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## **The Cultural Dynamics of Urban Food Governance**

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## **Abstract**

In the context of an ongoing crisis of the global food system, research has recently emphasized the transformative potential of emerging urban food policies, particularly in relation to new strategies and mechanisms utilized at the implementation stage. This paper aims to expand this debate through a focus on the cultural dimension of urban food governance --- that is, the values and meanings that inform municipal food policies. Based on the analysis of 19 documents produced by 17 cities in Canada, the UK and the USA and by formalized city networks, the paper identifies four core values that inform the narratives of urban food policies: a systemic approach to food, which is viewed as a multifunctional public good; an emphasis on civil society participation in the governance of the food system; a flexible and inclusive approach to re-localization; and a new focus on the trans-local scale. As the paper concludes, these values are creating an important platform to build the social and cultural capacities needed to meet a wide range of contemporary joined-up sustainability challenges – in the food system and beyond.

**Key words:** urban food governance; municipal food policies; integrated food strategies; local food governance; translocalism in the food system

## INTRODUCTION

The spike in food, fuel and energy prices of 2008 has had profound implications for the global geography of food security and for the research associated with it. Indeed, one of its main manifestations was a wave of riots that, as Holt-Gimenez (2008) noted at the time, exploded not in areas where food was unavailable, “but where available food was too expensive for the poor” – that is, in cities. Since then, the urban has emerged as a prominent empirical context for scholars interested in understanding the causes of the global food crisis and in addressing the perceived need for more effective and integrated food security policies (Candel, 2014; Marsden and Morley, 2014). Central to this urban turn has been the recognition that municipal food policies hold the potential to address the gaps inherent in a dominant governance context that traditionally prioritizes production-driven and market-based solutions over access-based and State-led intervention (Midgley, 2010; Sonnino et al., 2014).

An emerging body of literature is focusing on the effectiveness of urban food policies and governance (see, for example, Mendes, 2008; Deakin et al., 2015). Special attention has been devoted in particular to key mechanisms and strategies utilized by city governments at the implementation stage – particularly food policy councils (Blay-Palmer, 2009; Sonnino and Spayde, 2014), more enabling planning systems (Morgan, 2015) and public procurement policies (Sonnino, 2009a; Morgan and Sonnino, 2010). Not much has yet been written about the cultural dynamics that have been creating and shaping the municipal food governance context – that is, the values and meanings that underpin urban policy action. Is the re-scaling of food governance a retreat to localism? Or is it the product of wider changes in the way in which policy-makers think and feel about food? If the latter, do these changes hold transformative potential also at higher governance scales?

To begin to address these questions, this paper explores the food policy narratives that have emerged in 13 cities in the UK, Canada and the United States – countries that have played a pioneering role in the design and implementation of municipal food strategies. In total, 19 documents were analyzed; of these, 17 have been produced by the urban governments of Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Durham, Newquay and Sandwell in the UK; Toronto in Canada; and Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York City in the USA. The remaining two documents have been drafted by formalized networks of cities (i.e., the UK Sustainable Food Cities Network and the Food Policy Networks in the USA) that are committed to the improvement of their urban foodscapes.

A comparative analysis of the shared discursive elements that inform these municipal policy documents uncovers four fundamental and interrelated cultural values embedded in the new urban foodscape: systems thinking; participatory food governance; a flexible and porous approach to the re-localization of the food system; and an emphasis on trans-localism (see Table 1).

