security, economic autonomy and gender equality. Their work highlights the intersection of food, feminism and resistance in Brazil's urban periphery.

Inclusivity

All FPNs recognise that they should develop more inclusive strategies to enhance participation. In the US, South America and Australia, FPNs' bridging efforts extend to goals of social cohesion, racial and socio-economic equity in response to health disparities—including by engaging with migration and diaspora, colonial legacies and indigenous disempowerment. This is a priority in Canada, the US and Australia, where strategies are deployed to either change governance processes within FPNs to enhance representation or to establish new FPNs that represent alternative perspectives. For example, Food Secure Canada (FSC) experienced an internal revolt advocating for changes in language and governance, and thus accessibility of participation, within their organisation. The inclusion of small-scale farmers is also advocated by FPNs in the UK, Australia and Central and South America. In Brazil, food is framed as a political tool to bridge political divides between parties and foster solidarity for gender equity. In São Paulo, for example, the FPN brings together female community gardeners and urban farmers with agroecological technicians, civil servants and researchers in areas facing high levels of violence and social exclusion—particularly experienced by women of colour. Young farmers are seeking greater representation also in European-wide FPNs, as illustrated by Good Food, Good Farming's campaign, 'Growing a Better Future'.

Crises

FPNs are also at the 'hard end' of sudden shocks and extended challenges, which often have the effect of exposing structural weaknesses and gaps in public services, resulting in FPNs emerging or mobilising to address needed services and resources. For example, FPCs were established in the US and Canada as a response to cuts in social services that were unable to cope with mainstream systematic failures to provide food and nutrition security. In South America, FPNs emerged in response to political upheaval (in the case of Bolsonaro's government). In Asia, FPNs have tackled a range of challenges, including climate change, public health issues and changing diets. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food safety, which presented political opening for the Chinese FPN to promote shorter and more transparent food value chains. Similarly, the emergence of food safety fears from the pandemic and pesticide use created more engagement for the Thai FPNs with local food supply and urban agriculture. So too have FPNs in Australia and New Zealand gained momentum due to various crises since the early 2000s, including environmental damage, financial struggles such as the 2008 global financial crisis, urban sprawl and an increased concentration of supermarkets. For instance, Edible Canterbury in New Zealand arose from

the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes to build regional food resilience after natural disaster and induced supply chain disruptions. In northern and western Europe, FPNs emerged in opposition to industrialised food systems, environmental degradation and the cost-of-living crisis. A clear example of the latter is the UK-based Islington Food Partnership (IFP), which designated this borough as a Right to Food borough. In Southern Europe, where the economic crisis and the rising cost of living have reduced purchasing power for many working and middle-class families, initiatives such as Croatia's Solidarity Ecological Group have emerged to help people affected by the crisis, including immigrants and small-scale farmers.

2) 'Placing' FPNs across the urban and rural continuum

FPNs occupy different 'places' along the urban-rural continuum. Some represent hyper-urban, densely populated areas in many regions, where they tend to adopt strategies focused on strengthening urban food environments and economies by universalising access to healthy and sustainable food. Urban FPN-led initiatives such as food sharing and food hubs in Melbourne, Berlin and other cities create urgency around issues of food poverty, particularly for racially and socio-economically marginalised residents (i.e. elderly and migrant-background neighbourhoods). In Africa, where rapid urbanisation presents significant challenges for food systems governance, infrastructure, distribution and equitable access, FPNs as multi-stakeholder platforms have emerged organically to promote participatory governance, coordination and the active inclusion of marginalised voices in policy-making processes. One example is the Mbale Good Food Parliament, which was established in 2022 to respond to the increasing insecurity in urban areas, informality in food vending, lack of coordination across stakeholders and weak governance mechanisms. Specifically, the Mbale Food Parliament Network is uniquely integrated into local governance structures and plays a key role in advancing participatory governance by fostering inclusive platforms that empower marginalised groups, shaping local policy, driving innovation through support for urban farming and food systems incubation projects and enhancing accountability through stakeholder feedback mechanisms.

In Europe, North America and Asia, some FPNs have a rural focus. In Ghent, for instance, the local FPN works to connect farmers to land and business development resources in the hinterland. The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) considers itself a 'farmer-led organisation' that aims to connect small-scale farmers to land and support access to land for young farmers involved with ecologically sound agricultural systems. In both Australia and Canada, a shared colonial past has catalysed a need to advocate for Indigenous rights to rural land and food. Another shared focus for Australian and Central and South American FPNs is to assist farmers that face repression or vulnerabilities. For instance, the AFSA recognises the impact of powerful supermarket chains on independent farmers. FPNs in Senegal and Kenya also aim to access land for smallholder producers to address rural food and nutrition insecurity and implement the Right to Food. In Central and South America, FPNs are most often rural-focused, as expressed by the use of labels such as 'food resistance movements' and a strong focus on peasants' and farmers' rights, Indigenous issues, women rights and access to land, markets and seeds. In rural areas of Nicaragua, FPNs connect cooperatives, producer organisations, vegetable producers, coffee producers and cocoa producers.

The FPNs in this research reveal a strong heterogeneity in geographical scope—even within countries. For example, two national FPNs in Australia—the Australian Food Sovereignty Network and Sustain—have taken decidedly different geographical foci: one on rural aspects (Australian Food Sovereignty Network) and the other on urban issues (Sustain), corresponding, in turn, to different primary stakeholders, priorities and approaches. Another example is the Red de Municipios por la Agroecología in Spain, an association of local entities working thematically on many potential issues falling under the agroecology umbrella (e.g. climate change, healthy food but also participation and the role of small municipalities). Recently, this FPN has developed a document with 13 proposals for local administrations for the (then) upcoming legislature to encourage municipalities to include food-related issues in their policy agenda. The presence of farmers and their industry and trade representatives in FPNs can be linked to the prioritisation of agricultural production, land tenure and access (Bambilor, Senegal) and agroecological practices (e.g. Cordoba, Spain). Nonetheless, the inclusion of individual agricultural producers—beyond just their organisations or the known suspects—has proved difficult also in Cordoba, where certain private actors feel not represented or that participating is not worth the effort.

The commonalities across regions include a similar multi-scalar governance structure. For example, FPNs in both Thailand and China connect local councils and operational programs in individual cities under the umbrella of broader national networks where linkages are formed between municipalities, and between municipalities and the federal government. This 'hub and spoke' model is paralleled in many other locations. For example, FPNs in Canada are represented by the national body, Food

Secure Canada, who specifically aims to target policy interventions at the national level whilst providing resources and support for their members.

FPNs are also actively changing their geographical focus. In Amman, Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Lisbon, for example, public authorities are partnering through FPNs to establish land access at different scales, depending on the density of living conditions and scarcity of open green spaces—ranging from promoting private rooftop and balcony gardening in Amman to larger agro-parks and urban agriculture research hubs in Portugal and at the peripheries of Chiang Mai and Bangkok, Thailand. Urban land acquisition or access is supplemented by FPNs with building networks to transfer knowledge, scientific research and lived experiences on production methods and practices for urban agriculture.

In Europe, FPNs express a common purpose to realign interests from farm to fork—from the economic needs of agricultural producers on the periphery of the city to increasingly complex consumer demands in urban areas for fresh, quality and affordable food. FPNs in Switzerland and Germany, for example, cite a lack of social cohesion between rural and urban residents as both an economic and political divide, with farmers identified as increasingly misunderstood and devalued and urban consumers increasingly distrustful and concerned with food origins, food safety and indiscriminately inflated food prices. In response, FPNs attempt to align rural-urban interests through open dialogue and to promote food relocation to create shared economic interests.

FPNs in transitioning urban-rural regions share a purpose to bridge infrastructure, ideologies and capacity of state funding to create synergies for both urban residents and rural farmers and land workers. In Kenya, Nicaragua and Portugal, the language of linking, integration and unlocking synergies is highlighted in the mission and names of the FPNs, which often share a focus on harnessing public procurement in urban school feeding and care institutions to generate market access for local rural producers. In Chicago and San Diego, the vision of an urban-based FPN is to create land access to address inequities and structural racism for food security and political power redistribution.

3) FPNs involvement in translocal networks

Many FPNs in this research used to operate as diverse food and agriculture-related initiatives and informal networks before becoming formalised into FPNs. These formalisation pathways reflect similar external triggers, demonstrating key global milestones of translocal influence that can impact FPNs' activities, either by spurring the initial establishment of an FPN from fragmented or siloed stakeholders or by enabling the institutionalisation and expansion of existing activities (i.e. gaining financial resources, political will, partnerships, knowledge sharing, advocacy and policy development) in response to a new opportunity or urgent threat to local food systems. The findings reveal three common translocal developments (see appendix 3) that are grassroots-led, municipality-led or external NGO-led.

For many of the FPNs interviewed, involvement in translocal networks is a response to common challenges seen across regions—namely, funding insecurity and ensuring political will and commitments for institutionalising policy. Securing financial resources over time is a notable challenge shared by FPNs across all regions. As a result of dependence on short-term public grants, crowdfunding and foundations supporting their program and policy, activities are often planned on a project-by-project basis. The instability of funding resources makes it difficult for FPNs to establish, train and guarantee longer employee relationships to sustain and expand operations. Often key resources such as personnel, offices and event venues are dependent on volunteering or in-kind donations.

As a result of these uncertainties and increased pressures to address diverse crises as they emerge, ensuring continuity is a key challenge for many FPNs. The long-term viability of their initiatives is often contingent on the willingness of policymakers to prioritise food systems issues, making them vulnerable to political shifts and changing governmental agendas (e.g. Lisbon, Portugal). Additionally, since many FPNs operate within a framework of project-based funding and temporary or voluntary collaborations, ensuring a consistent policy engagement is challenging. An outlier is the Toronto Food Policy Council, which managed to sustain its operations over the long-term. In the case of Rome there is a particular challenge regarding continuity, especially concerning the future form and functions that the FPN should take, as the role of the Comitato Promotore—once focused on advocacy—needs redefinition to fully support the municipality's transition from policy design to implementation.

Representing informal manifestations of community-led action, the key example of grassroots-led FPN from the interviews was of La Via Campesina. Present throughout the world, La Via Campesina has launched a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants¹⁴, which is explicitly used by FPNs from Australia

¹⁴ The Declaration highlights the importance of maintaining traditional food cultures, emphasises the value of household and community and celebrates peoples' harmony with nature (Claeys 2014).

and Canada to define their working principles and connect to similar organisations from Latin America, where the peasant movement originated.

Municipality-led translocal networks are by far the most frequently joined by FPNs. MUFPP—the most popular translocal network signed by more than 290 cities¹⁵—is considered a practical tool for mayors to voluntarily commit to sustainable food systems by developing urban food policies. Based on the interviewees' experiences, the MUFPP framework has acted as a catalyst for fostering collaboration among local governments and stakeholders (e.g. in Africa), a driver for developing food strategies (e.g. in Asia) and a tool for building expertise and establishing new municipal offices (e.g. in Southern Europe). In this sense, the MUFPP has been developing as a translocal movement, with municipal-led food policies becoming spaces for mutual learning, adaptation and exchange among cities. The C40 Food Systems Network (C40) is another popular translocal network that facilitates mutual accountability and knowledge exchange and has the potential to broaden the scope of food policy actions by explicitly connecting food-related solutions to broader climate and health challenges. Consisting of a global network of about 100 mayors who have committed to tackling the climate crisis, C40 launched the Good Food Cities Declaration and Accelerator in Copenhagen in 2019 to link local food policies with climate and health action and include relevant criteria into public food procurement at municipal level. When committing to one of the thematic accelerators of C40 (frameworks helping cities to implement science-based solutions that address climate challenges), cities are called to develop and share action plans, including baseline figures on environment, climate, health, social and economic co-benefits on which they will report every two years.

'External NGOs' refers to the instigation or guidance of FPNs by international NGOs or multilateral organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the German Government Agency for International Cooperation, Rikolto, Hivos and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives¹⁶ (ICLEI).

Research and academia-based NGOs often play a key role in supporting translocal learning among FPNs. The role of activist-scholars working within FPNs as local members is often parallel by wider academic networks and institutions creating resources, conferences and workshops for exchange within and across regions. For example, the FPNs Project at the Johns Hopkins Centre for a Liveable Future develops state and local food policy through support for FPNs in the US and acts as a translocal resource by connecting North American FPNs; the International Public Policy Association¹⁷ was also mentioned in an interview as a connector for knowledge-exchange on theory and practice of building FPNs for policy development and FST.

4. Discussion

4.1. How do the regional contexts of FPNs shape their purpose, approach and impact?

Common themes from the data show that FPNs not only arise in response to crises but also act as key players in progressing community resilience, innovation and inclusive governance, often stepping in to fill gaps left by formal systems. Overall, strategies to overcome shared challenges experienced by FPNs tend to develop both horizontally, from within and across the FPN; and vertically, within the multi-level governance structures that can turn local actions into more enduring policies. Such actions can take significant time. An example of pursuing long-term goals is through effective engagement—both internally with members of the FPN and externally with related stakeholders and politicians—to gain solidarity and to be collectively recognised, which is vital to access more resources and to be prepared for change if opportunities arise. An example of strategy to help address long-term financial insecurity for FPNs is provided by Thailand, where the Department of Health introduced a sales tax on luxury items, alcohol and cigarettes to financially support the country's FPN. Other examples include the use of membership fees by the Swiss FPN to institutionalise a small but vital funding source for the network (with fees waived for those without the means to pay). The 'institutionalisation' of the two full-time staff working for the council and on the food strategy that gives the council's work greater structure is another example provided by Ghent. This 'employed-within-council' approach is also shared in some FPNs in both the UK and Australia.

¹⁵ As of February 5th, 2025.

¹⁶ ICLEI, formerly International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, changed in 2003 to ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability.

¹⁷ IPPA is an academic society which aims to promoting scientific research in the field of Public Policy, and contributing to its international development. See www.ippapublicpolicy.org/about-us.

The findings also highlight how FPNs seem to effectively strike a balance between being locally rooted in their contexts and translocally connected at an international/global level. Indeed, a key insight from the interviews is that most FPNs do not emerge from a vacuum, but rather from a multiplicity of pre-existing formal and informal initiatives and projects led in different sectors by various local actors. Translocal networks—such as the MUFPP, la Via Campesina and ICLEI—have been working as catalysts and drivers of formalisation of local arrangements, in ways that potentially emphasise (or at least do not harm) what Sonnino and Milbourne (2022: 923) refer to as the ‘place’s active and progressive engagement with diversity’.

Can the analysis of diverse regional FPNs from one location contribute to new understandings to others towards FST? How can regional perspectives inform urban food governance research?

