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Collaboration of Sustainability Initiatives — An Ethnographic Exploration into Barriers to Establishing a Sustainable Food Partnership in Cambridge, UK

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Despite a large number of sustainable food initiatives in the public, private and community sectors in Cambridge (UK), a citywide collaboration is absent. This thesis looks at the barriers preventing these initiatives from jointly establishing a successful sustainable food partnership in Cambridge, one of the most prosperous and yet unequal cities in the UK. The focus is on the divide between the third sector, as Sustainable Food Voluntary Organisations (SFVOs) represent most initiatives across the city, and the public sector, as the City Council has particular responsibility and power. The central research question is this: How does the (lack of) interaction between SFVOs and the City Council in Cambridge (UK) affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership? The fieldwork for this ethnographic research was conducted over three months. The key methods used were participant observation, mainly within eight SFVOs, and semi-structured interviews with 33 research participants, representing 11 SFVOs and the Council. The research reveals that, on the one hand, due to a lack of faith and mistrust in the Council and politics in general, citizens and SFVOs express their sustainable food convictions through personalised and civic politics. On the other hand, SFVOs who do interact with the Council, mainly through the Council's Sustainable City Grants, experience an unequal power balance in favour of the Council, which puts various pressures on SFVOs. Therefore, neither the lack of nor the actual interaction between SFVOs and the Council provide a basis for joining forces in an egalitarian way to make Cambridge a sustainable food city. The societal relevance of this research is that it provides a stepping-stone to establishing a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership in Cambridge. The understanding of barriers to partnerships around sustainable food is also a valuable contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. The academic relevance of this research is that it fills an existing gap in ethnographic explorations into barriers to the establishment of cross-sectoral sustainable food partnerships in the UK.

Keywords: Sustainable Food Voluntary Organisation; City Council; Lifestyle Politics; Political Consumerism; Sustainable Community Movement Organisations; Disavowal of the Political; Rhizome; Neoliberalism; Neoliberal Governmentality; Resistance; Isomorphism; Bureaucracy

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I would like to thank all the wonderful research participants I have met during my fieldwork in Cambridge (UK). Thank you for generously, graciously and patiently letting me into your world. It was great fun and truly enriching to participate in your diverse sustainable food initiatives: to assist with cookery workshops in community kitchens across the city; to cook meals with surplus food and serve them to the community in old churches; to plant, weed and harvest vegetables in beautiful community gardens; and so much more. It was truly inspiring to experience how much energy and positivity you commit to the cause of sustainable food — I have learnt so much from you. Thank you for openly sharing your motivations, experiences and perspectives and for not shying away from unpacking critical issues. Thank you for trusting that my research would be beneficial to you and to Cambridge. I hope this thesis can do justice to the trust and time you have given me, and that it can serve as a stepping-stone to the egalitarian joining of forces to transform Cambridge into the sustainable food city it could be — all the ingredients are there. Also, I would like to thank all the professors of my Master's degree course 'Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship' for encouraging critical thinking and holistic understanding. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, family, friends and fellow students for your creative thoughts, encouragement and support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“If there is one consistent issue with sustainable food and our whole local society, it is that Cambridge constantly fails to act collectively in a manner where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is a tragedy. Your research is a real-life study of Cambridge collectively failing to reach its potential on something that in its individual pockets it is really good at. Given the number of people and groups that are actively working on sustainable food, given the collective level of expertise and the access to financial and academic resources we have got, we should be punching far above our weight!”¹ Ben, a local historian I met at several political events, paused and gasped for air. This was the very moment I realised that I was on to something really important.

1.1 Research theme and research question(s)

The research theme of this thesis combines my keen interests in the collaboration of sustainability efforts and food, which I explored in the setting of Cambridge (UK). Cambridge Sustainable Food (CSF), an unincorporated association with a governing document, has since 2013, aimed to bring together the many local sustainable food initiatives, and is to date the strongest attempt to build a citywide sustainability partnership. However, four years on, CSF still experiences difficulties in encouraging collaboration across sectors. I strongly believe that if sustainable food initiatives across sectors were to join forces in an egalitarian way to create a local sustainable food partnership, this would allow them to strengthen their sustainable citizenship practices — that is, to do whatever “they possibly can to help improve social justice and safeguard nature to make the world a better place in which to live” (Micheletti and Stolle 2012, 88-89). Therefore, this thesis provides

¹Informal conversation with Ben, 27th March 2017

an ethnographic insight into the barriers to establishing a citywide sustainable food partnership, which works to make sustainable food a defining characteristic of Cambridge. As a result of new insights gained through my fieldwork, I adjusted my research questions (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 15) by restricting my focus to the (lack of) interaction between voluntary organisations in the third sector² — I call them Sustainable Food Voluntary Organisations (SFVOs) — and the City Council. Concentrating on SFVOs — part of the third sector — and the City Council — part of the public sector — seemed the most relevant focus in two regards: on the one hand, SFVOs were the most active players in the field of sustainable food, whilst the Council had particular responsibility and the most power and potential to make a citywide change in regard to sustainable food. On the other hand, it was one of the divides — characterised by a lack of interaction and unequal power relations — I witnessed in Cambridge. Considering the limited time I had for this research, focusing on this specific fragment allowed for a more in-depth analysis. Tsing (2005, 271) argues that it is only in acknowledging fragments that one can begin to understand the bigger picture. In this complex research theme, my approach seemed realistic: I had to look at a fragment to start to grasp the bigger picture.

Eventually, I arrived at the following central research question:

How does the (lack of) interaction between Sustainable Food Voluntary Organisations (SFVOs) and the City Council in Cambridge (UK) affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?

The subsidiary questions addressed are:

1. *How does the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the City Council affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?*
 - 1.1 What are citizens' and SFVOs' reasons for the lack of interaction?
 - 1.2 How do citizens and SFVOs express their political convictions instead?
2. *How does the interaction between SFVOs and the City Council affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?*
 - 2.1 What are SFVOs' motivations for the interaction?
 - 2.2 What are SFVOs' experiences of the interaction?

²Also known as voluntary sector or community sector

1.2 Scientific contribution

1.2.1 Societal relevance

Food matters in Britain. However, the predominant global food system is unsustainable. Not only is it generating vast amounts of food waste (Gustavsson et al. 2011, 4) whilst at the same time being incapable of feeding the global population (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2015), but the scale and pace of the long-running trend of consolidation and concentration of power in the food industry is also increasing (Lang and Heasman 2004, 128-141). These are only a few examples illustrating the many socio-economic and environmental problems that the predominant food system incorporates (Kneafsey 2010, 178). By 2050, over 80 per cent of Europe's population is expected to live in urban areas (United Nations 2015, 10). As many countries in the developed world are increasingly unable to supply themselves with food, urban areas, which mostly rely on externally produced food, are particularly affected (Wiskerke and Viljoen 2012, 21-25). The urban context, therefore, deserves particular attention. In an attempt to reassert control over their diets, people around the globe are trying to counter the predominant food system through various kinds of sustainable food projects (González 2014, 123-124). Cambridge had a high number of such initiatives in the community, public and private sectors. Many of these initiatives struggled, for example, in terms of financial and other resources, human power and activist burnout. Whilst there was significant overlap amongst these initiatives, there was only a limited degree of collaboration, knowledge and resources sharing, and a citywide co-ordination was absent. All research participants saw the benefits to be had in a citywide sustainable food partnership, including greater visibility, less duplication and greater leverage (see appendix 1). Why, then, were there difficulties in bridging across sectors? Why was an orchestrated effort across the city missing?

The societal contribution of this research, on the one hand, is an ethnographic inquiry into barriers to establishing a sustainable food partnership in Cambridge, with a focus on SFVOs and the Council, which I hope will provide a stepping-stone to dismantling the barriers and establishing a strong partnership. On the other hand, this research is relevant in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³, which are a global call for action to end poverty, protect the earth and improve everybody's lives and prospects, everywhere. In 2015, all of the UN Member States adopted the 17 goals as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which

³Whilst I see the SDGs as bearing much potential, such as that all UN Member States have adopted the goals, and a fixed timeline is given (United Nations 2019), I also see issues, such as environmental justice and social justice more generally not being incorporated into the language and ethos of the SDGs (Menton et al. 2020).

set out a 15-year strategy for achieving the goals. This research mainly addresses the following three SDGs: 1) The food and agriculture sector is central for hunger and poverty eradication (Goal 2: Zero hunger); 2) World-wide consumption and production has to be possible without destructively impacting the planet (Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production); and 3) Inclusive partnerships — also at the local level — are crucial to reach the SDGs (Goal 17: Partnership for the goals) (United Nations 2019). Due to being specific to the locality of Cambridge, the results of this thesis will not be applicable to other contexts. However, this research might well be useful in enhancing the understanding of similar issues in other cities.

1.2.2 Academic relevance

Research on collaboration of sustainable food initiatives has mainly been conducted in a conceptual or normative manner (Morgan 2015; Cretella 2016). Literature on citywide collaborative efforts tends to have a tone of advocacy (Levkoe 2011; Wiskerke 2009), whilst critique is relatively rare (Bedore 2014; Cretella and Buenger 2016). Empirical investigations into existing partnerships are still scarce (Candel 2014; Mansfield and Mendes 2013), whilst empirical investigations into barriers to such efforts are only starting to emerge. Amongst rare examples of case studies in similar contexts, barriers such as these were found: a lack of practical infrastructure and vision (Jégou and Carey 2015), a lack of political will and financial resources (Dubbeling et al. 2016) and unsupportive national level policy coupled with a lack of necessary powers at the local city level (Hawkes and Halliday 2017). To my knowledge, no ethnographic investigation into barriers to cross-sectoral sustainable food partnerships in the UK has been conducted. On the one hand, it is in this context that this ethnography aims to make an academic contribution. I am convinced that using concepts “is a way of living and not a way of killing life; it is a way to live in a relative mobility and not a way to immobilize life” (Foucault 2003, 14–15). To prevent my ethnography from being fuzzy and incoherent (Dean 2015, 365–366), I use key concepts and perspectives to analyse, interpret and explain my empirical materials, and also use the data I have collected to scrutinise certain concepts and perspectives. On the other hand, these key concepts might well aid other researchers in their explorations in other cities.

In chapter two, I explore the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the Council. Here, ‘lifestyle politics’ helps me illuminate how research participants found personal solutions to political problems rather than opting for mainstream political ones (Bennett 1998, 747). They did this through individualised responsibility-taking, that is, by politicising lifestyle elements and everyday life choices (De Moor 2017, 181). ‘Political consumerism’ provides a typical example of ‘lifestyle politics’ (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti

2005, 254), helping to understand how research participants' purchase of services receives political meaning through the individual's responsibility for the common good. Sustainable Community Movement Organisations (SCMOs) — social movement organisations which incorporate political consumerism to achieve environmental and social change — are an example of how research participants collectively took action (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140-142). By drawing on the cultural sociology concepts of denegation, boundary making, and role distancing, 'disavowal of the political' explains how research participants engaged in public life in spite of their distrust of mainstream political processes (Bennett et al. 2013, 531 and 543). Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of the 'rhizome' illuminates the potential of these activities for change, stemming from the accumulation of numerous small initiatives, a sort of underground root structure without centralised leadership (Thompson and Schor 2014b, 245-246).

In chapter three, I explore the actual interaction between SFVOs and the Council. I use 'neoliberalism' — acknowledging it to be heterogeneous in form and contingent on context (Dean 2015, 363) — in an ideologically and theoretically charged way to critique the modes of governance (Ganti 2014, 92-93) of the Council. 'Neoliberal governmentality' not only helps to understand how the effects of the Council's funding strategy on SFVOs unfolded (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 13), but also reveals a power imbalance by highlighting mechanisms through which the Council enacted its power (Buckingham 2009, 239). As neoliberal governmentality is not a simple top-down, one-way process, SFVOs, as active subjects, could shape it (Morison 2000, 119), amongst other ways through 'resistance' to governmental efforts (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 19). 'Isomorphism' helps to explain how the Council's pressure on SFVOs to adopt Council structures and procedures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 151 and 157) saw SFVOs in danger of becoming homogenised (Kontinen and Onali 2017, 3). Whilst the Council as 'bureaucracy' shaped and controlled SFVOs (Heyman 2004, 488-489), its opacity saw power handed to bureaucrats, the Council officers. They became gatekeepers who interpreted rules and policies and controlled the dissemination of resources (Hoag 2011, 82).

1.3 Research context and population

1.3.1 Research context

This research was conducted in the city of Cambridge. This is an interesting context, as the UK is one of the first countries to evolve innovative urban food governance arrangements (Coulson and Sonnino 2019, 171). Cambridge is located about 95 kilometres north of London, and has an estimated

1.3. Research context and population

population of 132,700 people (Annual Monitoring Report — December 2016, 5). It is a university city; the University of Cambridge has a worldwide reputation and some 20,000 students (Student Statistics 2015-16 2016, 10). Cambridge is also home to Anglia Ruskin University, one of the largest universities in the East of England, with 35,000 students (Anglia Ruskin University 2017). Cambridge is a particularly intriguing research location due to its large number of students who, on graduation, will have the ideal prerequisites for working in influential positions. If they are sensitised to food and sustainability, therefore, there is the potential for this knowledge to spread across society. Cambridge is a city marked by divides, that is, unequal power relations or absences of interaction. A study from Centre for Cities, the leading think tank dedicated to improving the economies of the UK's largest cities and towns, found Cambridge to be the least equal city twice in a row, even more so than London (Centre for Cities 2018, 60). Shopping for food in Cambridge mainly means being confronted with mainstream supermarkets. Even when shopping at the market square, hardly any local, organic or fair-traded food produce can be found. This might come as a surprise, as the countryside around Cambridge is some of the most agriculturally developed in the country. However, as James, a local farmer, told me: "This region is the bread basket of the UK, it is great for arable crops, but not for dairy, vegetables and fruits. Most arable food goes into big corporations, it does not come to Cambridge. We cannot provide the amount of local food that is needed."⁴

Despite — or maybe because of — the unfavourable preconditions, a high number of sustainable food initiatives were active in the public, private and community sectors, such as food waste projects, vegetarian food co-operatives and community gardens. But in comparison to other UK cities, Cambridge seemed to lag behind in terms of collaborations and partnerships of sustainable food initiatives,⁵ despite CSF's efforts. An unincorporated association with a governing document since 2013, CSF struggled to fulfil its main purpose, which was to operate as a partnership of public, private and community organisations working across sectors to promote a vibrant local food system. Whilst listing over 50 initiatives across the public, private and community sectors on their website, membership was not formalised. Most leaders of the listed initiatives that I met during my research struggled to explain what CSF was and saw it as a separate initiative; only two saw it as an (informal) network, and many had never worked with CSF before. Three initiative leaders I interviewed were not aware that they were listed

⁴Informal conversation with James, 10th April 2017

⁵For example, Bristol, the first city in the UK to have a Food Policy Council (Bristol Food Policy Council 2017), is also home to Bristol Food Network (2017) and the Bristol Green Capital Partnership (2017).

as members on CSF's website. Most CSF committee members I interviewed described the key aspects 'partnership' and 'umbrella' mentioned on the website as aspirational rather than factual. Led by enthusiastic, committed individuals, CSF operated as a separate initiative, focusing mainly on service delivery in order to raise their profile. Whilst many of their projects were delivered in collaboration with other local initiatives, shaping CSF into a partnership as such had not been a priority.

1.3.2 Research population

During my fieldwork, I had both single and multiple encounters with over a hundred research participants. My research population were people involved with SFVOs and the City Council, most of whom were listed as members on CSF's website. My research participants were predominantly white and from the highly-educated middle class.⁶ My involvement with the Council mainly took place through interviews with councillors and officers whom worked in the areas of strategy, grants and waste. My involvement with SFVOs took place through spending as much time as possible with them. I spent the most time with the following eight organisations, but I also selectively participated in other projects:

Cambridge FarmShare A small-scale, community-supported agriculture scheme (CSA) which created opportunities for collaboration between farms and the community

Edible Spaces A community group that reclaimed unloved and underused public spaces and transformed them by using edible landscaping for everyone to enjoy

Feast With Us A branch of a national charity where volunteers cooked and served meals of surplus food to vulnerable people in the community

Food Climate Factor A voluntary organisation that advocated the reduction of the carbon footprint of food

GardenShare A voluntary initiative which linked committed, enthusiastic growers with local garden owners who were happy to share, and see their gardens being used more productively

Healthy Food Initiative A voluntary group that created a programme of community events designed to help those on low income overcome barriers to accessing sustainable eating.

Preston Park Edible Garden A community garden run on organic principles, open to all ages and abilities

⁶Unfortunately, I did not have the capacity to research why certain groups of people of different race or ethnicity, citizenship status or education were not part of these endeavours (Mares 2014, 42).

