5 Urban-scale food system governance

An alternative response to the dominant paradigm?

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Food had a symbiotic relationship with cities for centuries. Food shaped cities. Food influenced the location, design, economies and politics of cities. For many cities their ability to ensure food availability determined their stature.[1] Recently, however, the relationship between food and the city has become increasingly opaque. Colonialism, industrialization and globalization have resulted in changes in food system functions. All of these changes have distanced cities from food production and changed the relationship between the city and food.

Defined in terms of the distribution of dietary energy supply, 868 million people around the world were considered chronically undernourished in 2013 (FAO 2013: ix). Crush and Frayne (2010) correctly argue that food insecurity is misleadingly regarded as an issue that only affects rural populations. African cities are expanding rapidly and are key centres of growth and development (UN-DESA 2012). For many urban residents, this growth and development is not translating into better livelihoods. Access to food is particularly problematic for poor people in African cities (Crush and Frayne 2010). In South African cities, where first apartheid and then prevailing policies have had a direct impact, urban food insecurity is high (Battersby 2011; SANHANES-1 2013). Current food system governance and policies perhaps even perpetuate urban food insecurity.

Urban food security and related consequences raise questions about the role of cities in the food system, and the processes that enable active city resident participation in the urban food system. It was these questions that precipitated my own enquiry into the nascent urban food system governance approaches and actions that I observed, both in my engagement with policy-makers and in practice.

The urban food system challenge forms part of a wider set of converging, mutually reinforcing transitions (Swilling and Annecke 2012). Four interconnected global, yet locally experienced, transitions are considered in this chapter. These include the second urban transition, the food system transition and the nutrition transition. Fourth, driven by the preceding transitions, is the emergence of alternative urban food governance innovations. These governance strategies are diverse. A collection of these emerging alternative food governance innovations are investigated, and provide a framework against which the South African urban food governance interventions are compared.

This chapter suggests that food insecurity in South African cities remains a pervasive and increasingly complex challenge. Addressing these complexities requires innovative governance approaches extending beyond the traditional remit of the city.

Mutually converging transitions

This book engages with the consequences of the polycrisis. The second urban transition is dealt with in Chapters 1 and 2. Linked to the untamed theme of the book, Pieterse (2013a: 21) highlights how descriptions of the developing world cities as 'endless vistas of shantytowns as the visible face of crisis' do not effectively capture the processes, networks and dynamics embedded within developing world cities. What the African city does reflect is an endless struggle for 'liveability', in which different forms of cityness emerge. The ability to participate in processes that enable the realization of the interests of urban residents is central to the notions of liveable urbanism (Swilling 2011: 90). This 'liveability' is observed in the changes that grassroots organizations have enacted through bottom-up agency (see Appadurai 2002).

A theme in the writings of Pieterse (2006, 2013b) is the question of participation, voice and, by implication, agency. Pieterse suggests that the role of communities in rebuilding the city is facilitated through the creation of '*homebru* strategies that emerge and flourish in a context of radical democratic politics that stretch across formal–informal, concrete–symbolic and consensual–conflictual binaries' (2006: 300).[2] Cities are in transition, particularly developing world cities. These transitions see different forms of agency and governance emerging. One area where this agency and governance is reflected is in how certain cities engage with food.

The food system transition process constitutes a broader set of interconnected transitions that reflect a number of attendant subtransitions. Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) food regime thesis focuses on the 'contradictory relations underlying the institutional and power structures across capitalist time, and at a particular conjuncture' (McMichael 2009: 292). Of interest here are the workings of the current food regime, the third or 'corporate' food regime, where the organizing principle is the market, not the empire (as it was in the first regime) or the state (the second regime) (McMichael 2009). I argue that one of the principal processes of the third food regime is a desire to tame. Taming is evident not only in how the retail market is structured, but also in how all points in the food system are being tamed. This taming reduces diversity and vibrancy within the food system. Problematically, this taming results in significant net losses – in farmers, health and, specifically, in food security, nutrition and voice. As discussed in the introduction, 'taming processes reduce complexity, homogenize and exclude'.