A regional approach to FPNs destabilises dominant understandings of multi-actor coalitions within the urban food governance literature, which has tended to narrowly focus on FPCs at the neglect of other initiatives that are indeed engaging with a broader range of issues, at multiple scales and through the contribution of a wider variety of food system actors.

First, with respect to governance, a global comparison of FPNs across regions introduces nuanced and diverse governance pathways and models. Governance structures are highly place-based within regions, differing greatly from one locality to the next, where diversity can draw out different alignments across government departments or sectors. For example, FPNs respond to calls by the health department in the UK, while the development sector leads FPN engagement in Africa and South America. Entry points for policy change are also emphasised by this diversity. For example, a Roman FPN despite operating ‘in the absence of national food policy frameworks, lacking substantial support and (often) the administrative competences needed to implement food policy initiatives at local government level, when formalised’ (interview) pushed for the ‘[municipal] Government’s adoption of the Food Policy Resolution’ (ibid.) and ‘turned their role from policy drafting into monitoring’ (ibid.).

Elsewhere, FPNs initiate or collaborate with local governments to crystallise regional FST into policy. In Sheffield, for instance, the FPN co-wrote a food strategy titled ‘Fairer, Healthier, Greener’ (SheffFood, 2022) that provides a vision for FST. Written by the local authority with support by SheffFood, this document was formally endorsed and approved by Sheffield Council bodies. Likewise, in New Zealand, Edible Canterbury co-created the drafting of the Food Resilience Action Plan and the complementary Edible Canterbury Charter with local government and others to bring together food producing sites across the region. Local organisations—including Christchurch City Council—were invited to sign the Charter committing to food resilience in the Christchurch region. In Ghent, a collaboratively written food strategy, ‘Ghent en Garde’, carves out a key role for the city’s FPN. Finally, the Ugandan FPN FLACK ‘actively supported the creation and roll-out of the Kisumu County Food System Strategy 2023–2027, helping to institutionalise county-level food strategy with a dedicated secretariat and resources’ (interview). The UK-based IFP, which designated this borough of London as a Right to Food borough, committed to Islington’s Food Strategy 2023–28 as pledged in the Islington Labour manifesto for the 2022 Local Elections¹⁸.

Some FPNs also strive to go beyond urban and regional scales to contribute to national food policy. The effort was successful in Scotland, where the Scottish Food Coalition managed to ‘integrate local food actions within national policy’ (interview). In Australia, a set of FPNs ‘actively contributed to developing policies for sustainable and just food systems, such as Australia’s 2013 National Food Plan’ (interview). Likewise, FSC led the drafting of a national food policy, ‘Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada’. These findings highlight how regional FPNs can shape FST pathways through new opportunities and strategies for collaboration but also through diverse and innovative forms of policymaking—e.g. driving programs for access to public lands for food production, supporting land permits for urban farming and licensing for new food-based businesses and markets. Hence, this research demonstrates that FPNs are practicing multi-level governance both horizontally and vertically across the globe, with a potential to enhance sustainability outcomes (López-García *et al* 2024). These opportunities are particularly evident in countries such as the UK, where a shift towards national devolution is opening new opportunities for governance across diverse scales (Edwards *et al* 2026).

Second, regional diversity further strengthens and broadens the identity of FPNs, allowing for social inclusion to extend to new stakeholders such as business—stakeholders who have been typically excluded from such networks. In all FPNs included in this study, private sector membership was intentionally directed towards local economic partners, small businesses and producers. FPNs from central urban and

¹⁸ See <https://democracy.islington.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=28818>.

peri-urban regions and the surrounding rural environments tend to reflect stronger engagement with the private sector in promoting access to shorter food value chains and local products. While some scholars and FPNs advocate that large-scale industry should not be involved due to their controversial practices, others question the ability for FST to be quickly and widely endorsed without their involvement (Darrot *et al* 2015).

Desire for greater autonomy also correlates with the assertion of cultural or regional identity. For example, new iterations of FPNs are emerging to uphold decolonial perspectives to empower and represent Indigenous and Black communities, primarily in northern America—a shift that is increasingly being documented in the literature (Elliott *et al* 2023, Loukes 2024). In Brazil, feminist FPNs started as a movement to emancipate women, but also to help people find a way to be more active against the political system. The Network of Agroecological and Peripheral Female Urban Farmers exemplifies how both formal and informal FPNs have long supported social movements addressing food justice and gender inequality. By embracing greater representation and diversity of perspectives, regional FPNs are heralding value-based approaches, alternative forms of resource use and governance models that can overcome traditional barriers.

Third, broader engagement with the region also disrupts concepts of FPNs and borders. Across regions, FPNs are building place-based narratives for FST through several strategies. While FPNs share very general themes of food security, food sovereignty, climate and nature concerns, they also engage with diverse and complex issues from their respective regional food systems. This analysis also reveals crossovers that create the ground for potential connections between not-so-obvious divergent coalitions. Three topics stand out in this regard: regional interpretations of the Planetary Health Diet; the institutionalisation of a food strategy with dedicated resources; and an emphasis on regional procurement, mainly through school food. However, the data show that a regional approach is only one of many characteristics that can unite FPNs beyond borders, such as urban-rural linkages and more. Aspects such as urbanisation, migration diaspora, historical and Indigenous roots should take more prominence in understanding current FST obstacles and power lock-ins facing FPNs.

Many (both urban and rural) FPNs share a common direction of FST to broaden access to land, markets and food-related resources. This influence appears in two fundamental ways: first, a shared focus on building access to land, markets and food-related resources serving predominantly urban or rural stakeholders in the regions; and, second, the role of rural-urban *bridging* as an aim of FPNs to build relationships, linkages across territorial networks and reduced silos between urban and rural food and agriculture policy issues. This bridging extends to the role of FPNs in creating shared spaces to address ideological and social divides among constituents both within urban areas and between urban and rural communities. Hence, building on literature on food considerations for city-regional perspectives (Carucci *et al* 2019), urban-rural linkages (Berkhout *et al* 2023) and the (re)territorialisation of food systems (González De Molina and López-García D 2021), this research demonstrates that urban-based FPNs are indeed expanding their geographical reach.

In sum, the regional context of diverse FPNs extends interpretations of the original concept of FPCs by elaborating the themes, actors and approaches of place-based identities. These disruptions add richness to the FST agenda by highlighting the possibility to integrate new spaces, stakeholders and approaches into the design of FPNs, which, in turn, can support the creation of new pathways towards transformation.

How can translocal networks help rescale food system governance?

Translocal networks in this study play two major roles: they serve as highways for ideas on FST; and they form significant conduits for building solidarity to address economic and political issues that are common across regions. The first role is playing a part in broadening concepts of stakeholder engagement, policy design and intervention programs, many of which are highlighted in the cross-regional analysis. The origins of FPCs in North America presented a model that has been a particularly influential translocal trigger for ideational foundations of FPNs in the UK and Europe but is also cited by FPNs in Asia. However, the findings demonstrate that many of the organisations and coalitions studied as ‘FPNs’ existed before their engagement in wider global and regional networks. The main contribution of translocal networks in spreading FST thinking is rather by functioning as catalysts for more organisations becoming FPNs in more regions of the world.

The role of translocal networks as conduits for solidarity and strategy to overcome challenges (i.e. navigating tricky political hurdles, finding financial resilience and building allied partnerships) can include exchanges on dealing with the moving tides of political polarisation and maintaining progress in context of shift to the right and nationalisms (Guiné 2024). The solidarity strategy through translocal networks is also part of the urgent responsiveness to global crises and challenges, with many examples

Table 2. General recommendations for policymakers, funders and researchers.

Target group	Policy recommendations
Policymakers	• To strengthen the role of FPNs and support their initiatives by providing sustained funding and other in-kind support. • To welcome engagement with stakeholders from FPNs (including in particular marginalised and vulnerable groups) within government working groups and across policy portfolios.
Funders	• To provide funding opportunities that can support horizontal and vertical network building and development. • To engage with FPNs to ensure that funding opportunities are understood and made accessible to all, regardless of their level of formality.
Researchers	• To support, evaluate and monitor the work of FPNs (both comparatively and through in-depth case studies) so that their actions are backed by scientific evidence and can be disseminated, adopted and scaled within international knowledge and practice networks.

during COVID-19 of quickly sharing lessons learned and measures for resilience (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future 2020).

4.2. Implications for policymakers, funders and researchers

If meaningful FST is to be achieved, policymakers and funders must recognise FPNs as legitimate actors and provide enabling conditions for their activities. This includes sustained investment, supportive regulatory frameworks and a willingness to engage with the participatory ethos these networks embody. The lesson here is not only that FPNs can create innovative governance structures to identify and tackle regionally contextualised food challenges, but that they are actively modelling the forms of collaboration across silos and sectors, and they are doing so while striving for inclusivity. The findings from this study concur with others who are exploring the potential of just and sustainable regional food systems (Edwards *et al* 2026). Table 2 below provides some general recommendations for policymakers, funders and researchers.

5. Conclusions

This comparative study demonstrates that FPNs have become vital infrastructures of governance in food systems, particularly in contexts marked by unclear food mandates and the absence of decisive leadership from national and international institutions. While governments have repeatedly failed to adopt systemic approaches—narrowing debates to agricultural production and sidelining issues such as nutrition, food waste and resilient supply chains—FPNs are filling this vacuum by creating spaces where transformation, albeit incrementally, can be advanced from the ground up and through a collective effort. Indeed, by convening municipalities, civil society organisations, producers and communities, many FPNs offer inclusive platforms where diverse priorities—food insecurity, sustainable diets, land access and just supply chains—can be addressed holistically. In doing so, they counterbalance the dominance of global agri-food corporations as well as the inertia of higher-level governance actors.

A key insight from this comparison is the adaptability of FPNs to diverse local conditions. Some networks anchor their work in the apparatus of municipal authority, embedding food within urban planning and procurement strategies. Others emphasise grassroots coalition-building and translocal solidarity, using shared learning to amplify regional innovations. Importantly, regardless of their positionalities, all FPNs tend to prioritise the inclusion of marginalised voices—those most directly affected by the very challenges FPNs seek to address.

The diversity of approaches documented in this paper reveals that there is no single model for success; rather, FPNs thrive when their strategies are grounded in place while remaining connected to wider networks of exchange. The result is a mosaic of innovation that demonstrates the feasibility of systemic transformations, even when national frameworks falter. Indeed, FPNs represent ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway 1988) that are both embedded within place and networks, constituting ‘partial, mutable, and hybrid’ states and subjectivities across scales (Haraway 1988, cited in Quintero González 2025: 584). Taken together, these place-based characteristics and translocal influences complicate existing notions of urban food networks, bringing into focus the multi-scalar dynamics shaping (and being shaped by) FPNs in response to regional histories, geographies and asymmetries of power.

FPNs are not without constraints. Limited resources, political volatility and an ongoing struggle for legitimacy threaten their stability. Nevertheless, their persistence in creating participatory mechanisms and experimenting with new forms of governance underscores their resilience. Crucially, they do more than respond to immediate crises: they keep alive the possibility of transformation by holding institutional space for food justice and sustainability. This includes securing and empowering research in more localities to examine how novel networks develop and grow, contributing to the creation of science-policy-society interfaces for FPNs towards FST (Duncan *et al* 2022).

Areas that would benefit from future research fall within questions of how FPNs can utilise different kinds of power to integrate their needs within policy, western versus regional perceptions of FST, alternative approaches to study FPNs and the 'region', themes that crossover between FPNs, and FPNs' potential capacity and roles to ameliorate future crises. Our data shows that a regional approach is only one of many characteristics that can unite FPNs beyond borders, where there are many potential overlaps on themes emerging in different regions. Clearly, there are important but still untapped opportunities for knowledge-exchange and problem-solving by engaging with different perspectives, produce and places. Hence, future research could explore the areas of shared regional FPN 'crossovers', such as migration diaspora, historical and indigenous roots, urban-rural linkages and more.

In conclusion, FPNs are no longer marginal or experimental. They represent an emerging architecture of governance that is grounded in regional realities while linked through translocal exchange. Recognising, supporting and scaling their situated knowledges is essential if we are to build food systems that are just, resilient and sustainable within planetary boundaries.

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Data availability statement

Restrictions apply. Data cannot be shared publicly via a URL/DOI. The research involves qualitative data which may contain identifiable information that could compromise the privacy of the research participants. The appendices are very detailed and provide much information that is covered in the article.

Ethics statement

All procedures performed in the research were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Surrey. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Surrey Assurance Team, FEPS 22-23 024 EGA. Informed consent was provided by all human participants. This research was also conducted in accordance with the principles embodied in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Appendix 1: Characteristics of place-based nodes

Region	Regional characteristics ^a	FPN name and type (in bold)	Origin	Regional scope	Stakeholders	Relationship to government	Contribution to FST	Member of national or international FPN network
North America and Canada	Action (rather than talk)	<i>Chicago Food Action Council (CFPAC)</i>	Formed in 2002 from the Illinois Food Summit organised by the Chicago Community Trust. Then became a nonprofit (501C3 in 2011), with fulltime staff (2017).	City-region (Chicago foodshed), with a focus on 'grassroots and 'grass tops'.	Local government staff and officials Anti-hunger Education Community Faith Organisations and workers along the food system Healthcare Environment Philanthropy Public health Justice	Independent from government	Food justice Food sovereignty Food procurement Food research Land access Licences and permits	Facilitates the Chicago Food Justice Rhizome Network that is open to everyone who is 'involved or impacted by Chicago's food shed, which includes all of Cook County, Illinois, and neighbouring Great Lakes states' (interview).
	Institutional inclusivity, integrating inclusivity within food system policies	<i>San Diego Food System Alliance (SFSA)</i>	Formed in 2011, changed from being primarily volunteer led to an independent nonprofit (501C3)	Regional (county-wide)	Farmers Fisher peoples Local businesses Residents Communities of colour Tribal communities	Independent from government	Food security Overcome crisis Land access Democratic governance Overcome crisis	
	Inclusion of cultural diversity and marginalised groups	<i>Food Secure Canada (alliance)</i>	Formed in 2001 from a conference in Toronto to challenge food insecurity.	Country-wide	Farmers Fishermen Food business owners Organisations Individuals indigenous Nations and Peoples Black Sovereignty groups	Independent from government	Zero hunger Healthy and safe food Sustainable food systems Democratic and inclusive governance Scientific-based Overcome crisis Mediation	

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Region	Regional characteristics ^a	FPN name and type (in bold)	Origin	Regional scope	Stakeholders	Relationship to government	Contribution to FST	Member of national or international FPN network
Africa	Stability through multi-stakeholder participation	<i>Mbale Good Food Parliament (GFC) and the Good Food Council (GFC), Uganda</i>	GFP formed in 2021, GFC in 2022, GFP started operations in Mbale 2023. Established by Global Consumer Centre (CONSENT), Rikolto, Food Rights Alliance, Shona, and Mbale City Council.	City-region	Local business coalitions Consumers, Local authority Food system actors Residents, especially women, youth and vulnerable groups	Created as a collaboration between food systems stakeholders and Mbale city council to support the city council. / Independent but in close collaboration with the city council.	Food Security Malnutrition alleviation Land access Democratic governance Scientific-based Overcome Crisis Mediation	Rikolto GFC/GFP collaborates with FPNs in the AfroFOODlinks project.
	Community-driven governance	<i>Bambilor Food Governance Initiative Committee (CIGA Bambilor), Senegal</i>	CIGA emerged in response to food insecurity challenges caused by urbanisation, loss of farmland, poor food storage, limited water access, outdated practices, and flooding.	City Council of Bambilor It covers the territory of Bambilor commune, with an explicit focus on the local food system: production (gardens, farms), processing (women cereal processors, GIEs), distribution (central kitchen, school canteens), and consumption (students, households).	Farmers Consumers Schools Decision-makers	CIGA is a local governance committee recognised by the municipal council. It is not purely governmental: it brings together the commune (local authority) and a consortium of partners (FAO, AFD, CICODEV, GrDr, etc.). The municipal council established CIGA through an Arrêté municipal (municipal decree) as part of a food systems governance effort.	Food Security Food Procurement Malnutrition alleviation Land access Democratic governance Mediation	The FAO supports CIGA through the Green Cities Initiative (GCI-RAPA) and a food systems resilience project in Senegal. The central kitchen project, under CIGA, was recognised at the MDT16 regional meeting in Cabo Verde (2024).