Surplus Food Project A small community group that distributed surplus food from supermarkets to people in need

Based on interviews with SFVOs and the Council, I began to understand that my research participants did not have a unified understanding of sustainable food. I got a different answer every time I asked the question of what sustainable food was. The many aspects of sustainable food interviewees named in their answers ranged from climate change and waste, to health and worker conditions, to fair pay and job creation (see appendix 2). All interviewees had collaborated with at least one other sustainable food initiative (see appendix 3). Motivations for collaborating included increased visibility and saving money (SFVOs) to seeing it as part of their responsibility or needing the expertise of other organisations (Council) (see appendix 4). All interviewees had more positive than negative experiences with collaboration, and generally found collaboration to be “positive”, “rewarding” and “worth it”. Positive experiences included saving costs by sharing resources, and the establishment of friendships (SFVOs) and getting more ideas for different campaigns, and benefitting financially by sharing costs (Council). Challenges included the need for a lot of management, and different time scales, which made spontaneous collaboration difficult (SFVOs) and time constraints, and that only liaising with green groups led to a limited view of the issues (Council) (see appendix 5). Interviewees across all sectors saw a variety of benefits in a sustainable food partnership including greater visibility, more ideas, higher efficiency, avoidance of duplication, more leverage and increased motivation (see appendix 1). However, all interviewees struggled to answer when asked what kind of sustainable food partnership they could imagine. There seemed to be a lack of examples of wide-reaching collaboration or cross-sectoral sustainability partnerships, as well as an ability to imagine them. Interviewees had ideas around coordination, communication and information, meetings, activities and a shared venue (see appendix 6).

1.4 Methodological and ethical notes

1.4.1 Methods

The research for this Master’s thesis was conducted in Cambridge, with fieldwork taking place from the 13th February until 12th May 2017. Rather than going to a faraway place with a different culture, I decided to do ‘anthropology at home’; to study my own society. Cambridge was my new home. My previous experience and contacts through volunteering in sustainable food initiatives facilitated my access to the field. Being at home presented a challenge of seeing through the ordinary into the extraordinary

(Greenhouse 1985, 261). Therefore, whilst studying my own culture, it was important for me to use research methods systematically, to increase the chances too making discoveries about human behaviour (Mughal 2015, 130). This thesis is an ethnography, which can be understood as “a methodology that acknowledges the complexity of human experience and the need to research it by close and sustained observation of human behaviour” (O’Reilly 2005, i). To obtain information, I made use of different methods. I was conscious of bringing my point of view and bias into my fieldwork and my analysis (Leibing and McLean 2007, 6), and that I constantly reduced what I experienced (Spradley 2016, 75). Also, consciously or unconsciously, I was choosing what to report, what to leave out and how to report it. Therefore, I tried to approach my data reflectively, and to be aware of my particular bias and emphasis in recording (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 182). There were times when I was present as an observer only, for example, during meetings between SFVOs and Council officers.

However, the first key method I used with SFVOs was participant observation — a core method of anthropology — which meant I actively participated in a wide range of daily routine, and out of the ordinary activities of research participants, such as projects, meetings and events. Participation was key whilst focusing on my topic, as was observation, of research participants and their interactions, behaviour, and environment (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 1-5). At the same time, I asked questions and collected other forms of data (O’Reilly 2012, 113-114). I tried to build a good rapport with participants to establish trustworthy relationships (Sluka 2012, 137), whilst trying to maintain a critical distance (Goslinga and Frank 2007, xv). Becoming an embodied research tool set limits to my objectivity. This compelled me to use a high degree of self-reflection in order to understand my influence on the research field (O’Reilly 2012, 222-224), and to be aware of this when writing down my experiences (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 142).

The second key method I used was the employment of two kinds of qualitative interviews. First, through informal conversations mainly with SFVOs, I took every opportunity to listen and to ask questions. These were fairly informal chats and informal questions (O’Reilly 2012, 116-118). Second, I used semi-structured interviews, either when I interviewed a person only once (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 139), or when I interviewed someone whose role was seen to have a higher status (O’Reilly 2012, 125). I conducted interviews with 33 research participants: 25 were active in 11 different SFVOs, and 8 were involved with the Council, as Council officers or Councillors. The interviews were based on a guide, which included a list of questions and topics, to increase the likelihood of covering the topics in a similar way,

but I left space for new leads, too (Bernard 2011, 157-158). I recorded semi-structured interviews which I later transcribed (*ibid.*, 291). I also used documents such as Council policies, websites, blogs and leaflets as additional data sources. I systematically coded and analysed qualitative data through content analysis, which allowed me to explore explicit (manifest) and covert (latent) meanings, and to test hypotheses (*ibid.*, 443-445). In my personal diary, I noted my feelings, doubts, highlights, and problems, and how I aimed to solve them (*ibid.*, 294).

1.4.2 Research position

I acknowledge that objectivity in any kind of research is questionable (DeWalt 2011, 94),⁷ and that (political) neutrality does not exist (Ticktin 2011, 83) in scientific research.⁸ As my research is driven by indignation — feelings of anger and worry — at the predominant unsustainable food system, my choice of studying the barriers to establishing a local partnership that aims to counter it is certainly not value-free (Nader 1972, 303). As an anthropologist, I see myself as having a particular social responsibility towards people, as I am both a part of the community I study and a part of the global community (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 14-17). I see my role as an anthropologist as one with the potential to achieve particular change in social reality (Scheper-Hughes 2004, 42-44). My research aims to support my research participants in creating a more democratic, less centralised and more palatable future (González 2014, 124) by ‘studying up, down and across’ sustainable food efforts in Cambridge. This corresponds to the ‘vertical slice approach’ as advocated by Nader (1972), which means connecting the powerless with the powerful (p. 292). ‘Studying down’, in my research, meant understanding how SFVOs perceived the uneven distribution of power in favour of the Council. ‘Studying up’ meant understanding the Council’s perspective, as well as the influence of greater powers not physically present in Cambridge on the behaviour of people in it⁹ (Mitchell 1966, 56 in Nader 1972, 291). In studying local potential opposition to the undemocratically governed food system, I answer in the affirmative the question as to whether ‘scientists who are also citizens’ should strive for ‘democratic relevance’ (González and Stryker 2014, 9). Taking my research to the wider public by sending it to sustainable food initiatives in the public, private and community sectors

⁷Even more standardised measurement tools, such as telescopes or gauges, need an observer, who brings their own specific theoretical, gender, class and other perspectives (DeWalt 2011, 94).

⁸Miriam Ticktin (2011, 83) plausibly argues that no such thing as (political) neutrality exists in scientific research, as choosing neutrality over all else is itself a decision, and means taking a stance, which renders the apparent neutrality political.

⁹Or in other words: The unit of interacting relationships is larger than the individual social unit (Mitchell 1966, 56, in Nader 1972, 291).

informs others of the barriers to establishing a citywide sustainable food partnership, and hopefully acts as a stepping-stone to overcoming them.

1.4.3 Ethical responsibilities

My research came with several ethical responsibilities. It was my responsibility to establish and maintain ethical relationships within the context of my research (Sluka 2012a, 304). Besides the obligation to do no harm — in particular harm to dignity, and to bodily and material well-being — I had to be transparent with regard to my purpose, methods, outcomes, and how I used my data (Principles of Professional Responsibility 2017). Also, respecting participants' right to privacy was crucial, especially as I worked with activists, professionals and politicians. Therefore, I obtained their voluntary and informed consent by using an informed consent form. Furthermore, I produced a project information sheet which included my contact details, so that research participants could know more about my research. The experiences my research participants shared with me were often critical in nature, for example many SFVOs found themselves caught up in dependencies on the Council's goodwill or funding. Therefore, I used pseudonyms for all research participants and SFVOs in order to maintain their privacy and to ensure my research does not negatively impact on their endeavours.

1.5 Structure of thesis

This thesis is divided into two main chapters. In chapter two, I address the first set of subsidiary questions, by exploring how citizens and SFVOs who did not interact with the Council expressed their sustainable food efforts. I found that this absence of interaction could be attributed to both a lack of faith in the Council to successfully take on sustainable food challenges, and a mistrust of mainstream politics in general. At the same time, I investigated how these citizens and SFVOs expressed their political convictions through personal and civic engagement. In chapter three, I address the second set of subsidiary questions, by exploring how SFVOs and the Council did interact on sustainable food issues, which mainly took place through the Council's Sustainable City Grants. First off, I found the SFVOs' motivation for this interaction to be an increased dependency on this funding stream as other funding opportunities in the neoliberal landscape started to dry out. I went on to inquire into SFVOs' experiences of this interaction, which were grounded in the uneven distribution of power in favour of the Council and led, amongst other things, to administrative burdens and changes of focus and purpose for the SFVOs. In the conclusion and discussion, I draw my findings together by answering the central research question of how the (lack of) interaction between SFVOs and the Council affects the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership. I elaborate on how

(the lack of) interaction between SFVOs and the Council does not provide a solid foundation to join forces in an egalitarian way to make Cambridge a sustainable food city. I also make some preliminary suggestions as to how the identified barriers could be surmounted.

Chapter 2

Lack of interaction between SFVOs and the City Council — An exploration of citizens' shift of political engagement

“The Council is completely disinterested. Party politics in general is problematic, it puts you in an ideological stronghold. There is some flexibility but you have to agree with your party. Then the party goes off and fights with other parties. I think it’s divisive, it’s not conducive to greater consensus and change. I don’t want to get involved in politics. I’m not a political person, I prefer to make changes by myself — I’m vegan, for example. And I also organise myself from a community perspective with people around me with the same interests — mainly the carbon footprint of food — and create change that way. We don’t share a political framework, that would constrain us. I really don’t think the political system is good enough.” (Leo, volunteer at the Surplus Food Project)¹⁰

2.1 “I’m not a political person, I prefer personal and community solutions” — An introduction

Many research participants and SFVOs who cared deeply about sustainable food did not interact with the City Council for different reasons. The running theme of this chapter is research participants’ and SFVOs’ shift of political engagement away from traditional political channels. The central argument is that, triggered by a lack of faith in the Council to successfully take on sustainable food challenges, and a mistrust of mainstream politics

¹⁰Informal conversation with Leo, 3rd April 2017

2.2. “To make sustainable food a defining characteristic of Cambridge isn’t the City Council’s vision” — Citizens’ withdrawal from traditional politics

in general, research participants and SFVOs expressed their political convictions on personal and community levels. The message I try to convey is that the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the Council did not provide a foundation for establishing a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership.

I begin by giving an insight into research participants’ view that the Council did not care about sustainable food, their disbelief that politics could bring about change, and their belief that the political system, as such, was broken. As a result, they retreated from a formal participation in politics. This followed a general trend, as numerous post-industrial societies in the late twentieth century experienced a massive wave of citizens withdrawing from traditional channels of political engagement (Norris 2002, 3). However, they did not become passive or apathetic. Believing that change was needed, they shifted their approach in two ways: first, I explore how they shifted their political efforts to their private lives (Haenfler et al. 2012, 2), by expressing their political convictions through lifestyle politics (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005, 254), such as political consumerism (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140). Second, I demonstrate how research participants who shared a lack of faith in political authorities, so-called ‘plenitude practitioners’, also shifted their focus to civic engagement (Schor and Thompson 2014, 3-4). Aiming to bring about change, they got involved with SFVOs, such as SCMOs — social movement organisations, which incorporate political consumerism to achieve environmental and social change (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140-143). Next, I investigate why, whilst engaging in civic life, many of these research participants and SCMOs did not think of themselves as ‘political’ (Dobernig and Stagl 2015, 456). I argue that this was possible through a ‘disavowal of the political’ (Bennett et al. 2013, 543). Finally, I provide an insight into the question of whether or not their political expressions on personal and community levels brought about change (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 43). Using the notion of the ‘rhizome’, I explore how these engagements did indeed lead to social transformation (Thompson and Schor 2014, 245-246). The citizens’ and SFVOs’ reasons for the lack of interaction are revealed, as well as the ways they found to express their political convictions. Furthermore, it becomes clear why the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the Council did not provide a foundation from which a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership could be established.

2.2 “To make sustainable food a defining characteristic of Cambridge isn’t the City Council’s vision” — Citizens’ withdrawal from traditional politics

Many of my research participants on the one hand cared deeply about and actively engaged with sustainable food, but on the other hand complained

2.2. “To make sustainable food a defining characteristic of Cambridge isn’t the City Council’s vision” — Citizens’ withdrawal from traditional politics

about the Council, criticising their disinterest in and lack of involvement with sustainable food. These are just a few of the statements I heard throughout my fieldwork: “What upsets me most is that sustainable food is not part of the city planning. If new housing projects are built, edible spaces are hardly ever considered. For example, in the whole North-West Development that is currently being built, there is not a single community garden space planned.” (Lisa, volunteer at a community garden)¹¹ “In the Council’s procurement policies, for their own food procurement, they may say: let’s go for local food instead of air-freighted food. Or for vegan, or at least vegetarian, food. But that’s not what is happening, there is no policy. They just don’t seem to think that’s important.” (Alex, volunteer at a community-supported agriculture scheme (CSA))¹²

The paperwork I saw about procurement for a new café at Clay Farm Community Centre, which is within the Council’s area of responsibility, showed that they aren’t thinking about sustainable food at all. Sustainability wasn’t even mentioned on the application form. If the Council was really interested, there are a lot of questions that they could have put on the form, so that anyone wanting to run a café on Council property had to demonstrate commitment. (Tom, member of a vegan activist group)¹³

Peter was the co-ordinator of the Surplus Food Project, a small community group distributing surplus food from supermarkets to people in need. His statement summed up the research participants’ perception of the Council’s attitude and actions quite well: “To make sustainable food a defining characteristic of Cambridge isn’t the Council’s vision at all.”¹⁴

Whilst many research participants cared deeply about and actively engaged with sustainable food, they displayed a general disbelief that (local) politics could bring about change in regards to sustainable food. Following Bennett et al. (2013, 530), I broadly understand ‘politics’ as the political processes of expressing preferences (what citizens do) and developing policies (what politicians and bureaucrats do). Some blamed the broken political system for the inability of the Council to bring about change. For instance, Luca, a volunteer at the Surplus Food Project, said: “In the UK our problem is that we don’t have proportional representation. The Greens, for instance, don’t have much say, despite the support they get from people.”¹⁵ Or Gregory, a volunteer of Feast With Us, a branch of a national charity where volunteers

¹¹Informal conversation with Lisa, 15th March 2017

¹²Semi-structured interview with Alex, 2nd March 2017

¹³Semi-structured interview with Tom, 20th April 2017

¹⁴Semi-structured interview with Peter, 20th February 2017

¹⁵Informal conversation with Luca, 5th March 2017

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cook and serve meals of surplus food to vulnerable people in the community, who told me: “I just think: how can we make change? We can’t change it, it’s impossible, it just is what it is. The Tories will always get elected, or Labour, whatever [...]. So I have a sense of [...] a lot of cynicism, anyway.”¹⁶ Or Iris, a vegan activist, who stated: “I’m not sure if it’s true, but many politicians say they can’t make the decisions they’d like, because they’d be voted out. But what can they get done, then?”¹⁷ Their views may be partly attributable to a feeling of underrepresentation linked to the UK’s ‘first past the post’ voting system.¹⁸ In this system, parties only get a seat if the candidate receives more votes than any other party. It is a system that suppresses the representation of small parties (Struthers 2018, 2). What is more, some research participants were convinced that the Council hindered or even actively worked against sustainable food efforts or trends. David, a volunteer at Feast With Us, felt that “there is a lot of cynicism in Cambridge. There’s a sense that it’s impossible to make things happen because the Council blocks so many things or even actively works against positive change. That’s at least how I feel.”¹⁹ A place which exemplified the Council’s counterproductive interventions was Mill Road, where various sustainable food choices used to be available. John, a member of a vegan activist group, told me:

I’ve lived off Mill Road for over twenty years. It used to be this independent street with lots of quirky, alternative food shops. The Council has say over which shops can be opened in which place. Now it’s mostly general cafés and restaurants and things. So there’re fewer and fewer shops like Arjuna, the vegetarian co-op where I get most of my food. In the last 12 years, supermarkets and chains invaded Mill Road: Pizza Hut, Subway, Tesco, Sainsbury’s ... It was very subtle and gradual, and before we know it we’ve lost the road. The Council clearly doesn’t care about having an alternative from the commercial city centre for people to get local, healthy, non-mainstream food.²⁰

John, along with other research participants, experienced a lack of urgency, or even concern on the part of the Council (Schor and Thompson 2014, 3). This echoes Bennett’s (1998, 758) finding that many citizens seem to have come to the conclusion that mainstream politics is, at worst, responsible for the economic circumstances that dominate private life and, at best, of little

¹⁶Informal conversation with Gregory, 27th April 2017

¹⁷Informal conversation with Iris, 15th April 2017

¹⁸At the time of my fieldwork, despite plenty support, there was only one Green Party member on the Council, Oscar Gillespie for Market Ward (“Councillor Details - Councillor Oscar Gillespie - Cambridge Council” 2017), and also only one Green Party Member of Parliament, Caroline Lucas for Brighton Pavilion (“Contact Information For Caroline Lucas - MPs And Lords - UK Parliament” 2017).

