

Master's Thesis – Master *Sustainable Development*, track *International Development*

Scaling impact of grassroots initiatives for sustainability within food policy councils

A comparative case study on the evolving roles of grassroots initiatives for sustainability involved in the formation of food policy councils in the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the Plain of Lucca, Italy



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Abstract

As civil societies increasingly acknowledge sustainability challenges, sustainability transition (ST) studies have investigated more and more the role of grassroots organisations in triggering scalable change. Attempts to frame such topics have focused particularly on the innovative contribution of grassroots innovations and developed analytical models to identify their scaling strategies. More specifically, upscaling, out-scaling, and capture models have been developed. However, as effective outcomes have proven to be hard to identify, ways in which grassroots organisations exert influence at a larger scale are still under investigation and needing of more empirical application.

The current study employs the aforementioned models, integrating them with another diverse body of literature on social movements and constituent power. Consequently, the notion of *grassroots initiatives for sustainability* (GISs) is used as an umbrella term to avoid constraining the scope to specific theoretical paradigm, and leaving the doors open for unexplored contributions.

The units of analysis are GISs scaling through food policy councils (FPCs) in two city-regions: Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Lucca, Italy. By conducting an Event-Structure-Analysis (ESA), the research reconstructs the history of the formation of the FPCs with particular attention to GISs' roles. The aim is ultimately to discover how GISs scale their impact through platforms fostering interactions among multiple stakeholders. The results show that GISs exerted remarkable influence by taking different and evolving roles over time. Primarily alternating collaborative, activist and strategic tactics, depending on the context and institutional support. Although in various forms, the role of the political agency of grassroots initiatives proves essential for GISs' scaling in both case studies, suggesting a necessity to integrate more political conceptualizations into ST research.

Considering these results, the present research finally proposes a nuanced interpretative spectrum integrating and reformulating the above-mention models, with specific emphasis on the political contribution of GISs.

Key Terms

Grassroots Initiatives for Sustainability; Food Policy Council; Scaling; Political Agency; Event-Structure-Analysis

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Original (Dutch)	English
GIS	/	Grassroots Initiatives for Sustainability
FPC	/	Food Policy Council
MRA	Metropoolregio Amsterdam	Amsterdam Metropolitan Region
ESA	/	Event Structure Analysis
IFP	/	Intermunicipal Food Policy

List of Foreign Terms and Translations

Original (Dutch or Italian)	English
<i>Voedselvisie</i>	Food Vision
<i>Agenda Groen</i>	Agenda Green
<i>Proeftuin Amsterdam</i>	Testing Ground Amsterdam
<i>Voedsel Informatie Punt</i>	Food Information Point
<i>Voedsel Verbindt</i>	Food Connect
<i>Stadslandbouw</i>	Urban Farming
<i>VoedselPark</i>	Food Park
<i>Orti in Condotta</i>	School gardens
<i>Cabina di regia</i>	Control room
<i>Gestione Associata</i>	Joint Management

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the problem

Starting from the mid-20th century, the intensification of agriculture and the geographical extension of food chains have led to a profound food system crisis related to environmental and societal issues. The food supply chain currently contributes to more than 26 per cent of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, excluding non-food agriculture (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Intensive agriculture has been linked to biodiversity loss, soil erosion, land acidification and eutrophication (Poore & Nemecek, 2018, Kopittke et al., 2019). In addition, industrialized food production has also been shown to largely contribute to global inequality and food insecurity worldwide (ILO, 1996; World Health Organization, 2021).

Over the past decades, researchers (Fonte, 2014; Zitcer, 2014; Cerrada-Serra et al., 2018) from several disciplines worked to frame these issues and linked them with empirical cases of producers and consumers all over the world. Diets, especially those of city dwellers, have been adapting to fast and industrialized food products at an increasing speed, quickening the above-mentioned detrimental processes (Poore & Nemecek, 2018; Lambin & Meyfroidt, 2011). An important underlying cause of today's food crises is the fact that the dominant agri-food system led to a social, cultural and economic separation between food and the territory of origin (Fonte, 2013). This separation ultimately reduces consumers' awareness and decisional power, locks out local business producers, and leads to unequal economic distribution along the supply chain, reinforcing the global injustice gap (Fonte, 2013).

These challenges resulted in the emergence of diverse actors trying to transform food supply chains and to reallocate control over food to the local governance (Goodman et al., 2012; Higgins et al., 2008; Dansero & Puttilli, 2013; Fonte, 2013). In particular, since the 90s civil societies have shown increased interest in developing and spreading alternative paradigms for food production, supply and consumption (Sage et al., 2020). More recently, their ability to provide sustainable visions has moved beyond the role of civil advocacy as they started to actively perform opposition to the status quo (Frantzeskaki et al., 2016; Sage et al., 2020). In this sense, the role of grassroots initiatives for sustainability (GISs) engaged in food systems constitutes one interesting and evolving phenomenon. GISs are defined as initiatives carried out by civil society instead of governments or businesses (Hossain, 2016). Seyfang & Smith define grassroots innovations as networks of "activists and organizations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development and sustainable consumption; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved" (2007, p. 585).

1.2 Scientific background

The nature and practical application of GISs have been extensively investigated (Hossain, 2016; Frantzeskaki et al., 2016; Feola & Nunes, 2014; Smith & Seyfang, 2013). Researchers have explored the potential of collective bottom-up action, highlighting the importance of knowledge and experience that grassroots organisations possess regarding what changes are most appropriate in specific localities. As defined by Seyfang and Smith (2007), this type of contextualised knowledge can create fit solutions and expand citizens' involvement at the local level, strengthening democratic dynamics by creating a sense of project and mission ownership. In brief, three relevant features characterise GISs: first, they emerge as responses to social needs, meaning that they target specific social groups' needs which institutions and markets often cannot reach, and offer ad-hoc solutions; second, they foster the ideological commitment of participants, which collectively create alternative paradigms, whether intentionally aiming to produce systemic change or not; and third, they build communal ownership and structures, relying on mutual exchange and shared meanings (Seyfang & Smith, 2007; Hossain, 2016).

Furthermore, over the past two decades, literature has been consistently referring to grassroots innovation¹ for sustainability (Frantzeskaki et al., 2016; Seyfang & Smith, 2007), stressing the relevance of civil societies' power to produce technologies, designs and best practices that can trigger systemic socio-technical changes (Seyfang & Smith, 2007).

Grassroots innovation has been analysed through an extensive and interconnected body of literature, including transition theories, sustainability transformation, social innovation and the multi-level perspective (Hossain, 2016; Lam et al., 2020; Geels, 2002). For this study, this emerging literature will be generically referred to as sustainability transition research (Grin et al., 2010; Frantzeskaki et al., 2016). Typical examples of grassroots innovation for sustainability research include energy projects, local material recycling, community-based water and sanitation initiatives, and food projects such as organic food supermarkets and community-supported agriculture groups (Hossain, 2016).

1.3 Problem definition and knowledge gap

While GISs bear the strength of a bottom-up force for local, sustainable transitions, how these can effectively produce larger-scale impacts is still under investigation. The fact that such initiatives involve less powerful non-business actors led to scepticism on their power to spread and enact systemic change (Feola & Nunes, 2014)². GISs often depend on low financial resources from grant

¹ In the present research the umbrella term, *grassroots initiatives* for sustainability, will be utilized in reference to grassroots innovations, grassroots initiatives, grassroots movements and community-based initiatives, as it implies a more general definition which is not associated with any theoretical paradigm in particular.

² For a literature review of the barriers and facilitators of grassroots initiatives consult Poças Ribeiro et al. (2021).

government funding and voluntary activities. This logically affects their continuity over time and secured participation (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). To investigate how GISs might trigger change, sustainability transitions literature has discussed the approaches of grassroots' "scaling" and defined several analytical models, including out-scaling, amplification, upscaling and scaling through (Lam et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2015; Fressoli et al., 2014). In addition, GISs sometimes actively contrast the idea of scaling their practice in that intermediation of powerful political or economic actors can lead to reformulation and modification of critical values and constituent meanings of the practice (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). This phenomenon has been framed by sustainable transition research as a "capture" of GISs' values by more powerful actors (Pel, 2015; Loorbach, 2007).

As illustrated in subsection 2.1, the scaling and capture models constitute the backbone of recent studies focusing on GISs' transitions and have consequently been used as analytical categories for the present research. Nonetheless, these models have been criticised for offering overly structured explanations of transitions (Ingram, 2015) and, in most cases, have been applied independently from one another. Due to this, the academic debate seeking to understand how GISs exert influence might ultimately undermine their intrinsic strength, namely their diversity. These initiatives foster diversification of practices which develop through multiple and, at times, contrasting dynamics and could lead to the co-existence of several nuanced analytical interpretations. In addition, the dynamics at play might evidence GISs contributing to sustainable transitions in ways that do not always fit into the notion of innovative change, in terms of socio-technical change, hence which might necessitate novel conceptualisations.

1.4 Research aim

To complement existing studies, the present research focuses on the interactions of grassroots *initiatives* for sustainability, leaving the doors open to a broader spectrum of dynamics through which they can trigger systemic change, including policy shaping. The analysis investigates a highly diverse organisation, namely, the food policy council. By nature, the food policy council (FPC) promotes interactions between multiple stakeholders and presents various internal dynamics. FPCs are groups of representatives from different sectors of the food system which aim to create platforms for coordinated action at the local level (Holt Gimenez et al., 2009). Hence, they can be understood as places of facilitated interactions and knowledge exchange, where grassroots initiatives can participate, develop their practices and spread lessons. Among others, FPCs engage with non-profit initiatives, local businesses and government policy and programs. Currently, no study has focused on the role of grassroots in forming FPCs and how these can contribute to bringing about systemic change by leveraging on interactions of multiple stakeholders.

This study focuses on GISs participating in the formation of the FPCs in the city-regions of Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Lucca, Italy. It analyses the events surrounding the formation of the FPC, with particular focus on the evolutions of GISs' roles. For instance, the scaling can be seen in terms of negotiation of meaning, artefacts, values and appropriateness (Hermans et al., 2016). The study is founded on a diverse set of analytical models (see section 2) to expand existing knowledge on GISs' role and sustainability outcomes.

The following overarching research question guides the research:

How do grassroots initiatives for sustainability scale their impact through food policy councils?

Furthermore, the following set of sub-questions is addressed to fulfil the main research question:

1. *How were the analysed food policy councils formed?*
2. *What was the role of grassroots initiatives for sustainability in the formation of the analysed food policy councils?*
3. *What does the evolution of roles of grassroots initiatives for sustainability mean in terms of analytical models?*

1.5 Relevance of the study and research contribution

The present study uses a novel case study fostering diversity of stakeholders' interactions, namely the food policy council. Through an analysis of these diverse dynamics, the present research aims to contribute to the academic debate by critically testing the existing frameworks and, where possible, proposing complementary conceptualisations to the notion of grassroots innovation. In addition, the present research contributes to the current literature on GISs by focusing on food policy councils in Europe. Remarkably, while extensive research has been conducted in the US, the European context has been overlooked in regard to this phenomenon and still necessitates specific investigation (Schiff et al., 2022).