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	Inclusive food governance	<i>Food Liaison Advisory Council of Kisumu (FLACK), Kisumu, Kenya</i>	2019-2023 and since revived and continuing. FLACK emerged as an output of a project ^b led by FAO and Italian Agency for Development Cooperation	Coalitions between two city councils (Kisumu and Nairobi)	Farmers Value chain actorsGovernment agencies, Research and academic institutions, Local NGOs and civil society organisations, Private sector players and financial institutions and Development partners such as FAO, USAID, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)	Dependent	Food Security Food Procurement Malnutrition alleviation Land access Democratic governance Scientific-based Mediation	AfriFOODLinks
Asia	Moving from fears to 'food freedom'	<i>Thailand Health Promotion Foundation, Nonthaburi (suburb of Bangkok) and Chiang Mai</i>	The first to be established in Asia in 2001.	National, connects Bangkok and Chiang Mai FPCs	An autonomous government agency chaired by the Prime Minister with Minister of Public Health as the first and second Vice-Chairman with two Boards ^c .	Healthy diet is one of many projects, includes vulnerable populations, communities, youth and family, health promotion organisation, and support mechanism ^d .	Food Security Food trade market Urban agriculture	MUFPP Toronto Food Policy Council IPPA
	A focus on food safety and sustainable diets	<i>Good Food Fund China (network with action hub)</i>	Established in 2021 as dialogue on meat consumption and food sustainability, then focused on food safety due to Corona ^e .	Projects in multiple Chinese cities.	Consumers. Small and medium business owners (i.e. farmers and wet market stall operators) Restauranteurs Schools University catering	Peripheral, aim for more direct support (financial) from government but for now working through reports on best practice and presence at high-level government congresses	Public education on food sustainability Networks Capacity Building Social innovation and entrepreneurship	UN Food Systems Summit ICLEI international foundations Leadership based in the US (Boston)

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Region	Regional characteristics ^a	FPN name and type (in bold)	Origin	Regional scope	Stakeholders	Relationship to government	Contribution to FST	Member of national or international FPN network
	Adapting to local environmental uncertainties	Committee for Green Amman	Municipal support for urban agriculture began in 2007 evolving into a multi-stakeholder forum on urban agriculture (now known as the 'Committee for Green Amman') in 2010.	City	Exclusively members of departments of local government, with influence of citizens through a central food market council (food producers and traders) academia and local charities.	In municipal government, links to national ministries (health, agriculture)	Environmental and climate change mitigation Food system resilience	Funding through UNDP projects in the region—synergies between economic development, food security, climate adaptive capacity and women's empowerment projects
Australia and New Zealand	Action into planning	<i>Sustain, The Australian Food Network</i>		National network this is urban based.	Local councils Growers Community groups	Independent from government; works with municipalities; contributes to policy at municipal and national levels	Advocacy Research Capacity-building	In name only with SUSTAIN Ontario and SUSTAIN UK.
	Advocating indigenous rights	<i>Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA)</i>	Established in 2010, as a farmer-led FPN. It is membership-based; not-for-profit incorporated association.	National network that is rural based. At the local scale AFSA links to peasant small-scale farmers as part of the global food sovereignty movement.	Farmers Consumers Community organisations Food businesses Advocacy groups ^f	Independent (radical); informs policy through submissions and laws that directly impact autonomy of their members	Advocacy (access to land) Research in agroecology Democratic governance Indigenous rights Basic Universal Income	La Via Campesina International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty Urgenci Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism Committee on World Food Security

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	Embracing a resilient and nature-inclusive food system	<i>Edible Canterbury (network)</i>	Emerg ed from a call for a food resilient region after the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes in Christchurch	Regional (Canterbury)	Community groups. Members of local council.	Independent from government, yet are actively involved in designing their food strategy	Food Security Land access Overcome Crisis Mediation Food resilience	
Central and South America	Promoting urban-rural linkages	Grupo <i>Interinstitucional de Paisajes Alimentarios Sostenibles (GIPASOS), Nicaragua</i>	Established in 2013 by the international NGO, Rikolto	In two territories located in urban-rural areas	Cooperatives Producer organisations Vegetable producers Coffee producers Cocoa producers	Independent from government due to political mandate	Food security Land access To support local businesses	Rikolto
	A focus on consumption and the long game of policy change	Coalición <i>ContraPESO (Strategic Platform against Overweight and Obesity Mexico)</i>	Emerg ed in response to the public consultation for Mexico's front-of-pack nutrition warning labels in 2019.	National	Civil society organisations that relate to weight and obesity issues	Independent of government; actively contributes to influencing policy	Food security Food literacy Public health	
	Empowering women	Paulistanas Agroecological Peripheral Farmers Network São Paulo, Brazil	Emerg ed in 2018 from two feminist civil servants ⁶ who proposed a working group called 'Women and Agroecology'.	Regional, focusing on peri-urban areas of São Paulo.		There is financial dependency from the local government of São Paulo.	Food Security Malnutrition alleviation Land access Democratic governance	

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Region	Regional characteristics ^a	FPN name and type (in bold)	Origin	Regional scope	Stakeholders	Relationship to government	Contribution to FST	Member of national or international FPN network
Europe—Southern	Informal network	<i>FoodLink, Network for the Food Transition in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal</i>	Started in 2019 and launched in 2022 as an informal network coordinated by public and private entities	City-region (Lisbon metropolitan area)	National institutions Local public institutions Academics Private sector NGOs	Independent from government	Food Security Food Procurement Democratic governance Scientific-based Mediation	MUFPP European Urban Agenda on Food Cleverfood
	A dynamic public policy space	<i>Mesa del Pacto de Milan, Cordoba (coordination roundtable)</i>	Started in 2017 from the MUFPP signature	City-region with an urban scope.	Civil society organisations Research Organisations of producers and businesses	Located within the Environmental Management Institute, linked to the local government but is not an official government body per se.		MUFPP National Network of Agroecology Municipalities
	Moving from advocacy to implementation	<i>Food Policy Promoting Committee (Comitato Promotore) Rome</i>	Started in 2017 by Rome with the NGO, Community Gardens Movement, to create a Food Council and Food Policy for Rome	Metropolitan city-region	Local, regional and national level stakeholders	Close and productive relationship, led to municipal formal adoption of the Food Policy Resolution	Food Security Food Procurement Democratic governance Scientific-based Mediation	MUFPP National network RUAF GAIN—Global Alliance for Food Nutrition
Europe—Northern, western and central	An incubator of ideas and projects	<i>Bruges Food Lab</i>	Emergred from the European project, Food Smart Cities for Development project, in 2015	City-region	A network of 40 actors, working on sustainable food	Independent to government; they receive (financial) support from the government	Democratic governance Mediation	Peer-exchange with other cities MUFPP

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	Making visible important connections across food system and policy	<i>Haarlem Food Future (HFf) (network)</i>	Originated as a bottom-up initiative in 2024; a membership-based network	City-region	Residents Entrepreneurs Urban farmers Traditional farmers Hospitality sector Educational institutions	Synergistic role between public and private stakeholders	Food Security Food Procurement Land access Democratic governance Mediation	Engages with people in surrounding municipalities.
	Creating structural change through local food policy	<i>Ghent Food Policy Council</i>	Originally created by the government in 2013.	Municipal, mainly in the Ghent and the Flemish partners.	A network of 30 partners from various food systems sectors	Dependent; it is a government-based initiative.	Democratic governance Scientific-based Mediation	European project (Food2030)
	Trialling a local food hub	<i>Berlin Food Policy Council</i> (Ernährungsrat)	Originated in 2015 as a working group to develop a vision for an urban food policy; formalised in 2016 to apply pressure to the city administration commitments as an MUFPP signatory.	City	Open to all food systems actors (farmers, consumers, civil society), coordinated by NGO coalition and scholar-activists. Policy makers and food industry representatives are not allowed to join the FPN in an official capacity.	Informal relationship—Independent watchdog and lobbyist for public interest, intervenes as a collective voice of civil society and liaison with multi-level NGO community.	Food Security Food Procurement Malnutrition alleviation Land access Democratic governance Scientific-based Mediation	Leading council organising a regional network of FPNs across German-speaking countries, with further international FPN connections MUFPP
The UK	The Right to Food	<i>Islington Food Partnership (a borough in London, the UK)</i>	Initially formed to address food poverty in the area.	A borough within a city; urban scope	Local organisations Individuals	Independent from government; 'do not be council led. Be council adjacent'; they have members in council and funding through public health but are more like third sector institution.	Food Security Malnutrition alleviation Democratic governance Mediation	Sustainable Food Places Network

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Region	Regional characteristics ^a	FPN name and type (in bold)	Origin	Regional scope	Stakeholders	Relationship to government	Contribution to FST	Member of national or international FPN network
	Transforming city-regional policy through collaboration and a holistic approach	<i>ShefFood (food partnership)</i>	Started in 2022	City	A cross-sector partnership of organisations across the city formed of local public agencies, businesses, individuals, academic and community organisations.		Food Security Social cohesion Democratic governance Mediation	Sustainable Food Places Network
	Integrating local food actions within national policy	<i>Scottish Food Coalition</i>	Formed to push through the Scottish Good Food Act in	National	It comprises 160 members in the Good Food Nation.	The Scottish Food Coalition have four key asks of Scottish Government to ensure Scotland truly becomes a Good Food Nation They produce reports, briefings, and action plans that drive systemic change for a fairer, greener food system.	Governance Scientific-based Mediation	Represents one of the national food networks for Scotland.

^a This was a part of the authors' coding to draw out a key theme that was distinct for the region of each node.

^b 'The Integrated Actions for Innovative Food Systems across Rural Urban Communities'.

^c The board is an independent expert appointed by the cabinet. The multi-sectoral Board of Governance comprises 21 members, representatives from nine different ministries and eight independent experts from various disciplines who have no political affiliations. The Evaluation Board has seven members from health promotion, finance and evaluation experts.

^d Continuous supporting and implementing a range of *short*, *medium*- and *long-term* health promotion programmes and innovative projects throughout the country. There are 15 master plans on issue-based areas (tobacco control, alcohol and substance abuse control, road safety and disaster management, health risk control, physical activity, healthy diet, media system and spiritual health), setting-based actions (vulnerable populations, healthy community strengthening, children, youth and family health, health promotion in organisation, health service system); and supportive systems and mechanisms.

^e To address potential of wet markets in Wuhan as driver of health and public safety risks.

^f Since 2011, the NGO included the Federal Advisory Council for the National Food Plan, dominated by eight organisations across Australian representing around one half million people.

^g The Council for Sustainable Rural Development highlighted topics as gender and ethnic issues in the agenda for sustainable urban and rural development and the result was the creation of a working group of female farmers in São Paulo.

^h After several years of discussion and bottom-up impetus from the city's thriving civil society. With 30 members from across the local food system, the FPC gives advice to the city and acts as a sounding board over policy proposals. It has been instrumental in operationalising strategic goals within food policies and projects, and since 2018 it has had a budget to support local food innovation.