City/urban food network	Source	Type of Innovation			
		Systems thinking	Participatory food governance	New Localism	Translocalism
UK					
Birmingham	Birmingham Food Council (2015) <i>Global food security</i>			XXX	
Brighton and Hove	Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (2006) <i>Spade to spoon: making the connections. A food strategy and action plan for Brighton and Hove</i>  Brighton and Hove City Council (2013) <i>Brighton &amp; Hove's Sustainability Action Plan</i>  Brighton and Hove City Council (2014) <i>A Connected City: A Sustainable Community For Brighton and Hove</i>	XXX			
Bristol	Bristol Food Policy Council (2012) <i>The Bristol Good Food Charter</i>	XXX	XXX	XXX	
Cardiff	Cardiff Sustainable Development Unit (2013) <i>One planet Cardiff delivery plan 2013-17</i>  Food Cardiff (2014) <i>Cardiff Food Charter</i>	XXX		XXX	
Durham	Charles, L., Durham Community Action (2014) <i>Sustainable local food strategy</i>			XXX	
Manchester	Manchester City Council (2007) <i>Food futures Manchester: A food strategy for Manchester</i>			XXX	
Newquay	Duchy of Cornwall and SUSTAIN (2007) <i>Newquay Growth Area Food Strategy</i>	XXX			
Sandwell	Sandwell Primary Care Trust and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (2008) <i>Growing healthy communities: A community agriculture strategy for Sandwell 2008 – 2012</i>		XXX		
USA					
Chicago	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (2010) <i>Chicago: GO TO 2040 regional comprehensive plan</i>		XXX		
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force (2010) <i>The Good Food for All Agenda: Creating a New Regional Food System for Los Angeles</i>	XXX	XXX	XXX	
San Francisco	Thompson, E. jr., Harper, A. M. and Kraus, S. (2008) <i>Think globally – eat locally: San Francisco foodshed assessment</i>			XXX	
New York City	New York City Council (2010) <i>FoodWorks: A vision to improve NYC's food system</i>		XXX	XXX	
CANADA					
Toronto	Toronto Public Health Department (2010) <i>Cultivating Food Connections: Toward a Healthy and Sustainable Food System in Toronto</i>	XXX		XXX	
CITY NETWORK					
Sustainable Food Cities (UK)	Sustainable Food Cities Network (SFCN) (2013) <i>About sustainable food cities</i>				XXX
Food Policy Networks (USA)	Center for a Liveable Future (2015) <i>Food policy networks</i>				XXX

Table 1. A synthesis of food governance innovations by city/network

As the paper concludes, these values raise new and important questions about the nature of urban food governance and its capacity to engender sustainable transformations – in the food system and beyond.

### THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN FOOD GOVERNANCE: A CRITICAL REVIEW

During the last decade, food price volatility, growing concerns about the sustainability of the food system under the effects of climate change and the growing incidence of land grabbing in the developing South have revamped academic debates about the food system. Theorizations of a “New Food Equation” (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010), the “New Fundamentals” (Lang, 2010) and a “new geography of food security” (Sonnino, 2016) have attracted attention to the coincident dysfunction of environmental and health systems, which is deemed to be responsible for creating or enhancing multiple forms of socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities in the food system (McMichael, 2009; Sage, 2013). Researchers agree that mainstream approaches to food security are unable to address the systemic and evolutionary nature of the food crisis, given their tendency to frame the problem around spatially aggregated arguments that focus on *either* demand *or* supply factors (Sonnino et al., 2014). The current food crisis, it has been pointed out, raises the need for a new theoretical and policy agenda that takes into account the “deeply inter-locking nature of economic, social and environmental systems” (Misselhorn et al., 2012: 10). As Lang (2010: 94) states, “the new era’s policies must assume the connections between environment, social justice and health” (see also Lang and Barling, 2012: 318).

An emerging body of literature is positioning the city at the forefront of this new and more holistic agenda (Sonnino, 2009b; Morgan, 2015; De Cunto et al., 2017). When, for the first time in history, most of the world’s population is urbanized, “cities have acquired a new role: namely, to drive the ecological survival of the human species by showing that large concentrations of people can find more sustainable ways of co-evolving with nature” (Morgan and Sonnino, 2010: 210). As Sonnino and Beynon (2015) argue, the driving force behind this newly envisaged role is predicated upon two main factors. Firstly, a desire to harness the power of civil society groups and food movements that align with wider interpretations of “sustainable food security” (see, for example Dwiartama and Piatti, 2015 and Allen, 2008) – a concept based on the fundamental assumption that “the long-term capacity of the food system to provide an adequate amount of nutritious food will depend on its ability to respond to the environmental and socio-economic challenges that threaten its resilience and to minimize its impacts on human and environmental health” (Sonnino et al., 2014: 174). Secondly, the desire at the local level to fill the policy vacuum that has been left by national policies entrenched within a larger scale productivist paradigm (Sage, 2013; Sonnino et al., 2016) that has had at best little, and at worst negative, impacts upon individual abilities to provide household food security (see Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998; see also Dowler and O’Connor, 2012; MacMillan and Dowler, 2012).