Furthermore, this study has strong societal relevance. As mentioned, GISs address concrete civil societies' needs and provide specific solutions to be applied in local contexts. Consequently, understanding the role that GISs play in producing a systemic change is not only academically important but leads to concrete benefits for analysed communities. This research delves into the dynamics surrounding the food policy councils' formation, providing practical insights for future policy council initiators to better leverage the role of policy intermediaries to bring forward GISs' instances. Moreover, the current research has practical relevance for the analysed food councils as it reconstructs a coherent storyline of the events that led to their formation, with particular attention to context and social dynamics.

2. Theory

The present research investigates the role of GISs in FPCs and is informed by existing theoretical frameworks on grassroots innovation, while also elaborating a novel theoretical model based on political and civil movements' constituent power.

2.1 Sustainability transition

The first group of theoretical frameworks can be understood as part of the vast body of literature which falls under sustainability transition studies, including sustainable transition theory, sustainability transformation, social innovation and the multi-level perspective (Frantzeskaki, 2016; Geels, 2002; Smith & Seyfang, 2013; Avelino et al., 2019; Westley & Antadze, 2010; Lam et al., 2020). In particular, it is relevant to conceptualise GISs through the multi-level perspective approach (Geels, 2002) on socio-technical transition, as this provides overarching definitions of key terms. In the multi-level perspective, transitions are seen as long-term processes enacted by the interactions between niches, socio-technical regimes and landscapes (Hermans et al., 2016).

Niches are places where experimental innovations can be protected from a too harsh and competitive regime and are used as categories to understand socio-technical changes (Hossain, 2016). As mentioned in section 1, these approaches focus on the innovative contribution of niches, which include grassroots. Grassroots are considered niches in that they share the same evolutive processes, such as network formation, learning, capacity building, empowerment and shielding of niche innovations, and because they are places of experimentation of alternative practices (Hossain, 2016). Regimes are the incumbent systems of dominant technologies, knowledge, techniques and institutions (Hossain, 2016). In the context of this research, incumbent regimes that could be considered are, for instance, big supermarket chains (dominant practices) and established regional or municipal governmental bodies (dominant institutions) as opposed to alternative initiatives and novel governance structures. Landscapes are external biophysical and societal developments that change at a very slow pace but highly influence regimes and niches. Landscape conditions are, for instance, societal trends and political events developing at the national or international level (Geels, 2002).

The following subsections present three analytical categories used to analyse grassroots innovation's role in socio-technological transformation.

2.1.1 Out-scaling and upscaling

The processes of out-scaling and upscaling have been defined by Hermans et al., (2016), Lam et al. (2020) and Laamanen et al. (2022). Although the characteristics of each process differ in specificity, they share similar interpretations of niches' roles. In particular, they all frame bottom-up

practices' pioneers as active initiators of processes of coalition building with actors such as scientists, policy-makers and broader civil society to expand their practice, address their specific needs and ultimately produce systemic change (Hermans et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2020). These conceptualisations help analyse GISs' agency and interactions with external actors to bring forward sustainable solutions and open broader-scale dialogues.

Out-scaling is demonstrated with "efforts to replicate and disseminate programs, products, ideas and innovative approaches in order to affect more people or to cover a larger geographical area" (Hermans et al., 2016, p. 287). This can be more generally understood as the traditional "adoption and diffusion" approach, where initiatives primarily broaden their reach, either in terms of participants ("network out-scaling") or geographical areas ("geographical out-scaling") (Hermans et al., 2016). In addition, the amplification model developed by Lam et al. (2020) is useful to enrich the out-scaling framework by dividing typologies of amplification. Amplifying out distinguishes between initiatives spreading in similar versus dissimilar contexts and with dependence or independence to the initial initiative (Lam et al., 2020). This division yields 4 sub-categories of out-scaling: growing (similar context/initial initiative-dependent), replicating (dissimilar context/initial initiative-dependent), transferring (similar context/ initial initiative-independent) and spreading (dissimilar context/initial initiative-independent) (Lam et al., 2020). Whereas the first three sub-categories imply a more or less direct extension or transference of the practices of an initial initiative applied to similar or dissimilar contexts, the spreading process reveals a particular case. It refers to the sharing of principles to already existing initiatives, highlighting the role of GISs as promoters of second-order learning and inspirational actors (Lam et al., 2020).

Upscaling processes address niche actors' activities to achieve innovations' adoption in the institutional arena (institutional upscaling). Upscaling is highly influenced by opportunities and barriers within institutional structures to embed such practices. This implies a two-fold interaction of the enabling and opposing conditions at the institutional regime level, as well as the actions of GISs' members to create linkages with intermediaries, advocacy and lobbying coalitions and mobilising "patrons" to upscale (Hermans et al., 2016). Institutional upscaling can cover several types of institutional arrangements, from informal operating rules to formal laws and policies, and at different administrative levels, from municipal to regional, national and so forth (Hermans et al., 2016).

For this work, an essential addition to upscaling can be identified in the scaling through (institutions) model by Laamanen et al. (2022). This model can be viewed as a sub-category of upscaling in that it refers to GISs attempts to influence institutional arrangements to advance social change. In particular, it seeks to involve segments of societies constructing and coordinating citizens' assemblies and participatory fora (Laamanen et al., 2022). In this sense, the scaling through model

looks at civil societies' engagement through local political institutions to achieve change. The local aspect is particularly relevant and, in fact, municipalities are identified as privileged spaces to scale through (Laamanen et al., 2022). In addition to pressuring through mobilisation and advocacy, which can be a stand-alone pathway for upscaling practices or views, scaling through happens via locally-based actions which aim to establish cooperation with local governments or infiltrate them. In both cases, local institutions are used as means to popularise and legitimise GISs beliefs and practices (Laamanen et al., 2022). Laamanen (2022) distinguishes between two types of actions. First, creating a cooperating environment with local authorities by seizing windows of opportunities and negotiating and influencing ideologies. Second, "using the tools of the state to recreate it from within" (Schlosberg & Craven, 2019). This is the case when the involvement of governmental actors only leads to lip service. Given such evolution, GISs can, for instance, attempt to create linkages with existing green or leftist parties with aligned values and hence scale within the structure of the state.

It must be noted that GISs' efforts to extend their impact often move along scales (moving higher or lower in level) and across scales (moving from one scale to another). In fact, out-scaling and upscaling can be viewed as dynamic processes and groups of actors participating in them can shift approach over time, from one to the other (Hermans et al., 2016). This means that strategies are not set in stone but evolve and develop depending on a multitude of internal and external factors, while trying to seize existing opportunities in a specific moment in time (Geels, 2002).

For this research, these models have been merged and synthesised into the following set of categorical lenses (*Table 1*), which facilitated the interpretation of scaling and amplifying efforts of GISs to create impact through the FPCs they are participating in.

Model/category	Definition	Reference
Out-scaling	Reaching new places/members	Hermans et al., 2016
Network out-scaling	Reaching new members	Hermans et al., 2016
Geographical out-scaling	Reaching new places	Hermans et al., 2016
Growing	Similar context/initial initiative-dependent out-scaling	Lam et al., 2020
Replicating	Dissimilar context/initial initiative-dependent out-scaling	Lam et al., 2020
Transferring	Similar context/ initial initiative-independent out-scaling	Lam et al., 2020
Spreading	Dissimilar context/initial initiative-independent out-scaling	Lam et al., 2020
Upscaling	Change of institutional rules, policies, laws via patrons mobilization and advocacy or collaboration	Hermans et al., 2016
Scaling through	Change of political institutions' rules, policies and laws via cooperation and/or infiltration specifically through local authorities	Laamanen et al., 2022

Table 1. Out-scaling and Upscaling

2.1.2 Capture

Niche capture has been defined by several authors (Smith, 2006; Pel, 2015; Fressoli et al., 2014; Penna & Geels, 2012) as an approach through which, willingly or not, niche innovations are fitted into dominant regimes to produce changes in practices or regulations. To better explain, as grassroots interact with incumbent socio-technical and institutional regimes to produce change, the process of negotiation of their models and meanings often also implies absorption and modification of their practices and goals. As indicated by Fressoli et al. (2014, p. 281), “these dynamics are shaped by the interplay of many different influences, such as policy framework and policy culture, the level of community organization, forms of resistance to an imposed technological conformity and the innovators’ capacity to generate interest among policy-makers”. The fundamental characteristic of interactions between regimes and grassroots is that they happen over long periods, presenting alternation and opposition of strategic forces on both sides. The evolving dialectical opposition of these forces can be viewed through the alternation of “domestication” and “radicalization” dynamics (Pel, 2015). The first dynamic suggests an adaption and modification of grassroots models and beliefs. Grassroots are generally rather weakly positioned actors, yet they build on strong shared motivation and transformative-prone spaces for experimentation. Hence, external more powerful actors, which recognize the potential of these innovations but are not transformative-minded, are inclined towards a modification of the innovations with a domesticating twist, which grassroots might find distorting.

Radicalization, on the contrary, happens when radical changes carried out by grassroots movements resist and continue along their trajectories without accommodating dominant regimes.

Radicalization and domestication have often been analysed as distinct contraposing forces. The struggle of grassroots is seen in terms of resistance to capture and “mobilization” to oppose dominant systems or acceptance of their rules and “insertion” in their agenda (Fressoli et al., 2014). “Mobilization” implies direct attempts of grassroots to challenge the dominant practices and power relations, hoping that the resistance will eventually force incumbent regimes to change their models or allow the innovation to interact with new socio-technical arrangements that emerge. “Insertion” of alternative innovation into dominant regimes means for grassroots to become fitted into prior regimes’ spaces and adapt to their rules, technologies, regulations and agendas (Fressoli et al., 2014). In these terms, the recurrent pattern of capture of initiatives is primarily an “apparent acceptance and silent neutralization” of grassroots efforts by the incumbent regimes, which can only be opposed by mobilized active resistance (Pel, 2015, p.674). One striking example is given by the mobility transition, which refused the mitigation of car dependency and slowly silenced the bottom-up opposition to the automotive industry that was aiming to produce radical value shifts (Augenstein, 2015; Hickman, 2013).

However, as expressed by Pel (2015), this general understanding of capture dynamics shows a tendency of scholarship toward idealistic conceptualizations of power and politics. An important factor often neglected in capture literature is the ambiguity of niche-regime dynamics. This refers to the necessity for grassroots breaking with the dominant regimes to be radical enough to constitute transformative potential, yet to be adaptable enough to become integrated into the existing system to trigger change (Pel, 2015). This paradox is also reflected in the strategic behaviour of grassroots and challenges the mainstream dichotomy of dominant regimes as “opportunistic” actors and niches as “victims” or “innocuous” actors. Capture can be framed as a potentially favourable process for captured innovators’ own ambitions and goals. “Strategic capture” dynamics can hence be viewed as windows of opportunity through which niches strategically fit their innovations or ideas to produce changes in dominant regimes by deceiving their radical nature and exploiting the capture (Pel, 2015).

For this research, these discussions and models have been merged and synthesized into the following set of categories (*Table 2*) which have been used to interpret capture dynamics of GISs into the FPCs they are participating in.