Appendix 2: Translocal FPN aims and place-based variations specific to regions

	Converging/translocal ideas of food systems transformation	Place-based variations in specific regions/individual FPNs
Urban- Rural transition	Food-sensitive land access (<i>point of difference—focus on urban agriculture or rural small-scale farmer focus</i>)	• Amman—Lack of publicly-owned space for urban agriculture (promoting food production on rooftops and balconies) • <i>Chicago Food Action Alliance</i>—Inequity of land ownership and access (political action and policy/ordinance change, grants for common space) • <i>CIGA Bambilor, Senegal</i>—Land tenure insecurity • Thailand—Dedicated land to urban agriculture supported by knowledge sharing and research/innovation • <i>Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance</i>—Supporting young farmers to access land • Ghent—Supporting farmers to get access to land to develop new businesses • Portugal—Public land scarcity—Investment by municipalities to set aside land for Agrofood Parks • FLACK, Kisumu—Developing urban agriculture with a strong emphasis on productive land use • Central and South America—supporting land and resource access for small scale farmers
	Rights-based social cohesion/ Indigenous rights/decoloniality/Polarisation	• Australia—Indigenous rights and inclusive food movements • Canada—Indigenous rights connecting rural and urban food systems • USA—Strong anti-racism element; food justice • Germany—Migrant integration; working across rural -urban and political divides, including in former East Germany • Europe—Implementation of the CAP and the relationship with sustainable food production is getting very critical in terms of ideologies. I.e. Big farmers are against supporting sustainable food, small farmers are not big enough to resist/push forward; (i.e. in interview with Good Food Good Farming) • Venezuela—Food as a political tool; working to bridge partisan divides and create shared action plan • UK—Rights-based approach to food • Portugal—Overcoming stigmatisation of food insecurity • Bruges—Challenges creating collaboration between Flemish/French initiatives
Regional autonomy/identity	Interpretation of different diets	• Asia—Eastern version of a western ‘planetary’ diet. I.e. Cultivating a culturally-acceptable diet; challenged by the rising consumption of meat and exotic seafood. • Africa—Promoting indigenous foods as healthier and more sustainable alternatives • UK—Healthier version from current diet; food pantry/banks versus food sustainability activism • Southern Europe—Efforts to highlight importance of the Mediterranean diet, including as food literacy in schools, mainly in Portugal and Italy this is an opportunity to bring nutrition in to the Mediterranean diet, school focus—canteens via public procurement by changing criteria of selecting the companies to provide food; also the general public has lots of campaigns and communication to have a healthier diet • Examples from North African countries of versions of Mediterranean diet

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	Institutionalise food strategy (national and/or municipal level) with dedicated resources	• Australia—National food strategy failed but dedicated food officer • The UK • Canada (achieved) • Scotland (achieved) • Ghent—First (2013), top-down created • Haarlem—(2014) Bottom-up desire to place food on the agenda • Bruges (2015)—Municipality pays an enterprise that coordinates Food Lab • Spain and Italy—Through MUFPP, place-based and translocal aspect; MUFPP has 6 dimensions—all signatory cities have been free to adapt to each specific context; governance aspect from MUFPP; Spain and Italy through the MUFPP have had an advocacy role to push the council to act • Africa—dedicated food officers emerging in different FPNs • FLACK, Kisumu—supporting the development of urban food policy with a strong emphasis on production
	School food diet (and procurement)	• Southern Europe and C40—Schools and procurement • UK—School food movement • A saturated topic for other regions (i.e. Berlin) • Public funding necessary to pay for schools • Portugal—Local municipalities to buy land to ensure healthier production and/or involving sustainable farmers to help organise the planning of yearly production to include food canteens provision; this is also in Italy and Spain • Africa—common focus on city level of food supply chains/food procurement within cities • Bambilor, CIGA—driving school canteen programmes (complimentary to national food security programs)
Response to global/local crises	Climate, political, health	• Asia—Before industrialisation and green revolution, there was a lot more famine and acute crisis in Asia, now is less; more recent is the crisis of COVID-19 and more interested in impact on middle-class; informal markets to address food safety/hygiene (pesticide use) and food security at the same time • Christchurch FPN—Post-earthquake recovery pushed them to pursue a more resilient and localised food system • Brazil—Political crisis, reactive to Bolsonaro's government, started to emancipate women, local movement that was supported by universities to help people to find a way to be more active against the political system; gender aspect was very strong—use of peri-urban area for female emancipation • Amman—Rapid urbanisation, scarcity of arable land, land and water

Appendix 3: Translocal knowledge and governance networks influencing FPNs

Type of translocal network	Name of translocal network	Resources from/influences of these translocal networks	Examples of members
Informal network (grassroots led)	Food sovereignty movement, Ie. La Via Campesina	• Agroecology • Declaration on the Rights of Peasants • Importance of maintaining 'traditional food cultures' • Emphasises household and community values • Celebrates harmony with nature (Claeys, 2013)	Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance
Formal governance network (municipal led)	Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)	• A (voluntary) framework for action (37 recommended actions across 6 thematic clusters) • A set of indicators for monitoring and evaluation • Potential driver of formalisation, pushing mayors to commit officially to food policy action (only mayors can sign the MUFPP) • Official events (e.g. regular summits, awards, peer-to-peer dialogues)	Bruges Food Lab; Mesa de Coordinación del Pacto de Milán de Córdoba; Milan; Rome: Food Link, Berlin FPC; Thailand Health Promotion Foundation
	UN Food Systems Summit	• To deliver progress on all 17 of the SDGs through a food systems approach	Good Food Fund China
	C40 Food Systems Network	• Potential driver of formalisation (only mayors can sign) • Links food-related action in cities to broader climate and health concerns/goals • High-impact Accelerators (frameworks for action) to encourage cities to draft and share action plans for implementing science-based solutions and to support monitoring of environmental, social, economic, health and climate data	City of Rome
	ICLEI CITYFOOD	• NGO-based, flagship programme on food policies • Facilitates horizontal (peer-to-peer) learning and exchange and vertical collaboration (with regional, national, supranational institutions and frameworks), including advocacy activity at high levels of governance • Includes a range of projects and initiatives led by Regional Offices • Work with experts to provide support to cities in their transition towards sustainable food systems	Good Food Fund China

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Science-Policy network (research academic/civil society/development exchange)	food policy networks project, Johns Hopkins University	• Technical support food policy incubation through food policy councils • Convening FPNs in larger community of practice extending throughout North America	Chicago Food Policy Council San Diego Food System Alliance
	International Public Policy Association (IPPA)	Provides regular forum for exchange of methods from researcher-practitioners, including monitoring impacts of FPNs and designing local food policy	Thailand Health Promotion Foundation
	Rikolto	Facilitates inclusive business relationships through a sustainable food systems approach Develops and pilots innovative and scalable practices with diverse partners Shares evidence through networks to promote scaling of practices and to influence the international political agenda towards more sustainable food systems	Mbale GFP and GFC; Grupo Interinstitucional de Paisajes Alimentarios Sostenibles, Nicaragua

Appendix 4: Introduction to the regions

North America and Canada

In the 1980s, cities in North America and Canada experienced an increasing food security crisis, where emergency food sites rose due to address poverty alongside cuts in social services (Riches 2018). City involvement in food issues was further spurred on by events such as the World Fair (1982), the United States Conference of Mayors (1984–1985), the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) and the World Health Organization's Healthy Cities program (launched in 1998). North America established the first Food Policy Council (FPC) in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982, where by 2020 more than 350 FPCs existed across North America and Canada (Schiff *et al* 2022). Formed in 1991, the Toronto FPC represents a leading example of one of the most enduring, inclusive and comprehensive citizen-led FPCs in the world (Blay-Palmer 2009).

Most FPCs operate at local and/or municipal governance level with a few working at a regional and/or state scale on local decision-making processes related to the food systems priorities of diverse stakeholders. All FPNs are working with partners to connect food with other policy areas and/or priorities, such as being in support of at-risk communities, including collaboration between food producers and consumers, whilst navigating diverse challenges experienced by food systems stakeholders in urban communities (Range *et al* 2023).

Examples of FPC' successes include the endorsement for the Good Food Procurement program that seeks to create a transparent supply chain, that in turn, transforms other sections—such as labour conditions—across the food system to meet its goals (Daniels and Delwiche 2022). An example of multi-scalar achievements includes the Canadian federal government creating a National Food Policy Advisory Council in 2021 to support cross-sectoral collaboration and engagement at the national level and to support the implementation of the new Food Policy for Canada (Schiff *et al* 2022).

North America and Canada has also experienced the call for decolonisation, advocating for greater representation and equality of Indigenous Nations, Black Food Sovereignty Coalitions and marginalised groups, both within existent organisations and through the establishment of new groups and coalitions (Loukes 2024).

Chicago Food Policy Action Council (CFPAC): Institutional inclusion and action!

The CFPAC seeks to create a food system that represents all Chicagoans, regardless of race, class or gender, and to support them 'to have the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through community-driven, ecologically regenerative, and economically viable processes' (CFPAC website¹⁹).

¹⁹ www.chicagofoodpolicy.com/.

CFPAC upholds a strong focus on race equity, recognising ‘structural racism in Chicago and across the country that have led to massive inequities in land access, food business ownership, food security, and political power along lines of racial identity’ (ibid.). To achieve this aim, they seek to co-develop, facilitate and advocate for policies that advance food justice and food sovereignty ‘by building local political power, supporting frontline workers throughout the food system, and facilitating Black/Brown partnerships and understanding’ (ibid.).

CFPAC desired to become more directly effective in their aims, subsequently changing their form, name (adding ‘action’ into their title) and approach. Their organisation has changed from a food policy council (FPC) model that ‘was predominantly trying to be embedded within city government or state government with the notion that either the executive put it in place by an executive order’ to became a separate entity as a nonprofit (referred to as a ‘501c3’ in the US). This was based on their reflections where they had seen: ‘in some other cities, where it is really important to have an outside group holding together continuity larger and have a lot more band range of possible actions and things that can advocate for the necessarily one that’s embedded in the city’ (interview). CFPAC also found the most effective way to work with government was with mid-level administrative staff, described as ‘the folks who really are doing the work and are tweaking the regulations are being like, “well, this is how this thing works”’ (interview). CFPAC focus their efforts on ‘grassroots’ and ‘grass tops’ issues, where ‘grassroots’ is ‘very much at the neighbourhood level, at the block level. ... Then a grass tops is kind of like synchronising that activity and a level above ... the 15 000 foot view rather than the 10 foot view’ (interview). This work, ‘comes together either at the state level, at a regional level or at the national level. So, we are connected kind of an all those different threads’ (ibid.). Committed to fighting the long-game, significant achievements include the adoption of the Good Food Purchasing Program into resolution within government policy in 2017.

San Diego Food System Alliance (SFSA): Institutional inclusion and changing the narrative

The SFSA seeks ‘to weave a network of San Diegans passionate about resolving critical food system issues and to offer a space for connection, learning, and sharing’ (SFSA website²⁰). Representing the county-level that includes urban and rural farmers, fisher peoples, local businesses and residents who are experiencing conditions of rising economic and food precarity, the SFSA seeks to work with and strengthen food justice, climate change and building resilience. The SFSA highlights the need for social inclusion, and most specifically, race equality. This includes within the organisation itself, as demonstrated in their staffing, leadership, governance, culture and interpretation of food system transformation, where they prioritise ‘racial justice, lived experiences, cultural heritage, relationship and trust building, and community leadership’ (website). In their interview, SFSA described how the founders of SFSA, being ‘primarily white lead nonprofit directors, people in positions of power and making decisions about how we should move forward with things’ changed in representation over time where the organisation ‘intentionally shifted the power to communities and a lot of those folks who were part of the original leadership body kind of stepped back’. Combined with their change to nonprofit status, SFSA recognised that ‘we are able to make those decisions, right? To say, this is the direction we want to go in’, where ‘because we are guided by our community leaders, you know, that’s also what they wanted to see’. This institutional transition in values and approach has since underpinned SFSA’s policy work, centring ‘community, farmer, food business, fisherman voices’ in policies such as the Diego County Food Vision 2030.

However, SFSA recognise that the need to change the narrative that enables conditions for marginalisation and disempowerment to persist remains an ongoing battle. They exclaim, ‘the biggest barrier is just like fighting up against the norm of like the way, you know, capitalism and white supremacy like hold our work and like, operate our day to day. ... All of that comes into play when you are trying to transform a food system to something that’s kind of like pushing up against that. ... there’s so much groundwork and education that has to be done in order to even get to a point where we can make that change’ (interview).

Food Secure Canada (FSC) /Réseau pour une alimentation: Towards inclusive diversity

Established in 2001, FSC represents a national alliance of organisations and individuals across Canada who work together to advance food security and food sovereignty. They strive to create a just, healthy, and sustainable food system that is built on social and ecological justice, supported by strategies of dialogue, policy advocacy, and empowering communities. Significant achievements by FSC include drafting Canada’s national food policy, ‘Resetting the Table: A People’s Food Policy for Canada’ (2011), the result

²⁰ <https://sdfs.org/>.

of a collaborative process with 3500 people, produced through ten policy discussion papers, as a result of holding 350 Kitchen Table Talks, 100s of policy submissions, dozens of teleconferences, and three conferences. More recently, FSC led the publication of 'Everyone at the Table' (2019), the first food policy for Canada that recognises a food systems approach alongside. This document was supported by establishing a Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council and federal engagement towards a National School Food Program. The FSC underwent institutional transformation in 2018 following a protest at their tenth Assembly when indigenous members, Black people and people of colour demanded greater recognition of diverse voices through dialogue, advocacy, and capacity building (Elliott *et al* 2023). This shift for greater institutional representation has extended to indigenous and Black food sovereignty coalitions appearing across North America.

Africa

Food systems in Africa are diverse, dynamic, plagued with an array of challenges, but brimming with potential. From one region to the next, and even within individual countries, significant differences are shaped by geography, culture, infrastructure, politics and governance. Urban and rural areas present further variations, with distinct challenges and opportunities. For this paper, and to facilitate a comparative regional analysis, the regional analysis will refer to Africa. However, as also stated above, it is important to acknowledge that Africa is not a singular, monolithic entity, but a continent of immense diversity. This distinction is critical, particularly when examining the evolving role of FPNs across the continent. The FPNs highlighted in this analysis are based in West Africa (Senegal) and East Africa (Kenya and Uganda), regions where such platforms have demonstrated notable successes and resilience. Regardless of geographic focus, the urgency to transform food systems across Africa is severe, and opportunities for meaningful progress are steadily emerging. This is reflected in the growing resources dedicated to Africa's food systems and the increasing emergence of multi-actor coalitions and FPNs addressing critical food system challenges.

Despite its vast agricultural potential and dynamic, decentralised food systems, Africa continues to face some of the world's highest levels of food and nutrition insecurity. This insecurity is increasingly concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas, where the pace and scale of urbanisation pose major challenges for food system governance, infrastructure, distribution, and access (HLPE 2024). Structural issues such as economic instability, underemployment, inadequate infrastructure, climate change and conflict further compound the situation. According to FAO and WFP reports, as of 2023, approximately 282 million people in Africa were undernourished—representing nearly 20% of the continent's population—while 21% faced severe food insecurity (FAO 2023a; WFP/FSIN 2024). These figures are stark, but they underscore the need for innovative and sustainable solutions, as exemplified by the emergence of FPNs across the continent—and especially in urban areas, where cities are increasingly adopting urban food policies to tackle complex food system challenges (RUAF, 2025).

FPNs in Africa represent a convergence of global inspiration and local ingenuity. Initially inspired by examples from North America and Europe, where FPNs emerged in the 1980s to address fragmented food governance, African cities and regions have reimaged these platforms to meet local needs (Pothukuchi and Thrower 2025). FPNs in Africa often prioritise fragmented governance, food security, urban agriculture, and livelihoods while addressing systemic issues like informal market integration, nutrition, food safety and equitable food access (RUAF Global Partnership on Urban Agriculture and Food Systems 2025). Global frameworks such as the MUFPP and organisations such as Rikolto, ICLEI, FAO and Hivos have further supported their development by fostering collaboration among governments, civil society, and private stakeholders (MUFPP Secretariat and RUAF 2024).

It is crucial to recognise, however, that the roots of African FPNs often predate formalised concepts introduced by academia and Western development organisations. Many FPNs or multi-stakeholder platforms in Africa emerged organically as grassroots responses to systemic challenges. Cooperatives, informal unions, community savings groups (*stokvels*), and crisis response mechanisms exemplify how local actors have historically driven coordination and collaboration in food systems. The term 'Food Policy Network' may be new, but the practices it encapsulates have long been integral to Africa's food systems governance (FAO 2023a).