¹⁹Informal conversation with David, 2nd April 2017

²⁰Informal conversation with John, 27th March 2017

2.3. “I live my convictions in my personal life” — Lifestyle as site of political expression

value regarding their solution. Hence, these research participants, along with many British people, had little trust in their Council (Whiteley 2012, 2).

As a result of their mistrust, many research participants had gravitated away from formal politics, become increasingly disengaged with the local government or avoided the political process altogether. Several expressed their disengagement: “I don’t engage with formal political processes. I’m not interested at all.” (Peter, co-ordinator of the Surplus Food Project) — “I don’t know anything about the local policy-making process.” (Phoebe, volunteer at a community garden) — “Politics and policy is not something I get involved with.” (Leo, volunteer at the Surplus Food Project) These statements are in tune with a general trend observed by many researchers, that of numerous post-industrial societies in the late twentieth century experiencing a massive wave of citizens withdrawing from traditional channels of political engagement (Norris 2002, 3). Long-term decline in party loyalty and affiliation resulted in a decrease in mainstream political engagement, such as voting turnout (Inglehart 1997, 293-296). This might lead us to the worrying notion of this disaffection potentially deteriorating democracy, as such, and of this disaffection, amongst other things, leading to disengagement (Bennett et al. 2013, 520-521). However, I found, like Schor and Thompson (2014, 3), that many research participants’ concerns about political processes and their lack of faith in the local government taking on sustainable food challenges led them to take politics into their own hands. During the course of my fieldwork, one way I observed this happening was seeing research participants making changes in their personal lives.

2.3 “I live my convictions in my personal life” — Lifestyle as site of political expression

One way I saw research participants coupling a strong support of democratic values with an increasing mistrust towards the Council and traditional political channels (Forno and Graziano 2014, 141) was their transference of political considerations to their private lives (Haenfler et al. 2012, 2), where they tackled perceived sustainable food problems. This phenomenon has been described by several different terms, including ‘life politics’, ‘civic innovation’, ‘individualised collective action’, ‘post-modern participation’ and ‘lifestyle politics’ (Lehman Schlozman 2016, 174). The new type of citizen practising this personalised politics (Bennett 2012, 20) has been given different names, too, including ‘critical citizens’ (Norris, 1999, 3), ‘citizen-consumers’ (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 39) and ‘critical consumers’ (Forno and Graziano 2014, 141). Many research participants who chose personal solutions to political problems over mainstream political ones (Bennett 1998, 747) did not identify their actions as political — I will come back to this later on. However, through individualised responsibility-taking, they politicised lifestyle

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elements and everyday life choices (De Moor 2017, 181). Or, in other words, they practised lifestyle politics, which, following Portwood-Stacer (2013, 6), I understand to be the “whole cultural formation around individuals’ use of everyday choices as a legitimate site of political expression.” A way I observed many research participants personalising politics was through political consumerism, a typical example of lifestyle politics, in which citizens’ ordinary, everyday decisions gain political significance (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005, 254). Political consumerism refers to the purchase of services and goods based not only on price and product quality, but also on producer behaviour and production methods, such as environmental sustainability and workers’ rights. Political meaning arises from stressing the individual’s responsibility for the common good, as the act of consuming is recognised as a crucial part of the production process (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140).

Most research participants mentioned several personal practical approaches and efforts regarding sustainable food, ranging from the reduction of food waste, to decisions around meat and dairy, or pesticides and packaging (see appendix 7). Having a sustainable diet was obviously very important to them. I found Lea’s holistic approach particularly impressive — we met at a screening of a vegan activism film in Cambridge. During one of our first encounters, when I asked her how she puts sustainable food principles into practice, Lea told me: “I grow, choose to buy and contribute financially to sustainable farming and trading practices, co-operatives, and supply chains based on direct trade as much as possible. I eat a plant-based, organic and largely seasonal diet.” Over the course of my fieldwork, Lea and I became friends — we had much in common. Helping her on her organic allotment plot, shopping together in Arjuna, the vegetarian co-operative on Mill Road, cooking and eating meals together, I witnessed how sincerely she acted upon her understanding of and convictions around sustainable food. I also came to understand that Lea’s practices of political consumerism relied on individualised responsibility-taking, and how this differed from traditional politics. Five different perspectives outlined by Stolle and Micheletti (2013) help to understand Lea’s sustainable food practice.

First, the structure and mobilisation methods of political consumerism are spontaneous, flexible and irregular — political consumerism does not require formal membership. Mobilisation for political consumer campaigns can be very unexpected, often motivated by corporate events or information (p. 36 and p. 42). A film had a strong impact on Lea: “So I watched ‘Cowspiracy’ in 2015, which I think is a really clever film. I was a vegetarian at that time. And as it was, I didn’t have any cheese in the house and I

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decided not to buy any more and see what happens. In fact, I've given up dairy and eggs ever since and gone completely vegan."

Second, political consumerism focuses on substantive issues instead of mainstream and routine politics. Elements of lifestyle are politicised, and politics gets confronted by the questioning of who is getting what, where and how in today's world. Spheres traditionally viewed as private stimulate political participation, as they involve the distribution of value, resources and power which affect the common good (ibid., 36-37 and 42). One late afternoon on her allotment, Lea told me:

I'm not a political person, I'm kind of a practical person. I'm not a member of any political party and don't go voting. I don't quite see the point if things don't change anyway, even if different parties are in power. I live my convictions in my personal life, I want to be the best person I can be. So you could say that I place my vote by deciding what food I grow, and buy and eat. That's how I contribute to a better world.²¹

Third, people have unique styles of individual involvement, for example, deciding what kinds of political consumerism to engage in, and how frequently. Political consumerist activities are mostly carried out in the numerous daily decisions of one's life. They do not necessarily lead to group interaction or in-person meetings, but are commonly caused by social and collective concerns (ibid., 37-38 and 42-43). Over a cup of tea, Lea explained what sustainable food was to her:

I think it is a sort of meditation practice for me, sort of like practising yoga. It is something I do daily, for example when I go shopping or when I cook. It's kind of always there for me. I see the connection food has with lots of larger issues I'm concerned about, such as climate change and social justice. And I want to make a difference there, I don't want to add to the damage.²²

Fourth, political consumerism has diverse targets beyond the government (public and private), aiming to influence other individuals, societal values, and a variety of powerholders, such as multinational corporations, through shopping choices, discussions and discursive practices (ibid., 38-43). When I asked Lea what kind of food products she did and did not buy, she laughed

²¹Informal conversation with Lea, 27th April 2017

²²Informal conversation with Lea, 10th April 2017

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and started to name a long list of items she boycotted — which is the negative form of political consumerism (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140): “Obviously, I don’t buy meat, fish, dairy and eggs. I also don’t consume palm oil because it destroys rainforests and whole ecosystems. And I don’t get anything from dirty multinationals such as Nestlé, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Unilever — do you want to hear more?” On the other hand, Lea practised buycotting — which is the positive form of political consumerism (ibid., 140):

I eat home-grown food for as much of the year as possible. If I buy food I go to Arjuna. I always go for organic food and where possible, I get food from the region, because it sustains local farmers and businesses. Otherwise, I go fair-trade wherever I can. This way, farmers at least get a better price for their produce. I look out for labels. It’s not always easy but I’m managing alright.²³

Lea was also the kind of person who would get into arguments with friends and family about their consumption habits, trying to nudge them into making more sensible, ethical food choices, sometimes successfully: “A few weeks ago, my little brother told me that he made a completely organic dessert. That was clearly inspired by me, otherwise he wouldn’t have told me, would he?”²⁴

Fifth and lastly, the Internet increasingly plays a role. It helps citizens to collect pertinent information and facilitates borderless exchange of information, problem formulation and solution-seeking, collective identification, political mobilisation and action and even value change (Stolle and Micheletti 2013, 38-39 and 43). Lea subscribed to various online newsletters, such as one from Ethical Consumer, an alternative consumer magazine. She was also part of different Facebook groups, such as the Cambridge Vegans and Vegetarians. Lea told me: “I find the Internet very useful. It’s a way for me to keep informed, to learn more about sustainable food and to have exchanges with others about what is important to me.”²⁵ Whilst several research participants, such as Lea, retreated to lifestyle actions only (Haenfler et al. 2012, 16), others, motivated by their ideal of a more sustainable food system and the wish to connect with others, became active in SFVOs. They were an example of political personalisation — which implies a profound commitment and belief — providing a basis for more lasting civic political engagement (Forno 2015, 542).

²³Informal conversation with Lea, 21st April 2017

²⁴Informal conversation with Lea, 5th March 2017

²⁵Informal conversation with Lea, 2nd May 2017

2.4. "Gardening with others is the way I can make the world a better place" — Civic engagement as site of political expression

2.4 "Gardening with others is the way I can make the world a better place" — Civic engagement as site of political expression

In many ways, political energies have not just ebbed away. Rather, they have diversified forming different tributaries (Norris 2002, 4-5). Whilst being politically motivated, research participants have chosen a different route to conventional politics or engagement with the local Council to bring about change (Forno and Graziano 2014, 151). Like Luca, who told me: "For me, sustainable food is something I approach personally, in my shopping habits, like by boycotting or choosing local or organic food. But it's also a community thing where I can promote local awareness with others, so we can bring about a change from the bottom."²⁶ Schor and Thompson (2014) argue that many of the so-called 'plenitude practitioners' share a lack of faith in, amongst others, political authorities to successfully take on ecological and economic challenges. Convinced that a radical new way of living is needed, they try to build a more sustainable economy themselves (p. 3-4). Rather than (only) confronting systemic, global problems by transforming their own lifestyles, in a hands-on, human-scaled community approach, the plenitude practitioners I met in Cambridge have tried to create a localised, sustainable economy from the ground up, in a way that resembles a decentralised yet broadly correlated approach to collective problem-solving (Thompson and Press 2014, 130). Constant discrediting, mistrust and disenchantment with political institutions discouraged them from taking on institutional reform. Instead, they built parallel institutions or looked at alternative routes of change (Bennett et al. 2013, 544). They retreated from political activism to civic politics for different reasons, such as getting discouraged by political setbacks or because their efforts made them unhappy, like Susan's experience (she was the co-ordinator of a community garden):

I am deeply concerned about environmental and peace issues and was doing a lot of political activism and protests. I was getting absolutely fed-up with shouting "NO". Progress was so slow and I was becoming very negative because of all the protesting. I realised that I needed to reduce that aspect of my activism and look at other ways of changing the world. The community garden I'm involved with now is a positive way of saying 'YES'. I have a knowledge base in gardening and environmental biology and can take positive action by using my knowledge. Gardening with and enabling others to create a wildlife friendly and productive garden whilst creating a closer community, is one way I can make the world a better place. Our community garden shows

²⁶Informal conversation with Luca, 5th March 2017

2.4. “Gardening with others is the way I can make the world a better place” — Civic engagement as site of political expression

that working together has distinct advantages. It’s about growing - growing local organic produce, friendships, environmental awareness and a strong community.²⁷

During my time in Cambridge, I got involved with several SFVOs, such as a CSA scheme, surplus food projects, growing projects and community gardens. Through these localised alternative communities, as consumers, citizens enacted changes of practice and ‘did politics’ in everyday life in a way that does not necessarily relate to the hegemonic understanding of the consumer as market participant or citizen as political actor (Wahlen and Laamanen 2015, 401). So rather than looking to top-down solutions from politicians, the diversified actions of these plenitude practitioners generate new assemblies of technology, lifestyle practices, human capital and social relationships mediated by the market. They were convinced that these actions were a more likely driving force for a more sustainable and emotionally rewarding economic system (Thompson and Schor 2014, 234).

One way I saw research participants who were passionate about sustainable food organising themselves to make the changes they wanted to see was through SCMOs. SCMOs can be defined as social movement organisations which incorporate political consumerism to achieve environmental and social change. They do this primarily by mobilising citizens through their purchasing power. The market is their main ‘battlefield’, where members associate the act of buying with expressing broad social and political preferences (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140-143). There is still a ‘scholarly blind spot’ in terms of investigating these groups. This is because they do not easily replicate common understandings of ‘lifestyles’ that are individually oriented and ‘social movements’ that are more organised and collectively oriented (Haenfler et al. 2012, 1-2). At the political level, SCMOs experiment with innovative environmental regulatory governance models based on voluntary action and engagement, aiming to encourage a way of acting (Forno and Graziano 2014, 152) that promotes a more sustainable food system. Whilst an SCMO’s function varies, they share some common cultural and organisational traits in terms of their attitudes towards consumption and the primary targets of their actions (ibid., 143-144), which I will illustrate using the example of one of the longest-running food SFVOs in Cambridge: Cambridge FarmShare, a small-scale CSA scheme. CSA schemes are SCMOs due to their locally focused, alter-consumerism nature (ibid., 154). Cambridge FarmShare is run as a partnership between Transition Cambridge and Tulley Organic Farm. Transition Cambridge is part of the Transition Town movement. In 2005, Rob Hopkins co-founded the first Transition Town in Totness (UK), and it has grown to be a worldwide

²⁷Semi-structured interview with Susan, 23rd April 2017

2.4. “Gardening with others is the way I can make the world a better place” — Civic engagement as site of political expression

phenomenon. The grass-roots movement arose in response to the growing concern about climate change, environmental degradation and the near end of finite non-renewable resources (Connors and McDonald 2010, 558-561). This movement, inspired by the ideas of permaculture, aims to transform communities into self-reliant and resilient local units in order to work with the direct and indirect challenges of peak oil and climate change (Kenis and Mathijs 2014, 172). Due to their local anti-consumerism character, Transition Towns are SCMOs, too (Forno and Graziano 2014, 154). Emma was one of the volunteers I often met on the farm; she had been part of Cambridge FarmShare since day one. It is Emma’s voice I use in the following explanation of SCMOs, taken from conversations we had whilst weeding, planting and harvesting vegetables on the farm on several Saturdays over the course of my fieldwork.

The first cultural trait of SCMOs originates from the Global Justice Movement’s focus on environmental and social justice concerns. Their view is that current standards of consumption are unsustainable, and that the main focus on price reduction of products undermines labour standards and emphasises exploitation of workers (*ibid.*, 143). This attitude was central to how Cambridge FarmShare’s founding. Emma told me:

In the Transition Foodgroup, we all agreed that the industrial food system was damaging the planet and people. We realised that without getting involved with growers, we couldn’t justify the line that we wanted to make a change to the food system in general and the food culture in Cambridge in particular. We wanted to scale our work up and integrate the food chain more, basically make a connection between garden fork and kitchen fork.²⁸

Second, SCMOs criticise mass production and instead favour small-scale production, guarantee workers fair profits and limit the retribution of intermediaries throughout the value chain (*ibid.*, 143). Emma explained:

We wanted to support a local farm and get involved in some direct trade. So we got in touch with the Tulley Organic Farm, an organic veg- and fruit-growing business just outside Cambridge. That was 2011. We found out that their organic food box scheme was struggling. There was a lot of competition from better financed box schemes on a national level that took over small ones. Tulley Organic Farm was dedicated to local and seasonal food,

²⁸Informal conversation with Emma, 4th March 2017

2.4. “Gardening with others is the way I can make the world a better place” — Civic engagement as site of political expression

but that didn’t match the mainstream market expectation for box schemes anymore. It was an opportunity for us to help.²⁹

Third, SCMOs support local producers and/or community projects, and are also concerned about the transnational distribution of life opportunities and wealth (ibid., 143). Emma expressed this as follows:

Together with Tim, the farmer, we came up with this scheme which we are really excited about. They make their farmland available for volunteers to use; we have fortnightly working sessions on Saturdays. In exchange, volunteers help plant, weed, and harvest the farm’s crops. They can take away freshly picked veg or fruit available on the day. We also always have a bring and share meal back at the farmhouse. It is Transition’s most successful long-term project to date.³⁰

Fourth, beyond the capitalist market setting, SCMOs try to encourage on-going and direct producer-consumer relationships, or even co-production (ibid., 144). In Emma’s words: “For us, the social exchange is really important. So that we as consumers can create and maintain a connection with real, local food growers. And also that we can engage in the growing process alongside farmers.”³¹ Finally, SCMOs cultivate a reciprocal solidarity between producers and consumers (ibid., 144). Emma told me:

The days on the farm are great fun; they are social days, really. I liked the people on the farm, Tim and the other volunteers that got involved, and that’s why I stayed. When you work alongside each other on the land, it’s such a good way to make friends and to develop bonds, isn’t it? For me, this scheme is all about organised actions and networks which aim to support a different form of consumption.³²

However, what puzzled me was that, whilst the decision taken by many research participants (including Emma) to get involved with SFVOs in Cambridge was civic-minded and entailed a shared sense of responsibility to bring about change, they kept asserting that what they were doing was not political (Dobernig and Stagl 2015, 456).