Model/category	Definition	Reference
Capture	Process of negotiation of GISs models and meanings with dominant regimes, which often implies absorption and modification of their practices and goals	Pel, 2015; Fressoli et al., 2014
Domestication	Dominant regimes modifying the GISs innovations/practices with a domesticating twist, which grassroots might find distorting	Pel, 2015
Insertion	Practice and value modification and re-adaptation to regime's own agenda	Fressoli et al., 2014
Radicalization	GISs continue along their radical change trajectories without accommodating dominant regimes' agendas	Pel, 2015
Strategic capture	Capture exploitation by GISs to strategically embed their innovation or practice	Pel, 2015
Mobilization /Opposition	GISs actively challenging the dominant practices and power relations	Fressoli et al., 2014

Table 2. Capture

This research benefits from the combination of scaling, amplifying and capturing frameworks in that it allows to analyse of multiple types of dynamics. In fact, coalitions interested in the initiatives most likely have different ambitions and perspectives on these practices and might take them into different and sometimes opposing directions. The distinction between deliberate and purposeful transformative efforts and inadvertent top-down capture is often blurry, as both regime and grassroots levels engage in strategic actions (Hermans et al., 2016). Acknowledging the complexity and virtual impossibility to grasp all of the dynamics, in reality, is important to analyse data humbly and open-mindedly. However, as the purpose of this research is to analyse the evolving role of GISs and their contribution, the author decided to capture the co-existence of multiple dynamics by utilizing diverse frameworks and re-adapting them to the specific contexts that emerged, as this was regarded as the optimal way to minimize bias and analytical constrictions.

2.2 Constituent and constituted power

The second theoretical perspective utilized to derive analytical categories for the present study explores the bottom-up social movements and civil society activism to bring systemic change at the institutional level. Unlike the previous group of theories, this part of the theoretical framework was constructed by merging two bodies of literature coming from diverse subjects of analysis and geographical origins. The contribution stems from research on Latin American movements seeking justice and popular participation in national policy and law-making (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013; Azzellini, 2016) and from the literature on Voluntary Simplicity, Degrowth and other social movements typically developed in the Global North which aim to produce societal value shifts (Alexander, 2013; Coglianese, 2001).

As divergent as the application and outcomes of these two groups of research are, the understanding and conceptualization of the role and potential of grassroots initiatives are remarkably similar. In particular, change is perceived in both cases as a process which happens thanks to the active political engagement of grassroots movements with institutional actors to modify social norms and policy arrangements in favour of more citizens' participation. Hence, highlighting the importance of the political agency of grassroots movements in triggering institutional change, differently to the socio-technical innovativeness which was the core of the previous framework. Agency is "the property or capacity of actors to make things happen" (Cole, 2022). Therefore, political agency can be defined as the capacity of actors "participating in a 'common' exercise of political power" to make (or deconstruct) institutional arrangements (Sanchini et al., 2019).

The key conceptual term "constituent power" was originally introduced by the former and controversial Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez (Azzellini, 2016), in regards to bottom-up movements' power and has been consequently re-defined by Azzellini (2016, p. 17) as the "legitimate collective creative capacity of human beings, as expressed in the organized social base". Constituent power is the principal agent of change of national norms, which in the Venezuelan case was the Constitution, and comes from large-scale collective political engagement. The top-down "constituted power" refers to states and institutions that "must guarantee the framework and material conditions of the process" of constituency (Azzellini, 2016).

Re-applying these concepts to social movements such as Voluntary Simplicity and Degrowth in the Global North, Alexander (2013) analyses the interactions between power-holders and social members speaking up on the behalf of a constituent power which might lack representation and wishes to change the power arrangements and norms of the constituted institutions (Alexander, 2013). This literature defines grassroots social movements as active contributors to legal transformations. Notably, quoting Alexander (2013), "if legal concepts are 'social constructs', then social movements can be understood as a mechanism through which legal concepts are socially constructed and reconstructed". On the one hand, law reformation is seen as an intrinsic goal of social movements, in that legal rearrangements can lead to desired social change, which is the primary purpose of these movements. On the other hand, existing legal frameworks also highly affect societal habits and consequent framing of problems, hence influencing the agency of grassroots movements.

Constituency processes through which constituent power impacts constituted power are dialectical dynamics, where social movements have the power to affect law and policy just as much as vice versa. To exemplify once again with the mobility transition, it is currently very difficult to escape car culture as public transportation often does not offer efficient alternative solutions. Yet if societies were to actively pressure for law reformation to obtain efficient public transport or safer bike lanes,

new regulations would emerge as well as new lifestyle options, which would consequently affect social needs and ultimately social movements' renewed demands (Alexander, 2013).

In the following subsection, constituency is analytically framed and linked back to the previously defined frameworks to further define its unique characteristics and concrete addition to upscaling and out-scaling and capturing models.

2.2.1 Constituency

Constituency can be defined as the process through which constituent power impacts and rearranges the constituted institutional power by leveraging its political agency. This process is advanced through bottom-up political pressure to open up popular participation and discussion to actively shape policy and regulations.

Key characteristics of the constituency framework can be paralleled to the niche-regime interactions. Firstly, the persistence of ambiguity between constituted power and constituent powers absorption. In fact, although constituent power withholds popular legitimacy, it is subjugated to the constituted power in its applicability. Hence, it needs to manifest itself as a revolutionary power for institutional change, yet it somehow has to remain adaptable to be strategically integrated. Secondly, constituency fosters dialectical confrontations between top-down and bottom-up powers, viewing institutional arrangements as in a permanent “state of becoming” (Pel, 2016, p.677). Thirdly, similarly to the upscaling process, it produces bottom-up practices absorption into institutional arrangements.

However, important distinctions between this framework and the previous ones must be highlighted to understand the contribution. In particular, the fact that constituency lies in the political agency of grassroots movements, rather than their innovative power, leads to two considerations. First, it implies substantial differences in the outcomes of grassroots action, namely institutional changes specifically in terms of policies, laws and social norms specifically, as opposed to socio-technical regimes change. The ultimate goal here plays a relevant role; in fact, whereas upscaling dynamics also impact institutional policies, grassroots trying to upscale generally focus on leveraging institutional norms' power to increase support and embed their innovative practices. Differently, grassroots enacting constituency processes act to modify institutional arrangements hence attributing power to the hands of citizens. This point leads to the second consideration, which regards the process through which grassroots can impact constituted powers. The political agency implies that grassroots can enact processes of institutional change, rather than enduring them. In a way, this conceptualization tries to overcome the idea of grassroots as passive participants of power dynamics. Previous literature (Pel, 2016; Lam et al., 2020; Hermans et al., 2016) generally lacked framings that

viewed grassroots as actors with legitimate political agency. Hence, institutional change was always either understood as a consequence of actions taken to increase initiatives support (Upscaling), or the result of captured values which were conveniently reformulated by dominant regimes to fit into their own agendas (Capture).

Testing the functioning of political agency through constituency dynamics can play a big role in defining what is the potential of grassroots initiatives for sustainability which are aiming to change norms at the local and/or national level. Consequently, this framework could contribute also to socio-technical understandings of grassroots innovation and pave the way for a new model of analysis. Key concepts have been here summarized (*Table 3*).

Model/Key term	Definition	Reference
Constituent power	“Legitimate collective creative capacity of human beings, as expressed in the organized social base”	Azzellini, 2016
	Civil society’s power that might lack representation and wishes to change the power arrangements and norms of the constituted institutions//Social power that constructs and reconstructs legal concepts and frameworks.	Alexander, 2013
Constituted power	State and institutions that “must guarantee the framework and material conditions of the process” of constituency	Azzellini, 2016
	Institutional power that shapes the framework within which constituent power can make changes to normative and legal concepts	Alexander, 2013
Political agency	Capacity of actors “participating in a ‘common’ exercise of political power” to make (or deconstruct) institutional arrangements.	Cole, 2022; Sanchini et al., 2019
Constituency	Process through which constituent power impacts and rearranges the constituted institutional power by leveraging on its political agency. Political participation is not solely a mean to an end but a goal in itself.	Researcher’s own definition

Table 3. Constituency

3. Methods

To understand the conceptual and methodological structure of present research the research framework is illustrated in *Figure 1*. The previous section (section 2), which constitutes the theoretical framework and identifies analytical categories, has been included to visualise its contribution in the analysis of results. The current section, section 3, explains data collection and data analysis methods applied to the two case studies. Section 4 reports the results of the analysis, dividing them in terms of storyline of the development of the FPCs and subsequent dynamics and roles of GISs according to analytical categories. To aggregate the relevant results, a comparison between the two case studies is also presented. Section 5 discusses grassroots scaling factors as emerged in section 4, reflects on the theoretical implications of the analysis, provides contributions to the existing analytical models and offers recommendations for future research. Finally, section 6 highlights the main takeaways and makes final remarks on the present research.

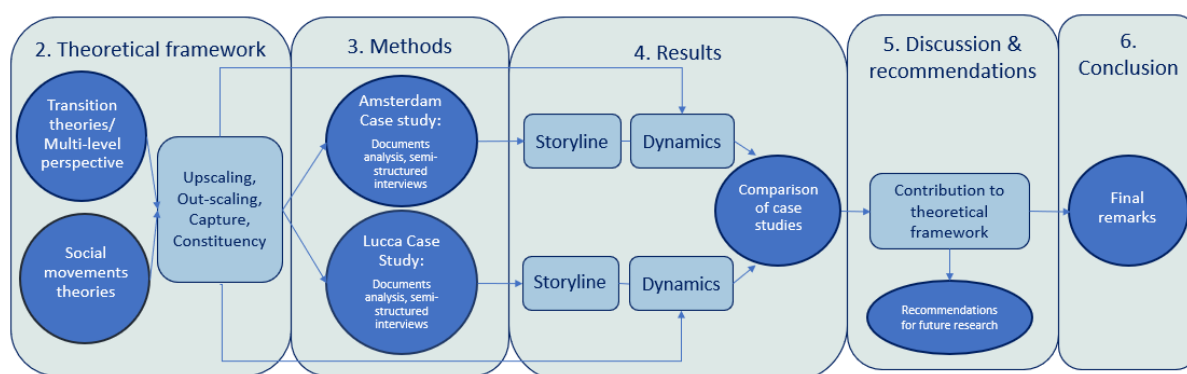


Figure 1. Research framework

3.1 Research Strategy: Case study

In order to define the roles of GISs, a qualitative inductive research strategy was adopted. The unit of analysis are grassroots initiatives for sustainability currently or previously participating in food policy councils and the research was conducted in two case studies located in the metropolitan region of Amsterdam, Netherland, and the plain of Lucca, Italy. The presence of two case studies served the purpose of substantiating the theories and identifying similarities and differences in the two contexts to understand how these affected the outcomes. Case studies are a specific type of research strategy in which the aim of the researcher is to gain in-depth knowledge into specific processes confined in time and space (Verschuren et al. ,2010). The function of this research is to define and expand the current understanding of grassroots evolving roles and processes.

3.1.1 Type of case study: Food policy council

The FPC is a particularly interesting case to gather insights on grassroots initiatives and test the different analytical models of GISs' scaling. FPCs represent not only an unprecedented type case study to look at scaling dynamics, but also they imply multiple stakeholders convening to work on food policy shaping and governance. This made FPCs a solid basis of analysis to gain insights on the constituency model. Furthermore, interactions of actors with diverse interests is implied in its constitution and hence required application of multiple conceptual interpretations.