Interestingly, African FPNs often stand out for their focus on specific target groups, particularly marginalised communities. As also portrayed in the analysis, many are established to address a lack of inclusive decision-making in tackling food and nutrition insecurity. These networks frequently prioritise empowering marginalised voices through participatory processes such as workshops, community meetings, and forums that inform policy formulation. This emphasis on inclusive governance helps advance food and nutrition security for all (RUAF Global Partnership on Urban Agriculture and Food Systems 2025). Furthermore, while some FPNs emerge organically, many are initiated by international NGOs

or multilateral organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the German Government Agency for International Cooperation, Rikolto, Hivos and ICLEI, amongst others (RUAF, 2024). These developmental actors often adapt similar models across multiple cities and countries, contributing to the proliferation of FPNs in Africa.

Across Africa, FPNs share several common characteristics. They often serve as inclusive platforms, bringing together a wide array of stakeholders, including governments, community-based organisations, smallholder farmers, vendors, and private sector actors. These networks work towards creating more equitable food systems by addressing issues such as food security, nutrition, and sustainability (FAO 2021). Notable examples include the Kisumu Food Liaison Advisory Committee in Kenya and CIGA Bambilor in Senegal, which focus on empowering marginalised groups, fostering agroecological practices, and improving local food systems governance.

However, African FPNs face unique challenges. Limited financial resources, a lack of legal recognition and weak links between local and national governance often hinder their effectiveness. Despite these difficulties, African FPNs remain a testament to the continent's resilience and innovation, demonstrating that there is an appetite for collaborative and human-centred governance to drive transformative change in even the most challenging environments.

Africa's food systems embody a delicate balance of challenges and opportunities, with FPNs positioned at the heart of efforts to create more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient outcomes. While the concept of FPNs may have been formalised in recent decades, their underlying principles have deep roots in African traditions of collective action and community-based governance. Additionally, the emphasis African FPNs place on inclusive governance highlights their potential to drive meaningful change. As Africa continues to navigate its FST, FPNs offer a promising avenue for fostering collaboration, driving policy innovation, and unlocking the continent's immense potential.

Mbale Good Food Parliament (GFC) and Good Food Council (GFO), Uganda: Stability through multi-stakeholder participation

The GFC and its broader platform, GFP, together serve as Mbale City's FPN. Established as part of the Good Food for Cities Project coordinated by Rikolto, these structures aim to foster participatory governance and transform urban food systems by involving diverse stakeholders (Rikolto 2022). The Mbale FPN was initiated through the efforts of Food Rights Alliance, Rikolto, and Consent. The GFC was conceived as a smaller technical body to operationalise decisions made by the broader GFP, representing various food system actors. What sets this FPN apart from others is the fact that Mbale City Council members take up key positions in the council with the Town Clerk acting as chair of the council. This FPN therefore has quite strong buy-in from the local government. The initiative also drew lessons from earlier platforms like the Food Systems Multi-Stakeholder Platform at Makerere University.

The dual structure of the Mbale FPN allows the GFC to focus on technical roles while the GFP ensures inclusive stakeholder engagement. Its objectives include:

1. Advancing participatory governance: creating inclusive platforms that empower marginalised groups like women and youth in food governance
2. Contributing to policy development: advocating for the creation of a city-level Food Ordinance to regulate food safety and vendor practices.
3. Promoting innovation: supporting urban farming and initiating incubation projects for local food systems innovation.
4. Strengthening accountability: ensuring feedback mechanisms between stakeholders for effective implementation.

Key achievements include policy advocacy, by securing commitments for a Food Ordinance in Mbale; inclusive engagement, by establishing a 70-member GFP with diverse representation, and market organisation, rebranding market stalls to improve visibility and consumer trust. The FPN faces challenges like limited funding, political resistance, lack of legal registration, and underrepresentation of certain groups like street food vendors (Rikolto 2022).

The Mbale FPN exemplifies how multi-stakeholder platforms can foster innovation and inclusivity in urban food systems governance. Addressing funding and representation gaps is critical for its sustainability and replicability. Its structure and function allows for direct and deep engagement with a variety of stakeholder groups and as a result of the strong buy-in from the City Council, it does not necessarily face a risk of imploding like many other FPNs in Africa.

Bambilor Food Governance Initiative Committee (CIGA Bambilor), Senegal: Community-driven governance
CIGA Bambilor is a participatory FPN established in Bambilor, Senegal, to enhance community food security, sustainable development, and nutrition. CIGA Bambilor was created as part of an FAO initiative aimed at strengthening local food governance through a multi-stakeholder platform. It formalised its operations through a general assembly involving producers, consumers, NGOs, and local authorities. Efforts are ongoing to secure legal recognition for expanded operations and funding.

CIGA Bambilor's objectives include:

1. Synergy building: fostering collaboration among food system stakeholders, including elected officials, technical services, and community organisations.
2. Agroecology and nutrition advocacy: promoting agroecological practices and healthy diets to empower local communities.
3. Knowledge sharing: training stakeholders in sustainable practices like composting and agroecology.

Their key achievements include advocating for municipal budget lines dedicated to food initiatives; establishing school and home agroecological gardens and school feeding programmes and training women and youth in income-generating activities like beekeeping and local food processing. Key challenges include funding and resource constraints, land tenure insecurity, resistance to agroecology adoption, and weak linkages with national government initiatives.

CIGA Bambilor is a testament to the power of community-driven governance. Addressing systemic challenges like land tenure and ensuring national integration will be vital for scaling its successes. With strong buy-in from a political level (particularly the mayor's office), this FPN has been able to convene regular meetings and have impact on policy and programs being driven by the Commune de Bambilor.

Food Liaison Advisory Committee of Kisumu (FLACK), Kenya: Inclusive food governance

The FLACK, formerly known as the Food Liaison Advisory Group, serves as Kisumu County's FPN. It ensures that marginalised actors—and those typically excluded from decision-making—have their voices heard in the development and implementation of food strategies. As a multi-stakeholder platform convening government agencies, research institutions, NGOs, development partners, finance bodies, private-sector actors, academia, youth, and women, FLACK promotes inclusive food governance.

It actively supported the creation and roll-out of the Kisumu County Food System Strategy 2023–2027, helping to institutionalise county-level food strategy with a dedicated secretariat and resources. FLACK also advances the integration of food systems into schools—through food systems education, school-linked agriculture, and procurement—nested within its broader county-wide planning effort. Established in 2019 under the FAO's Green Cities Initiative, FLACK aims to develop a self-sustained participatory food governance system and establish planning mechanisms to support sustainable food systems in Kisumu (FAO 2021).

FLACK was initiated to address fragmented food systems governance by convening diverse stakeholders, including government departments, civil society organisations, private sector entities, and community groups. Its primary objectives include:

- Developing participatory food governance: Establishing inclusive platforms that amplify the voices of various food system actors to influence decision-making processes.
- Supporting sustainable food system planning: Advising urban planners and policymakers on holistic approaches to sustainable food development.
- Advocating for marginalised groups: Including marginalised voices in food systems governance to promote equitable access to nutritious food and drive economic development.

FLACK has played a pivotal role in shaping key food-related policies in Kisumu County:

- Kisumu County Food Systems Strategy 2023–2027: FLACK contributed to this comprehensive strategy to achieve food security and combat malnutrition.
- Kisumu County Agri-Nutrition Implementation Strategy 2023–2027: FLACK's inputs shaped this strategy, which integrates agriculture with nutrition to enhance community well-being.

Despite its achievements, FLACK faces several challenges. Funding constraints include insufficient financial resources, that limit its ability to convene meetings and sustain activities; lack of legal recognition,

where the absence of formal legal status hampers funding opportunities and influence; and issues of sustainability and continuity, where leadership changes at the county level disrupt progress and require consistent advocacy for support.

FLACK demonstrates the potential of FPNs to transform food systems governance through inclusivity and collaboration. However, this FPN also came to a standstill when the project that initiated it came to an end. A new project, AfriFOODlinks, has now made more resources available for regular convenings and stakeholders in FLACK are actively exploring ways to make the initiative self-sustaining. Addressing challenges related to funding and legal recognition is essential for its long-term success. FLACK serves as a model for other regions aiming to develop resilient and inclusive food systems, particularly in terms of its role in policy development.

Asia

Asia is roughly classified geographically into East, Southeast, and South Asia, including the Middle East. The FPNs in Asia reviewed in this study are relatively recent developments with highly heterogeneous motivations and strategic mandates for engaging in food and agriculture at a local level. However, their emergence reflects some of the meta trends that are shaping food systems in the region, in particular rapid and uneven economic development. Economists have traced a major transition across food systems in Asia since the 1960s linked to technological change and globalisation—contributing to less incidences of famine and hunger, growth of (and inequality between) lower and upper-middle classes, urbanisation and leaving agriculture-based livelihoods (Pingali and Abraham 2022). But despite reduced famine and acute hunger crises in the region, food and nutrition insecurity persists—Asia and the Pacific accounts for half of the world's severely undernourished people, majority of whom are women (FAO 2023b). Largely based within urban or peri-urban areas, FPNs reviewed in the region focus on addressing dietary changes of the emerging middle classes and public concern with environmental degradation, in particular, documented health impacts of food-related disease, food safety and climate change.

In Asia, the rise in rates of people with metabolically unhealthy overweight and obesity has been attributed primarily to a Westernisation of traditional diets, i.e. increased consumption of processed and convenience foods—but there is also evidence that the obesity challenge in Asia is compounded by environmental pollution of air and water. The public dialogue on healthy diets are seen as external, Western challenges with less uptake of dialogue on meat reduction, plant-based or protein alternatives—according to market research, surveyed consumers in several Asia countries 'do not intend to reduce their conventional meat consumption—and nearly a quarter want to increase it' (GFI-APAC 2024: np). However, like many regions, the COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to food hygiene, safety in Asia, including health risks of pesticide and agricultural chemicals. In response, the FPNs reviewed in the study are focused on connecting urban populations to sustainably produced food sources locally and directly to urban agriculture.

FPNs can be seen often as a more recent phenomena rooted in decades of endemic traditions and are highly endemic to the specific national contexts—cultural, political and environmental, but there are similarities are relatively recent developments gaining resonance—the first MUFPP Asia-Pacific Regional Forum took place in 2022. Despite emergence of FPNs based in the region, there remains a scarcity of data and documentation due to the lack of literature in academic databases or accessible via English language web-based search; additional outreach was necessary to inquiry through channels of regional academics and non-government organisations.

Health Promotion Foundation Nonthaburi (suburb of Bangkok) and Chiang Mai, Thailand: Moving from fears to 'food freedom'

A tradition of urban agriculture in both Bangkok and Chiang Mai precedes the initiation of their two recently founded and interconnected food policy councils, which were both initiated in 2021 under the funding of the Health Promotion Foundation. These organisations formed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in part reacting to public concern and fear about safety of food, including detrimental impacts of pesticides on human health and a perceived lack of transparency on food origins.

Organic and urban agriculture is also tied through the FPN to the political, economic and cultural significance of food in Thailand, being of primary economic importance through gastronomic tourism, but also the diverse use in daily life of both formal/mainstream supermarkets and informal/wet markets. The Thai Monarchy's interest to develop organic agriculture nationally is echoed by an economic policy to create a levy on luxury and harmful goods to fund the food health program. Locally, 'food freedom' is also a motivating factor for through the Thai FPN, described as food free of domination of corporations, harmful pesticides and agricultural production practices. The concentration of political influence of industrial agriculture remains one of the primary challenges cited to expanding the networks reach.

The foundation of the FPN was motivated by a desire to harness political will occurring at multiple levels—municipal, city-regional and national—to expand residents' access to resources, knowledge and markets for local organic produce and participation in urban agriculture. However, a level of formalisation of the FPN was catalysed through international influences (specifically the desire to become an MUFPP signatory, which requires FPNs and an urban food strategy). The model of FPCs in Toronto and North American are cited as part of the inspiration through research and academic involvement into international conferences and knowledge sharing exchanges on FPN best practice governance and policy co-design. Overall, the relationship to government is synergistic—the FPN's role is to inform and innovate new urban agriculture practices, liaise the public, including outreach to marginalised communities, and calm fears about food (safety and food insecurity).

Good Food Fund China: A focus on food safety and sustainable diets

The Good Food Fund China is a network based in Beijing with national reach that originated as a joint network to bring together divergent discourses—organic agriculture, animal welfare, environmentalism, and youth issues. It started as a food summit and 'Good Food Pledge' dedicated to promoting dialog around the concept of food systems and commit to eight value-based principles for the future of the food system and the planet. The network transitioned to a national 'Action Hub' in 2021 through participation in the UN Food Systems Summit and engagement with ICLEI which formalised the group on an international stage and shifted activities to an incubator role in order to plan, partner and execute multi-sector projects, campaigns and reports.

Within a context of centralised government, the network's strategy involves two approaches to creating incremental change while maintaining political neutrality on the periphery of policy processes: first, working jointly with research institutions to collaborate on evidence-based reports which respond to current government agendas and priority areas (i.e. achieving global competitive edge on energy use, food safety at wet markets in response to the COVID-19 pandemic), including an annual report on best practices which the network compiles and presents at the National People's Congress. As second strategy is working to directly influence public opinion and dietary behaviours via a 'soft approach' on controversial topics like 'plant-based' and 'planetary diet'. Working through relatable and influential spokespeople—home cooks, small farmers, chefs and community leaders—the network aims to align what are perceived as Western constructs with culturally appropriate and publicly-acceptable Eastern versions to advance sustainable diets.

Committee for Green Amman, Jordan: Adapting to local environmental uncertainties

Adapting and shaping the local environment—and food systems—in the context of an uncertain climate future is the central focus of the committee; this group can be categorised as a government task force, exclusively made up of members of the city administration, but at the same time acting as a conduit for influence of citizens' ideas and engagement, as well as influence and funding from international NGOs and development aid organisations.

Responding to local priorities, the taskforce oversees two urban strategies: first, public planning projects within the framework of the Green City Plan, mainly to create pockets of urban agriculture on privately owned land; due to the lack of access to land resources through publicly owned land, the taskforce engages with individuals and households to promote urban farming activities; and second, the group contributes to the Amman Resilience Strategy, specifically focused on safeguarding economic development, food safety and security, and integrating social projects with local farmers and food traders in the face of global risks—planetary warming and pandemics.

Citizen inclusion is one of the roles of the taskforce, specifically, the local food traders and regional farmers who contribute to the co-design a central food market through their dedicated central market council—the representatives of community non-government organisations and mainly private food businesses. In another example, planning is conducted directly with residents green the city through new public parks system.