²⁹Informal conversation with Emma, 25th March 2017

³⁰Informal conversation with Emma, 25th March 2017

³¹Informal conversation with Emma, 6th May 2017

³²Informal conversation with Emma, 29th April 2017

2.5. “Our project isn’t political” — Resolving contradictions of political engagement through ‘disavowal of the political’

2.5 “Our project isn’t political” — Resolving contradictions of political engagement through ‘disavowal of the political’

Instead of opting for the conventional political route, research participants chose the civic route of engagement to make changes around sustainable food. I soon came to realise that they were not thinking of themselves as ‘political’ (Dobernig and Stagl 2015, 456). According to Bennett et al. (2013, 530), it is common amongst those who engage in civic life to say that what they do is not political. During my fieldwork, I often heard how SFVOs distanced themselves from politics: “We don’t care about politics!” — “We don’t do politics!” — “Our project isn’t political!” were statements I regularly heard and documented. I found there to be different reasons for this marginalisation of the political. One was, as pointed out earlier, research participants’ disbelief that politics actually change can anything, as Lee, a volunteer in a seasonal cookery project, expressed: “We’re not that interested in politics. Also that is not the way things mainly get done.”³³ Others, like Leo, quoted at the start of this chapter, despised politics due to its divisive nature and preferred to bring about change from a ‘community perspective’. I also came to understand that some SFVOs feared being political as they understood politics to be an obstacle to the workings of democracy if it were to serve the public good. The signifier ‘political’ was often attributed to the people and processes that favoured particular interests (Bennett et al. 2013, 531 and 534). Some worried about their work having politically left-wing connotations, like Amy, a volunteer at Cambridge FarmShare: “Sustainable food shouldn’t be a political issue, but I feel it’s often perceived as such. I wish it was perceived quite aside from party politics, because it makes it much more difficult. It means it is associated with entrenched values.”³⁴ Others feared that being political would be detrimental for their project, such as Peter, the co-ordinator of the Surplus Food Project: “We take a conscientious decision not to get political. If you start to express political leaning, that’s not good for your group, you might deter potential volunteers.”³⁵ Some groups found it beneficial not to be political. They avoided political affiliations and stances as they believed this would enable their community action to be more broadly based and less divisive (Hébert 2014, 70).” Being ‘non-political’ or making ‘non-politically-motivated decisions’ was about being community-minded, working for the general good and embodying public spirit. In this way, these SFVOs rejected and also actively redefined the political. They put civic participation forward as an antidote to political action, which they saw as favouring private interests (Bennett et al. 2013, 534-535).

³³Informal conversation with Lee, 22nd March 2017

³⁴Informal conversation with Amy, 7th April 2017

³⁵Semi-structured interview with Peter, 20th February 2017

2.5. “Our project isn’t political” — Resolving contradictions of political engagement through ‘disavowal of the political’

Some SFVOs thought not being political would raise their profile. Georgina, a volunteer at Feast With Us explained: “Project work is important to us, it shows we’re doing something on the ground. It gives us a high profile. That’s how we’re pulling in more people. If we were political, and tried to influence policy making, our profile would surely be lower.”³⁶ Others thought not being political allowed them to be more inclusive, such as Phoebe, a volunteer at a community garden: “At the outset, we adopted the policy of not being political. We’re not favouring some parties or politicians over others, and also don’t criticise any of them. The decision was made on the grounds of inclusivity. We want people from all political persuasions to be comfortable with us.”³⁷ Others echoed that not having a political identity allowed them to work with a more diverse audience, such as David, a volunteer at Feast With Us: “It is crucial not to be seen as being political or coming from a specific angle like, for example, the Green Party. We are trying to create a neutral identity so we can get involved with many different people and organisations, but without identifying with one specific identity.”³⁸

So how is it possible for these SFVOs to deny that their commitment is political? Bennett et al. (2013) give an explanation using a concept which they call ‘disavowal of the political’ (p. 543). Disavowal is a stance which claims the possibility of living entirely separately from the political sphere (ibid., 531). This disavowal does not necessarily reflect apathy or withdrawal from political life (ibid., 529). By drawing on the cultural sociology concepts of denegation, boundary making, and role distancing they show how civil society members engage in public life in spite of their scepticism of mainstream political processes (ibid., 543). To explain how ‘disavowal of the political’ works, they refer to Bourdieu (1994). He linked disavowal (denegation) to a ‘cultivated disinterestedness’ or ‘disinterested interest’. By disavowing the political, citizens cultivate a political disinterest while simultaneously actively engaging in politics (p. 522). Civil society members draw boundaries between the political and themselves to create a positive identity and to gain legitimacy and trust in the eyes of others. Consciously or unconsciously, they disavow politics in order to distance themselves from the stigma associated with the perceived nature of political actors, such as politicians. This way, disavowal can be understood as a form of role distancing, not showing a real separation from politics but instead a distancing from what is political (polluted) which in turn establishes what is civic (good) (ibid., 531-532). Personally, I perceive the work of SFVOs towards a localised utopian vision of a more sustainable society, whilst not being party political, as deeply political indeed (North 2010, 591), as it rejects the status-quo and instead tries

³⁶Semi-structured interview with Georgina, 7th April 2017

³⁷Semi-structured interview with Phoebe, 15th March 2017

³⁸Informal conversation with David, 2nd April 2017

2.6. “It’s by little touches that we can make change” — Considering the potential for change triggered by personal and civic politics

to bring about positive change. However, whether or not personal and civic politics can indeed bring about change is debated.

**2.6 “It’s by little touches that we can make change”
— Considering the potential for change triggered
by personal and civic politics**

Critics doubt that personal and civic politics can bring about positive change. Some argue that these endeavours preserve ethnic and class privileges, as participants are often white, affluent and from a middle-class background (Lekakis 2013, 60). Indeed, Lisa, a long-time volunteer in one of the city’s community gardens, told me: “Our project grew from the middle-class. We are actually all educated, middle class, mainly white sort of people, aren’t we? We occasionally get people coming who are homeless or who are in trouble and don’t have any money. But they don’t stay. They come once, have a look around, and probably think, ‘middle-class cliquiness.’”³⁹ Others argue that these actions offer an acceptable gloss on market relations processes whilst diverting attention and energy from more organised collective action (Craig 2019, 174). Indeed, many research participants were happily occupied with their community projects. For example, David, a volunteer at Feast With Us, told me one day as we were laying the table for a large community meal:

When I came to Cambridge, I knew about this project. I liked the idea: first, we collect surplus food from local supermarkets, then we cook delicious three-course meals and serve them to members in need in the community. We have immediate results. We not only save surplus food that otherwise would get thrown away, but we also help out people in food poverty. It’s by little touches like these that we can make change. Also, I know I don’t have infinite time, so I want to concentrate on one project only.⁴⁰

Others worry that these endeavours suppress the potential of citizens to tackle inequality and decrease their ability to address the most challenging social problems and hence to radically transform society (Bennett et al. 2013, 542), by avoiding political matters and focusing on a more personal, low-key level (Hébert 2014, 90-91). Indeed, many research participants focused on positive ways to engage and shied away from bigger, more daunting issues. For example, Amy, a volunteer at Cambridge FarmShare, told me: “Our project isn’t about petitions and negotiations with Councillors and marches and protests. It is about positive and creative action. We try to do whatever

³⁹Informal conversation with Lisa, 15th March 2017

⁴⁰Informal conversation with David, 26th March 2017

2.6. “It’s by little touches that we can make change” — Considering the potential for change triggered by personal and civic politics

possible while the politicians do nothing.”⁴¹ Stolle and Micheletti (2013) partly blame the various doubts regarding lifestyle politics and political consumerism on the deficiency of systematic empirical studies into extra-parliamentary political participation and individual political responsibility (p. 43-44 and p. 57-58).

However, some researchers point to positive changes which personal engagement or lifestyle politics can bring about. To name two: on the one hand, using direct strategies, change in lifestyle is thought to lead to social change, either by focusing on one’s own lifestyle, or by focusing on mobilising the general public to make lifestyle changes. On the other hand, in indirect strategies, attempts to change one’s own or others’ lifestyles are coupled with additionally creating or enlisting leverage from companies or political authorities to make demands for change on a broader scale (De Moor 2017, 182-183). Other researchers point to positive changes which civic politics can bring about. For example Axon (2017, 19-20) states that community-based sustainability projects are a useful approach to facilitate, maintain and increase the uptake of sustainable lifestyles in the long-term. Craig (2019, 185) points to an enrichment of people’s personal and social lives, as by participating in group engagements, relationships are fostered and genuine friendships built. According to Thompson and Press (2014, 140), practical methods of political consumerism, such as involvement with a CSA, reskill the consumer-citizen’s consumption practices and support them in gaining a greater sense of personal effectiveness in the face of daunting global problems. Forno and Graziano (2014, 152) assert that political consumerism endeavours, if co-ordinated, can create alternatives for consumers which are capable of replacing the provision of sizeable retailers, which frequently lack conscience in their dealings with small producers. Having observed and joined in with different forms of civic political action during my fieldwork, having witnessed how enthusiastically and in how many different ways research participants tried to contribute to a sustainable food system, and how their actions made a difference to people around them, I found Thompson and Schor’s (2014, 245-246) reflections particularly enlightening and convincing. They argue that while all acts on a personal level — for example, following a vegan diet like Lea — or on a civic level — for example, being involved with a CSA like Emma — might seem innocuous, or worse still, to reproduce the dominant market system, these acts and projects should be seen as a whole. However, by drawing on Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s notion of the ‘rhizome’, which is “a botanically inspired trope of social resistance and transformative potential,” we can see the potential for change stemming from the accumulation of numerous small initiatives, a sort of underground root structure without centralised leadership. What they believe

⁴¹Informal conversation with Amy, 7th April 2017

eventually leads to exceptional social transformation is an interconnected revolution, the entirety of heterogeneous, localised nodes in the rhizomatic web. Still, it is vital to recognise and combat the broader structural issues and injustices that permeate the global economy through organised political action. Plenitude is neither a universal cure nor a replacement for wider political participation. But politics based on practical objectives rather than on ideals does not have to be a domain of either-or absolutism.

2.7 Reflecting on citizens' turn to personal and community politics

In this chapter, I have scrutinised how research participants and SFVOs, who cared deeply about sustainable food, did not, for different reasons, interact with the City Council. The reasons for the missing interaction were rooted in a lack of faith in the Council and in politics in general to tackle sustainable food challenges. On the one hand, these 'plenitude practitioners' (Schor and Thompson 2014, 3-4) tried to bring about change through personalised politics, that is, lifestyle politics (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005, 254) such as political consumerism. On the other hand, they tried to bring about change through civic politics, such as through engaging with SCMOs — social movement organisations which incorporate political consumerism, to achieve environmental and social change (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140-143). Through a 'disavowal of the political', they were able to see their actions as non-political (Bennett et al. 2013, 543). Their engagements led to social transformation in the form of an interconnected revolution, that is, as an entirety of heterogeneous, localised initiatives in a rhizomatic web (Thompson and Schor 2014, 245-246). I raised the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the Council as matter of concern to show that it did not provide a foundation from which to establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership. In the next chapter, I will explore how other SFVOs did indeed interact with the Council — mainly through the Sustainable City Grants — and how this interaction, which happened within entrenched structures, led to an unequal power balance in favour of the Council, therefore also not providing a solid foundation from which a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership could be democratically established.

Chapter 3

Interaction between SFVOs and the City Council — An exploration of unevenly distributed power

It was a warm afternoon, the glaring sun shining through the window into Lorene's spacious living room. With the sun shining on her face, Lorene was lying flat on her back with outstretched arms, her long blonde hair tousled, her eyes closed. "Are you okay?" I asked her anxiously. Lorene was a powerhouse. A young mom of two, she was the chair and the main driving force behind GardenShare, a voluntary initiative which linked growers with local garden owners who were happy to share, and see their gardens being used more productively. I had met Lorene many times over the weeks, but I had never before seen her like this. She sighed deeply: "I'm tired! I don't want to do the GardenShare map!" I asked Lorene how it had come to this and she explained: "The map with local people willing to share their gardens was a good reason to apply for the Council's Sustainable City Grants. I couldn't find any other money for GardenShare. The Council doesn't give you money for the same thing like it did before. I was hoping to combine the idea of a GardenShare map with our Skillshares workshops, where we provide people with basic gardening skills. So we could still educate people in food growing. And to get enough funding from the Council to pay somebody else to do the GardenShare map. But the Council gave us less money than we asked for. I don't want to be doing any project delivery anymore! I don't know what to do. I'm tired ..!" Lorene sighed deeply again.⁴² A few days before I found Lorene lying spread-eagled and exhausted on her living room floor, Caroline, the Council officer responsible for the funding pot the money came from, told me: "Every

⁴²Observations and informal conversation with Lorene, 27th April 2017

3.1. “I don’t know what to do, I’m tired” — An introduction

year we want something different, something new for the Sustainable City Grants. It is a start-up fund, it generally doesn’t get rolled over to the next year. If you prove your project works and makes a difference, then somebody else comes in to mainstream it.”⁴³ When I asked Caroline how she thought the SFVOs experienced the Council’s grant system, she said: “I think they are obviously very appreciative of the Council’s funding.”⁴⁴ I was puzzled — her and Lorene’s opinions were diametrically opposed. How could it have come to this?

3.1 “I don’t know what to do, I’m tired” — An introduction

As a result of implementing neoliberal policies, the City Council’s involvement with sustainable food has shifted from direct delivery to contributing towards SFVO projects (Paley 2002, 483-484). This was mainly done through the Council’s Sustainable City Grants. However, the interaction between the SFVOs and the Council, due to their conflicting agendas, was often unstable and had messy outcomes, or involved, as Tsing (2005, 3-12) put it, friction. The running theme of this chapter is the interaction between SFVOs and the Council, which mainly took place through the funding process of the Sustainable City Grants. The central argument is that this interaction took place in entrenched structures, leading to an unequal power balance in favour of the Council. However, the Council officers, who were implementing the policies, as well as the SFVOs, who were increasingly dependent on this funding stream, maintained a certain level of agency. The message I try to convey is that the interaction between SFVOs and the Council did not provide the solid foundation necessary for the egalitarian establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership.

From 2010, in the name of austerity, Britain started to implement neoliberal policies of reducing expenditure (Davey 2017, 8-9) which had a negative effect on local authorities, and on their discretionary services in particular (Whitten, 2019, 205). I will show how the City Council started, how mostly through grants, to redistribute sustainable food efforts to SFVOs (Davies 2011, 643). Through the lens of neoliberal governmentality, I will illuminate how the effects of the Council’s funding strategy impacted on SFVOs (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 13) and highlight mechanisms through which the Council wielded its power (Buckingham 2009, 239). Next, I will argue that the Council applied a market-driven logic to their grant system

⁴³Semi-structured interview with Caroline, 24th April 2017

⁴⁴Semi-structured interview with Caroline, 24th April 2017

3.2. “They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff” — Grant funding in a neoliberal context

through private sector measures, by using indicators and quantified outcomes to compare projects and measure their effectiveness (Le Galès 2016, 508-509 and 516). However, I will demonstrate that despite the uneven power balance, SFVOs were ‘active subjects’ (Morison 2000, 119) who made use of their agency amongst other things by resisting some aspects of the Council’s power (Brady 2014, 32). Then, I use the concept of isomorphism to demonstrate how the SFVOs’ dependency on Council funding and the Council’s funding requirements (Leiter 2012, 1040) put various pressures on them (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 467). Finally, I elaborate how the opacity of the vague, inscrutable, and irrational bureaucracy of the Council handed power to its bureaucrats — Council officers — who became gatekeepers, controlling the dissemination of information and resources (Hoag 2011, 82). On the one hand, the SFVOs’ motivations for this interaction and the experiences they had will become clear. On the other hand, it will become clear why the interaction between SFVOs and the Council failed to provide a solid foundation from which to jointly establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership.

3.2 “They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff” — Grant funding in a neoliberal context

The state and civil society are not separate, enclosed entities, but rather are strongly intertwined (Nelson 1999, 102). This entwinement in Cambridge was most evident at the point where the local government — the Council — and the SFVOs had most reason to interact: funding. This is an interesting entry point, as funding is highly revealing of political intentions, connections and alignments (Heyman 2004, 492). Neoliberalism is particularly well suited to start to understand this interaction. Depending on the perspective, neoliberalism can seem to mean many different things (Ong 2006, 1). According to Ferguson (2009, 171), many anthropologists use neoliberalism as an abstract causal force, namely as a synonym for capitalism, or for “the world economy and its inequalities.”⁴⁵ However, I use neoliberalism in an ideologically and theoretically charged way to critique the Council’s modes of governance (Ganti 2014, 92-93) in their interaction with SFVOs around funding. Between the post-WWII period and the late 1970s, the state agencies in the UK largely dominated the voluntary and community sector by planning, funding and providing the majority of social security, social wel-

⁴⁵Whilst neoliberalism and late capitalism share certain assumptions, such as that markets are more efficient than the state, they differ significantly in manifold ways, such as in their genealogies and ideological connotations. Through the lens of neoliberalism, a good society cannot be “natural,” instead, it can only be reached through “a concerted political effort and organisation” (Ganti 2014, 92-93).