FPCs are groups of stakeholders from different sectors of the food system. FPCs develop networks of coordinated action at the local level by engaging, inter alia, with government policy and programs, non-profit initiatives, local business and food workers (Holt Gimenez et al., 2009). They focus on bottom-up participation and might include farmers, food workers, food processors and distributors and, more broadly, concerned citizens. Furthermore, FPCs can take many different organizational and legal forms, such as legislations, executive orders or grassroots organizations, depending on their development and where they are housed (Boden & Hoover, 2018). Despite their different forms, FPCs generally function similarly and build on similar techniques to secure stakeholders participation, which include the fostering of place-based activism, provision of tangible solutions to local problems, and the framing of government buy-ins (Schiff, 2008). As identified by Schiff (2008), FPCs have two fundamental roles; to act as networkers and interactions' facilitators, and to educate members and stakeholders in sustainable food systems. The primary goal of FPCs is, by convening multiple stakeholders into discussions, to influence local or regional government decision-making, policy and planning (Boden & Hoover, 2018).

Furthermore, the present research aims to keep into consideration, as much as possible, relevant contextual factors surrounding the food policy councils formation. As highlighted by Andreola et al. (2021), cultural, political and legal systems of opportunities can facilitate or constrain the existence and spreading of GISs and their interaction with food sector stakeholders and, hence, highly affect the development of the food policy councils.

3.1.2 Comparative case studies: food policy councils in the Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam and the Plain of Lucca

This research focused specifically on two FPCs located in and around the cities of Amsterdam and Lucca. These two cases were selected for their specific characteristics, which suggested diverse and interesting dynamics for comparison.

Based on preliminary investigation into the cases, and in particular from the relative websites, different approaches to sustainability and local initiatives integration emerged. Starting with the Food

Council of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Region (*Metropoolregio Amsterdam*, MRA FPC), it appeared that the structures of the council and proposed projects had a strong focus on network creation between existing initiatives, particularly supported by innovative means such as a regional online data platform (Food Council MRA, 2020). Furthermore, on its website the MRA FPC was defined as a non-profit organization, hence independent from governmental bodies (Food Council MRA, 2020).

Differently, the case of the food policy council of Lucca, named Plain of Food of Lucca (*Piana del Cibo di Lucca*), appeared to be primarily revolved around citizens' political engagement in policy shaping and preservation of local food traditions and landscapes. The Plain of Food is defined as an "initiative for coordinated and participated management of policies" in which Lucca city-region's citizens are, together with institutions "protagonists of change" through collective action (*Piana del Cibo*, 2019). In line with this approach, as observed on the FPC's website, the initiatives participating were farmers city markets and local projects designed to support local restaurants and promote local producers and products (*Piana del Cibo*, 2019). Furthermore, the administrative office of the Plain of Food resulted to be located in a municipal office of Capannori, one of the cities in the region, hence demonstrating strong dependence from institutions. Consequently, the apparent differences in approaches between the two case studies suggested diverse dynamics through which grassroots practices and values could have developed through time.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through two primary methods: document collection and semi-structured interviews.

3.2.1 Document collection

The data collection was focused on gathering secondary data, such as websites content, internal documents, and existing food policy related studies. In the case of the MRA FPC, a few documents were retrieved online (5), while the majority (107) were provided by one of the co-founders of the food council. One previous research document (Halliday et al., 2019) found online was considered as baseline for identification of important events in the food council evolution. The 107 documents received included reports of meetings, policy documents, communications between municipality, provinces, and the food policy council, transcripts of past interviews, events plannings, presentations, university lectures and internal documents which highlighted discussions and reflections between the co-founders. These documents, originally in Dutch, were first translated to English, inspected to identify the relevant ones (41), and then categorized based on the series of events they were related to. As mentioned, original baseline events were the ones highlighted in a

previously published article (Halliday et al., 2019) whose author is the co-founder of MRA FPC, while further details were gradually added during documents' reading and interviews. This phase required a simultaneous work of documents scanning and interview guide's definition, in order to shape a specific focus within the broader history of the food policy council.

Similarly, for the case of the Plain of Lucca FPC a series of documents (10) were retrieved online, including intermunicipal food policy chart, guidelines for FPC coordinators, FPC definitions, published research papers and university theses. Furthermore, the Plain of Food's president provided the researcher with additional documents (13) which included the council's reports, notes and minutes from past meetings. As done for the MRA FPC, an initial document (Arcuri et al., 2022) was retrieved and maintained as baseline for the analysis of the overall history of the food council. For the analysis of events, the above-mentioned material and notes of past meetings were used to derive key turning points in the food policy council formation and GISs' involvement with institutions. This was done primarily by looking at internal documents and main takeaways of relevant meetings. The collection of notes of past meetings was particularly resourceful in defining the unfolding of events in the most accurate way possible.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher organized informal introductory meetings with two MRA FPC's members and one informal introductory meeting with a Plain of Food FPC's member. These meetings were held with the more responsive members, to facilitate the initial phase of the research which primarily relied on the creation of personal connections with members and stakeholders. This process was particularly useful to create a functioning network base and get to know the structure of the councils. Following, and occasionally during the introductory meetings, a total of 16 semi-structured interviews were held with 14 distinct actors, considered relevant for the purpose of this research. Two interviews were complemented by follow-ups due to the fact that interviewees were particularly relevant members. In particular, the primary target were participants involved in the FPC since its origin and members of GISs. The purpose was to have specifically interviews with members who were knowledgeable about the FPC's history and grassroots involvement. As all of the interviews had to be recorded for in-depth analysis, consent was asked at the beginning of each interview to participants. All the participants agreed to the conditions described by the researcher. It is important to note that the interviews were open-ended to allow participants to share their opinions and knowledge freely. Aside from the general content of the interview guide, which aimed to obtain information on the structure of the FPCs and role of GISs more generally, interviews were tailored depending on the level of knowledge of each interviewee on the food policy council formation and surrounding events. [Annex 1](#) shows an example

of interview guide developed for the MRA FPC. *Table 4* outlines the interviewees' positionalities and roles in the respective food policy councils.

	Name	Role/Positionality	Role in food policy council
MRA FPC	Interviewee 1	Researcher, urban farmer (GIS)	Member of ANFP (Amsterdam Network for Food Planning), segment of MRA FPC
	Interviewee 2	Emeritus professor, researcher, urban farmer (GIS)	Co-founder
	Interviewee 3	Researcher, urban farmer (GIS)	Member of ANFP
	Interviewee 4	Food entrepreneur, anthropologist, member of Slow Food Amsterdam (GIS)	Co-founder
	Interviewee 5	Former member of Edibles Amsterdam (GIS), urban farmer (GIS), member of Amsterdam Urban Agriculture Foundation	Participant
	Interviewee 6	Employee at food campaign agency, involved in GIS	Participant
	Interviewee 7	Urban farmer, member of Amsterdam Urban Agriculture Foundation	Participant
Plan of Food	Interviewee 1	Agronomist, Researcher, urban farmer, member of Slow Food (GIS)	Coordinator of the urban garden thematic table
	Interviewee 2	Former school president, urban farmer, member of Slow Food (GIS)	President, participant in school and education thematic table
	Interviewee 3	Former Capannori administrative officer, supporter of GISs	Initiator, representative for Capannori municipality within the council (now moved to Lucca)
	Interviewee 4	Agronomist, Technical and promotional background, member of Slow Food (GISs)	Participant in the "local production" thematic table
	Interviewee 5	University professor, member of Slow Food (GIS), city councillor	Representative for Lucca municipality within the council
	Interviewee 6	Member of Caritas (GIS)	Coordinator of the access/ food waste thematic table
	Interviewee 7	University researcher	Former researcher of the Plain of Food

Table 4. Interviewees and their multiple roles

Document collection and interviews were combined in order to cross validate data through triangulation. As each method bears advantages and drawbacks, combining documents and data sourced served to corroborate, refute, elucidate or expand on findings and reduce potential bias. Furthermore, in this case, the triangulation also helped to better capture several dimension of the analysed phenomena.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed in two phases; background analysis, primarily based on data collected through documents and introductory meetings inputs, and event structure analysis, which was carried out with data collected through interviews and documents at a later time. For these analyses interviews were first transcribed and coded with the use of the software NVivo.

3.3.1 Background analysis

In the first data analysis phase, a background analysis was conducted. This was considered to be useful for a preliminary phase in order to know how the food policy councils were composed, who are the primary actors participating, and what were their positionalities. For the background analysis, FPCs' websites were consulted, as well as any further material provided by FPCs' members. As already noted, a few initial informative conversations and correspondences were conducted in order to investigate internal dynamics and structures to direct the semi-structured analysis to the most suitable members of the councils.

3.3.2 Event-structure-analysis

Following the background analysis, an event structure analysis (ESA) was conducted. This phase of the process focused on elaborating important information particularly from the semi-structured interviews and notes of meetings. More specifically, this analysis was useful to reconstruct the processes undertaken by GISs in the FPCs' creation and their roles. The aim was to derive important turning points and milestones in terms of decisions made and actions taken by the GISs and other stakeholders, and consequently analyse how these were absorbed and which output they produced. These propositions or actions were identified based on the definition of "event" provided by Griffin (1993). An event is "a distinguishable happening, one with some pattern or theme that sets it off from others, and one that involves changes taking place within a delimited amount of time" (Conkin and Stromberg 1989, p. 173).

The ESA conducted with the use of ETHNO helped building improved narratives which reflected causal reasoning and logical interpretations of events (Griffin, 1993). ESA is defined as “a computer assisted method for defining the logical relations among events, focusing on how each event enables and expands other events” (Corsaro & Heise, 1990). This method implies interpretative rigour but also facilitates construction of complex logical linkages of events, which might have otherwise seemed unrelated. In other words, the ESA helps the researcher to replace the mere temporal order of events with her own knowledge about the case to make causal connections, which enriched the chronological storyline and allowed for more sophisticated data interpretation. To understand the functioning of this method of analysis diverse literature which applied the event structure analysis was also reviewed (Ponti, 2012; MacPherson, 2018; Corsaro & Heise, 1990).

The benefits of using ESA can be summarized in: first, evidencing the evolution and interchange of meanings and practices by diving into the depth of the logical correlations of events developing over different timelines; second, allowing to functionally establish responsibilities and contributions to the diverse stakeholders which interacted in the FPCs’ formation in the most accurate way possible; and third, facilitating the interpretation of data through the existing analytical categories by extrapolating defined events and inquiring their relation.

To functionally carry out the ESA, interviews were first coded on Nvivo as “event”, “context” or “outcome”. [Annex 2](#) shows an example taken from one event, one context and one outcome obtained in from different interviews with MRA FPC’s members. The propositions that were identified as turning points were further listed on an excel spreadsheet under ETHNO’s categories of “agent” “act” and “object” and each was linked to the relevant source (document or interview). This helped to maintain information organized to then proceed with the analysis on ETHNO. In addition, a “context” column was used on the excel spreadsheet to keep into consideration the contextual linkages between events. Following a series of screenings, the most relevant propositions (or events) were then uploaded on the software ETHNO. The process of data analysis with ETHNO was a reiterative one: propositions were inserted and eventually deleted or bundled when they seemed to refer to the same sequence of actions. The time period considered for both case studies’ analyses started from what was considered to be the preliminary phases which led to the formation of FPCs until today.

Following data analysis using ETHNO, a storyline of the events was first drafted. In this regard it is important to mention that the MRA FPC’s case study consisted of a longer and more articulated history compared to the Plain of Food, hence the storyline developed was ultimately reviewed by the main referent and co-founder of the food council. As most of the data was gathered via interviews, having one key participant’s validation was considered necessary to guarantee the highest level of

accuracy before proceeding with the interpretation of data. However, the same was not done for the Plain of Food's case study, due to the limited time frame analysed and existence of multiple research exploring the history of the council in a rather detailed manner (Arcuri et al., 2022; Arcuri et al., 2020). In this case, participant's direct validation was not deemed required because these existence of multiple background research meant an overall reduced risk of errors and misunderstandings.