In response to global shocks, COVID-19 created a sense of fear and urgency over uncertainty of the future—this included both economic stability of city residents and food security in times of crisis. These concerns led the task force to connect to international funding for projects to promote resilience and citizen autonomy i.e. urban agriculture on rooftops and private gardens, reusing greywater and reducing food waste to prepare in response to potential global shocks.

Australia and New Zealand

Due to their geographical proximity, Australia and New Zealand are often considered together as Australasia or as part of the broader region of Oceania. Differences include Australia being a continent, while New Zealand is not, while both have their own distinct cultures. In Australia, there has been growing interest in sustainable food since the early 2000s, prompted by environmental and economic concerns, such as extreme weather events, resource degradation, the 2008 global financial crisis, urban sprawl and an increased concentration of supermarkets (Edwards and Davies 2018a). So too does Australia experience significant issues of hunger, obesity, food deserts, food swamps and food waste (Foodbank Australia 2016, Sheridan *et al* 2016; Huse *et al* 2017). External pressures such as weather extremes and loss of biodiversity, amongst others, have also been keenly felt in New Zealand—the Christchurch earthquakes being a notable shock, in addition to the dangers of invasive species, and the impact of COVID-19 (Dombroski *et al* 2020).

Alternatively, the social benefits of community agriculture have also been widely embraced, where community gardens, school food, food swaps, shared dining, and community growing programmes can be found in most major cities. For example, Melbourne, Australia, was found to be third in 100 cities surveyed from around the world for their involvement in food sharing activities (Edwards and Davies 2018b). Furthermore, initiatives are providing actual alternative marketplaces, such as food hubs, whilst working to change laws that block small-scale, sustainable agricultural innovation (Kurnia *et al* 2016, Klerkx *et al* 2022).

To support, coordinate and strengthen food system actions, FPNs are emerging across the region. In Australia, national-level coalitions include the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA), the Right to Food Coalition, New Economies Network Australia, Open Food Network, Young Farmers' Connect, Sustainable Table and SUSTAIN (Freeman and Smith 2024). These organisations interact and are supported by a strong network of not-for-profit food redistribution institutions, including FareShare Australia, SecondBite and One Umbrella, whose work often extends to address issues of nutrition, dignity, and productive urban space and food waste legislation (Edwards 2023). These FPNs have actively contributed to developing policies for sustainable and just food systems, such as Australia's 2013 National Food Plan (which unfortunately fell on deaf ears) and the People's Food Plan to follow, which employed exhaustive grassroots' consultation (Carey *et al* 2015). Likewise, New Zealand has seen the emergence of FPNs, including in Canterbury and Dunedin.

Sustain, Australia: Planning with action

Sustain, a national charity-designated FPN, describe themselves as a 'think and do' network that specialises in designing and building sustainable and healthy food systems. They emerged from an academic project and because of Australia's white paper on agriculture that did not achieve the objectives of the alternative food movement. Sustain work with diverse stakeholders from the public, community, business and academic sectors. However, their core role is as consultant to local governments where they apply the Circles of Food methodology to co-design and develop local food strategies, as demonstrated by the Cardinia Food Circles (Lourival and Rose 2020). Sustain have also produced guides to support local councils and groups to develop their own food strategies.

Furthermore, Sustain has contributed to developing FPNs on multiple scales across Australia, as demonstrated by facilitating the Local Government Urban Agriculture Network representing more than 15 local councils, establishing a Food Governance Taskforce that produced a Position Paper, and hosting events such as the Urban Agriculture Forum, Urban Agriculture Month and the Australian Community Food Hubs Conference. To support greater solidarity across Australia's food justice and sustainability movement, Sustain has also produced the Urban and Regional Food Declaration that seeks to integrate set principles, such as an agreed lexicon of definitions, framework for policy and legislative changes, tools for mobilisation, advocacy, assessment and analysis.

Additionally, Sustain took on the practical project of Oakhill Farm, a previously neglected site that has become a community space and food forest where Sustain and members of the community can experience the challenges and opportunities of growing food. At this site, Sustain also donates fresh food to food relief charities, hosts farm tours, and organises food growing workshops and activities.

Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA), Australia: Advocating indigenous rights

The AFSA is a farmer-led civil society organisation of people working together towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems—expressed as an agroecological approach—that fosters

the democratic participation of Indigenous Peoples, smallholders, and local communities in decision-making processes. AFSA define themselves as ‘an anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, pro-collectivist organisation working to build solidarity across movements working for food sovereignty, food security, climate action, workers’ rights, and against extractive industries’ (website).

AFSA works to provide legal advice for smallholders, to engage all levels of government for policy and legal reform, to support young farmers to access land, to promote agroecology as a practice, a science, and movement, and to support First Peoples’ sovereignty.

AFSA’s legal actions include formally constituting the Legal Defence Fund in 2016 to support small-scale producers to address inappropriate-to-scale regulations and planning schemes and winning a land use legislation reform in Victoria in 2018 that recognises small-scale pastured pig and poultry farming as low risk and distinct from industrial intensive livestock farming. Furthermore, they are initiators and lead authors of the People’s Food Plan (updated in 2023), developed as an ‘open, inclusive and democratic’ document in response to the Australian Government’s National Food Plan that recognises a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, farmers, community organisations, independent food businesses and advocacy groups. AFSA are explicitly farmer-led and seek to better understand how best to support First Peoples towards food sovereignty goals in Australia as a colonised country.

Edible Canterbury, New Zealand: Embracing a resilient and nature-inclusive food system

Edible Canterbury is a leading FPN in the region of Christchurch, New Zealand. Working with the Food Resilience Network and Otākaro Orchard, Edible Canterbury formed after the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes to respond for the need to create a food resilient region. Towards this aim, Edible Canterbury created the Food Resilience Action Plan and the Edible Canterbury Charter. Local organisations—including Christchurch City Council—were invited to sign the Charter, committing to food resilience in the Christchurch region. The Charter sets out the guiding principles and establishes accountability of collective efforts to create a more food resilient region.

Edible Canterbury differs to other FPNs by being economically secure. They achieved this aim by acquiring land to set up their own social enterprise, the Otākaro Orchard. The Otākaro Orchard is a self-sustaining site, with its own Cafe and Information Centre, serving also as a headquarters for the Food Resilience Network. This site is expanding, having won a tender to develop the North Frame Community Garden. As such, Edible Canterbury represents a rare example of a financially-sustainable and policy cohesive community vision, backed by local and national government and the private sector.

Furthermore, Edible Canterbury extends the concept of resilience to consider the welfare of the broader environment. This relational perspective seeks to care for the ecosystems that flow into the food system, to consider environmental aspects that include the rivers, sea level rise, forests and seeds.

Central and South America

Central and South America are often considered as a region due to their shared cultural and linguistic characteristics, which are remnants of colonial influence. While Central America is geographically part of North America, its close ties with South America in terms of history, language, and culture lead to it often being grouped together as a single region.

Many FPNs have emerged across South and Central America in reaction to conventional agriculture’s ‘intensive use of synthetic inputs, a paid workforce and export promotion’ which in turn has negatively impacted public health, the environment and social equity (Sabourin *et al* 2018:1). For example, this large-scale corporate ownership has resulted in small-scale holdings making up 83% of the agricultural producers in South America but only occupying 12.3% of the land (Oxfam International 2016). Alternatively, health impacts include high rates of obesity, which in turn, contribute to cardiovascular disease across South and Central America (Lanas *et al* 2016).

FPNs in South and Central America are often likened to ‘food movements’. Altieri and Toledo (2011: 587) speak of peasants, NGOs and some government and academic institutions in Latin America as spearheading an ‘agroecological revolution’, trialling ‘new approaches and technologies involving the application of blended agroecological science and indigenous knowledge systems’ towards enhancing ‘food security, conserving natural resources, and empowering local, regional and national peasant organisations and movements’ (ibid). As a result, FPNs in Central and South America often have a strong focus on rights for peasants and farmers, indigenous issues, women with goals across food movements including food access and control to land, markets and seed (Oxfam International 2016, Silva Garzón and Gutiérrez Escobar; 2020, Brochner 2022). Furthermore, solidarity networks have made significant policy impacts in the region, with examples including food markets as a collective strategy to influence policy in Brazil (Pizarro Muñoz *et al* 2024); diverse collectives, ‘missions’ and new policies emerging

from the attempted food sovereignty movement in Venezuela (Edwards 2023), and the rise of organic food networks, such as 'organopónicos', in Cuba (Goeury 2024). La Via Campesina, perhaps one of the most active and impactful FPNs in the world, has a strong active presence in Central and South America, where it unites peasant organisations and farmers as a collective identity to mobilise against destructive capitalist actions of seed monopolies, genetic modified organisms, free trade agreements and World Trade Organisation (Nicholson and Borras 2023).

Grupo Interinstitucional de Paisajes Alimentarios Sostenibles (GIPASOS), Nicaragua: Promoting urban-rural linkages

GIPASOS, a programme supported by the international NGO, Rikolto, works in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Ecuador. In Nicaragua, GIPASOS seeks to build strong connections between small-holder farming organisations, companies and other stakeholders who work across rural and urban areas (Rikolto Global Strategy, c. 2022). Key pillars of these projects are to promote sustainable food production, to support inclusive markets, and to support advocacy and provide space to make public policies. However, due to the socio-political context in Nicaragua, GIPASOS 'work a little differently on this third pillar' (interview).

To promote urban-rural linkages, GIPASOS' key desire is 'to bring the food produced in the two territories closer to the cities' (interview). To achieve this, GIPASOS work with a union of horticultural cooperatives that channel the cooperatives' products to the capital. The project was run in two parts: first, a pilot programme (2016–2021) validated the use of an integrated landscape management approach in the Lake Apanas region. This work has involved working with a union of vegetable cooperatives in Lake Apanás to bring together six grassroots cooperatives from different territories to implement funds and actions. They include commercial entities in their operation as 'We think it is better to be close to them in order to find alternatives together'. GIPASOS have also been involved with designing a model for a diversified agroforestry system for coffee cultivation and for the diversified sowing for cocoa cultivation. Other tasks include developing an alternative management protocol for vegetable ponds.

Success of this pilot led to a second programme being established on sustainable food systems in cities (2022–2026), which continues to promote integrated land management and incorporates a new peanut-growing area (Casanova and Gutierrez 2021). This integration also occurs at the social level, where GIPASOS promote corporate social responsibility by supporting community improvements in the school and social projects for its members and the community. Their work on sustainable consumption includes growing an awareness about the true costs of food, 'to ensure that consumers recognise that, in order to have really healthy food, there is a price to pay' (interview).

GIPASOS acknowledge how work with multi-stakeholder platforms can be slow where an integrated approach encompasses 'not only in production, but in all its dimensions, cultural, economic, environmental, political and social' (interview). So too does the reality of pushing for change also expose possible risks. In response, GIPASOS keep a low profile 'so as not to be subject to any sanction or eventual closure' (interview). This outcome results in some situations where they 'do not have the holistic approach that we should have. In this context, we are only just applying and reorienting our interventions more towards the productive, touching a little bit on the social, but not with the emphasis that is needed' (interview).

GIPASOS value collective action as it tends to 'have a greater impact' (interview). They identify how 'collaborative action helps to reduce effort, save economic investment from the organisations and investment of time with the family' (interview), while enabling a more holistic approach to sustainability. Furthermore, GIPASOS acknowledge that in Nicaragua, 'tradition has a lot of weight' (interview), where cultural history can become a barrier: 'that limits the transfer of techniques or methodologies or alternative practices to produce in a more environmentally friendly or healthier way, because it has been rejected' (interview). GIPASOS are instead working to validate alternative products in small areas to demonstrate possibilities for using other products.

Coalición ContraPESO, Mexico: A focus on consumption and the long game of policy change

Coalición ContraPESO in Mexico is a public health coalition managed by the organisation, Salud Crítica, that seeks to protect the health of the Mexican population, especially with regards to obesity and non-communicable contagious diseases. While the coalition works at the national level, many of its actions occur in cities. The coalition emerged from the need to bring organisations together to have greater strength to position issues to have impact, and promote, policy. It arose when a new federal government was about to commence, followed by considerable interest from civil society organisations for Mexico to prevent overweight and obesity. The Coalition also provides training and opens opportunities for its

members to participate in advocacy. They describe, 'we do a lot of advocacy work. We seek to coordinate with decision making in the executive and legislative spheres. So we are constantly identifying and managing these opportunities, and as we go along, we also involve coalition members to participate' (interview).

ContraPESO has been involved in many public health policies. The coalition was involved in reforming the General Health Law for Mexico, an activity supported by press conferences, academic events and public forums. Originally the coalition was slightly larger, consisting of more organisations that covered human rights, safe mobility, child protection and prevention of non-communicable diseases. They keep an open door to organisations outside ContraPeso who 'need some technical accompaniment or some support on a specific issue regarding scientific evidence or advocacy processes' (interview) to provide support when possible.

Other public health campaigns include proposing a tax on sugary drinks, the protection of breastfeeding and preventing non-communicable diseases for children. They endorse childrens' rights by highlighting the state's omission to prevent their exposure to unhealthy foods at schools. ContraPESO are advocating for Mexican school food to be free of conflict of interest and to promote regional, sustainable food. They explain, 'the shops that operate inside schools should at least have healthy food, provide free drinking water for children to consume inside the school, prohibit these foods with warning labels'. However, a mismatch between government levels is proving a barrier where ContraPESO work at a federal level but in Mexico, but both informal (market stalls) and formal businesses are established and regulated at the municipal level.

ContraPESO's work highlights both the need for multi-level collaboration and the long game of policy change, where they acknowledge that 'this collective work is very important, but this collective work does not come in a simple way', requiring complex coordination, much dialogue, attention to shared priorities and a clear direction to move forward. This process takes time, where they acknowledge that: 'It took many, many years to achieve the tax, it took many, many years to achieve labelling, and many attempts were made beforehand. And many of these attempts did not result in an effective regulation that would protect, but they did build a way to understand it as a coalition that could work and that could not' (interview).

Network of Agroecological and Peripheral Female Urban Farmers, Brazil: Empowering women

In Brazil, both formal and informal FPNs have supported social movements to solve problems of food security and food justice since the 1970s. Women drive the Network of Agroecological and Peripheral Female Urban Farmers in São Paulo. This FPN is based in São Paulo—a city that has 12.5 million inhabitants, representing the fourth largest metropolitan region in the world and is one of the most unequal cities on the planet: socially, economically and spatially. The region where the network operates is inhabited by the lowest socioeconomic status members of the city, who lack public services and who face high levels of violence and social exclusion. The Network of Agroecological and Peripheral Female Urban Farmers seek to support marginalised women from peripheral regions of the São Paulo metropolitan area to participate in the Sustainable and Solidary Rural Development Council.