The recent proliferation of urban food strategies, charters and plans, and the establishment of new organizational institutions such as food policy councils, show that in many countries (particularly in the global North) city governments are recasting themselves as food system actors (Sonnino, 2009b). Early analyses have concentrated on the outcomes produced by the re-scaling of food governance, with studies focusing in particular on the early implementation stages of urban food policies (Mendes, 2008) and the novelty of the governance mechanisms that have been deployed so far, including sustainable public food procurement (Sonnino, 2009a; Morgan and Sonnino, 2010; Ashe and Sonnino, 2013) and the establishment of multi-actor partnerships such as food policy councils (Blay-Palmer, 2009; Sonnino and Spayde, 2014). Little or no attention has been devoted to the wider processes and cultural dynamics that have shaped those outcomes. What values and ideals underpin the emerging urban food initiatives? Do such values have the potential to engender wider systemic transformations in the food system? Answers to these questions undoubtedly have an important contribution to make to ongoing debates about the capacity for scaling-up and scaling-out local food governance innovations (see, for example, Candel, 2014; Sonnino et al., 2016).

#### URBAN FOOD GOVERNANCE: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

A comparative analysis of 19 documents launched in the last decade by cities of different sizes in Canada, the USA and the UK has uncovered four fundamental values that inform the narratives of urban food policies: a) a systemic approach to food, which is viewed as a multifunctional public good; b) an emphasis on civil society participation in the governance of the food system; c) a flexible and inclusive approach to re-localization; and d) a new focus on the trans-local scale.

#### Systems-Thinking: Maximizing the Potential of “Good Food”

As Mendes and Sonnino (in press) explain, until recently, food policies (where they existed) were typically developed as individual or ‘stand-alone’ policies that did not take into account the inter-dependencies between different stages of the food system or its wider connections with human and environmental health. The first innovative feature shared by many urban food policies is *systems thinking* – a concept and practice based on the idea that “complex issues are linked, there are multiple actors in the system and they are connected, and integrated solutions are required” (MacRae and Donahue, 2013: 5). Indeed, at the city level, policies tend to be structured around an explicit recognition of food’s multidimensional connections with different social contexts, sectors and other community systems.

The English city of Brighton and Hove was one of the earliest to stress the multiple relationships that the food system has with “social equity, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, global fair trade and the health and wellbeing of all residents” (Brighton and Hove Food Partnership 2006: 1).

Similarly, in Canada Toronto envisions a “health-focused food system” that “nourishes the environment, protects against climate change, promotes social justice, creates local and diverse economic development, builds community” (Toronto Public Health Department 2010: 6).

The quintessential example of systems thinking in the narratives of urban food policies is arguably a new, cross-cutting notion of “good food” that several cities utilize to describe the multidimensional development potential of the food system. As Sonnino and Beynon (2015) summarize, in the UK Bristol defines “good food” as “good for people, good for places and good for the planet” (Bristol Food Policy Council, 2012:3). Cardiff’s food charter similarly notes that “good food means fair food: it should be good for people, good for the place we live in, and good for our planet, as well as being affordable and nutritious”. At the same time, the charter also makes explicit the potential of food to bring a multitude of positive community benefits: “The food we consume has a huge impact on life in Cardiff -- not just on our health, but also on our communities, businesses and the environment” (Food Cardiff, 2014: 1). More specific is the definition provided by the city of Los Angeles, which uses the notion of “good food” to frame its overarching vision for a food system that “prioritizes the health and wellbeing of our residents [and] makes healthy, high-quality food affordable”, while also contributing to enhance the urban environment, create a thriving economy and protect and strengthen regional biodiversity and natural resources (Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force 2010: 11).

In practice, urban efforts to connect food to other public goods have originated the emergence of what Brighton and Hove (2006) calls “an integrated, cross-sectoral approach to food policy”. City governments are making a conscious effort to connect food with other policies and sectors. Los Angeles, for example, raises the need for “integrating local food system planning into our region’s Climate Action Plans, Regional Transportation Plans and other regional planning documents” (Food Policy Task Force 2010). In the UK, Newquay’s food strategy argues that the development of “reliable markets for local food growers, fishing communities, processors, caterers and retailers” can make a significant contribution to the objectives of its sustainability strategy – namely, limiting the population’s greenhouse gas emissions and ecological footprint and enhancing regional economic development (Duchy of Cornwall and SUSTAIN 2007: 7–8). Brighton and Hove explicitly aims to support “networking opportunities to encourage links between sectors” and ensure “local policy and planning decisions take into account food issues” (Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, 2012:4). As Sonnino and Beynon (2015) describe, this long-standing dedication to “ensure that food work is prioritised in strategy at a city level” (*ibid.*) has been fruitful, as food, in its various secure forms, has been included in a number of city-wide policies. For example, local food is included in the city’s local planning framework; local and sustainable food is one of the ten key principles of the “One Planet Living Strategy and Action Plan” (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2013); and, as of 2014, there was a dedicated food section added to the overarching Sustainable Communities Strategy, which makes specific reference to the food strategy as an achievement for the city (Brighton and Hove City Council, 2014). Similarly, the “One Planet Cardiff” sustainability strategy includes a section on