A number of food regime transitions have specific relevance to the urban food question. These transitions fall within the wider concept of what is termed the 'Big Food' transition (Stuckler and Nestle 2012; Monteiro and Cannon 2012). The Big Food phenomenon is evident in South Africa (Igumbor *et al*. 2012). Within the

Big Food transition, two sub-transitions are evident. One is the supermarket transition documented and theorized by Reardon and colleagues (see Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003; Reardon *et al*. 2012). The nutrition transition (Popkin 2002) is typified by adverse changes in diet, and is directly associated with urbanization (Mendez and Popkin 2004: 75).

Different groups are responding to the changes in the food system and the attendant consequences of the third food regime. While these groups are diverse, some are referred to as alternative food networks.

Alternative food geographies

The different responses to the current food system represent a maturing body of socio-spatial food theories under the umbrella of alternative food networks (AFNs) (Renting *et al*. 2003; Watts *et al*. 2005). AFNs are described as being:

> New rapidly mainstreaming spaces in the food economy defined by . . . the explosion of organic, Fair Trade, local, quality, and premium speciality foods. In these networks, it is claimed that the production and consumption of food are more closely tied together spatially, economically and socially.
>
> (Goodman and Goodman 2007: 2)

The same authors argue (with cynicism and truth) that these AFNs reflect a sense of 'upper class angst' (Goodman and Goodman 2007). As a result, the somewhat privileged view of AFNs requires the inclusion of wider food system-related discourses.

I have spent time working in different parts of the food system as a professional, and later as an academic and a researcher, trying to understand the system. My areas of interest include sustainable food and urban food issues. In this work, I have encountered proactive and valuable projects, processes and actors. However, these initiatives and actors often competed with one another, undermining the different approaches despite an overarching sustainability ethos. These experiences further support the need for the expansion of the concept of AFNs.

Borrowing from Wiskerke's (2009) term 'alternative food geographies', I build on the notions of an integrated and territorial agrifood paradigm to refer to AFNs and further expanded food system interventions as Differentiated Food Geographies (DFGs). This DFG approach seeks to categorize the different food system perspectives according to three areas of analysis: focus, scale, and ideology or politics. While a measure of overlap and duplication exists, this categorization highlights four different responses to food system challenges:

- A production focus – including the organic and other such movements, and reflecting a politics of land-based activism (see Altieri and Nichols 2005; Kate 2010).
- A green focus – still with a dominant production focus but seeking to validate green actions through labelling and certification. This reflects notions of

doing less harm and a politics of regulation (see Bennett 1997; Collins and Fairchild 2007).
- A justice focus – which considers issues such as food sovereignty and food justice but focuses predominantly on alternative market systems, displaying a politics of justice and culture (see Patel 2007).
- A spatial focus – which questions how specific scale-based domains engage with the broader food system and the levers and structures required to ensure wider benefit. Here the politics of equality and place-specific cohesion dominate (see Roberts 2001; Blay-Palmer 2009).

This chapter focuses on the spatial-specific responses in food system governance, as these reflect most directly the urban food governance trends and, I argue, hold potential for engagement with and validation of untamed urban food system actions.

International food governance analysis

A distinct spatial focus to food governance is emerging internationally. Belo Horizonte in Brazil has developed a number of city government-led pro-poor interventions (Barker 2007; Rocha and Lessa 2009). Other South American cities taking this type of approach include Bogotá and Medellín in Colombia. In North America, cities, counties and states are developing spatially bounded food governance initiatives. The Toronto Food Policy Council (TFPC), the designated custodian of the Toronto Food Charter, is aligned to, but outside, government (Friedmann 2007). Other examples of North American and European city food strategies reflect the need for local relevance, contextual knowledge and governance that generally extends beyond the current governance domain of the city.

While caution should be exercised and it is unwise to adopt uncritically any international trends in local food governance, some key themes within urban food governance are evident. These themes include a clearly articulated scalar boundary of operations, networked knowledge generation, participative governance, inter-ministerial engagement, a deliberate pro-poor orientation, and research-informed interventions used in the formulation of scale-specific food strategies.