The network was initiated by two feminist civil servants in 2018 who proposed a Women and Agroecology Working Group to implement gender inclusion into policies. They expressed how: 'we understand that all policies, strategies, programs and projects related to agroecological development must be guided by broad and democratic participation, respect for the specificities of the territories and account for gender and ethnicity issues' (interview). This FPN served as the base of the feminist organisation, Sempreviva Organização Feminista (SOF), that endeavours to construct a network of female community gardeners and urban farmers, together with agroecological technicians, civil servants, and researchers in the periphery of São Paulo. SOF seeks to identify the challenges that participants face regarding food access to understand how they organise their domestic activities concerning food, to stimulate their economic autonomy and to promote discussions on gender equality guided by feminist ideas and the agroecological practices.

Success of the network is in part contributed to the support of a team of public servants, who act as volunteers and who bridge the initiative with the city council. However, the low level of education of the participants that hinders them from taking full ownership of management aspects. Other constraints, such as the unequal distribution of domestic work is also detrimental for their participation in urban agriculture activities. From a technical standpoint, uncertainties regarding the continuity of the project, the bureaucracy involved in the infrastructure of setting up a community garden or urban farm, and difficulties with logistical aspects, further these challenges. Furthermore, despite their efforts, women's work in urban agriculture is still not fully recognised by public authorities in Brazil, where they

do not receive sufficient public resources to develop their potential due to slow implementation of public policies and other strategic priorities by the city council. However, the FPN seeks to expand its scope of action, increase the number of participants, establish new partnerships and aspire to access multiple sources of funding to obtain greater autonomy from São Paulo City Council (Carvalho *et al* 2020).

Europe—southern

Southern Europe is traditionally recognised for its food culture, a high number of traditional food products, smaller food enterprises and a wider variety of production systems and end products compared to northern countries (Jordana 2000). Food consumption is characterised by a high degree of cultural identification (Savino *et al* 2018). The emphasis on the social, cultural, economic and ecological (climate) dimensions of food are rooted in the Mediterranean Diet concept, embodying a whole lifestyle common to many countries, beyond just nutrition and health implications (Dernini and Capone 2024). At the same time, the Mediterranean region has been identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as a hotspot for climate risks, putting urban and rural areas—and their linkages—at risk, while also creating opportunities to enhance the resilience of food systems (Egal 2024).

A key event for food systems in Europe—and Southern Europe in particular, occurring within Milan EXPO—is the launch of the MUFPP in 2015. The MUFPP has catalysed the development of urban food policies, inspiring cities to implement (sustainable) food strategies by providing a common and voluntary framework for action. Some authors have highlighted the MUFPP's role as a flexible tool for locally adapted solutions (Martín and De la Fuente 2022). Indeed, despite sharing a common international commitment through the MUFPP, the different cities' implementation of food policies reflects their unique context, history, and challenges. This goal has been supported by other pan-European food system networks, such as Eurocities, ICLEI, ANCI²¹, and Red de Municipios por la Agroecología.

A further element reinforcing the commitment towards local food policies, the Farm to Fork—the Plan of the European Commission within the European Union Green Deal—aims to transform the European Union's food system to be more sustainable, addressing its environmental and climate impact, food security, and global competitiveness. In the Strategy, the Commission 'invites all citizens and stakeholders to engage in a broad debate to formulate a sustainable food policy including in national, regional and local assemblies' (European Commission 2020: 20).

In all the cases under review, FPNs in Southern Europe operate in the absence of national food policy frameworks, lacking substantial support and (often) the administrative competences needed to implement food policy initiatives at local government level, when formalised (e.g. Rome). An emphasis on ensuring access to healthy and sustainable food for all is common across Southern European cases assessed. The interviews highlighted that FPNs in Southern Europe often address asylum seekers, refugees, children, women, low-income households and small-scale farmers. The 'new' working poor and middle-class households, losing their purchasing power and struggling to make ends meet, are also a target group of these FPNs. Less formalised initiatives also exist, like the Solidarity Ecological Group in Croatia, which seeks to help people who have been affected by the austerity crisis, including immigrant households and small farmers (Orlić *et al* 2022).

FoodLink, Network for the Food Transition in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal

FoodLink, Network for the Food Transition in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, is an informal network that was established in 2021 by a working group composed of local, regional, and national stakeholders who defined the strategic vision and scope of action for the decade ahead. The group was coordinated by the University of Lisbon at the invitation of the Lisbon and Tagus Valley Regional Coordination and Development Commission²², in collaboration with Instituto Superior Técnico (Oliveira 2022). This network operates as a collaborative platform of public and private entities that are driven by three core principles:

- Sustainability, focusing on the interconnection between soil, water, biodiversity, and energy;
- A circular, resilient, and proximity-based economy;
- Safeguarding the Mediterranean diet, reinforcing cultural identity while promoting scientific and technological innovation throughout the food system.

²¹ ICLEI—Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network working with more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. ANCI—Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani is the National Association of Italian Municipalities, a non-profit organisation representing the interests of Italian municipalities.

²² the central administration agency responsible for the regional implementation of the H2020 ROBUST Project's Living Lab—Unlocking rural-urban synergies.

Aligned with the vision and mission to achieve Lisbon's metropolitan food transition goals by 2030, FoodLink has drafted an action plan, approved by the Metropolitan Council in 2025, that serves as a guiding framework—not as a prescriptive plan—to provide direction and inspiration for future interventions in the metropolitan food system. It invites all stakeholders to creatively translate guidelines into actions.

Mesa de coordinación del Pacto de Milán de Córdoba, Spain: A dynamic public policy space

The Mesa de coordinación del Pacto de Milán de Córdoba (Mesa) is an agri-food coordination roundtable for political advocacy that started with the signature of the MUFPP in 2017. Since then, it has gone through different stages of development and is currently being reactivated by its members. While it began as a delegation linked to the Department of the Environment, several changes of government at the municipal level led to the creation of an entity—the Secretary of the MUFPP—which still sits within the Environmental Department but has no dedicated budget, fixed structure, or rules. Academic actors based at the Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos (ISEC) have been playing a decisive role, holding everything together and creating momentum around the issues being discussed.

A high level of flexibility characterises the roundtable, which has been set up with the explicit purpose of meeting a specific need of both the promoters and other social groups already operating in this field in the area: 'we needed a space for the co-creation of food policies within the city in which different actors were represented' (interview). A certain degree of 'protagonism' is allowed to all participants in the current arrangement of the Mesa, as they can change and adjust the activities according to specific needs and resource availability. In terms of the Mesa's 'institutional home' (Halliday and Barling 2018), this lies within the Environmental Management Institute, which is linked to the local government but is not an official government body per se. This link was necessary, according to the interviewee, to make the roundtable a 'public policy space', so there was a push to have the food policy agenda within the city council's agenda (which is, in any case, embodied in the MUFPP signature). Most of the actors²³ taking part in the roundtable have also been involved in a project, Alimentando Córdoba (Feeding Córdoba), that aimed to collectively develop a sustainable and resilient urban food model. Alimentando Córdoba is coordinated by ISEC and co-financed by the city council. Four main axes of work have been identified from the local food system, each leading to further developments and projects: to promote short supply chains; to encourage innovation and training in sales networks; to optimise logistics; and to ensure equitable access to local, fresh, and sustainable produce. The Mesa collaborates closely with the National Network of Municipalities for Agroecology, serving as an active link between the MUFPP office at the city council and this national network.

Key challenges so far include:

- (1) Vulnerability to political changes, linked to the absence of structure, meaning they would have to re-start from scratch every time a new government enters into force.
- (2) Dependence on priorities set by political/electoral dynamics does not allow for long-term work: it is hard to convey the message that this space can be effective to achieve improvements/change, if policy priorities are eventually in the hand of politicians.
- (3) Inclusion of producers: while there are associations of producers and other businesses (e.g. ecological restoration/catering), it is difficult to involve the entrepreneurs, the private companies, as they may not feel represented or feel that participation is worth the effort.
- (4) Inclusion of citizens, vulnerable groups and, in general, of collectives and people who are not directly linked to ecology and to food sovereignty is hard to achieve: 'the social entities involved do not have citizen participation' (interview).
- (5) 'Local councils tend to find it difficult to unite the different areas that are closely connected to the agri-food issue' (interview): it is hard to make the link explicit between agroecology and equity at the policy level, although in some local projects they managed to have this link emerge while carrying out activities apparently disconnected (example is that of the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations, which found themselves interested in and committed to the Right to Food discourse).

²³ The project includes representatives of the Centre for Sociological Agricultural Studies (ISEC) of the University of Córdoba, the association VSF-Justicia Alimentaria Global and the Alliance for Food Sovereignty of Córdoba on the civil society side, as well as businesses and producers' organisations (Mercacórdoba S.A., the Eco Córdoba association of shopkeepers and hoteliers, the Ecomercado association).

Comitato Promotore for a Food Policy in Rome, Italy: Moving from advocacy to implementation

The Comitato Promotore for a Food Policy in Rome (Comitato) is an advocacy network established in Rome in 2018, in response to a growing need for a coordinated approach to food policy. The term 'Comitato' (lit. Committee) was chosen to reflect the democratic and collaborative nature of the organisation, where decisions are made collectively, ensuring that such a diversity of voices and perspectives are represented. Comitato was indeed created as an inclusive organisation that brings together 50 different entities from various sectors related to food, including manufacturing, distribution, research, and citizen groups.

The primary goal of the Comitato was advocating for a Food Council and for the development of a comprehensive Food Policy for Rome, a goal which has been achieved. The Comitato's efforts have indeed culminated in 2021 with the adoption of a Food Policy Resolution by the Municipality, which officially endorsed the Comitato's vision and roadmap for achieving these goals. This Resolution represented a significant achievement, as it marked the formal commitment of the local government to implement the proposed food policy framework. In the long run, the promoters of the initiative envision a science-based agroecological transition. A broad and diverse range of stakeholders partake in the *Comitato*. They operate at multiple scales, from local to regional, and even national levels through connections with larger organisations and networks. These include local producers and distributors, both individuals and cooperatives involved in food production and distribution (ranging from small-scale farmers to larger organisations), environmental and workers' associations, individual citizens and civil society organisations. Research institutions play a critical role in contributing scientific knowledge and expertise to the Comitato's initiatives. They have also been facilitating (formal and informal) connections with similar initiatives in other cities and networks. Inclusion seems to be a strength of the Comitato, in that:

the Comitato, by its very nature, has links with many groups, simply because it is composed of organisations that are very active in this Region. It comes natural to all members to share what they do when we get together. So, for example, researchers update us on various studies, and those belonging to the world of production tell us about other relevant issues... I mean, it is its nature to have connections with other groups, it kind of comes about that way. In fact, that is the most important aspect of the Comitato. (interview)

The Comitato has maintained a close and productive relationship with the local government (City Council and Metropolitan city). Its advocacy efforts were instrumental in the local government's adoption of the Food Policy Resolution, which formally recognised and endorsed the Comitato's proposed vision for a sustainable food system. This relationship has evolved over time. At the very beginning, the Comitato's role was primarily advocacy and promotion, pushing for the adoption of the Food Policy. After the resolution was passed, the CP's role shifted to monitoring, ensuring that the participatory nature of the initiative was maintained and operating as a sort of connecting thread between the different entities of the Food Policy Council.

The City of Rome, being the Capital, is the very centre of political activity in the country. Therefore 'even if it [the Municipal Government] is not directly involved, Rome still has a role when it comes to agri-politics'. Instead, the Comitato's interactions with other levels of government, such as the Lazio Region, could be improved and strengthened. The regional level, for instance, could be critical in that regional governments in Italy have responsibilities on agriculture, and other sectors related of interest (e.g. health).

Several enablers and barriers have been identified, which have arisen in the process undertaken so far and may have a role in either facilitating or hampering the future development of the Comitato initiative in the medium to long term. First, maintaining continuity, leadership and consistency: while horizontal leadership and inclusion are mentioned as key strengths of the Comitato, in terms of democratic decision making, maintaining continuity and consistent leadership posed challenges and led to periods of fatigue. It took a lot of commitment and leadership when differing priorities and individualism emerged among members. Second, potential conflicts with 'the big players': as the Comitato pushes for an agroecological transition, it faces potential resistance from larger market players who have, at times, expressed unease about the participatory and sustainable approaches adopted. Third, relations and engagement with higher levels of government, e.g. regional government: the Region plays a critical role in governance and legislation related to agriculture, which is essential for the full implementation of the Comitato's vision. Strengthening this relationship will be crucial for future progress but will also entail overcoming other barriers related to national and even European Union legislation. Lastly, the uncertain role of the Comitato in the transition from advocacy to implementation. The Comitato's role is changing as the food policy moves from the design to the implementation phase and needs definition and clarity. For instance, in relation to whether it should continue to exist in its current form, and with which functions,

or evolve into a different entity more suitable to the implementation stage. The City of Rome is member of C40 since 2005, signing for two high-impact accelerators (Green and Healthy Street and Urban Nature) and taking part, among others, to the C40 Food Systems Network.

Europe—Northern and western

We approach North and Western Europe as one region considering the historical development of FPNs in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. These welfare states all have highly industrialised food systems. FPNs have risen simultaneously following examples from and exchanges with the US and Canada.

In north and western Europe, food policy councils (FPCs) have arisen in the past decade. In 2013, the city of Ghent formalised a food strategy titled ‘Ghent en Garde’. It was accompanied by the Ghent FPC, through the initiative of the Alderman spearheading the food strategy. Across Belgium, more citizen initiatives have led to FPNs, including around Liège, (Ceinture Aliment-terre Liegeoise) and more recently in Bruges (initiated through MUFPP). In Germany, FPCs (ernährungsrat) have primarily grown from societal initiatives (Birnbaum and Lütke 2023). Berlin and Cologne were the first cities to establish a FPC. Germany now has a dense network of FPCs across the country, representing over 45 cities and regions across the country, united in a network under the motto ‘Food democracy now!’ (Ernährungsstrategie.org). In the Netherlands, the food policy council of Ede was found in 2018, by a group of citizens. The municipality developed a food strategy, for which the policy council then became a semi-institutionalised sounding board and advisory body (Sibbing and Candel 2020). Across the Netherlands, other municipalities followed suit. By 2023, a Community of Practice between FPCs had been established that allowed councils to exchange lessons learned and capture best practices.