food that lists one of their actions as supporting “the Cardiff Food Charter and the Cardiff Food Council and promote healthy, sustainable and ethical food as part of a thriving local economy” (Cardiff Sustainable Development Unit, 2013:4).

### Participatory Food Governance

Systems thinking, as embedded in the concept of “good food”, provides the cultural background for another important aspect of urban food policies: that is, the establishment of institutional arrangements that aim to facilitate coordination between different actors and the integration of different sectors. The emerging urban food governance context is indeed an inclusive one. Chicago, for instance, advocates the establishment of a specific non-profit regional food entity that “should be represented by a variety of members (economic, environmental, transport, agricultural, public health, etc.) to analyse and support food policy issues from a comprehensive perspective and coordinate federal grants and loan programs” (Chicago Metropolitan Area for Planning 2010: 156). Similarly, Los Angeles suggests the establishment of a “regional food policy council” (Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force 2010: 28), which was also formed in Bristol following recommendations of research that underpinned the development of the city’s Good Food Plan.

The novelty here has to do with an explicit focus on enhancing participation in the design and implementation of food policy. As stated in New York City’s food strategy, food policy councils can play an important role in eliciting “non-governmental input on policy changes” (New York City Council 2010: 75). This quote echoes recent work by Candel (2014), who has emphasized the importance of involving civil society in food security governance. As he argues, civil society is in a unique position to identify local problems and response gaps, to enhance public support for food policy intervention and to build capacity across institutions, policy sectors and governance scales.

Moreover, the strategies show a unique comprehension that, as well as requiring civil society and ‘non-governmental’ support to recognise the local needs and gaps, multi-stakeholder involvement is essential to ensure the long-term success of these local initiatives. As outlined in Sandwell’s Community Agriculture Strategy: “Political and organisational leadership and robust partnership working between Sandwell’s local authorities and voluntary and community organisations will be essential in achieving the aims of the Strategy. This will be a shared endeavour but responsibilities for key steps will be clearly identified. Strategic and service level commissioning which values shared outcomes such as improved public health, social inclusion, and community cohesion will be required” (Sandwell PCT and Sandwell MBC, 2008: 27). This represents the view that connections with a wider set of actors beyond the traditional policy setting are bidirectional and that a reciprocal relationship contribute to building capacity within and between various sectors and actors (Sonnino and Beynon, 2015).

## The New Localism

The adoption of a systemic and participatory approach to food governance has important repercussions also on the definition of the policy intervention context by city governments. In general, urban food strategies emphasize the importance of the local scale – particularly in relation to the role that urban agriculture and community-growing initiatives can play in addressing food security and sustainability objectives. Significantly, however, the re-localization of the food system is never seen as an end goal; rather, it is a means to an end. In simple terms, local food is often part-and-parcel of wider sustainability strategies.

One of the most significant aspects of this “new localism” (Sonnino, 2016) is a broadening up of the notion of “local” beyond the municipal administrative boundaries – in other words, beyond territoriality. Although most urban food policies recognise the potential of the ‘local/urban’ (as defined by New York City) in enhancing food production, the main focus of the underlying narratives is what New York City Council defines as the ‘local/regional food system’, which is seen as crucial to address food security concerns. As stated in Los Angeles’ food strategy: “while the benefits of urban agriculture are significant to individuals and neighbourhoods, poverty and hunger . . . exist on such a massive scale that supporting urban agriculture should only be viewed as a supplement, not a replacement, strategy to solve food insecurity and improve food access” (Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force 2010, 26).