This review has used data specific to two North American food governance sources. First are data from the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC), a grouping of over 170 food policy councils (FPCs) (as of May 2012).[3] The data from these groups were drawn from CFSC sources, validated through online reviews and tested through key informant interviews. A report investigating Canadian place-specific food governance structures informed the second review. Here 64 organizations were investigated (MacRae and Donahue 2013).

The areas of focus of the CFSC initiatives offer insight into focus, mandate and need. Through a process of key word/phrase attribution, 12 areas of focus were identified and organized according to governance scale. Figure 5.1 reflects the frequency of focus at specific scales and highlights the dominance of a local-level focus. This focus offers insights into the changing role played by local entities in food governance. The focus on knowledge, policies and legal frameworks, and

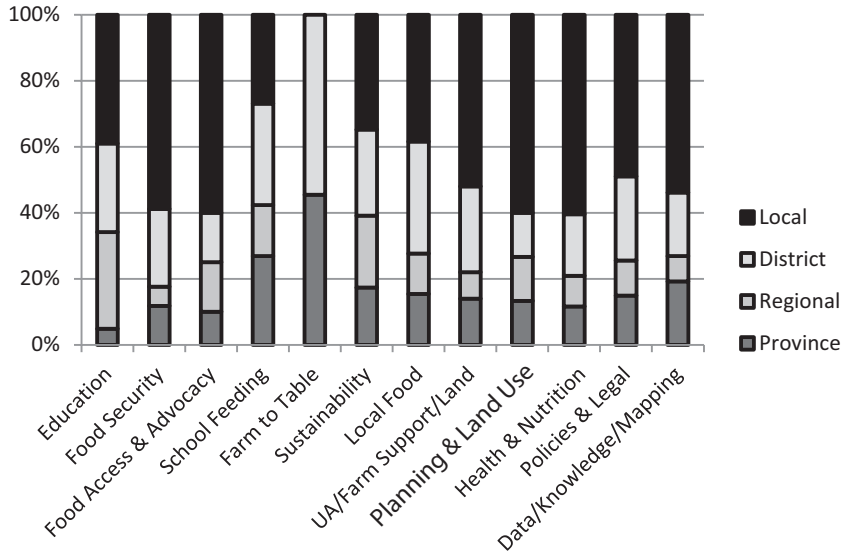

Figure 5.1 Area of focus by scale.

issues associated with planning highlighted at the local scale in Figure 5.1 reflects a local food systems trend (Dahlberg 1999; MacRae and Donahue 2013).

A key question that needs to be asked at this point is whether the formation of these scale-focused food governance structures possibly reflects a form of taming, even if this is as a counter to the taming associated with the third food regime?

The city of Belo Horizonte in Brazil has approached urban food system governance differently. In Brazil food is a right of citizenship (Barker 2007). A city government unit, the Secretariat for Food Policy and Supply (SMAAB), has engaged directly with urban food governance since 1993. Its actions have evolved into six main areas of focus: subsidized food sales, food and nutrition assistance, supply and regulation of food markets, support to urban agriculture, education for food consumption, and job and income generation (Rocha and Lessa 2009: 391). The case of Belo Horizonte is often described as a city-led initiative. However, one of the foundations of success in the Belo Horizonte case was the role and participation of civil society through the creation of the Municipal Council for Food Security at the start of the process. This provided a platform for social mobilization into policy and programmes (Rocha and Lessa 2009: 397).

It is important to stress that the local or city-scale focus does not imply self-sufficiency or the concept of localization (see Hopkins 2008). Local in this instance involves a focus on how food flows are governed in the interests of the local (Morgan and Sonnino 2009), taking care to avoid the so-called 'local trap' (Born and Purcell 2006). When the reviewed scale-specific food governance approaches are considered collectively, key operating principles can be deduced. These are described in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Scale-specific operating trends

Theme	*Action*
Governance	Governance that draws on multiple actors from within and outside government.
Management	The majority of cities play an indirect management role, using their convening authority to facilitate processes and actions as opposed to top-down management.
Knowledge/data	Recognition given to the knowledge and networks of multiple food systems actors, facilitating the equitable use and application of this knowledge. Considers immediate issues but also long-term trends.
Remit	Direct focus given to contextual issues pertinent to the specific locality. Broader issues are still considered but form the locality's perspective.
Interdisciplinarity	Focus on intersections between issues, breaking traditional governance silos. The interconnections between health, education, planning and environment dominate.
Ideology	A general alignment with an ethos of sustainability, but generally considered in a more integrative manner, beyond a sustainability-as-green focus.
Networking	Engagement with multiple food system actors and specifically other cities, sharing experiences, knowledge and challenges.