3.4 Research Ethics

The present research was conducted abiding to the General Data Protection Regulations of Utrecht University. Data collected was either retrieved online or was provided directly by participants in the study. Furthermore, interviewees were asked for verbal permission to record the online or offline meetings and were informed about confidentiality and privacy regulations. In particular it was clarified that only the researcher could have access to recording and transcripts. Furthermore, to guarantee data security, all primary data will be deleted after the official graduation day. Given the personal content and profile of interviewees, the researcher decided to anonymise all participants' names.

3.5 Operationalization of analytical categories

For this study, the three analytical categories have been operationalized through quantitative and qualitative types of measurements.

Out-scaling was observed in terms of increase in number of members participating (Network out-scaling) and reaching of new localities (Geographical out-scaling) over time. Furthermore, where possible, geographical out-scaling was further defined according to the level of similarity of the contexts where the practice was out-scaled and the dependence to the original initiative.

Upscaling was measured in terms of increased embeddedness of innovations, values or practices into the institutional arrangements, meaning policy documents, regulation or laws (re)formulations. One typical example could be that of smallholder farmers markets governance at the city level, where the farmers markets practice is slowly embedded into municipal policies after intense pressure from local farmers or advocacy groups. Scaling through is observable in local political engagement of GISs with increased cooperation with local authorities or infiltration through political parties with aligned values. Consequently, scaling through was framed as a subcategory of upscaling which involved small localities as sphere of action for grassroots scaling.

Capture dynamics were observed by looking at the way events unfolded over time. In particular, these events were investigated to determine practices or innovations which grassroots communities were developing and which were consequently practically or conceptually taken by more

powerful economic or political actors and inserted into their own agendas (Domestication). Specific attention was paid to evaluate which dynamics entailed insertion of a certain practice or concept into the regime's dominant rules and whether the capture might have been to a certain extent voluntary and strategically planned by grassroots initiatives (Strategic capture). Similarly capture dynamics could include the radicalization of grassroots practices and principles in response to attempt of insertion in the dominant actors' agenda. This events can be viewed for instance in strong mobilization and opposition, through campaigns or demonstrations.

Finally, Constituency processes were analysed through the lens of continued political agency. Political agency is observable in social norms, legal frameworks and policy ideas advanced by GISs and maintained during food policy councils constitution, and following activities. In particular, these contributions refer to the active participation and efforts to create change in arrangements and governance models in favour of popular involvement. As the goal was to measure how GISs contributed to the agendas, policies and laws formulation, looking at political participation was key. The ESA served to identify political propositions (in the form of events or statements) which were requested or introduced by the involved GISs. Evaluating the intrinsic aim of GISs logically came with more burdens and interpretative bias. However, through background analysis and event structure analysis it turned out to be feasible to discriminate between GISs' instrumental intentions to participate in policy discussion to bring forward a specific innovation or practice (Upscaling dynamic) versus a continued participation over time, which characterized constituent political agency.

The political agency hence is viewed as the intention to change institutional arrangements, to attribute more power in the hands of citizens, rather than to embed an innovation into institutional logics per se. It must be noted that this distinction does not mean that co-existence of both upscaling and constituent political agency could not happened. On the contrary, political agency was demonstrated through both. The distinction between upscaling and constituency is hence primarily useful to move from the conceptualization of political involvement in a sense of mere mean towards an end to a goal in itself.

The following table (*Table 5*) summarizes the theoretical framework and operationalization of the analytical categories.

Theories	Actors seen as	Process		Measured by	Output	Outcome
Transition Theories/ Multi-level perspective	Innovators	Out-scaling	Network	Number of practices	Initiative expansion	Socio-technical change
			Geographical	Geographic extension		
Transition Theories/ Multi-level perspective	Innovators/ Political actors	Upscaling	Upscaling	Strategic political agency/advocacy and/or collaboration Initiative embeddedness in dominant institutional regimes	Policy/regulation/law influence	Socio-technical change/ Institutional change
			Scaling through	Strategic political agency/collaboration with local authorities Initiative embeddedness in dominant institutional regimes		
Transition Theories/ Multi-level perspective	Innovators	Capture	Domestication	Insertion of practice/value into dominant actors' agendas	Initiative embeddedness in dominant socio-technical or institutional regimes	Institutional change
			Radicalization	Mobilization/opposition to domestication		
Social movements theories	Constituent power/Political actors	Constituency		Political agency for the sake of policy/governance model co-creation and co-participation with citizens	Policy/regulation/law influence	Institutional change

Table 5. Operationalization of the analytical categories

4. Results

The following section presents the results of the analysis. For each case study, the storyline of the formation of the food policy council (sub-rq1) and dynamics and evolutions involving GISs (sub-rq2) are illustrated. In addition, a third section compares the two case studies to elaborate on common and divergent characteristics, which helps then discuss the results in light of the baseline theoretical frameworks (sub-rq3).

Moreover, as explained in subsection 3.3, the ESA used to interpret data allowed the researcher to deduce logical causalities, which do not necessarily correspond to temporal evolution. For this reason, the “storyline” results are not presented in chronological order, but as clusters of causally correlated dynamics. The reader should also be informed that the series of events here listed have been selected to account for the major occurrences which saw GISs’ involvement with institutional actors. As the purpose of the present research is to analyse GISs’ role, the experiences of key participants during these events have been prioritized over the broader comprehension of the development of a food policy in the selected city-regions.

4.1 Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam Food Policy Council (MRA FPC)

The MRA FPC is a non-profit organization working to connect food-related initiatives, food businesses and policy makers to jointly devise solutions (Food Council MRA, 2020). The annual plenary meetings are attended by a group of about 50 individuals representing different civil and commercial food organizations (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). In addition, one independent segment of the council is the Amsterdam Network for Food Planning, an interdisciplinary platform comprising of young professionals, students and scholars working to share and improve their research on sustainable food planning (*interviewee 1*). MRA FPC is positioned as an independent organization from governmental authorities (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2), however it has defined itself as a regional-level actor to reflect a city-region perspective on food systems.

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Interviewee 2), however, it has defined itself as a regional-level actor to reflect a city-region perspective on food systems.

4.1.1 Storyline: formation of MRA FPC

The chronology of the events and developments that led to the MRA FPC's formation as inserted in ETHNO software are presented in [Annex 3](#). Furthermore, the outcome of the ESA analysis conducted on ETHNO are illustrated in [Annex 4](#).

4.1.1.1 Contextual factors

The Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam (MRA, known in Dutch as Metropoolregio Amsterdam) is comprised of different government authorities: 32 municipalities, two provinces (North Holland and Flevoland) and the Transport Authority Amsterdam, which are divided over seven sub-regions (Metropoolregio Amsterdam, 2022). The region, which amounts to around 2.5 million residents and extends for around 150,000 hectares of land, is relatively spatially and economically cohesive, as it approximately follows the contours of the Amsterdam's daily urban system (Metropoolregio Amsterdam, 2022). However, the shift from Amsterdam city to the Amsterdam city-region has been made quite recently, culminating with the adoption of the name "Metropolitan" in 2007 (Janssen-Jansen, 2011). Due to its novelty, the region has yet to be fully institutionalized and is still in the process of developing a regional administrative authority to coordinate activities (Janssen-Jansen, 2011). Finally, the region accounts for about 50% of the whole county's jobs and economic outputs, and almost 45% of the total county's population, hence representing a densely populated and vibrant urban-region (Janssen-Jansen, 2011).

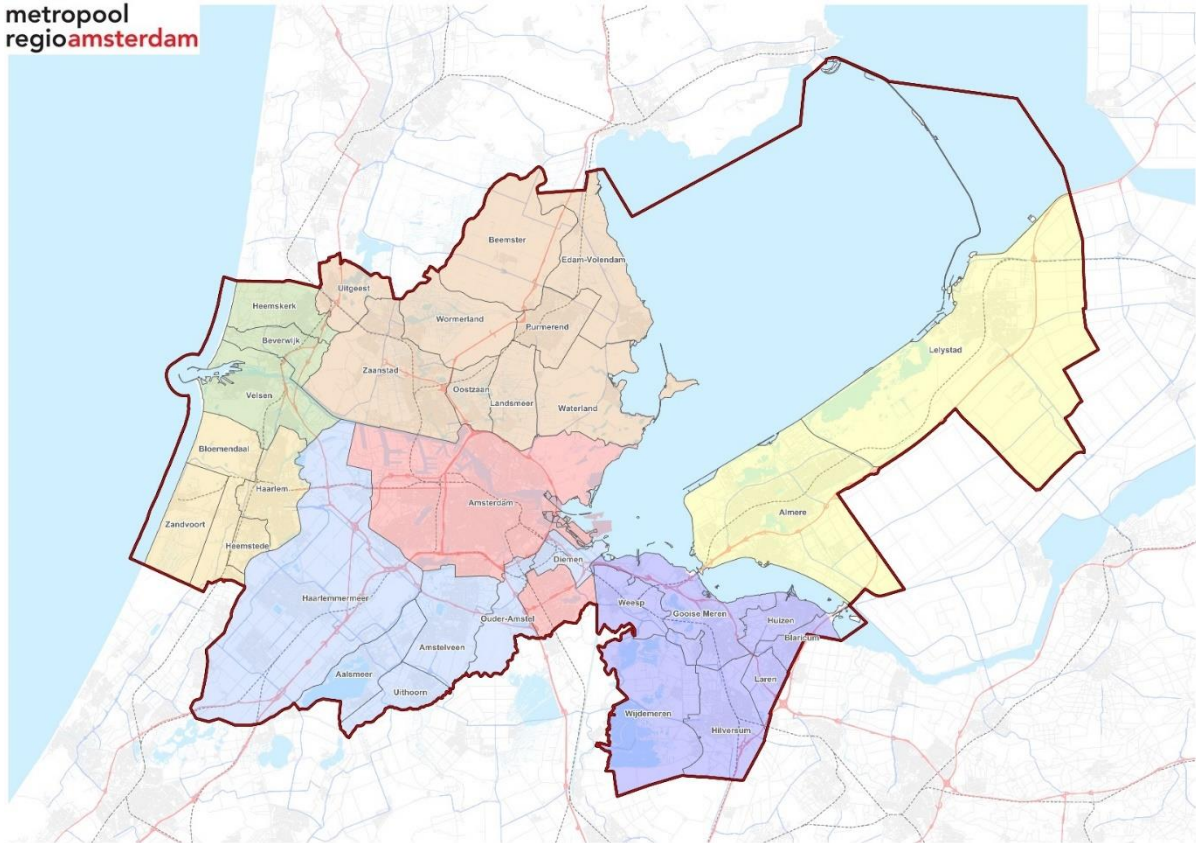


Figure 2. Map of Amsterdam Metropolitan Region. Retrieved from Metropoolregio Amsterdam, 2020.