3.2. “They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff” — Grant funding in a neoliberal context

fare, and other ‘public’ services (Cairns et al. 2005, 869-870). From the 1980s, neoliberalism gathered pace (Crouch, 2011, vii). Entangled in wider neoliberal processes, cities came under pressure to stay competitive, both nationally and globally (Coulson and Sonnino 2019, 178). The focus shifted to ‘less government’, that is a move from public provision to private markets and from collective to individual responsibilities (Crouch, 2011, vii). From 2010, in the name of austerity, Britain implemented neoliberal policies of reducing (social) expenditure⁴⁶ (Davey 2017, 8-9). Under austerity in Britain, cuts had a negative effect on local authorities and their discretionary services in particular (Whitten, 2019, 205). Councils controlled by the Labour Party — Cambridge being one of them — were hit particularly hard by austerity with significant reductions in spending power (Berry and White 2014, 3). As a result, the Council’s core grant from the government, which was £5.6 million in 2014, has since been reduced to zero. With fewer resources, the Council thus had to deliver services in a new way (Cambridge City Council 2017a).

As the local government became increasingly unable or unwilling to fulfil their obligation around sustainable food, they instead created the conditions for SFVOs to take responsibility (Paley 2002, 483-484), as they were seen to have expertise and experience in this area (Davies 2011, 643). All Council officers I met during my research were struggling in the light of an increasing lack of financial resources. As a result, their focus shifted away from direct delivery to adding value to existing projects. Katy, a Council officer who worked in the area of health and wellbeing, told me that:

Sustainable food is an area where the Council would like work to be done. A lot of our work is about knowing what is happening in the city and how we can add value to things rather than starting something afresh. That’s quite a light touch in a way, but that’s the nature of what we’re doing nowadays. It’s kind of doing as much as possible with as little as possible as quickly as possible.⁴⁷

Rose, a Council officer, told me that the Council’s work on sustainability, including food, suffered particularly hard from shrinking financial resources:

Within the Council, we had something called Cambridge Sustainable City, that was three years ago. We had a sustainability

⁴⁶Analytically, there is a difference between austerity and neoliberalism. They differ in terms of the way policies are justified: whilst neoliberalism presumes that the stepping back of the state allows people to prosper, austerity claims that the state has overspent and must therefore tighten its belt. However, these justifications are often used for the same government actions (Davey 2017, 8-9).

⁴⁷Semi-structured interview with Katy, 27th February 2017

3.2. “They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff” — Grant funding in a neoliberal context

officer, who was involved in a whole range of initiatives. As government funding started to dry out and the Council contracted, that post was lost. Some Council officers were asked to pick up and cover some of the work. Some didn’t have a background in sustainability and had little sustainability knowledge, really.⁴⁸

So, as the Council started to retreat from the provision of public services, it began to redistribute tasks to SFVOs by using the logic of the competitive world market (Paley 2001, 3). Contrary to the national trend, the Council did not outsource sustainable food efforts through contracting, but mainly by offering grants to SFVOs. According to Neil, an Opposition Councillor, this can be traced back to neoliberal practices: “If the Council gives grants, they can forget about it and leave it. They don’t want to have an officer who needs to spend time managing it and evaluating it. They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff.”⁴⁹ This practice led to increased worry that, in the words of Jude, a GardenShare volunteer: “the Council might feel that the community does all the things needed and that they, the Council, don’t have to do anything.”⁵⁰

In these times of austerity, SFVOs increasingly experienced difficulties obtaining funding from other sources, and hence increasingly depended on the Council. However, they had to compete for a share of the diminishing pot of Council funding (Coulson and Sonnino 2019, 175), which made the community sector environment increasingly competitive. This aggravated divisions within the sector and prevented SFVOs from being local allies in trying to change the current societal issues (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 474). In the words of Oscar, the sole Green Councillor — we met through an SFVO which he co-ordinated in his free time: “The funding for a lot of organisations comes from the same pot of Council money. The organisations are competing with each other to get that funding. That’s a sad situation. I can’t change that, I have no power, with one vote out of 42.”⁵¹ Lana, a volunteer at GardenShare, confirmed this perspective: “People think of NGOs, charities and community groups as being all nice and cuddly and to the greater benefit of the planet, but they are as competitive and as ruthless as the politicians. Because everybody is struggling to get funding to survive. And if they’re all in the same city, like here in Cambridge, that intensifies the competition.”⁵² Indeed, several SFVO leaders stressed the importance of the Council funding. If they could not get Council funding for some of their projects, these simply would not happen. In some cases, not being

⁴⁸Semi-structured interview with Rose, 26th March 2017

⁴⁹Semi-structured interview with Neil, 29th April 2017

⁵⁰Informal conversation with Jude, 12th March 2017

⁵¹Semi-structured interview with Oscar, 13th April 2017

⁵²Informal conversation with Lana, 16th March 2017

3.2. "They would rather someone in the voluntary sector stresses out about that stuff" — Grant funding in a neoliberal context

able to obtain Council funding even led to existential problems, like those experienced by Edible Spaces. Operating since 2011, this SFVO reclaimed over 18 unloved and underused public spaces around the city and, by using edible landscaping, transformed them for everyone to enjoy. At the beginning of my research, the group was struggling with a decline in its numbers of volunteers. They saw a promotion film as the most promising way to recruit new volunteers, but their funding application with the Council had just been declined, and they could not find other funding. Whilst we were weeding a raised bed next to a busy road one Saturday morning, Elly, the project co-ordinator, who was clearly upset, told me: "Surely, what we are doing is in the interest of the Council, isn't it?" She raised her voice, trying to drown out the noise of passing cars: "Sadly, we couldn't find other funding. And we can't just get one of our volunteers to make this film, it needs special skills, which are very different from gardening. Also, it needs a lot of time, it just wouldn't be fair not to pay anyone to do this work."⁵³ This conversation happened a week before Elly left the city for good. After she left, no-one put themselves forward to co-ordinate the project. Some of the long-standing volunteers thought about finding another group in the city to take over the project, or even bringing it to an end and abandoning the growing spaces that had been lovingly cared for by volunteers for years.

However, it was not just the difficulties in obtaining funding from the Council that had manifold negative effects on the SFVOs. As SFVOs began filling the void left by the Council (Harvey 2007, 171) their involvement in service provision made boundaries between them and the Council more fluid and uncertain (Morison 2000, 102) and led to their complicity in the local government's power (Paley 2002, 483-484). Lorene, the chair of GardenShare, experienced this personally. The project — partially financed by the Council — linked garden owners with no time with enthusiastic gardeners with no garden. One morning, Lorene found herself in a live interview with a local radio programme. The moderators started questioning whether the money spent on GardenShare, for a handful of people, was a legitimate way of spending tax payers money. Lorene was taken by surprise and tried to evade the question, but later told me frustratedly: "Why do they ask me? They should ask the Council! They decided to fund this project, it is their choice and their money!"⁵⁴ This exemplifies how, by outsourcing their responsibilities to local SFVOs, the Council was held less accountable for their decisions, which in turn led to increased public pressure on SFVOs. Another issue was that the Council grants came with various conditions, which put increased pressure on SFVOs. I witnessed a number of SFVOs struggling with these conditions. Therefore, I am going to show how the interaction

⁵³Informal conversation with Elly, 8th April 2017

⁵⁴Informal conversation with Lorene, 9th May 2017

3.3. “This is what we are asked to do, so we do it” — Neoliberal governmentality at play in monitoring and reporting processes

around funding for sustainable food exemplified neoliberalism working as a ‘technology’ of government, reconfiguring the interaction between the governed — the SFVOs — and the governing — the Council [...] “as an active way of rationalising governing and self-governing in order to ‘optimise’” (Ong 2006, 3). I am going to use Foucault’s (1978, 19) concept of (neoliberal) governmentality to illuminate the difficulties that arise from this interaction.

3.3 “This is what we are asked to do, so we do it” — Neoliberal governmentality at play in monitoring and reporting processes

Whenever I asked Council officers about the Council’s involvement with sustainable food, and whenever I asked SFVOs about their involvement with the Council, I was referred to the Sustainable City Grants, one of the only remnants of the lost Cambridge Sustainable City efforts, which Luke, a Strategy Officer, had told me about. £30,000 per year was allocated to this funding pot, which was co-ordinated by the Climate Change Officer. Once a year, SFVOs could express their interest in getting money from this funding stream. However, this grant system was shaped by neoliberal processes. I do not understand neoliberalism as a monolithic concept — rather, it is heterogeneous in form, contingent on context, and cannot be reduced to a single type (Dean 2015, 363). There are different approaches to understanding neoliberalism, such as policy framework, as dominant ideology, as culture or as governmentality (Brady 2014 16-17). To better understand the funding interaction between SFVOs and the Council, seeing neoliberalism through the lens of governmentality is particularly enlightening — also because voluntary organisations have received limited attention in debates concerning governmentality (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 470-472). Governmentality has the capacity to render neoliberalism visible in some ways. However, to avoid using governmentality as a ‘cookie-cutter’ typification or explanation, and to avoid assuming that it provides a sufficient account of neoliberalism’s nature, or an explanation of its existence (Rose, O’Malley and Valverde 2006, 97-98), I am also going to make use of other concepts when analysing the interaction between SFVOs and the Council. Not only does governmentality help to understand the effects of the Council’s funding strategy on SFVOs (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 13), but it also reveals a power imbalance by highlighting mechanisms through which the Council exerted its power (Buckingham 2009, 239).

But what is governmentality? In Foucault’s writings, the term first appeared in the Collège de France lectures of 1978 and 1979 as *gouvernementalité*. It originates in the French adjective *gouvernemental*, and is one of his central

3.3. “This is what we are asked to do, so we do it” — Neoliberal governmentality at play in monitoring and reporting processes

concepts (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 1). Governmentality is “the contact between the technologies of the domination of others and those of the self [...]” (Foucault 1978, 19). In other words, it encompasses the — social and political — forces that steer individuals’ behaviours and attitudes (Buckingham, 2009, 245). Governmentality helps to understand the intersection of the SFVOs’ agency with the Council’s influence (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 470-472). Looking from Foucault’s (1979) perspective of governmentality, SFVOs were bound both by their ties to the Council of control and dependency, and also by the ties of their own identity (by a conscience or self-knowledge) (in Lyon 2011, 223). So whilst the SFVOs found themselves in (funding) structures determined by the Council, they were not just powerless victims but still had their individual agency. However, power between SFVOs and the Council was unquestionably unevenly distributed. To grasp this uneven power distribution, neoliberal governmentality is particularly useful, which, according to Ong (2006, 4), stems from the infiltration of market-driven calculations and truths into the domain of politics: “In contemporary times, neoliberal rationality informs action by many regimes and furnishes the concepts that inform the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness.” It was in an interview with Rose, a Council officer, that I realised that this market-driven logic appeared in the Council’s grant system. She told me: “For the Council now, if time and money is being invested in a project, they want to see evidence of outcomes and how the money is spent. So rather than having a talking shop of people with good intentions and ideas to change the world, there needs to be a practical plan how they’re going to do that.”⁵⁵ This market-driven logic appeared in the Council’s grant system in the form of private sector measures, such as quantifying outcomes and using indicators with the aim of comparing submitted projects and measuring effectiveness. I see the indicators and quantification of outcomes as technologies employed by the Council, associating knowledge and power (Le Galès 2016, 508-509 and 516).

Whilst issues around measuring outcomes, as well as the dominance of managerial arrangements have been influencing SFVOs for some time (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 480), performance indicators have significantly increased since the turn of the millennium (Le Galès 2016, 514). Measurable outcomes and the use of indicators were an integral part of the funding process of the Sustainable City Grants, as Caroline, the Climate Change Officer, explained:

I’m trying to be quite rigorous with what we’re expecting for that funding. We want outcomes that we can measure. We help

⁵⁵Semi-structured interview with Rose, 26th March 2017

3.3. “This is what we are asked to do, so we do it” — Neoliberal governmentality at play in monitoring and reporting processes

community groups interested in the funding with the monitoring of objectives, drawing up what it is that they’re going to do, and try to tie their efforts down to measurable outcomes we can monitor throughout the year. At six months, and at the end of the full year, I ask them to report to let us know how they spent the funding.⁵⁶

So, the Council’s measuring of the applicants’ reported efforts is mostly based on quantitative methods, such as measurable indicators. It might be beneficial for SFVOs to identify tangible outputs and outcomes, something some people active in SFVOs would like to do. Ollie, a volunteer at Feast With Us, told me: “There is no analysis whether what we are doing is creating any impact.”⁵⁷ He was questioning whether what he was doing in his free time actually created some change, and therefore would have welcomed measurable outcomes of the community initiative’s work. However, through the perspective of governmentality, monitoring and reporting can be understood as ‘technologies’ for exerting power at a distance. This happens by normalising specific preferred approaches or procedures (Buckingham, 2009, 245). Caroline’s explanation about the use of measurable outcomes indicates that whilst outsourcing responsibility to SFVOs, the Council maintained its authority in a reconfigured mode. It did this by constraining the activities of the SFVOs, although not through rigid discretionary limits. Instead, it obtained leverage indirectly through means of regulation, such as performance targets, monitoring practices and resource constraint (Allen 2004, 26). Another issue is that measurements and quantification are not neutral (Le Galès 2016, 516), which is why they are surrounded by growing debate. For example, often only the elements of particular interest are measured. Also, information provided by indicators focuses on issues they were designed to measure (Prosperi et al. 2015, 29-30).

The Council went a step further, as the co-ordinators of the Healthy Food Initiative, Hillary and Robin, experienced. They applied for a Sustainable City Grant to create a programme of community events designed to help those on low income overcome barriers to accessing healthy, sustainable eating. After volunteering for their events over some weeks and getting to know Hillary and Robin, they agreed to let me attend their meeting with the Council to discuss their funding application. It was then that we found out how rigid the funding criteria were. It turned out that the only possible fit for the community events achieving funding priority was “Reducing consumption of resources, increasing recycling and reducing waste.” And the only possible fit for a specified outcome was “Increase reuse and recycling,

⁵⁶Semi-structured interview with Caroline, 24th April 2017

⁵⁷Informal conversation with Ollie, 13th April 2017

3.3. “This is what we are asked to do, so we do it” — Neoliberal governmentality at play in monitoring and reporting processes

and reduce general waste produced by residents or businesses.” During the meeting, Caroline, the Climate Change Officer, did not just strive to make the project outcomes measurable, but also introduced new elements, in order to match the project with the Council’s funding priorities and outcomes. Being aware that without the funding, they would not have been able to run the project, Hillary and Robin reluctantly agreed to the adjusted funding agreement they were nudged towards, which had as its new main outcome: “Participants gain knowledge about how to prepare low-cost, healthy food in a way that reduces food waste, and have the confidence to apply this at home.” When I interviewed Caroline shortly after, she told me: “We help grant applicants as far as we can, because if they’re going to be delivering something we want delivered, we’ll try and assist them in any way we can, really.” Whilst Caroline clearly saw her efforts in a positive light, Hillary and Robin were quite frustrated. After leaving the Guildhall, where the meeting took place, Hillary complained: “The people we’re working with have no money to throw away food. Surely, the more wealthy people are the problem in terms of food waste! The Council mixes up low income work with environmental work. It doesn’t make sense.” Robin added: “But this is what we are asked to do, so we do it.” Whilst volunteering at one of the community events, I witnessed how Myriam, the facilitator, struggled with addressing food-waste issues. Myriam was clearly very self-aware, and later told me that she shared the co-ordinators’ uneasiness, and that the focus on food waste was demotivating for her.⁵⁸ This incident demonstrates how, in the neoliberal landscape, the Council found itself increasingly incapable of supporting vulnerable citizens and hence outsourced this work to SFVOs through the Sustainable City Grants. On the one hand, it shows that through neoliberal governmentality, the Council’s funding criteria and policy instruments led to the imposition of objectives and mechanisms based on private market logic (Le Galès 2016, 514). On the other hand, it showcases how the Council’s funding processes discouraged SFVOs from creating holistic project frameworks entirely suited to their aims (Costas Battle, Carr and Brown 2017, 863). This had a negative impact on volunteer or staff motivation, as experienced by Myriam, and, in the worst case, might have led to increased retention issues (Buckingham 2009, 245).