In this context, regions, and the connections between municipal organisations within them, are also given prominence. Urban regions are re-thought of as “complete quasi-independent human ecosystems” (Rees, 2015: 207) where the human community’s productive hinterland needs to be consolidated as much as possible in close proximity to its consumptive center. As described by Sonnino and Beynon (2015), the surrounding ‘South West England’ region, for example, is an important feature of the Bristol Good Food Plan, which states that their “approach to food is both daring in scope and ambition; its aim is a sustainable and resilient food plan integrated on a regional level” (Bristol Food Policy Council, 2013:7). Indeed, one of the strategy’s key objectives is to “increase procurement of regional staples, and establish more markets for local producers” (Bristol Food Policy Council, 2013: 22). This objective recognises the role of the wider region in shaping the local foodscape for the better and suggests support through “an established network of retail markets that could provide fresh, seasonal, local & regional foods throughout the city” (*ibid.*: 23).

Significantly, many North American cities utilize the term “foodshed” to broaden the definition of local food, taking into account, as stated in San Francisco’s food strategy, not just territoriality, but also a range of quality attributes such as agricultural production methods, fair farm labour practices and animal welfare (Thompson et al. 2008: 4). Likewise, Los Angeles associates the concept of ‘foodshed’ not just with food production and consumption, but also with a range of regional economic, employment, demographic and environmental indicators (Los Angeles Food Policy Task Force 2010). As Toronto’s food strategy states,

“the strategic challenge is to build the links within this common foodshed” (Toronto Public Health Department 2010: 7) - a refashioned foodscape in which the city, the countryside and all different actors and stakeholders that occupy their spaces are reconnected physically, culturally, environmentally, socially and economically. Quoting Manchester’s food strategy (Manchester City Council, 2007: 19): “At present . . . the model is a chain in which food is produced outside the city, brought in, sold, consumed and the waste and packaging disposed of generally outside the city again . . . There is considerable scope for . . . creating a closed loop system [that] would attempt to reconnect the city to the food it consumes and reduce the environmental impact of food consumption”.

Importantly, urban food strategies, especially in the UK, note that the absence of appropriate institutional frameworks does not and should not interfere with a more enlightened perspective on the local/regional foodscape (Sonnino and Beynon, 2015). Durham, for example, makes explicit the need to create regional links for the good of local food even where regions lack formal relations: “although the English regions lost powers and investment with the demise of the Regional Government Offices and the Local Development Agencies in 2011, the North East continues as a constituency for the European Parliament and retains a strong local identity. Local food does not recognise administrative boundaries and it is important that we maintain close links with other areas in the region” (Charles and Durham Community Action, 2014:7).

At the other end of the scale, city strategies also recognise their role in the wider food system and the real and potential impact they have on global food security. This moral and ethical dimension is illustrated in one of Cardiff’s principles of fair food: “workers throughout the food chain, both in Wales and abroad, should have good working conditions and be paid fairly for their work and produce” (Food Cardiff, 2014:2). Comparably, Manchester’s food strategy includes ethically and fairly traded and produced food, emphasising that “food production and trading should only use fair pricing and ethical employment for and by producers, in the UK or overseas” (Manchester City Council, 2007:17). A more explicit expression is found in Birmingham’s food charter, which lists global food security amongst their four priorities -- a significant development in comparison to the examples mentioned above (Sonnino and Beynon, 2015). As proclaimed in their website, “although Birmingham can do next to nowt about global food security in terms of food production, we citizens still have a significant role to play as consumers, and our Council in setting up infrastructures that promote certain kinds of behaviour...” and promotes ways in which its citizens can “...support and encourage research into global food security, and encourage infrastructures that enable all of us to do the best we can to mitigate against famine, hunger and malnutrition” (Birmingham Food Council, 2015).

In short, far from falling into the “local trap” – or the mistaken assumption that local food systems are inherently more ecologically sustainable and socially just than systems at larger scales (Born and Purcell, 2006: 195), urban food strategies progress a nuanced understanding of scale that sets ‘local’ food systems within relational contexts that can be jurisdictional, bioregional or geographical in nature (Mendes and Sonnino, in press). What defines such

context is not territoriality, but values of solidarity that aim to (re-)connect sometime distant food system actors and their ideas, practices, knowledge and resources.

### Translocalism

As described above, localism is inherently translocal. Many cities are clearly expanding the productive and consumptive foodscape beyond their municipal boundaries, with important cross-scale repercussions, as some scholars are beginning to note. Emerging evidence shows that the re-ordering of food rights, governance and assets in one city often leads to important cross-overs of learning and reflexivity in other cities (Sonnino et al., 2016: 9). As Blay-Palmer et al. (2016: 38) state: “by convening around good practices, communities can reinforce a global System of Sustainable Food Systems that: enhances a sustainable flow of food, knowledge and people; develops the capacity to activate sustainable local food systems in a more collective manner; and, potentially, resists the disaggregating impacts of neoliberalism”.