4.1.1.2 Amsterdam city food policy: Testing Ground, Voedselvisie and Agenda Groen

The first event which set the preconditions for more involvement of civil societies with institutions and paved the way to the formation of MRA FPC is the “Testing Ground Amsterdam” pilot project (*Proeftuin Amsterdam*). Inspired by pre-existing food policies in the cities of London and Toronto, in 2007 Amsterdam city decided to develop a food vision following provincial goals to stimulate biological agriculture (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). The projects collaborating to build this food vision were primarily focused on healthier food systems for children and elder people (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). The food policy document conceived quickly obtained support from regional and provincial actors, as well as recognition from civil societies and initiatives which received modest subsidies from city authorities (Halliday, J., et al., 2019). The implementation of the plan, which was defined and carried out top-down by Amsterdam city, lasted until 2010 when the project lost political support. It was considered overall successful according to several bottom-up actors (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5), as it also led to the increase of sustainable food-related initiatives in Amsterdam and surrounding areas (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017, Halliday, J., et al., 2019). However, GISs also noted the lack of direct inclusion of civil societies in the food policy definition. These considerations were not isolated; in 2011 and 2012 a series of international conferences were held in several European

countries around the theme of citizens engagement in food policies' creation (Internal document 24, Personal communication, Interviewee 2)³. From this moment on, the efforts of the municipal (Amsterdam city) and provincial (North Holland and Flevoland) governmental bodies to create a food vision undertook a series of separate developments (Interviewee 2).

Stimulated by the international discussions and building from the overall positive experience of Testing Ground, in 2012 Amsterdam municipality decided to start drafting a new food vision. This time with the clear aim to involve more civil societies and food industry stakeholders. In 2013 a series of events, defined as a “run-up to a food vision” (Interviewee 2), was organized with a participatory process involving stakeholders and citizens in the co-designing of the food vision. In this context, as noted by different interviewees (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5), the role of the grassroots initiative Edible Amsterdam, as well as other leading GISs, was crucial. In fact, despite the reportedly poor organization of the city administration, unsalaried GISs' staff managed to arrange several activities such as meetings between civic initiatives and public officers, facilitation of dialogue between actors, and drafting of relevant texts to be included in the final vision document (Halliday, J., et al., 2019).

Interviewee 2 described the overall mismanagement of the event pointing out how one of the coordinators from Edibles Amsterdam was hired from the municipality to lead some activities, yet “she felt very much abused. Because in the end, she hardly got paid. [...] and the administrative procedures were sloppy. Basically the municipality profited because this woman had a large network. [...] So most of the leading initiatives were involved in the process.”. Furthermore, as a result of the expected co-producing process, the participating GISs and stakeholders were expecting to be informed on developments and changes of the food vision. However, according to interviewee 5 from Edibles Amsterdam, after the last meeting in May 2013, initiatives lost touch of the project's evolution and were informed about the final document only after its publication.

Nonetheless, disappointment about the events' mismanagement and lack of clear communication was somehow compensated by the enthusiasm for the launch of the Amsterdam food vision (*Voedselvisie*) in January 2014. The *Voedselvisie* document, which was sponsored by the leading political party *GroenLinks*, included several interesting aspects which envisioned the city food strategy as a rather integrated one. It addressed five relevant dimensions; health, nutrition, economic viability, social participation and environmental sustainability, and provided an overview of the existing

³ These included the XXIV European Society for Rural Sociology Congress (22–25 August 2011, Chania, Greece); the International Conference on Multifunctional Agriculture and Urban-Rural Relations: Agriculture in an Urbanizing Society (1–4 April 2012, Wageningen, Netherlands); the 9th European IFSA Symposium (1–4 July 2012, Aarhus, Denmark); and the XIII World Congress of Rural Sociology (29 July–4 August 2012, Lisbon, Portugal) (Internal document 24, Personal communication, Interviewee 2)

situation, future visions and concrete financial plans (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2014). Additionally, *Voedselvisie* aimed to establish a *Voedsel Informatie Punt*, a platform for information exchange between all the stakeholders and advised to form a city food policy council for policy shaping. The working group developing the vision organized an event called Prototyping the Food Council with different stakeholders to showcase how it would have worked (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). Notably, *Voedselvisie* was not endorsed by the provincial authorities of North Holland and Flevoland, which instead focused on a separate food policy under the aegis of the Amsterdam Economic Board (interviewee 2). Ultimately, as reported by interviewee 2, after the launch of *Voedselvisie* Amsterdam administration did not really comply with the overall food vision but rather prioritized the health sector and mostly dismissed the rest of the objectives that made the food vision comprehensive. The idea to form a food policy council was also temporarily abandoned. In retrospect, interviewee 6 commented on the overall process of co-designing as “more of a theoretical exercise” which eventually led to policies that “did not really take into account the initiatives and bottom-up efforts that were dispersed on the territory”.

The major event that delayed the continuation and effective implementation of the *Voedselvisie* was the 2014 municipal elections. When the supporting party *GroenLinks* lost the elections, the whole vision was dismissed. As mentioned by interviewee 2, the tendency to overturn policy documents delivered by previous administrative mandates is quite common in Dutch politics. In the case of food policies, which were still in a phase of development and not attached to any established government funds, this led to rather unreliable policy plans which could be easily subverted. The newly elected board of mayor and alderman developed a completely new and substantially different vision for sustainable food systems in the city. In particular, the deputy mayor with the portfolio on Nature and Environment produced an agenda addressing the relationship between the city and nature and limitedly included the topic of food (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). The new agenda, called Agenda Groen, focused on urban greening and hence envisioned sustainable food systems primarily in terms of urban gardening and agriculture and improved legal spaces for their development (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). The health dimension also received considerable funds. Ultimately, a low budget was assigned to the other components of the pre-existing *Voedselvisie*, and GISs and civil societies which had participated in the process of co-designing were left disappointed (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 6 commented on the matter saying “what they [the municipality] did, didn't make sense, because what the original strategy described was how important it is to have an integral, efficient vision to take all the different dimensions in accounts if you're working on a food policy. And then it was later on just put into the box of 'green'. It was only about greening the city and urban farming and, like, in narrow definitions!”. In regards to grassroots organizations' involvement,

interviewee 6 also shared his perspective by saying that probably at that stage they were “not organized enough to put more public pressure on the new chosen political party. It was instead quite easy for them to just let the party drop the whole plan”. Whilst organization lobbying for more public attention, financial resources and policy changes existed, the general public was probably not involved enough to respond.

With the *Agenda Groen*, the administration that run Amsterdam city from 2014 to 2018 provided relatively little space for political involvement of civil societies. The *Voedsele Informatie Punt*, originally maintained in the agenda, was stopped due to difficulties in finding a common ground between parties (Kuhlmann, A.E., 2017). This left bottom-up initiatives and stakeholders to develop autonomously and with limited financial support. Yet, the *Voedselevisie* participatory experience had created a shared understanding among civil societies regarding the need to have a comprehensive food strategy around a series of defined, interlinked themes. Unsurprisingly, the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 saw a notable increase in individuals, NGOs, advocacy groups and sustainable food businesses which were committed to radically transforming the food system in the city of Amsterdam and its metropolitan region (Halliday, J., et al., 2019). In parallel, at the regional level, administrative bodies had developed plans to concretize what had long been envisioned as a regional food network.

4.1.1.3 Flows of Food conference, and the creation of the MRA FPC and the Voedsele Verbindt foundation

In the spring of 2017, the province of North Holland invited relevant GISs to participate in the creation of a new regional food vision (Halliday, J., et al., 2019). At this point in time, the interests of regional actors and bottom-up parties were somewhat aligned. GISs⁴ were growing and the past municipal policy failures, added to increasing awareness of the importance of a regional perspective for food planning, were pushing food entrepreneurs and advocacy groups to think of food management at the Amsterdam metropolitan region level. In particular, key GISs’ actors (denominated as “food champions” or “policy entrepreneurs”⁵) had been carefully studying the benefits of regional food policy councils for grassroots participation. At the same time, North Holland

⁴ It is important to note that while speaking about GISs as monolithic entities, the development of the following events highly depends on individuals’ decisions and efforts.

⁵ Two actors represent what has been labelled by as “food champions” or “policy entrepreneurs” (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015), meaning key figures “investing their own resources, such as their time, expertise and reputation to perform important functions in the policy process” (Giambartolomei et al., 2021). The evolution of the MRA FPC and the involvement of GISs can ultimately be substantially attributed to their dedication in building trust, networks and gaining political support. Furthermore, in the years preceding this meeting they had already been independently building ties with several actors from institutions at municipal and provincial level and elaborated their own plans to develop a food policy platform to convene bottom-up and top-down actors.

province and the other institutional actors were looking for more consistent bottom-up enthusiasm to support their projects.

With the financial support of North Holland and Flevoland provinces and Rabobank Amsterdam in December 2017 an advocacy group, led by the food champions, held a conference called *Flows of Food* at the *Beurs van Berlage* Amsterdam to discuss regional policy plans. The venue was not selected randomly, but rather it was accurately chosen by GISs' representatives to be a prestigious one to attract bigger players. Interviewee 4 reported *"when there is something about food you can easily get the location filled up with interested people. But it's a very specific target group who will come to these meetings. But I thought, we must do something else. Because we wanted to attract also the dominant players in the field, and people from the municipalities and province and also other institutions. So we had to make it exclusive, which wasn't done before. That attracts attention. And looking back, I think that strategy worked!"*. This denoted a rather clear intention on the side of the GISs to create an institutionally recognized platform for discussion. The Flows of Food conference led to the elaboration of a regional food policy charter which revolved around six main themes: logistics and food flows, healthy food, circular economy, food landscapes, food and education, tourism and leisure, and citizen science and data (Internal document 33, Personal communication, Interviewee 2).

During the event, a regional food manifesto (Internal document 55, Personal communication, Interviewee 2) was signed by North Holland and Flevoland provinces, Rabobank, several companies, research institutes and the advocacy group's representatives. This important document also marked the official establishment of Amsterdam Metropolitan Region Food Policy Council. The manifesto mainly represented a common recognition of shared goals and commitments. The two food champions became the official founders of MRA FPC. As highlighted in the press release document published one month before the events, the advocacy group's purpose for these meetings was to *"galvanise bottom-up projects initiated by civil society groups and top-down strategies from government and corporations"* (Internal document 33, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). The food council MRA was embedded in a growing food network consisting of citizens, NGOs, and business and government agencies, and functioned as a platform for civil societies and small green entrepreneurs (doc 10). Its role was also to promote viable projects on the territory and advise regional agendas. As the province of North Holland was also aiming to revitalize the regional food network by gaining more bottom-up support (Interviewee 2), the Flows of Food conference can be seen as a key event in which several parties united to consolidate the pre-existing plans, bringing forward their own ambitions and building trust between networks.

In the first years after its launch, MRA FPC not only remained independent from the government but also did not acquire any legal status. Specific reasons are discussed in section 4.1.2.

However, for the present storyline, this is important to acknowledge because it contributes to explaining the following events. One important success of the Flows of Food conference was that it led to the creation of a core group, an “informal body of deliberation” (Interviewee 2) composed, among others, by leading politicians from North Holland and Flevoland, several industrialists, representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the co-founders of MRA FPC. In 2018, the co-founders together with other members of the group were invited by provincial authorities to discuss options and the viability of a regional institute which could act as a network, bringing together the conventional food players, which were not involved in MRA FPC (Interviewee 4). The fact that MRA FPC had no legal status contributed to creating a sense of urgency and legitimization among the institutional authorities to establish a recognized entity where government money could be entrusted.