Another issue that became evident through my fieldwork was that the values of many local initiatives were neither quantifiable nor measurable (Dunn and Riley 2004, 637), and were hence at odds with the neoliberal values of the Council’s funding system. When I asked Jude, the co-ordinator of an urban garden, what their project was all about, she explained: “Our urban garden is a way to educate people in a different way of working. Rather

⁵⁸Observations, 9th May 2017

3.4. “We are feeling relieved about stopping the whole process” — An example of resistance to neoliberal governmentality

than as an individual, you work as a community. It’s also creating an environment where people are comfortable with themselves and nature. So making an oasis from the badness of the world, in a way.” Jude was looking for funding to extend the garden. After a sunny morning weeding several raised beds, Jude sat down together with two long-standing volunteers to work on the application form for a Sustainable City Grant. Jude had been made aware by a friend that only if they could demonstrate their impact, would they have a chance of obtaining Council funding. So here they were squatting between colourful raised beds, surrounded by tall trees and carefully pruned berry bushes, fresh soil under their fingernails, racking their brains as to how they could twist parts of what they did in order to try to match the purpose of the community garden, with the rigid Sustainable City Grants criteria.⁵⁹ They were trying to find a way to demonstrate their social worth, to transform their holistic approach into measurable outcomes, likely to satisfy the Council’s expectations which were dominated by a marketised, corporate vocabulary (Costas Batlle 2017, 360). This is an example of how neoliberal governmentality pushed SFVOs towards pursuing their interests through a framework of an economic rationality (Morison 2000, 119). However, it is important to acknowledge agency when trying to understand neoliberal governmentality (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 482). One way that SFVOs’ agency emerged was by resisting some of the Council’s pressures in the funding process.

3.4 “We are feeling relieved about stopping the whole process” — An example of resistance to neoliberal governmentality

During my research, I witnessed that neoliberal governmentality is not a simple top-down, one-way process but rather that SFVOs were ‘active subjects’ who could shape it (Morison 2000, 119). The funding processes uncovered gaps where the agency of SFVOs, amongst others, could emerge in the form of resistance against some aspects of the Council’s power (Brady 2014, 32). This is only natural, and echoes Foucault’s (1978, 95) words: “Where there is power, there is resistance.” The concept of resistance can be interpreted in many ways. In the example I am going to put forward, I understand resistance as opposition to the Council’s efforts (Bröckling, Krasmann and Lemke 2011, 19), manifested as peaceable retreat. During my research, I spent many Sunday mornings in Preston Park Edible Garden, one of the most beautiful community gardens in town, with raised beds, a forest garden, a beehive, a polytunnel, and so much more. It was a true oasis to which volunteers had tended for many years. One day, Elizabeth, a volunteer at the

⁵⁹Observations and informal conversation with Jude, 12th March 2017

3.4. “We are feeling relieved about stopping the whole process” — An example of resistance to neoliberal governmentality

garden, excitedly told me that she and other volunteers were contemplating building a tea hut in the community garden and that they had turned to the Council’s Sustainable City Grants for help. However, they got referred to another of the Council’s funding pots, the Community Facilities Grants — they could not quite remember why. Eventually, Preston Park Edible Garden was awarded a grant of £15,000. When I met Elizabeth for an interview, she told me in length what had happened:

We have decided to refuse the grant from the Council, it has been a while coming. We are feeling relieved about stopping the whole process. During the application process, we had quite a few discussions with Lucie Taylor, a Strategy Officer, and the application became less formal. We don’t know how our vision for a tea hut built by the community got so out of hand, but one step at a time it turned into a centre built and run by us for the wider community, a sort of mini community centre. We felt that the additional people coming were not going to be good for the garden and that the organisational work was not good for the gardeners. It was too difficult to adhere to what they wanted back from us. We couldn’t commit to long-term monitoring, and tie the garden to the commitment of making the hut available for 500 hours per year for five years, for free or for donations. Then there was the payback clause. If we didn’t stick to the agreement, we would have been personally liable to pay back money. After three years it still would have been £6,000. Given that we are a community group, we might not exist in three years’ time. If some of us moved or left the garden then the remaining core members would be personally liable for the bill even though they didn’t instigate the project. When, after a lot of organisational work, you’ve got the money sitting there and available, it is tempting. But our worry was that the tea hut project, as it ended up being in the final proposal, put our group and the garden at risk. We will start building a much smaller tea hut in autumn if people are still up for it. We hope to use recycled stuff as much as possible and will need to start finding a bit of funding.⁶⁰

Elizabeth made it clear that she understood how the Council had to ensure value for money but that during the funding process it had become clear that the Council’s grant system and stipulations were poorly designed for helping small voluntary groups:

When requirements for giving a grant are designed for quite structured groups and small businesses rather than small community groups. This is a real shame as it is small loosely run voluntary

⁶⁰Semi-structured interview with Elizabeth, 7th May 2017

3.5. “Would we report what didn’t work? Of course not!” — Isomorphism at play in monitoring and reporting processes

groups like ours which build up communities, create a diverse range of amenities and improve the city’s environment at almost no cost to the Council. We’re trying to find other grants in Cambridge. I don’t know if we’ll get it or not, but we don’t feel under intense pressure anymore.⁶¹

It seemed that with the tea hut project, Preston Park Edible Garden experienced how, through their grant system, the Council tried to outsource responsibility to SFVOs. Preston Park Edible Garden wouldn’t have been allowed to charge groups for using the hut. Looking at the grant process, it looks like the Council wanted to bend this hut project into a free public meeting space, with minimal financial and no actual physical input from their side, which they could then name as free meeting space they’ve supported. Whereas the Council did not offer free or cheap meeting spaces available to the public. The expenditure of some local community groups had increased over the years, partly because they had to start to pay for the use of Council community rooms which they could previously use for free (Support Cambridgeshire 2018, 9). Preston Park Edible Garden serves as an illustration of an SFVO that did not play by the rules of the Council by not fulfilling their expectations. The SFVO resisted the Council’s power by dismissing the funding with the requirements it would have entailed (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 472 and 477), so that they could keep the secluded nature of the garden and give people the space to garden in peace. This example illustrates neoliberal governmentality’s complexity as more than just a simple top-down force (Costas Batlle 2017, 361-362). Another way I noticed the unequal power balance stemming from the interaction between SFVOs and the Council through the Sustainable City Grants manifesting itself was through isomorphic processes (Kontinen and Onali 2017, 2).

3.5 “Would we report what didn’t work? Of course not!” — Isomorphism at play in monitoring and reporting processes

Isomorphism changed the SFVOs by making them more similar to each other, or in other words, more homogenised (Kontinen and Onali 2017, 3). Isomorphic processes in SFVOs can be traced back to political influence (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, 150), and are particularly strong where dependency and dominance (coercive isomorphism), uncertainty and ambiguity (mimetic isomorphism), and involvement with experts (normative isomorphism) are intense (Leiter 2012, 1040). All of this can be seen in Cambridge in the interaction between SFVOs and the Council. As demonstrated earlier, many SFVOs depended on the Council’s funding and were subject to its

⁶¹Semi-structured interview with Elizabeth, 7th May 2017

3.5. “Would we report what didn’t work? Of course not!” — Isomorphism at play in monitoring and reporting processes

power once they entered the funding process. I observed SFVOs looking up to others who managed to attract a considerable amount of funding from the Council, trying to learn from their success. And, once SFVOs entered the funding process, they found themselves involved with the Climate Change Officer who, as an expert in the field, advised the applicants’ projects. The more SFVOs transacted with the Council, the more homogeneous they became among themselves. It was, amongst other things, the standardised performance, reporting mechanisms and funding requirements which exerted pressure on SFVOs and seemed to lead to isomorphism, as SFVOs increasingly adopted the structured procedures of the Council, who funded their projects (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 151 and 157). This homogenisation could have led to disadvantages for SFVOs. By resembling the bureaucratised Council and becoming more similar to each other, they ran the risk of losing their variety, innovation and creativity and ultimately their ability to respond to minority needs and preferences (Leiter 2008, 69). The Council did not directly experience the consequences their actions had on SFVOs (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 150), amongst other reasons because their interaction was not based on trust and transparency, as I am going to show. Hence, they were not aware of their influence on SFVOs.

The most prevalent isomorphic process I witnessed during my fieldwork was coercive isomorphism. Using the experiences from my fieldwork, I will reflect on this kind of isomorphic process only. This will allow me to give a bit more of an in-depth account. The SFVOs’ dependency on Council funding and the political influence of the Council’s funding requirements (Leiter 2012, 1040) led to an enforced change of SFVO activities, or in other words, to coercive isomorphism (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 467). As demonstrated earlier through the example of the Edible Spaces project, which, by not being able to obtain Council funding experienced existential problems, SFVOs struggled to find alternative funding sources. The Council, strong due to their control of the financial resources, coerced the SFVOs — which were clearly weaker, as dependents on the Council’s funding — to adopt their guidelines and requirements. Some SFVOs felt this pressure as persuasion, others as force. Some changes in the organisation of SFVOs were a direct response to the Council’s requirements. As demonstrated by the Healthy Food Initiative, that ended up fulfilling the Council’s own priorities by focusing their community events on food waste, the SFVOs substantial dependency on Council funding led to SFVOs resembling the Council, on whose resources they depended (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 150 and 154). As a result, there was limited space for individual responses to making sustainable food more of a characteristic in Cambridge (Kontinen and Onali 2017, 3). Also, the coercive pressure to narrow the focus of their activities may have dissuaded SFVOs from being innovative, leading to a culture

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within SFVOs of focusing on meeting a narrowed range of dictated outcomes. The requested values and demands duly became part of the SFVOs’ activities, and organisational operation. This demonstrates the prevalence of isomorphism and its altering effects (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 474). However, as soon as SFVOs no longer felt constrained by the possibility of the Council’s force, the threat of force and hence the coercive pressure vanished (Allen 2004, 25).

A survey carried out by the Charity Commission (2007) revealed a potential cause for concern in that receiving funding from (local) governments might have a negative impact on SFVOs’ independence and governance, for example, SFVOs being reluctant to criticise the policies of their funders for fear of losing funding. Indeed, during my research, I experienced how SFVOs made use of self-censorship, manifesting the coercive pressure exerted by the Council (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 475-477). In the context of the interaction around funding between SFVOs and the Council, I understand self-censorship as SFVOs controlling what they share with the Council to prevent repercussions, without being officially told that such control is necessary. (“SELF-CENSORSHIP — Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary” 2020). During my fieldwork, only on three occasions I was told stories with a disclaimer that I could not use them in my thesis — even though I was completely transparent that all information would be anonymised. All three research participants were involved with SFVOs who received funding from the Council. And all these stories were criticisms of the Council. If they were not willing for me to use their stories anonymously, the chances of them openly criticising the Council was even more unlikely. There was a second way I saw self-censorship taking place.

Whilst SFVOs might have been nudged into funding interactions with the Council due to limited funding opportunities in times of austerity, they voluntarily subordinated themselves and acquiesced to the Council’s funding and monitoring system. However, entering into direct interaction with the Council led to increased coercive pressure (Allen 2004, 25) through discipline, which was part of the local government’s strategy (Morison 2000, 120). Once the SFVOs agreed to the funding terms, they found themselves in a disciplinary context, where any deviant conduct revealed through the monitoring system may have been punished (Löwenheim 2008, 258-259). By signing the terms and conditions of the Council funding, the SFVOs agreed: “I understand that if we have not met all the terms of the funding agreement, including the need to send additional information/documents, payment may be withdrawn” (Cambridge City Council, 2017b). These sanctions can be read as examples of coercive isomorphism. Most SFVOs I met that applied for Council funding were volunteer-led. Not having any financial

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resources was their main reason for applying for the Council’s funding in the first place. Had they lost funding halfway through implementation, the volunteers would have had to cover the costs out of their own pockets. Once SFVOs had started to implement their project, they were not only deterred from breaking the funding agreement — even if circumstances changed and a different type of intervention became more appropriate — but also made use of self-censorship so as not to risk losing their funding (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 474). Kate, the chair of a surplus food project, looking back on their experience of Council funding, told me:

There was this real threat that we might lose the funding if things had gone wrong. Would we report what didn’t work? Of course not! Also, I felt there was no opportunity to learn from mistakes and to improve from there. The Council wouldn’t have supported us in putting this into practice anyway. They don’t continue funding the same projects. So what’s the point in telling them what didn’t work?⁶²

This example shows that, as the Council was mainly interested in success stories, when reporting performance and outcomes SFVOs succumbed to coercive isomorphic pressure, which shaped discourse and reporting, and repressed transparency around project failures. This led not only to a limited understanding on the Council’s part as to how the projects were run and prevented the public from understanding how the Council took on its responsibilities, but also hampered discussion of failures and mutual learning opportunities between SFVOs themselves and, ultimately, collaboration between them (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 475-476). Another angle from which the unevenly distributed power between SFVOs and the Council revealed itself was through bureaucracy — a necessary part of any modern democracy (Bernstein 2017, 31).

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Bureaucracies not only shape political processes, they also shape and control other human beings. Bureaucracies are instruments of power, which take on lives of their own (Heyman 2004, 488-489). Bernstein and Mertz (2011, 7) suggest that anthropologists should view bureaucratic administration as an opportunity to observe social life and political action, processes and dilemmas. The power perspective on bureaucracy is particularly valuable since it reveals the interfaces between SFVOs and the resource-controlling Council (Heyman 2004, 490). Along with neoliberal governmentality and isomorphism, bureaucracy especially revealed itself in the Council’s arrangements

⁶²Informal conversation with Kate, 18th April 2017

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for monitoring, reporting and evaluating their funding streams. Bureaucracy seemed to aim to make the implementation of the funding objectives more effective (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 469), whilst it also helped the Council to control the range of risks associated with outsourced responsibilities (Tomkinson 2016, 187). This was confirmed by Caroline, the Climate Change Officer: “I try and get people to tie down what they’re going to do and make sure it is effective and has lots of benefits.”⁶³ However, the requirements to demonstrate economic efficiency and the accurate delivery of the funded projects placed high demands on SFVOs in terms of bureaucratic processes (Cairns et al. 2005, 870). Furthermore, reporting requirements could clash with the achievement of desired outcomes. Reporting requirements were a burdensome time commitment, leading to staff and volunteers investing an increasing amount of time overseeing and implementing reporting requirements instead of delivering services (Tomkinson 2016, 189). In all the funding agreements I was party to, no extra money was made available for monitoring and reporting. Hence, it was the SFVOs who had to bear the costs — mainly time and energy — of these activities. This is not uncommon: according to research by New Philanthropy Capital in 2013 in the United Kingdom, nearly two-thirds of charities said their funders were not paying for impact measurement (Kail, Van Vliet and Baumgartner 2013). These accountability systems were implemented by low-ranking ‘programming’ employees or volunteers who experienced and suffered from the imperfect fit between quantified measures and qualitative work (Wright 2013, 82).

When bureaucrats — the Council officers — and non-bureaucrats — the SFVOs — interacted, I noticed that they both brought along their own understandings and practices. SFVOs were not simply passive recipients of bureaucratic action, but rather played an active role — despite the unevenly distributed power (Heyman 2004, 492). Once funding had been awarded, the SFVOs faced a choice: if and how to comply with the Council’s rigorous funding and reporting requirements. It was one of the instances where their agency could unfold. On a rainy Tuesday evening, I attended the trustee meeting of Food Climate Factor. The purpose of this SFVO — I participated in its activities many times throughout my fieldwork — was to advocate the reduction of the carbon footprint of food. That evening, I not only witnessed how burdensome the Council’s monitoring and reporting requirements were for SFVOs, but also how SFVOs made use of their agency in response. As Lydia, the chair, proudly presented the Sustainable City Grants agreement with the Council, the trustees praised her income-generating achievement. However, Alice, the co-ordinator, was the person who was actually going to implement the project. Alice was a strong, enthusiastic woman in her early

⁶³Semi-structured interview with Caroline, 24th April 2017

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thirties who full-heartedly invested a lot more time into her work than she was paid for, because she believed she could make a difference. It was only at that meeting that she found out about the Council’s reporting requirements, one of which was to separately record all the work hours spent on the project. The requirement was added by Caroline, the Climate Change Officer, who was concerned with making the most of the funding and trying to ensure that the time invested by the SFVOs led to satisfying results for the Council. The funded project was only one of four projects Alice was delivering. The thought of having to follow this Council requirement brought actual tears to Alice’s eyes, in front of the trustees, the committee and myself. With a quavering voice, Alice declared that she would find it virtually impossible to separate all hours spent from those spent on other projects. She explained how tasks from different projects were often intertwined and regularly needed simultaneous attention. The trustees, however, insisted that the Council’s requirement had to be followed. Lydia was well aware of how invested Alice was in her work and how pivotal she was to the Food Climate Factor’s success. After the meeting, Lydia took Alice aside. They agreed that writing down an estimated hour would do. Lydia promised to cover for Alice and to support her should any problems ever arise. So the chair, Lydia, agreed a pact with the co-ordinator, Alice, in order to manage the Council’s bureaucratic requirements and to make them bearable, concealing her decision not only from the trustees, but also from the Council.^{64,65}

Having experienced the strict implementation of funding policies, I was surprised when Neil, an Opposition Councillor, told me that: “[a] lot of the Council’s policies don’t seem to be written down, they ‘just do things that way’.”⁶⁶ In spite of them self-representing as rational and effective — or more likely because of this — bureaucracies are often the exact opposite. Whilst many of the Council’s rules and hierarchies were explicitly laid out, the Council as bureaucracy was vague, inscrutable, and irrational both for insiders — Council officers as well as Councillors — and outsiders — the SFVOs (Hoag 2011, 81-82). A recent survey revealed that the SFVOs in Cambridge lacked an understanding of the Council’s priorities and strategies. Only 45 per cent of local community groups reported that they had a good understanding of these. A scarce 11 per cent of the groups that helped the Council with delivery were involved in helping to set priorities and strategies in the area of their expertise. And less than 40 per cent reported a very good working relationship with the Council (Support Cambridgeshire 2018, 7). Hence, it does not come as a surprise that during my research, I did not meet a single SFVO who easily understood the Council’s structure,

⁶⁴This can also be interpreted as an act of resistance.