Source: own analysis

Many of the international city programmes emerged in the context of an urban food policy vacuum. Northern cities reflect a number of different governance approaches and motivations. In the South American city examples, the city governments drive processes but with embedded participatory processes. Recently new forms of food governance have emerged in certain South African cities.

South African urban food governance trends

South Africa has no urban-specific food policies, but general policies and legal frameworks that consider the challenges of food security are in place. These frameworks obligate all spheres of government to act. The two primary frameworks are the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996), specifically Section 27(1)b, the so-called 'Right to food clause' which compels organs of the state to ensure the progressive realization of the right to food. Second is the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) of 2002. The IFSS was formulated and housed within the National Department of Agriculture (now DAFF). Problematically, this focus perpetuates a rural, productionist view of food security and as a result effectively disregards urban food insecurity. A dominant focus on production may enable the desired positive food trade balance, argued as a determinant of food security in the National Development Plan (NDP 2012: 230), but this does not translate into food security at either the household or the city scale.

In the context of pervasive yet poorly understood urban food insecurity, it is necessary to reflect on the food security challenges in selected southern African cities. In 2008 the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN), focusing specifically on poor areas, found 77 per cent of people suffered from food insecurity in poor areas of the 11 southern African cities it surveyed. This trend was evident in the three South African cities within the AFSUN review. In Cape Town 80 per cent of those surveyed were found to be moderately or severely food insecure (Battersby 2011). More recently, the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES) found 68 per cent food insecurity in urban informal areas (SANHANES-1 2013: 22), aligning with data from the 2012 General Household Survey reflecting food access constraints (StatsSA 2013).

Although other South African cities have engaged in forms of food system interventions, these remain locked in project and production-oriented interventionist paradigms. Stellenbosch and Cape Town, while in no way exemplars, reflect a new trend, one where more systemic approaches are emerging.

Through a partnership between the University of Stellenbosch and Stellenbosch Municipality, a food system study for Stellenbosch was carried out. As part of this process, a Draft Stellenbosch Food System Strategy (DSFSS)[4] was developed and adopted by the municipality in 2011. The DSFSS borrowed heavily from international urban food governance typologies in terms of governance and food security interventions. However, although formally approved, the strategy has not been implemented. Conceptual and process-related faults limited the uptake of the DSFSS. Enquiries into the stalling of the DSFSS revealed multiple challenges, highlighting the complexity of developing such governance structures. One of the key challenges reported was a disregard for food system agents and the argument that the top-down nature effectively excluded any untamed forms of food system agency.

Despite a long food history, Cape Town's current engagement in food system issues originates from the development of the Urban Agriculture Policy (UAP) of 2007 (CoCT 2007). The UAP implementation precipitated an ever-increasing engagement with wider food system issues (Visser 2012), which led to the realization that there was a need for a city-wide food strategy. This realization was reinforced by ongoing engagement with other cities, including Belo Horizonte and the TFPC in Toronto.

The nature of the emergent food system engagement precipitated a call for tenders to conduct a study into the food systems and food security in the City of Cape Town in 2013. This call sought to 'investigate [the] multi-faceted urban development challenge comprising of two inter-related aspects, namely 1) the components and effectiveness of Cape Town's food systems, and 2) the status of food insecurity in Cape Town' (CoCT 2013: 10). In May 2014 (at the time of writing) the study had been completed and was awaiting formal approval. The city now needs to determine how it will use the study findings and recommendations, which included detailed stakeholder reviews, to inform a city-wide food strategy.