To fulfil this purpose, in February 2019, the foundation *Voedsel Verbindt* (Food Connect) was formed. As noted by interviewee 4, the function of *Voedsel Verbindt* took the role of a vehicle in the hands of provincial governments and municipalities to bring forward the interests (and responsibilities) of dominant economic players in the shaping of more sustainable food systems (Halliday et al., 2019). MRA food council was on the other hand built around themes of food democracy and food sovereignty and hence aimed at supporting bottom-up political participation and grassroots innovation and hence was maintained independently from the *Voedsel Verbindt* foundation. As commented by interviewee 4, *“we thought it was good to have a regional institute which took care of the food policy, but to us that wasn’t enough [...]. Our mission was not completed. We said not to become part of Voedsel Verbindt ourselves [...] because we think the real change must come from bottom up. That was originally our motivation: we saw that there were a lot of local initiatives, but most didn’t succeed because there was no continuous and structured policy to support them. So, it was important to work on a bottom up strategy and see how to connect and give attention to these small initiatives!”*. Trust and mutual interest were built over time between *Voedsel Verbindt* and MRA FPC, also thanks to knowledge and contacts exchanges (Interviewee 2). The collaboration benefited both organizations, and the co-founders of MRA FPC soon began to be heavily involved in the board of *Voedsel Verbindt*, albeit in an unofficial capacity.

4.1.1.4 Amsterdam city Voedselvisie revival

In March 2018, the GroenLinks party won the municipal elections in Amsterdam. Soon after, because of bottom-up pressures and favourable political conditions, the *Voedselvisie* was put back on the municipal agenda with the promise of a new food strategy. In this context, the Flows of Food conference and the MRA FPC formation could have stimulated Amsterdam municipality to also re-

vitalize their food policies. Furthermore, it is important to notice that the municipality of Amsterdam did not join the provincial network developed around the *Voedsel Verbindt* foundation. Rather, it quite clearly took distance and expressed its intention to develop a municipal food council. Competition between administrative levels might have played a two-fold role in the constitution of food policies; on the one hand fastening separate commitments provincially and municipally, on the other hindering the creation of aligned plans.

In 2018, GISs participating in the MRA FPC were invited by the city alderman to discuss the development of the Amsterdam food strategy. As reported by interviewee 2, during these meetings they realized that the municipality had appointed little manpower and low budget on the vision, discovering that comprehensive food management was once again not prioritized and resources primarily had been allocated to already established domains, such as health and nutrition. However, this time the food vision benefitted from a higher degree of institutionalization, as the food dimension was at least formally included into the portfolio of Alderman for Public space and Green. Finally, the food strategy document produced focused on six lines of action: food as social connector, waste and food waste, healthy food environments, regional food production and distribution, food entrepreneurship and animal welfare (Internal document 92, Personal Communication, Interviewee 2). In addition, a municipal food council was established in late 2021 also thanks to the contribution of MRA FPC's founders' network and knowledge. MRA FPC's founders were invited to officially take part into the municipal food council, yet this decision has been pending ever since. This is due to compliances in aligning the approaches and the fact that MRA FPC has always been traditionally unaffiliated to government institutions (interviewee 2, interviewee 4). Cooperation of Amsterdam municipality with *Voedsel Verbindt* remained rather sporadic.

4.1.1.5 Recent events and the European Food CLIC project

The years 2018 and 2019 brought several opportunities to consolidate MRA FPC's newly established network and expand its reach. On the occasion of the prestigious We Make the city festival, organized in June 2018 by the grassroots organization *Voedsel Anders*, MRA FPC joined forces with important bottom-up organizations, such as Slow Food Youth Network Amsterdam and *Van Amsterdamse Bodem*, and organized the "We Feed the city" event. It consisted of a weekend full of workshops which aimed to raise awareness and involve citizens in the food transitions (Stichting WeMakeTheCity, 2018). It was in this context that one important manifesto was signed: the urban farming manifesto. Consequently, core members of MRA FPC researched the need for an urban farming platform. In 2021 MRA with other GISs working in the field of urban farming united to form the biggest urban farming foundation in Amsterdam: The *Stadslandbouw* Amsterdam foundation

(Amsterdam Urban agriculture foundation, officially founded in 2022). The foundation took the role of formal urban farmers' representative and became a reference institution for the Amsterdam administration (Interviewee 7).

Another relevant involvement of MRA FPC dates back to 2019 when the council got engaged with GISs' advocating against Amsterdam municipality over the use of *Lutkemeerpolder*, in North-west Amsterdam (interviewee 3). Protests started when the municipality decided to change the land-use code of this piece of land, which had been managed by local communities and organic farmers for decades, from agricultural to industrial land use. The change was primarily driven by economic reasons and implied that the land should have been repurposed in the logistic area for the close-by industries. Over the following years, mobilization from civil society had increased, calling for a green area in the city where urban farmers could grow food for the citizens. In 2021 the movement turned into a crowdfunding project which is currently aiming to purchase the land and transform it into an official city park for urban farming; *VoedselPark*. In this context, MRA FPC's role, as one of the leading partners, was to act as a platform channelling existing GISs towards a common cause and making use of social media to reach and involve the broader civil society (interviewee 4). The communication aspect has recently also been very politically relevant; during the 2022 city election, the social media pages invited citizens to vote consciously for parties that took the matter into account (Interviewee 3). Supported by the joint forces of different grassroots organizations, the case soon attracted citizens' attention and gathered social media resonance. This event led to an increase in the number of GISs collaborating and exchanging knowledge.

Up to today, despite these projects, the MRA FPC has not obtained the expected support from provincial actors to the point of becoming an advisory body, nor consistent participation of grassroots initiatives, primarily due to a lack of resources and effective governance structure (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 6). The initiatives so far have been supported ad hoc, and the function of MRA FPC primarily relied on the commitment of volunteers and co-founders, with strong engagement of academics and young professionals that work around sharing knowledge and organizing awareness campaigns. In the past year, thanks to the MRA FPC increasing recognition by institutional actors also internationally, the council has been selected to participate in the European Food CLIC program. The project aims to strengthen the links between science, policy and practice to establish continuous and inclusive interactions among food-involved actors (doc 46). With more steady financing from the Food CLIC funds, the MRA FPC is currently planning to bring into action the several projects that have been designed but never implemented, to professionalize the council by hiring young staff and to legalize into a formal entity. In December 2021, MRA FPC has created its own foundation, A Matter of Food, yet for commercial purposes, it is currently in the

process of establishing also a parallel association (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). With a new change of staff, a defined legal entity and the Food CLIC project around the corner, the next years seem to be reserving many opportunities for MRA FPC to facilitate the scaling of GISs involved.

4.1.2 Dynamics and evolving roles of grassroots initiatives for sustainability

In light of the above-described events, the following subsection seeks to explain the dynamics among actors involved and particularly the evolution of GISs' role using the proposed analytical categories. To do so, the main turning points described in the storyline have been examined in terms of out-scaling, upscaling, capture and constituency dynamics.

4.1.2.1 Out-scaling

To begin with, it is important to note that the Testing Ground Amsterdam project started in 2007 was perceived by several actors as a kick-off occurrence for the development of a sustainable food strategy in the region (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4). Following its onset, different kinds of grassroots initiatives for sustainability started to expand both in terms of increase in numbers of practices and geographical reach. This highlights a rather clear out-scaling dynamic, including at the same time **network and geographical out-scaling**. In particular, as the type of out-scaling is more referred to values spreading into different practices, it can be considered as a case of “transferring” out-scaling (Pel et al., 2020). The institutional top-down force hence demonstrated in this phase to be an essential element to consolidate and extend civil societies' awareness of sustainable food practices.

4.1.2.2 Capture

Growing GIS pressures and international discussions on the subject pushed Amsterdam municipality to incorporate civil groups in the policy-making process a few years later. However, a thorough examination of the 2013 participatory events revealed that the engagement of grassroots actors appeared to be more formalized than concretized. To mention interviewee 2, *“the municipality used the results of this interactive process for its own purposes [...], to legitimize its efforts with a vision, whereas they actually hardly allocated any competent personnel to conceive a vision [...] they simply took the document that was prepared bottom up by initiatives, and they used it for their own purposes, turned it into their own food vision”*.

This notion is supported by the fact that the final version of the food policy, *Voedselvisie*, did not reflect the complete vision produced by civil society, and that the Amsterdam municipality

concentrated primarily on the health dimension. This circumstance appears to be best characterised as a case of values- and thus legitimacy-capture. While paying lip service to civic societies, the municipality was able to absorb GIS values and ideas and incorporate them into its agenda and ultimately legitimize its own vision, rather than co-designing a new one.

The literature on participatory governance procedures has extensively discussed this sort of values domestication (Chilvers, 2009). According to Chilvers (2009, p. 403), this process can be viewed as a "decision justification" in that decision-making institutions employ participation as a sort of justification to "decision outcomes through manipulation of the framing of the participatory process to achieve those ends". In other words, while the participatory process was never explicitly designed to allow for co-designing, it was presented in such a way that it was regarded as such. Furthermore, the newly elected Amsterdam party reformulated the initial calls of GISs for an integrated strategy and kept, from the delivered inputs, only the best suited practices within their newly founded *Green Agenda*, namely urban gardens and sustainable agriculture.

4.1.2.3 Out-scaling

Following the domestication and throughout the 2014-2018 city government, GISs were generally "silenced," with no specific mobilization (Radicalization) enacted in response, indicating a general lack of public involvement and organization of GISs. However, participation in activities leading up to a food vision, as well as improved public awareness on food-related topics, prepared the way for greater bottom-up network building and boosted civil society's commitment. Furthermore, the lack of an institutionalized venue for public dialogue acted as an indirect motivator for civil societies to strengthen their self-organized networks and communication skills. Out-scaling of networks was especially visible in urban gardens, which increased in quantity as a result of the new agenda's incentives (Interviewee 7).

4.1.2.4 Upscaling, Capture and Strategic capture

Given these conditions, the 2017 Flows of Food conference was hosted in an ideal environment to the creation of GISs. It is vital to emphasize that the process of ideation and establishment of the MRA FPC should be traced principally to two significant grassroots actors from quite different backgrounds. One GIS representative is an emeritus professor of Urban Food Systems, a member of an urban farming group, and a member of an established network of institutional officers with whom he had previously collaborated or who were former alumni. The second GISs' representative is a food entrepreneur, urban gardener and anthropologist. Ascertained that the role of these actors has been determinant in the genesis of MRA FPC, it is necessary to acknowledge their personal background as

it allows to further explain and discuss the importance of food champions for grassroots scaling (see subsection 5.1).

Following their testimonies, analyses of the Flows of Food event unveiled particularly interesting dynamics. At the time of the conference, the GISs representatives had started to become more and more involved with regional, rather than municipal, actors in the attempt to expand their reach while also seizing the opportunity created by the alignment of goals with the provincial administrations. The conditions for infiltration and collaboration with regional actors were strategically created by the GISs' representatives, who had in fact set up the event in a notorious location. This development consists of several interpretations: the GIS actors were attempting to increase their power and recognition, in other words, to scale up institutions, by drawing the attention of higher provincial authorities, building contacts, and infiltrating their agendas. This was done, to some extent, by strategically allowing provincial representatives to capture the excitement, local knowledge, and already existing networks for their own objectives.