⁶⁵Observations, 18th April 2017

⁶⁶Semi-structured interview with Neil, 29th April 2017

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who said they had a good, long-lasting relationship with a Council officer, or who found it easy to get help from the Council. These are just a few of the comments I have heard from SFVOs: "I've always found I needed to go through people at different levels, and then they change. It can be quite hard to know who in the Council is the right person to talk to. Usually, in any e-mail I send I go 'This is the question, are you the right person? Or else, do you know who is?'" (Elly, project co-ordinator at Edible Spaces)⁶⁷ "There have been several occasions where I've been forwarded to somebody else who has been entirely unresponsive, even after several approaches. Things that go to the Council often just dead-end." (Janet, co-ordinator of Garden-Share)⁶⁸

The Council feels very impenetrable to me, so difficult to find a way into. There are two things that constantly happen. First, the guy who is responsible for allotments has only one day a week allocated to work on community gardens. So there is a limited resource availability. And second, the accountability of the Council is not very transparent, so who is responsible for what? (Suzy, volunteer at Preston Park Edible Garden)⁶⁹

All Council officers I met, in one way or another perceived it as difficult for SFVOs to get connect with the Council. One reason given was the limited resources: "It can be hard to get in touch with the right people at the Council, we're busy and understaffed, same as everywhere,"⁷⁰ Paul, a waste manager, told me. Or in the words of Charlie, a Council officer: "The Council being a big organisation, it might be frustrating at times that things work slower than they should."⁷¹ However, the Council did not seem to be well connected internally, either, as people within the Council also faced difficulties in finding their way through. Neil, an Opposition Councillor, explained: "FairShare wants to set up a warehouse to distribute surplus food to local organisations. I asked an Executive Councillor if there is a Council building that could be used. It took me several referrals until I was passed to the Executive Officer for Property, head of the Council estates. He said 'maybe, but not right now'. That was it. Very vague."⁷² Even Council officers working in similar fields sometimes did not meet. Katy, a Council officer who worked in the area of health and wellbeing, told me: "At a sustainable food event organised by a local community group, I recently met a guy that was

⁶⁷Informal conversation with Elly, 28th April 2017

⁶⁸Informal conversation with Janet, 18th April 2017

⁶⁹Informal conversation with Suzy, 23rd March 2017

⁷⁰Semi-structured interview with Paul, 2nd May 2017

⁷¹Semi-structured interview with Charlie, 5th May 2017

⁷²Semi-structured interview with Neil, 29th April 2017

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from the Council, too; he works around food waste. It's a really obvious thing but we haven't met up, our paths haven't crossed before."⁷³

Charlie, a Council officer, told me that he felt he had no power and rather just executed the Councillors' orders: "The concerns of the local Labour government influence their expectations and aims. As Council officers, we have to follow and do as we're told."⁷⁴ However, I have come to see that it is not the case that some parts of the Council make decisions and Council officers merely carry out those decisions in a mechanical, routine way. Actual bureaucrats in real bureaucracies, just like citizens in all kinds of other environments, make decisions constantly, communicate with others, and surpass their own power (Bernstein and Mertz 2011, 7).

The opacity of the Council's vague, inscrutable, and irrational bureaucracy handed power to bureaucrats — they became gatekeepers who controlled the dissemination of information and resources. The Council officers, as bureaucrats, embodied the spirit of this unpredictable bureaucratic creature. They were at the same time inanimate — lazy automatons, blindly serving the Councillors' powers — and animate — nefarious, selfish obstructionists (Hoag 2011, 82). The implementation of rules and policies to real cases always involves interpretation. Specific rigidities and blindnesses are not just random products of bureaucratic dumbness, rather, they reveal broader power structures (Heyman 2004, 493). Since idealised laws and regulations are never precise enough to suit a local context, it is the Council officers' responsibility to interpret them (Hoag 2011, 82). As anthropologists, we should pay special attention to how bureaucrats do their work, especially in the grey area between official policy and unofficial discretion. This can give clues to wider political structures and governing ideologies (Heyman 2004, 489). Despite encountering helpful Council officers, some members of SFVOs experienced structural barriers to successfully navigate this grey area. Claire, the coordinator of an SFVO, told me about her experience with a Council grant application. She explained that a Council officer was helpful in advising the SFVO in its application for a Council grant and seemingly enthusiastic about Claire's proposal. However, some aspects of the project did not meet criteria required by another Council department to realise the project. The grant officer seemed relaxed about bending the rules as this would benefit both the SFVO and the officer's departmental aims. In fact, the grant officer was offering a larger grant than the SFVO had applied for. Claire suspected that there was a deadline by which the grant funding had to be spent and that it might be easier to give away the money in big

⁷³Semi-structured interview with Katy, 27th February 2017

⁷⁴Semi-structured interview with Charlie, 5th May 2017

3.7. Reflecting on power relations between SFVOs and the City Council

chunks to projects that ticked all the boxes. However, Claire was not given assurance that this bending of the rules would not be detrimental to the project's success. In other words, Claire was uncertain whether the grant officer had achieved interdepartmental agreement. If not, the project could have failed and Claire's SFVO would have had to pay the Council back the value of the grant. Claire did not get this assurance and was hesitant to complete the Council's grant application process. Luckily, she was able to find external funding, so Claire could avoid the risks associated with interdepartmental conflict within the Council.

Through this application process, Claire experienced how the grant officer became a gatekeeper who controlled the implementation of the Council's grant process (Hoag 2011, 82) and how the grant officer interpreted or, as Claire put it, 'bent' the grant rules and turned a blind eye to certain requirements. However, Claire did not experience this rule-bending as beneficial and suspected there were departmental interests for doing so (Heyman 2004, 493).

3.7 Reflecting on power relations between SFVOs and the City Council

In this chapter, I have scrutinised how, in times of austerity, through the implementation of neoliberal policies, the City Council increasingly outsourced its sustainable food efforts to SFVOs (Paley 2002, 483-484), mainly through the Sustainable City Grants. The main interaction between SFVOs and the Council took place through these grants, with the Council in the dominant role of grant giver and the SFVOs in the subordinate role of grant applicants and receivers. The SFVOs' motivation for applying to this funding stream and subsequent increased dependency on it was that in times of austerity, in a neoliberal landscape, other funding opportunities had started to dry up. Analysed through the lenses of neoliberal governmentality, isomorphism and bureaucracy, it became clear that the Council's monitoring, reporting and evaluating arrangements, which aimed for efficiency and accountability, put various pressures on SFVOs (Cairns et al. 2005, 870). SFVOs clearly experienced the uneven distribution of power in favour of the Council. However, whilst struggling with, amongst other things, administrative burdens and a change of focus and purpose of activities, the SFVOs were not just powerless. Instead, they made use of their agency (Heyman 2004, 492) in order to protect themselves and to make the requirements bearable. The Council being at some levels, inscrutable to both insiders and outsiders, handed power to bureaucrats, the Council officers. Council officers did not just blindly carry out political decisions, but had agency themselves (Bernstein and Mertz 2011, 7) and became gatekeepers who interpreted the idealised laws and regulations

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(Hoag 2011, 82), at least at times to their own advantage. As suggested by Hoag (2011), rather than 'debunking' the bureaucratic processes which led to this unequally distributed power, I reframed the interaction between SFVOs and the Council as a matter of concern (p. 89), to show that it did not provide a solid foundation from which to jointly establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership. In the next, final chapter, I will return to the central and subsidiary questions of my thesis to discuss the findings of my research and draw some conclusions.

Discussion and conclusion — Learning from the (lack of) interaction between SFVOs and the City Council

First, the summary and conclusion provide a brief summary of my findings and answers to the central and subsidiary research questions. Also, I point to the scientific contribution of this research as well as the relevance of anthropology in this research context. Next, the broader implications and recommendations show how this research, striving for democratic relevance, potentially contributes to particular change with regard to social reality. Finally, I point towards issues which could not be unpacked here due to the limitations of this research, and make suggestions how they could be explored in future research.

4.1 Summary and conclusion

Inspired by my keen interest in the collaboration between sustainability endeavours and food, in this thesis I have set out to understand the factors limiting the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership in Cambridge (UK). To do so, taking my limited research time into account, I narrowed the focus and sought to answer the following central research question: *How does the (lack of) interaction between SFVOs and the City Council in Cambridge (UK) affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?* My research revealed that neither the lack of nor the actual interaction between SFVOs and the Council provided a solid foundation from which to establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership in an egalitarian way.

On the one hand, the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the Council did

not provide a foundation from which to establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership (*Subsidiary question 1: How does the lack of interaction between SFVOs and the City Council affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?*). The reason is that due to a lack of faith and a mistrust in the Council and politics in general to tackle sustainable food challenges, citizens and SFVOs did not interact with the Council (*Subsidiary question 1.1: What are citizens' and SFVOs' reasons for the lack of interaction?*). One way they tried to bring about change was through personalised politics, that is, lifestyle politics (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti 2005, 254), mainly through political consumerism (Forno and Graziano 2014, 140), such as by following a vegan diet or boycotting certain products. Another way they tried to bring about change was through civic politics such as by engaging with SCMOs. An example of a social movement organisation which incorporates political consumerism to achieve environmental and social change (ibid., 140-143) I encountered in Cambridge was a community-supported agriculture scheme which created opportunities for collaboration between farm and community. In either case, citizens and SFVOs generally did not see their actions as political (Dobernig and Stagl 2015, 456), which was possible through a 'disavowal of the political', that is, by cultivating a political disinterest, drawing boundaries between the political and themselves, and by distancing themselves from the stigma associated with mainstream politics (Bennett et al. 2013, 522-532). It seems apparent that their efforts led to social transformation in an interconnected way, or in other words, they were able to bring about change as part of an entirety of heterogeneous, localised nodes in a rhizomatic web (Thompson and Schor 2014, 245-246) (*Subsidiary question 1.2: How do citizens and SFVOs express their political convictions instead?*).

On the other hand, the interaction between SFVOs and the Council did not provide a solid foundation from which to jointly establish a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership, either (*Subsidiary question 2: How does the interaction between SFVOs and the City Council affect the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership?*). In times of austerity, Britain implemented neoliberal policies to reduce expenditure. The Council's funding cuts led them to outsource their contribution to sustainable food through their Sustainable City Grants, whilst funding opportunities for SFVOs started to dry up. In turn, SFVOs increasingly depended on this funding stream (*Subsidiary question 2.1: What are SFVOs' motivations for the interaction?*). The interaction through the Sustainable City Grants took place within entrenched power structures with the Council in the dominant role of grant giver and the SFVOs in the subordinate role of grant applicants and receivers. The unevenly distributed power in favour of the Council put various pressures on SFVOs. Neoliberal governmentality revealed how the Council's funding priorities and policy instruments allowed the imposition on SFVOs of

objectives and competitive mechanisms, based on private market logic (Le Galès 2016, 514). These had a negative impact on SFVOs, such as discouraging them from creating holistic project frameworks entirely suited to their aims, if they were largely immeasurable (Costas Batlle, Carr and Brown 2017, 863), or if they did not fit the Council's funding criteria. In the interaction around funding, SFVOs were exposed to coercive isomorphic pressures, such as sanctions for deviant conduct (Löwenheim 2008, 258-259), which, amongst other things, shaped SFVOs' discourse and reporting activities and repressed transparency around project failures (Milbourne and Cushman 2014, 475-476). However, the SFVOs were not completely powerless and instead made use of their agency, for example through resistance (Brady 2014, 32). The Council's monitoring, reporting and evaluating arrangements, which aimed for efficiency and accountability, placed high demands on SFVOs in terms of bureaucratic processes (Cairns et al. 2005, 870). Also, the opacity of the vague, inscrutable, and irrational bureaucracy of the Council handed power to bureaucrats — Council officers — who became gatekeepers, controlling the dissemination of information and resources, at times to the disadvantage of SFVOs (Hoag 2011, 82) (*Subsidiary question 2.2: What are the SFVOs' experiences of the interaction?*).

As stated in the introduction, this thesis makes a scientific contribution in two ways. On the one hand, it is relevant in the societal context in two ways: first, the findings of this ethnography provide a stepping-stone to establishing a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership in Cambridge, by pointing to the barriers to doing so. Second, food, as well as (local) partnerships are essential parts of the SDGs, which is why the understanding of barriers to partnerships around sustainable food is a valuable contribution. On the other hand, this thesis is relevant in the academic context in two ways: first, it is a contribution to emergent research into barriers to the establishment of cross-sectoral sustainable food partnerships and, to my knowledge, is unique in being an ethnographic study on this theme in the UK. Second, I have used different key concepts and perspectives to interpret my fieldwork, ranging from 'lifestyle politics', 'political consumerism', 'Sustainable Community Movement Organisations', 'disavowal of the political' and 'rhizome', to 'neoliberalism', 'neoliberal governmentality', 'resistance', 'isomorphism' and 'bureaucracy'. As they have aided understanding in this thesis, other researchers might find them useful in similar explorations, too.

This research illustrates that anthropologists are particularly well-equipped to fill the gap in research of something non-existent, that is, to render the invisible visible and to bring the non-existent into existence. I remember well how puzzled I was at the beginning of my research: I tried to find out how to research something that did not exist in my chosen location — a citywide

collaboration of sustainable food initiatives. Anthropology is quite intimate, which allows for personal engagement with the people and communities being studied (Scheper-Hughes 2004, 42). Participant observation, a key method of anthropology and of this research, paves the way for trustworthy relationships (Sluka 2012, 137). It was through ethnography, by using different methods and by being on the ground, getting involved through direct and social contact with SFVOs, Councillors and Council officers over three months (Willis and Trondman 2000, 5), that the barriers I tried to understand came into view. This allowed me a deep insight into and understanding of the issues at hand. I hope this thesis will contribute positively not only to the 'academic world', but also to the 'real world', which brings me to ...

4.2 Broader implications and recommendations

As set out in the introduction, I strived for my research to have democratic relevance (González and Stryker 2014, 9), and I see my role as an anthropologist as one with the potential to achieve particular change with regard to social reality (Scheper-Hughes 2004, 42-44). In this spirit, this thesis carries a hopeful message. On the one hand, it revealed that plenitude practitioners — citizens with a lack of faith in and a mistrust of the Council and politics in general — expressed their sustainable food convictions through personalised and civic politics, without getting involved with the Council. On the other hand, this research not only revealed unevenly distributed power between SFVOs and the Council, and how this posed a barrier to the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership, but also, it revealed that the Council was not aware of the effect its policies and their execution had on SFVOs. Sharing this thesis with Council officers and Councillors will hopefully aid the Council's understanding of the loss of opportunity posed by citizens and SFVOs who did not interact with them, as well as of the effects the outsourcing and managing of their sustainable food efforts had on SFVOs. Sharing this thesis with SFVOs will hopefully aid them to gain a better understanding of the Council and the pressures it is subject to. On the one hand, I hope my thesis will be a wake-up call to the Council to engage with the energy which plenitude practitioners expressed through personalised and civic politics. On the other hand, I hope my thesis serves as a starting point for SFVOs and the Council to enter into discourse, listen to each other, learn to understand 'the other side', build trust and bridge differences to join forces in an egalitarian way and help Cambridge become a city recognised for its sustainable food. However, I suspect that my research will not contribute much to the understanding of other divides in the city which hinder the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership, which brings me to ...

4.3 Limitations and future research

There are a number of limitations to my research. First, I unfortunately did not have time to unpack issues surrounding other divides in the city, such as those between SFVOs and the local biotech companies or the University of Cambridge. In future research, a focus on these divides would allow for a more holistic understanding of barriers to a citywide sustainable food partnership. Second, this research has been conducted within a short period of three months and, therefore, only provides a snapshot of the research participants' attitudes and experiences. Future research could track the interaction of SFVOs and the Council over time to more directly link their attitudes and experiences. Third, due to my existing links in the community and my history of personal activism, I conducted participant observation only with SFVOs, whilst I have obtained information from the Council mainly through semi-structured interviews. Future research could also conduct participant observation with Council officers to get a more in-depth understanding of their perspectives and experiences. Fourth, I only had the time and capacity to explore barriers to the establishment of a cross-sectoral sustainable food partnership. My findings could serve as a basis for future research into how these barriers could be overcome. Finally, the local perspective of this research limits the generalisation of the results. However, the themes and concepts used in this research might well be applicable to other localities, and may aid future research in understanding similar issues in other places.