Examples of this translocalism include the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (a protocol that has already been signed by more than 130 cities from across the globe), the Sustainable Food Cities Network in the UK, FAO’s Food for Cities global network and the Food Policy Networks project currently being developed by the Centre for a Liveable Future at Johns Hopkins University in the USA. The latter project has been described as developing “effective and robust food policy at the state and local levels by working with existing food policy councils, national organizations and other interested groups.” Recently conducting a review of partnerships and strategies across North America, “the Food Policy Networks is poised to enhance and *amplify the impact...* by building the capacity of local, state, regional, and tribal food policy organizations to forge working partnerships and to become more effective policy players” (Center for a Liveable Future, 2015).

In a similar vein, the Sustainable Food Cities Network in the UK aims to provide support to cities that are developing strategies and charters and associated partnerships to govern them. Membership of the network is open to “any town, city, borough, district or county [...] as long as it has a cross-sector food partnership working to create a better food system. The key is that you are willing to share your successes (and your failures!) and are interested in learning from others” (SFCN, 2013). Peer-to-peer learning, dissemination of best practice and knowledge-exchange are at the heart of the network, which also aims to provide support and advice for localities seeking to drive the three positive changes of “establishing an effective cross-sector food partnership; embedding healthy and sustainable food in policy, and developing and delivering a food strategy and action plan” (SFCN, 2013).

Clearly, the new localism emerging at the urban level is nurturing a progressive sense of place that transcends conventional scalar categories and state jurisdictions to foster an inclusive and more global sense of citizenship. Trans-localism, in short, is increasingly becoming a site for doing, performing,

experimenting, practicing and sharing things differently – in Sonnino et al.'s words (2016: 10), for creating or consolidating “networked relationalities” between food production and consumption.

### THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF URBAN FOOD GOVERNANCE: SOME CONCLUSIONS

Decades of industrialization and urbanization in advanced economies have historically promoted an “active and artificial flattening of food geographies” (Sonnino et al., 2016: 10). For a long time we had the luxury of hiding or disguising the externalities associated with the industrial food regime and an associated “productivist spatial fix” that created a rigid separation between the city and the countryside (Marsden and Sonnino, 2012; Moore, 2010).

During the last decade, the emergence of a range of complex and cross-scale food security and sustainability challenges has prompted city governments to re-cast themselves as new inter-scalar food policy actors. Through an emphasis on values of participation, social inclusion, reflexivity and collaboration, urban food strategies in the global North are challenging conventional development theories and established planning models. As even FAO (2011: 6) has recognized, “a new paradigm is emerging for eco-system based, territorial food system planning [that] seeks [...] to improve the local management of food systems that are both local and global”.

Relationality is arguably the most distinctive shared feature of the emerging urban foodscape. By harnessing and recognizing their social and political ability to act, cities are beginning to relate their food systems to wider sets of public goods. In the process, new spaces of solidarity are shaping up. As described earlier, urban food narratives are informed by ideas of reconnection between food producers and consumers, between cities and their surrounding rural regions and between the urban and the global scale, with spatially distant communities of food insecure people also included in some urban food strategies (Sonnino, in press). Clearly, there is a new and more collaborative political sensitivity developing at the city level, which is embracing and attempting to transform the politics that shape the distribution of, and access to, “good food”. From a cultural perspective, we are perhaps witnessing the emergence of what Madanipour and Davoudi (2015) call a “progressive” (as opposed to regressive) localism that is enabling democratic capacity-building, opening up possibilities for more sustainable practices and for an enhanced cross-scale solidarity. There are important questions emerging here about the potential of such sensitivity to create or enhance cultural capital (i.e., municipal actors’ food knowledge and skills) and change their “habitus” – that is, their sense of one’s (and others’) place and role in the world of one’s lived environment (Hillier and Rooksby, 2002: 5).

It is too early to assess how successful urban food policies will be in reshaping the dominant food system. However, it is important to note that there are new questions being addressed and new collective visions being formed at the urban level. At the very least, urban food governance is creating an important platform

to build the social and cultural capacities needed to meet a wide range of contemporary joined-up sustainability challenges and, more broadly, to get a step closer to a more inclusive and reflexive food politics.

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