The FPN movement is growing in this area of Europe, whereby networks focus on both societal initiatives and city-regional food policy. These networks take a variety of shapes and forms, each relating differently to political realities, bringing together different networks and pursue different goals. In the Netherlands, aspects of the diversity between FPNs were captured by den Boer *et al* (2023), as they analysed four FPNs across the country. The authors primarily report on five challenges faced by these networks, including: establishing a diverse core group, engaging with specific stakeholders, developing a shared vision and transition pathways, positioning an FPN vis-a-vis government, and connecting to other networks in meaningful ways. In Germany, the reviewed FPNs are filling in gaps in governance by integration of migrant perspectives in participatory urban food planning and policy, working from the neighbourhood-level to broader social cohesion and integration in society and food culture. The legacy of former East-West national separation created uneven demographic and economic development, differences which persist in the form of political and ideological polarisation, as reflected in the success of right-wing parties in former East German states and rural communities (Reiser and Reiter 2022). In this context, the priority of local FPNs is inclusive participation of city residents and social cohesion at the neighbourhood level. Oldenburg Food Policy Council, for example, works on bringing groups together from across political divides—from both the city and surrounding rural areas, by providing neutral spaces for public dialogue and discussion on food issues. In Austria, the focus of the reviewed FPN in Vienna is mainly on educational projects that target different groups such as children, students or public procurement staff members. Alternatively, in Bern, Switzerland there is an emphasis on providing a marketing platform to highlight local and ethical producers and sustainable businesses, with membership in the network open to representation of local cafés, restaurants, farmers and food businesses in the region.

Within the region overall, some networks specifically direct attention towards the involvement of relatively food deprived and vulnerable groups, whereas others focus on working with (incumbent) institutional stakeholders, for example on building short food and regional supply chains. While some networks specifically focus on policy activities, others operate at greater distance and primarily employ social initiatives, independent from governments. Alternatively, each of the FPNs interviewed in Belgium and the Netherlands do not have many specific programs for vulnerable or marginalised groups. Among the interviews, three are presented here as the most effective and diverse in characteristics.

Bruges Food Lab, Belgium: An incubator of ideas and projects

The Bruges Food Lab was established in 2015 initiated by the MUFPP and supported by the City of Bruges who sought to develop a ‘bottom-up’ sustainable food strategy. The Food Lab is a place of the exchange and incubator of best practices and ideas for projects. The Food Lab is the driver and supporter of actions, which includes the development of the Food Strategy of Bruges. Stakeholders within the Food Lab include representatives from the province. The Food Lab is also in contact with the other regions of Belgium in peer-to-peer exchanges between cities within Belgium. However, the Food Lab currently has no direct influence at the regional and national level.

As part of the co-creation process and its role as an initiator, the Food Lab has proposed to create a FPC, which has not yet been established. It is intended that the FPC will be to influence the policies at the municipal level. The current lack of a FPC in Bruges highlights the peripheral role of the government and the relationship between the Food Lab and the government. The municipality partially funds the Food Lab by paying an enterprise that collaborates and hosts the Food Lab; therefore, sustaining the Food Lab to a certain extent. The Food Lab have discovered that financing is necessary to hire a full-time employee rather than only rely on volunteers, which can limit their activities. The Food Lab is trialling a paid membership scheme to evaluate if people will be willing to pay to be involved. Difficulties over this trial period include the exclusion of some businesses that were unwilling to pay yet their involvement is crucial for the co-creation of the food strategy. The Food Lab seek to reach more companies for the co-creation process of the Food strategy and FPC. However, they are struggling to acquire broader outreach, to increase lobbying, and to communicate their goals and activities to reach more companies.

Haarlem Food Future, The Netherlands: Connecting across food system and policy

Haarlem Food Future started in 2014 as a bottom-up initiative to get food on the agenda—both at and beyond the municipal level, while also seeking to integrate issues across food systems to consider aspects such as sustainability, health, inclusivity and economic aspects. This integration across food systems issues is particularly important for the Dutch government system, especially at the municipal level, where ‘food’ is addressed by different departments leading to compartmentalisation, where multiple departments must be approached, and hence is difficult to reach and to bring together.

In the beginning, Harlem Food Future experienced barriers where they were not perceived as being good for the city due to a lack of trust. However, since 2018, they have become a legal entity and have since become positioned to work both with the government and with food organisations in the city, serving to connect them and to encourage people to make healthier and more sustainable food choices.

Haarlem Food Future has a synergistic role with the government. For the government, Haarlem Food Future helps gather people together, as well as connect with cities and neighbourhoods that are hard to reach: it engages with people in the surrounding municipalities, such as Bloemendaal, Zandvoort, and Almere. However, there is a sort of ‘natural barrier’ with Amsterdam, as there is a lot going on in Amsterdam, which is independent of the Haarlem area. Furthermore, the FPN has a close connection with the Department of Sustainability and Circular Economy.

Ghent Food Policy Council, The Netherlands: Creating structural change through local food policy

Originally created by the government in 2013, the Ghent FPC has their own food strategy, ‘Ghent en Garde’, and acts as a sounding board for the city’s food policy, issuing recommendations on new or existing projects, proposing new ideas, discussing the city’s strategic vision, and acting as a major ambassador to help promote the city’s vision on sustainable food production and consumption. Their Food Strategy consists of three main goals. The first one is based on stable production for shortening the supply chain and supporting farmers to get access to land to develop new businesses. The second one is about vulnerable groups and supporting them to make sure that everybody has access to healthy food. The third one is about a circular economy and food waste.

A government-based initiative, the Ghent FPC is totally dependent on the willingness of the government, so stands the risk of being dismantled after elections. However, due to its location, there is collaboration with local governments. The Ghent FPC does not decide on new policy measures but can give advice related to them. For instance, when there is a decision on the budget. Another difference for this FPC is that there are two people who work full time for the council, which makes the work behind the council more structured. For instance, the organisation of the four to five meetings annually and the agenda points to discuss are organised by these people of the administrations.

The Ghent FPC is mainly active in the Ghent area, and the Flemish part (less connected to the French part of Belgium), where it is also connected with the Netherlands through a European project (Food2030). A person from the administration maps the different parts of the food system such as farming, processing, supermarkets, eating healthy, and academia. Based on their different expertise, a long list is created, and people are contacted and asked if they would like to join the FPC. More specifically, members include entrepreneurs, practitioners, and representatives from NGOs, such as on vegetarian food, fair trade and farmer organisations. Other levels of policy are also included, such as the policy level of East Flanders, which is the same province as Ghent. In total, there are approximately 30 people,

including people who are part of the administration who prepare the agenda, and the alderman/woman. The key challenge is that it is extremely dependent on political willingness for its continuation²⁴.

Berlin Food Policy Council (BFPC), Germany: Trialling a local food hub

The BFPC is an example of a coalition of civil society organisations which focuses on bringing the strengths and resources together to further a food transition movement and ensure accountability and transparency of local government. Established in 2016 and formalised in 2018, the Council is a citizen-led organisation, mainly reliant on volunteers. While BFPC's collaborators are often driven by specific (often timebound) projects and intersect with the group of organisations that secure project funding from the city Senat, the Council operates independently and autonomously of government. It formulates political demands, brings together citizens and other members of the food network, and works to create appropriate structures and processes for participation in the political and urban planning space.

The cornerstones of the Council's work is the *Lebensmittelpunkt* (food hub) concept, developed with and by neighbourhood food hubs, and a Berlin campus/house of food are examples initiatives working together with diverse partners (i.e. food services, food producers, direct supply and delivery, start-ups, urban gardening, food education, neighbourhood centres, community kitchens and food banks). This dynamic and collaborative movement has attained a level of maturity in the municipality and continues to expand, linking to rural neighbouring states and forming a translocal network throughout the German-speaking European region. One key challenge which is in focus in their work is expanding cooperation with organisations and citizens who advocate for low-income households, social justice and/or migrant communities, with a specific emphasis on Turkish and Arab communities in Berlin.

The United Kingdom (UK)

The UK can be considered a region both politically and administratively. Politically, the UK is a sovereign state comprising four constituent countries (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), and administratively, it contains the nine regions of England and the individual countries of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, devolution is occurring across the UK, presenting as of yet undetermined outcomes for food governance.

Significant issues facing the UK food system include labour shortages, supply chain volatility, land use, diet-related disease, health inequality, food insecurity and the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. For example, almost three out of ten adults in the UK are obese, resulting in government expenditure of an estimated £18 billion on conditions related to high body mass index every year (OECD 2019). To transform the UK food system, Dimbleby, the author of the UK Food Strategy, believes that a shift needs to 1. Break the 'junk food cycle' that often also exacerbate social inequalities, and 2. Correct 'the invisibility of nature' to reintegrate ecological health within food system practices (Dimbleby 2021: 50).

Policies that exist to tackle these issues include national-led policy interventions such as the School Food Program, the Holiday Activities and Food programme, Healthy Start vouchers, a legal commitment to reduce the UK's carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, and a pledge to ensure that 30% of land is protected for nature by 2030 (Gov UK 2020). However, many recommendations from the National Food Plan were not implemented, and a major rift remains between lacking effective national food policy and regional and municipal-based food initiatives.

Of the latter, the UK is characterised by more than 100 'food partnerships', a specific type of FPN that are supported by the Sustainable Food Places Network, a national programme established in 2013 that is coordinated by three national food charities, Food Matters, the Soil Association and Sustain. This programme has provided support to members who are expected to establish, facilitate and evidence a cross-sector food partnership with clear terms of reference, producing a Food System Overview and a Food Partnership Work Plan. Providing numerous guides and templates, the Sustainable Food Places Network also offers members an opportunity to participate in a nationally recognised awards program (receiving either bronze, silver or gold) that provides criteria for members to scale up their just and sustainable efforts, including developing food policy charters and action plans amongst other strategies. Initially called 'Sustainable Food Cities', this title changed to acknowledge the varied scales of food partnerships (for example, from boroughs through to regions) emerging throughout the UK.

While food partnerships have achieved substantial outcomes (see the Sustainable Food Places Network Impact Hub by Etches 2024), they are also challenged by limited resources (both locally and from risk of loss of financial support from the Sustainable Food Places Network), and impacts from the

²⁴ The Ghent FPC ceased operations in 2025.

Cost of Living Crisis, climate change and COVID-19 (Jones and Hills 2024). Other significant types of related-FPNs in the UK include climate commissions, independent advisory, city-wide partnerships that bring the public, private and civic sectors together to work collaboratively with the local authority.

Islington Food Partnership (IFP), England: The Right to Food

The IFP is an independent coalition of local organisations and individuals who seek to build a thriving local food system in Islington. Islington is a borough, located within London, the capital city of England. It is England's second most densely populated Local Authority, with only 13% of green space (Islington Food Partnership, c. 2023). IFP produced the Islington Food Strategy 2023–2028 (c. 2023) that outlines the ways they will work together to bring about change. This strategy names four key areas: healthy, affordable food for all; a sustainable local food economy; the climate and nature emergency; and people-powered change. A member of Sustainable Food Places Network, in 2022, the IFP received the bronze Sustainable Food Places Award for their efforts and achievements.

The IFP is committed 'to offering community food services that go beyond the traditional food bank model' (Islington Food Partnership 2023). In other words, they embrace a shift to a food systems approach. For example, a representative describes how they shifted from: 'food bank models to food co-op or food hub or like pantry models towards the end of 2020 and 2021' (interview). This approach seeks to displace the stigma associated with the food bank model to instead offer a more dignified service. Their aim to promote 'building community through food' (ibid.) includes associated activities such as community meals, community growing and establishing a food cooperative.

Furthermore, with input from the IFP, Islington Council became a Right to Food borough in 2022 committing to support the five demands: 1. Universal free school meals; 2. For the government to state how much of minimum wages and benefits is for food; 3. Independent enforcement of legislation; 4. For the government to fund community kitchens, such as dining clubs, 'meals-on-wheels' services, school holiday meals and cookery clubs; and, 5. To take food security into account when setting competition, planning, transport, local government, and all other policy.

SheffFood, England: Transforming policy through collaboration and a holistic approach

SheffFood is a cross-sector food partnership based in Sheffield, Yorkshire. Twice winner of the Silver, and one of the Bronze, Award as part of the UK's Sustainable Food Places Network, SheffFood has instigated a range of actions, collaborations and policies towards transforming food policy in the South Yorkshire region.

SheffFood strive to take a joined-up, holistic approach to policy across both the food system and the region. For example, in line with the Sustainable Food Places Network's objectives, SheffFood have produced a series of reinforcing policy documents. These include a Terms of Reference that sets out shared key definitions, organisational scope and goals; a Food Charter for both businesses and residents to commit to action as part of the Good Food Movement; and a Food Strategy, 'Fairer, Healthier, Greener' (SheffFood 2022) that provides a vision for food system change. Written by the local authority with support by SheffFood, this document was formally endorsed and approved by Sheffield Council bodies. SheffFood have also produced a Local Food Action Plan (Treuhertz *et al* 2023) that is both a living document ('a snapshot in time, reflecting emerging and incomplete ongoing connections, relationships, and activities') and a detailed plan of action, laying out seventy-three actionable steps and projects.

A core strength of SheffFood's program is their collaboration across sectors while seeking to employ inclusive engagement strategies. For example, almost one hundred organisations were involved in the co-creation of their seven-year Local Food Action Plan (2023). This process brought together a range of themed working groups to address and invigorate action towards addressing specific food system challenges. This plan was structured around five cross-cutting strategies to highlight how actions within each working group 'do not happen in silos, and that strategic actions to transform Sheffield's food system can build upon each other to enhance impact across the city' (interview), seeking to develop a cocreated, practical and deliverable outcomes.

Scottish Food Coalition, Scotland: Integrating local food actions within national policy

The Scottish Food Coalition represents a diverse group of civil society organisations across Scotland. They are supported by partners, Nourish Scotland and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, who provide the secretariat, administrative communication and funding. Over several years, through their collaborative campaigning, the Good Food Nation Bill was passed into Scottish law in 2022. This law takes a whole system approach, offering a coherent framework that seeks to contribute 'to everyone's health and wellbeing; that values the work to put food on our plates; that supports high animal welfare

and sustains our wildlife, natural resources and environment for generations to come' (Scottish Food Coalition website²⁵).

The Good Food Nation Bill sets a precedent for other FPNs to integrate food within policy. It requires the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and health boards to create food plans, creating multi-level government plans that must all set out: (1) main outcomes to be achieved in relation to food-related issues; (2) the policies needed to do this; and (3) the measures that will be used to assess progress toward these outcomes. In preparation for these plans, it is a statutory requirement that Scottish ministers and relevant authorities have regard to certain international instruments, which includes demonstrating how they will satisfy the delivery of the Right to Food. To oversee that this preparation and delivery, the Act introduces a new independent food commission which will hold the food plans to account and provide advice and recommendations for achieving the Good Food Nation vision. It is anticipated that Local Authorities and Health Boards will produce their plans in 2025, to be revisited by a progress report every two years, and a formal reviewed every five years (Nourish Scotland 2019).

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²⁵ <https://foodcoalition.scot/>

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