Appendix

5.1 What benefits do you see in a citywide sustainable food partnership?

Summary

Interviewees across all sectors saw a variety of benefits in a sustainable food partnership, including: greater visibility, better access to information, improved knowledge exchange, more sharing of ideas, more awareness-raising, greater efficiency, less duplication, increased collaboration, greater leverage and boosted motivation.

Quotes

Visibility

- “A partnership could get involved in local festivals and events and make the cause more visible to the community.” (public sector)
- “If all the staff and volunteers get more visibility, and are also valued more by people, their work hopefully gets more recognised. Then hopefully they will gain more momentum, they will grow, and reach out to more people. And people could get more involved and feel proud of their city and themselves.” (community sector)

Information

- “A partnership could help, no matter how large or small organisations are, to understand where people’s expertise is and what area they’re serving.” (public sector)

5.1. What benefits do you see in a citywide sustainable food partnership?

- “It would be like a collective of everything that is there, a one-stop shop.” (community sector)

Knowledge

- “A partnership would allow us to share best practice and knowledge.” (public sector)
- “There could be very useful and tangible knowledge sharing.” (community sector)

Ideas

- “When more people come together, you have more ideas and you can create different kinds of campaigns.” (public sector)
- “Sharing ideas is the main benefit. Usually, you don’t know that the café down the street has five bins and a monitor system to reduce their waste, unless you talk about it. That’s a benefit of bringing people together.” (community sector)

Awareness raising

- “The partnership might raise more awareness among the general public.” (private sector)
- “Lots of people don’t know about [sustainable food]. With a partnership, you can raise more awareness.” (public sector)
- “If people hear [about sustainable food] on different levels, they might become aware that they can make the change.” (community sector)

Efficiency

- “A partnership helps to make efficient use of people, time, space and resources.” (public sector)
- “The more people that you can involve from different sectors, the more you can hope to achieve, because people will look at it from different angles and perhaps that leads to something that you haven’t necessarily thought of, because you don’t know quite what other areas’ focus is.” (community sector)

5.1. What benefits do you see in a citywide sustainable food partnership?

Duplication

- “The partnership could help to avoid duplication.” (private sector)
- “That’s what everyone says is needed, so there isn’t duplication.” (public sector)
- “What we have in Cambridge now is a large number of small to medium-size organisations, which makes it very difficult to co-ordinate actions and consolidate activities. There is a lot of risk of duplication and activist burnout. A partnership could help with that.” (community sector)

Collaboration

- “If two small initiatives have a similar goal in one aspect of their work, enabling them to come together and work together is something a partnership could facilitate.” (community sector)
- “A partnership increases opportunities of working together.” (public sector)
- “A partnership might lead to an increase in organisations helping each other.” (community sector)

Leverage

- “Having [a partnership] that becomes more known means you can tackle problems together with more power.” (private sector)
- “More voices are better than one. Members can identify common issues and ways to tackle them collectively.” (public sector)
- “By focusing people’s efforts you can bring in additional resources, information and support, so you have the leverage for more change. You are also able to measure that change. And you have a really good story to communicate as well.” (community sector)

Motivation

- “Seeing what is going on [might give] people a boost to go further.” (community sector)

5.1. What benefits do you see in a citywide sustainable food partnership?

- “When you get lots of people together who are really passionate about a thing, really good things can come out of it. Sometimes you need that community to give individuals the confidence and motivation to actually start things up.” (public sector)
- “For some people it’s motivating to know that they are part of a bigger movement, to see evidence of what is happening in other sectors.” (community sector)

5.2 What is sustainable food?

Summary

Interviewees named a strikingly high number of different aspects around what they understood sustainable food to be, ranging from climate change and waste, to health and worker conditions, to fair pay and job creation. Some interviewees mentioned only one aspect of sustainable food, others named up to twelve different aspects.

- Analysed according to three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, societal, and economic), it stood out that across both sectors, interviewees associated sustainable food mainly with the environment. The social dimension received considerably less attention across both sectors and the economic dimension received the least attention.
- Not all interviewees understood how sustainable food links across all dimensions. For instance, one interviewee from the public sector said: “I’m not so clear about the impact on climate change and the environment, but there are elements there, too.”
- Some of the views contradict each other, also within sectors. For example in the public sector, whilst one interviewee said that sustainable food “avoids intensive farming and fertiliser use”, another thought that “[...] sustainable food doesn’t necessarily have to be organic”.
- Views on certain aspects differed. For example, in terms of meat consumption, some people from the public sector stated that sustainable food meant that “intensive animal farming is avoided,” whilst other people from the community sector said that sustainable food meant “reducing meat consumption”. Another example is the question of packaging. Whilst some interviewees from the public sector advocated “using good packaging, so not using plastic,” several interviewees from the community sector pointed to “reducing packaging”.

Overview

Analysed according to three dimensions of sustainability, interviewees associated sustainable food with the following aspects:

Environmental dimension

Climate change

- low carbon footprint
- reduced mileage
- low mileage

- mostly plants
- reducing meat
- using local farmers
- no shipping
- no air-freighting
- reducing dairy
- local food
- minimum greenhouse gas emissions

Soil

- organic
- not taking more than giving back
- regenerating soil
- reduced pesticides
- protecting soil
- respecting soil
- soil conservation
- maintaining soil fertility
- no monocultures

Seasonality

- seasonal food

Waste

- reducing waste along the food chain
- no waste of resources

Packaging

- minimising
- recyclable
- no plastic

General

- good for planet
- no water degradation
- no GMO
- minimising damage to environment
- no damage to nature
- limiting water usage
- protecting biodiversity
- keeping planet healthy
- protecting wildlife
- food from spade to plate being most beneficial to natural environment

Societal dimension

Health

- protecting health
- no pesticides
- nutritious
- good-quality food
- low in fat and sugar

Social conditions

- fairness towards producers
- supporting local farmers

Access

- food shared equally among the population
- healthy food available to all
- no food poverty

- access to decent food for future generations

Animals

- no intensive animal farming
- no harm to animals

General

- local network of growers creating a feeling of community
- conscientious about the impact on people
- good for people
- no harm to people
- joyful food
- sustaining current food systems for future generations
- increased self-sufficiency
- food from spade to plate being most beneficial to human beings and other creatures
- connection to growers for emotional relationship with food

Economic dimension

Fair treatment and pay

- fair pay
- financial support of local producers
- fair-trade

Profit

- profit for producers

Job creation

- creating jobs

General

- affordable food

5.2. What is sustainable food?

- support of sustainable food businesses
- supporting local producers to keep the local economy thriving, and reinvesting in the local economy
- opportunities for poor growers to sell locally

5.3. With what sustainable food initiatives are / were you collaborating?

5.3 With what sustainable food initiatives are / were you collaborating?

Summary

Across all sectors, interviewees collaborated with at least one other sustainable food initiative:

- Interviewees involved with the public sector collaborated with initiatives from all sectors (however, least of all with the private sector): with organisations from the public sector e.g. in terms of knowledge exchange; with organisations from the private sector e.g. in terms of advertising; with organisations from the community sector e.g. in terms of accreditation.
- Interviewees involved with the community sector mainly collaborated with initiatives from the private sector by receiving donations of food or money. But some were also involved with organisations from the community sector, e.g. through advertising, or jointly organising events.

5.4 What was the motivation?

Summary

Interviewees mentioned a number of motivations for collaborating with other sustainable food initiatives.

- In the public sector, interviewees emphasised that working with other organisations helped to reach the Council's goals — including that of becoming a sustainable city — was part of their responsibility. Other motivations included encouraging certain behaviours to bring awareness to local people, such as food growing, where food comes from or how to cook with fresh produce. Another was the need for expertise from other organisations.
- In the community sector, interviewees' motivation to collaborate centred around mutually benefitting and helping each other, as well as educating each other and promoting co-operation rather than competition. Another motivation mentioned was increasing visibility and reaching a new audience more effectively, pointing to benefits in outreach and publicity. Other motivations included saving money, and being credible in the aim of making a change to the local food culture.

Quotes

Public Sector

- "It's part of the Council's initiative to have a sustainable city. Part of the Council's work is to work with other organisations to reach their goals every year and to be part of a bigger initiative. It's very important that every council in the country works with green initiatives, because all councils have an aim and a quota that they need to fill. It should be part of their responsibility to do that work."
- "We've supported local small-scale allotment projects, gardening projects in our community centred on trying to encourage people to grow food."
- "We need the expertise of other organisations. All these organisations, I find them very helpful, and I can't be an expert in every area of catering, because there's just such a wide variety of things going on in catering that I need that help from various organisations at times."

Community Sector

- "Collaboration helps us to educate ourselves and each other."

5.4. What was the motivation?

- “The idea was to increase visibility and to reach out to people who haven’t heard about us [more effectively]. So there is a benefit linked to outreach and publicity.”
- “It’s about promoting co-operation rather than competition, it’s trying to break away from that competition, plus sort of individual spaces.”

5.5 What experience did you have?

Summary

- All interviewees had more positive than negative experiences of collaboration.
- Positive experiences of interviewees from the public sector included generating more ideas for different campaigns, benefiting financially by sharing costs, and prompt, efficient, and straightforward communication, which helped to make things happen. The only two challenges mentioned were that only liaising with green groups led to a limited view of the real issues, and that collaboration took a lot of time.
- Positive experiences of interviewees from the community sector included a manageable workload when collaborating with small initiatives, cost savings, the ability to resolve difficulties in the absence of competition, and interesting conversations which led to friendships. Challenges mentioned included the need for a lot of management, a lack of clear vision, and high workload, especially in terms of emails and reminders, as well as different time scales which made spontaneous collaboration difficult.

Quotes

Public Sector

Success

- “When liaising with [other food sustainability initiatives], we get more ideas to do different campaigns to spread the word better.”
- “I experience collaboration as generally rewarding or beneficial to my work. It’s always good in terms of finance and budget to be able to share and be able to collaborate. [We] save money in a lot of areas.”
- “Most [food sustainability initiatives] we collaborate with are prompt and efficient - if I send them an email they will get back to me, and that sort of thing.”

Challenge

- “When you collaborate only with other green groups it doesn’t always give you a realistic picture. We often see a lot of the same people [at the green events in the city], and we sometimes feel like we don’t really get to talk to anyone else, and everyone knows what we’re saying. When only liaising with green groups, [you] can get quite a limited view of the issues.”

5.5. What experience did you have?

- “Collaboration takes a lot of time and therefore is not always our main priority. We have lots of other priorities.”

Community Sector

Success

- “Most food waste initiatives [we are working with] are responsive.”
- “Collaboration works well for us where we have common ground and aims; where we define roles and responsibilities.”
- “The best way to have a working collaboration is when we work around one practical project with a start and end date. So we know what there is to do.”

Challenge

- “Collaborations require quite a lot of management, like all working relationships.
- “If there is no clear idea about how the collaboration should look, nothing will happen.”
- “It’s often quite a lot of work, a lot of emails and reminders. [Most] people are volunteers, it’s not their job, they don’t have a lot of time. With some people it works super well. Some organisations, I have to ask them week after week before we can collaborate. Or others say yes, but then I don’t hear from them; I find that quite hard. Then from others, I suddenly get so many emails that I can’t cope with them.”

5.6. What kind of citywide sustainable food partnership can you imagine?

5.6 What kind of citywide sustainable food partnership can you imagine?

Summary

- Across all sectors, most interviewees struggled to describe what kind of food sustainability partnership they could imagine in Cambridge, e.g.: “I think it’s hard to tell, ‘partnership’ is quite an abstract term.” (public sector) or “I don’t know. I can’t imagine it, because it doesn’t exist.” (community sector)
- Some interviewees were not sure if this partnership already existed, e.g.: “I don’t know if CSF does this partnership already. But if there is something in place, it is not visible enough.” (public sector)
- A few interviewees saw CSF as a partnership, e.g.: “I can’t imagine anything different to what is happening now, Cambridge Sustainable Food is a really great organisation.” (community sector)
- Across all sectors, interviewees had ideas in terms of co-ordination, communication and information, meetings, activities and venues.

Quotes

Co-ordination

In terms of co-ordination, several interviewees from both sectors mentioned that the City Council should take the lead, e.g.:

- “The Council could have a separate budget to pay a co-ordinator who could co-ordinate, and have a bigger focus on that.” (public sector)
- “Ideally, the Council would co-ordinate: they are key in delivering services and in bridging the gap between the community, businesses and university.” (community sector)

Communication and information

Regarding communication and information, ideas included the use of an online platform and website, social media, newsletters, mailing lists, and online forums, e.g.:

- “Emailing and social media play an important role, and are effective forums for organising things.” (public sector)
- “The partnership would be a source of information about what is happening in Cambridge and would make it available to people to use.

5.6. What kind of citywide sustainable food partnership can you imagine?

The partnership would be recognised as an excellent resource for anyone wanting to develop food sustainability in the city. It would help people to know what has already been done in the city, so that others can learn from their experience.” (community sector)

Meetings

Many interviewees saw meetings as essential. Some people suggested that there would need to be an informal aspect to these, too. Regarding how often meetings should take place, opinions varied from monthly to every couple of months, to twice a year or annually. Some interviewees suggested having themes or practical input, such as talks, presentations or QA sessions, e.g.:

“There need to be a lot of face-to-face meetings, people being in the same place, catching up, chatting — a lot of good ideas come up like that. Different configurations of people turning up. So pretty informal: hanging out, sharing, learning.” (public sector) “Meetings would be good where people could come together and cross-fertilise ideas.” (community sector)

Activities

Different kinds of activities were mentioned, including skill sharing and training sessions, e.g.:

- “I could imagine training sessions, for example on doing accounts for a small business.” (public sector)
- “Some sort of festival to bring all initiatives together would be great so the actors in each sector could get to know about what others do.” (community sector)

Venues

A venue was thought to be essential by many interviewees; ideas included office spaces, a café, meeting and kitchen spaces, e.g.:

- “A physical location, accessible to the outside world would be good, a space where people can come together and talk about their ideas and trial things.” (public sector)
- “If there was a central, solid place, a physical place for people to come together and to do things together — to learn, explore, distribute, and

5.6. What kind of citywide sustainable food partnership can you imagine?

share food — that would be the obvious thing to start. And it has to be accessible for everybody.” (community sector)

5.7 How do you put this into practice?

Summary

Most interviewee's theoretical understanding of sustainable food was much broader than their practical actions. Whilst some interviewees remained vague about their personal efforts, most pointed to difficulties they experience in trying to do so.

Quotes

Importance of sustainable diet

- "We select what we eat with sustainability considerations in mind." (public sector)
- "I try and go for a whole person approach. I'm vegan for 3 years, vegetarian since my teenage years. CO2 emissions are a main reason why I'm vegan, but also the treatment and abuse of animals. I buy local vegetables on the Sunday market, bread is from a local baker, I cook from scratch most of the time. I buy fair-trade and organic, where possible." (community sector)

Practical approaches

- "Me and my partner made the decision to try to eat more sustainably in various ways, by buying organic, buying a bit more locally, reducing meat and dairy, thinking about food miles a bit more, and trying to eliminate food waste as much as possible." (public sector) "
- "We are trying to eat mostly seasonal and local food. We get most of our fruit and vegetables from the market, but we also have an allotment, and that's quite productive." (community sector)

Vagueness

- "That's the thing I'm sort of figuring out still." (community sector)
- "I've just got a greenhouse that I'm going to put up very soon, hopefully, because I've got some tomatoes on the way and some chillies. I like to grow things that are useful, and [...] it's nice not to have to buy lots of fruit and veg if you can grow it yourself." (public sector)

Discrepancy

- “My understanding of sustainable food, I live it very badly in everyday life.” (public sector)
- “I put sustainable food into practice messily and arbitrarily.” (community sector)

Enormity

Most interviewees pointed to difficulties they experienced, indicated by the repetitive use of the word “try”:

- “It’s very challenging, I feel.” (public sector)
- “How do I put this into practice? It sometimes feels like such an enormous task. It feels very daunting.” (community sector)

Lack of time

- “I try as much as I can, within the limitations I have and all the things that I do, but eating well is part of what our family is about. There is probably more we could do around food miles, but it’s more about our time resources stopping us from going and doing that more effectively.” (public sector)
- “I used to grow my own vegetables. I don’t at the moment, I don’t have time.” (community sector)

Financial struggles

- “Certain things you can get organic, but they’re out of reach of the budget. It’s difficult in a way to comprehend that you need to do something for the world, but you’re restricted monetarily.” (public sector)
- “It’s very stressful, also from an economic perspective, to find sustainable food on a low budget.” (community sector)

Chapter 6

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