Discussion

The Stellenbosch and Cape Town food strategy processes emerged in the contexts of an urban food policy vacuum, and of high, yet often unrecorded, levels of food insecurity and attendant dietary and nutritional challenges. Both urban areas eschewed traditional project-driven welfarist food system interventions. These nascent processes are argued to reflect the beginnings of a change.

One trend evident in Cape Town and Stellenbosch is an engagement with a far wider stakeholder group. Both the Stellenbosch and the Cape Town processes have actively sought to access knowledge networks at the community scale, where different actors are displaying agency, responding to and engaging in food system activities. These agency-type actions are a resource in food governance processes, a resource with essential knowledge about food system dynamics and faults. These agents are vital, even if they disagree with or contest government intervention in the food system. Such untamed epistemic communities offer valuable food system insights, and their inclusion in food system processes enables greater voice and agency in food strategy design.

Globalization and the associated neoliberal policies have prompted shifts in urban governance, altering the relationship between cities and the nation state. This shift has been described as a move from developmental Fordist-oriented approaches to liberalized entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989: 4). Although some North American food governance structures (FGSs) reflect a form of urban food system entrepreneurialism, the general trends evident in FGSs reviewed avoid such liberal entrepreneurial governance. The international FGSs reflect neither a reversion to Fordist nor liberalized entrepreneurial governance approaches. The emergence of 'pluralistic' governance structures is driven by the absence of formal local food-focused governance initiatives (MacRae and Donahue 2013; Emanuel 2013), structures originally enabled through inclusive (Keynesian) local government. The liberalizing trend in local government has resulted in a food policy (and food-related remedial action) vacuum (Harper *et al.* 2009). Contextually focused FGSs are seeking greater levels of inclusivity and ways to counter inequalities in the food system (Harper *et al*. 2009). In many instances, the FGSs are created specifically because the trickle-down notion associated with liberal economic theory is not delivering the claimed food system benefit (Cook 2013).

It is clear from the international and South African cases that city government has a critical role to play in urban food system governance. Pieterse (2013c) posits that the city's governance role entails the city using its legitimate authority to convene divergent urban (food system) stakeholders. City governments have a unique ability to bring different groups together, through funding and their legal mandate, to ensure participatory processes. As the accountable entity (at the local government scale) for the progressive realization of the right to food, cities are explicitly required to play an active role in such processes. Additionally, if certain groups require greater attention (such as the vulnerable and food insecure), the city must direct additional attention to these areas, ensuring that the vision of any food governance process is aligned to wider city needs, while at the same time

preventing capture by splintered ideological perspectives. Disparate views of the food system and food system outcomes are inevitable, as evidenced in the DFG. Informed by the city's dual roles of convener and custodian, cities need to play the role of facilitating food system processes and actively encouraging agent-style *homebru* and untamed actions. This represents a new and emergent form of place-specific, and in this case urban, food governance.

Conclusion

Urban food system actions are emerging. Many actors are active in urban food activities in the rapidly changing South African cities. City government and other food system stakeholders all have essential roles to play in urban food governance processes. The changing role of cities means that food system governance and food security interventions can no longer remain the domain of national government, focusing on rural areas where productionist responses dominate. Cities have a critical role to play in systemic governance interventions that seek to enable food availability as well as food access, appropriateness and agency.

This is not the exclusive responsibility of city government. Processes are necessary to facilitate the agency actions of a wider grouping of urban food system stakeholders. Such actions are emerging. There needs however to be a radical shift in how participation in urban governance processes is approached. Collaborative forms of urban food system governance offer potential pathways to improved food system governance. Accepting and embracing the untamed nature of many agency actions in the food system, and seeking out ways to include these agents or actors in food system processes, while retaining their untamed vibrancy, is argued to be an essential component of effective food system governance.

Notes

1 See Carolyn Steel's (2008) description of the first cities and how food influenced these for more on this point.
2 *Homebru* is a colloquial South African term used to describe emergent local actions, activities, responses or characteristics that reflect the local dynamics. This generally has positive connotations.
3 The CFSC was disbanded at the end of 2013.
4 For the full strategy see www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/assets/news_article_files/stellenbosch_draft_food_strategy_july_2011.pdf

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