In retrospective, interviewee 2 exposed insightful considerations regarding the actual intentions of the participating actors. In particular, on the one hand the Flows of Food was seen by GISs' representatives as the moment of foundation of a regional food policy council, the MRA FPC, which was envisioned in terms of independent platform for grassroots initiatives and stakeholders' discussion, and advising body for policy makers (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). On the other hand, provincial actors were trying to establish a regional network which could facilitate collaboration between conventional food-industry stakeholders, while however ensuring civil societies' support. In the light of these reflections, the dynamics can ultimately be understood as both values capture from dominant actors, who were aiming to set up a regional network but with the legitimizing support of bottom-up initiatives, and strategic capture, in so far as the GISs representatives had somehow agreed to these values domestication with the purpose of creating a collaborative space to interact with institutions (hence moving towards an upscaling).

4.1.2.5 Upscaling

Over time, both sides compromised with their reciprocal goals (Interviewee 1) and as the approach was maintained collaborative, trust was built. Both parties benefited from the collaboration: *Voedsel Verbindt* foundation was established, comprising of provincial actors, conventional food industries and GISs' representatives, while the MRA FPC was integrated into institutional discussions as its co-founders were unofficially involved into the board of *Voedsel Verbindt*. The unofficial participation, meaning that they were invited on their personal title rather than on behalf of MRA FPC's representatives, is an interesting object of analysis as it evidences a

contrasting behaviour. Although MRA FPC was ideated bottom-up, its interactions with institutions were underway from its constitution. Yet MRA FPC also maintained an undefined legal form, primarily due to the misalignment of the co-founders' visions, and an independent position from governments. According to interviewee 3, the absence of an official affiliation to any political entity was necessary for the MRA FPC to maintain its original role as a platform and facilitator of interactions among specifically grassroots organizations. In line with Seyfang & Smith's (2007) arguments, this tactic might be evidence that despite the intentions to scale up institutionally, the GISs were also contrasting the idea of an official association with provincial actors due to the risk of a reformulation of the original meaning of the food council. The particular positionality of the two co-founders turned out to play a key function because they could leverage policymakers on a personal account without jeopardising the aim of the MRA FPC.

The participation of the co-founders in the *Voedsel Verbindt* board allowed for the MRA FPC to obtain more recognition. In 2018, the engagement of MRA FPC's core grassroots members in the shaping of the municipal food policy demonstrated that this recognition had spread and made their contribution attractive also to the city-level administration. The legal ambiguity of MRA FPC allowed the organization to also infiltrate its influence into different administrative tiers, thus making it an inter-scalar actor within a competitive environment between provincial and municipal institutions (Upscaling). One outcome of this process can be seen for instance in the foundation of the *Stadslandbouw* Amsterdam foundation, which was strongly facilitated by the extended network and political levers moved by MRA FPC's representatives.

In 2019 MRA FPC also took up a leading role in the *Lutkemeerpolder* protest, which has currently developed into one of the core initiatives of the council: the *Voedselpark* project. This development further evidences the dual nature of MRA FPC and its oxymoronic struggle: to obtain legitimacy via collaboration with institutional actors and to maintain a grassroots role by actively participating and manifesting in the representation of civil societies (Upscaling). Remarkably, the *VoedselPark* project has been highly successful in involving civil societies and attracting the attention of the media. What has facilitated its success, according to interviewee 6, is the fact that it was a practical and relatable project in nature, which ultimately made it easy to attract civil societies' attention. Efforts to shape an integrated food vision, although conceptually indisputable, were over time perceived as dispersive and were mostly inconclusive, as also demonstrated by the developments following 2012 run-up to a food vision event (interviewee 6).

Interviewee 6 argued that focusing on less but more concrete challenges to bring forward would have been beneficial for the MRA FPC. This ultimately means that in the absence of a political

counterpart that recognizes the importance of a structured participatory advisory body, activist upscaling might ultimately be a more effective strategy to maintain participation.

Table 6 summarizes key events from the storyline and relative GISs' evolving roles and dynamics according to analytical categories.

MRA FPC	
Storyline (Events)	Dynamics
GISs increase thanks to favourable municipal food vision	Out-scaling
GISs participate in the municipal run up to a food vision events. GISs' inputs were reformulated into Amsterdam city's own vision.	Values capture
Run up to a food vision events had spread awareness on sustainable food-related subjects	Out-scaling
MRA FPC is founded by creating bottom-up collaborations with regional actors. GISs' values and network were absorbed for regional actor's own purposes.	Upscaling/Strategic capture Network capture
Mutual collaboration with institutional actors and infiltration of key GISs' actors into dominant actor's board via personal channels	Upscaling (collaborative)
Activism against specific measures implemented by Amsterdam municipality	Upscaling (activist)

Table 6. Summary of the key events in the storyline and relative dynamics

4.2 Plain of Food of Lucca

The Plain of Food of Lucca is an officially recognized food policy council operating in the area of the Plain of Lucca, Italy. In particular, it involves five out of the seven municipalities which are part of the Plain of Lucca: Lucca, Capannori, Porcari, Altopascio and Villa Basilica (Arcuri et al., 2022). Participants in the FPC constitute primarily representatives of civil societies and GISs, representatives from the municipalities' boards and food sector stakeholders. The council's last meeting was attended by about 20 participants, however, as explained in the present subsection, the governance model is structured to foster a rather continued participation. Finally, the Plain of Food is collectively managed by the five municipalities and, until recently, had an administrative office in Capannori.



Figure 3. Map of Plain of Lucca. Retrieved from Regione Toscana, n.d.

4.2.1 Storyline: formation of Plain of Food

The chronology of the events regarding the formation and development of the Plain of Food of Lucca, as used in the event structure analysis, is presented in [Annex 5](#). [Annex 6](#) represents the storyline developed on the software ETHNO.

4.2.1.1 Contextual Factors

The area defined as Plain of Lucca in Tuscany, central Italy, is located in between coastal areas and hills on the one side and mountains on the other (Arcuri et al., 2022). The inhabitants and extension of the five cities integrated in the Plain of Food are illustrated in *Table 7*.

Municipality	Area (km ²)	Inhabitants (2011)
Altopascio	28,58	15 731
Capannori	155,96	46 774
Lucca	185,79	90 107
Porcari	18,05	8911
Villa Basilica	36,57	1540

Table 7. Main features of the municipalities involved in the Plain of Food. Retrieved from Arcuri et al. (2022)

Historically, the cities of the Plain of Lucca have been part of a unified administrative political body. The capital city, Lucca, is the most socio-economically prominent one and exerts a strong influence on the whole city region (Arcuri et al., 2022). The second largest city, and protagonist in the formation of the Plain of Food, Capannori, has traditionally constituted the rural area feeding the city, Lucca, and is considered as one of the biggest rural municipality in Italy. The vast hilly and mountain system surrounding the city maintains an important agricultural role despite the urbanization process (Arcuri et al., 2022). Overall, the orographic characteristics of this territory have allowed for a rather elevated level of diversification of rural areas and consequent abundance of agricultural and agrogastronomic activities (Arcuri et al., 2022).

4.2.1.2 Tuscany regional participatory law and the role of Capannori

One important event which set off the process of civil societies involvement in the regional food policy in motion is the enactment of the 2007 Regional law for Participation (Regione Toscana, 2007). The aim of this law was to trigger processes of active citizenship and in particular to “contribute to renovate the democracy and its institutions integrating them with practices, processes and instruments of participative democracy” (Regione Toscana, 2007). One of the key aspects was to find a pathway to substantiate participatory practices at the local level and hence introduce a model of deliberative democracy without threatening the full titularity and legitimacy of institutions in their making decisions, fundamental features of representative democracies. To do so, the region created a regional Authority for participation which acted as an independent and neutral organ with the role of evaluating and approving participatory projects proposed by several types of actors: citizens, associations, city administrations, etc. With this law, Tuscany acquired the most participatory prone legislation in Italy and sparked the emergence of several projects aimed at citizens’ awareness raising and participation.

In particular, the municipality of Capannori over the years demonstrated a rather receptive attitude. As highlighted by several interviewees (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4), this was also facilitated by the fact that Capannori benefitted from a remarkably active social context with abundance of associations. Furthermore, to manage its dispersive geographical distribution, the municipality has a long tradition of direct citizens engagement with institutional actors, most importantly the city mayor, who organize meetings to receive direct feedback on the administration’s management (Interviewee 1).

In 2012 Capannori initiated its first participatory project financed by the Authority for participation which focused on active citizenship within schools, involving associations, organizations, parents and teachers in the co-development of projects related to children’s educative programs. As

highlighted by interviewee 2, the role of the school was critical in this phase, although the participation was initially not revolved around food-related subjects. As the project carried on, food themes were gradually introduced particularly because of the involvement of one key grassroots actor, namely the Slow Food organization. The co-designing of educative programs over time merged into the Slow Food project “*Orti in condotta*” (“school gardens”), which sought to educate teachers and parents on ways to transmit younger generations knowledge related to food culture and environmental protection (Città di Lucca, 2014). Furthermore, it is important to note that active civil societies concerned with the school environment were themselves pushing for the renovation of school canteens and introduction of such projects in their curricula (Interviewee 2)

In the realm of sustainable food systems, Slow Food also played a key role in the area fostering local production by establishing two important *Presidi*⁶ which effectively became recognized by local restaurants and their products commercialized in the area. Other grassroots were also involved, in particular some local associations and farming groups working towards shorter food chains, the green association *Lega Ambiente* campaigning for more sustainable food systems and the Caritas Diocesana, a charity institution distributing food to solidarity canteens and battling against food waste.

4.2.1.3 Lucca and Capannori Mayors signs MUFPP and Circularifood project

It was against this background that the food policy process officially started in May 2018, when the Mayors of Capannori and Lucca signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact⁷ (Interviewee 3). Following this, the administration of Capannori⁸ decided to apply to the Regional Authority for participation to start a new 6-months participatory project, called Circularifood, with the purpose to establish a regional food chart (Interviewee 3). Capannori played a critical role by setting up a “*cabina di regia*” (literally “control room”), which acted as an informal steering committee composed of public officials, academics, grassroots representatives and citizens working on food-related issues (Arcuri et al., 2022). The *cabina di regia* also engaged with Sociolab, a company working in participatory processes animation, and collaborated with the research association Sismondi laboratory of Rural studies, which contributed by adding a scientific lens to the project. Furthermore, from the beginning,

⁶ “The *Presidia* are Slow Food Communities that work every day to save native livestock breeds, local fruit and vegetable varieties, bread, cheeses, cured meats, sweets, and more.” (Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, 2015)

⁷ The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, signed in the occasion of the 2015 Milan EXPO event, is an “international agreement among cities from all over the world, committed “to develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimize waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change”. It is currently signed by 225 cities worldwide (Comune di Milano, 2015)

⁸ The process of participation was initiated by a significant player who fits under the label of “policy entrepreneur” due to her job as a municipal official.

it was decided to extend the reach of the project to the cities which were traditionally part of the Plain of Lucca: Porcari, Altopascio and Villa Basilica. This decision was taken for two reasons: to create a regional food policy which integrated homogeneously the whole city-region, which is geographically and culturally connected, and to leverage on more political weight to receive greater support to the overall project from the Regional Authority for participation (interviewee 3).

The timeline of events which led to the launch of the Plain of Food of Lucca in January 2020 is visualized in *Figure 4*.

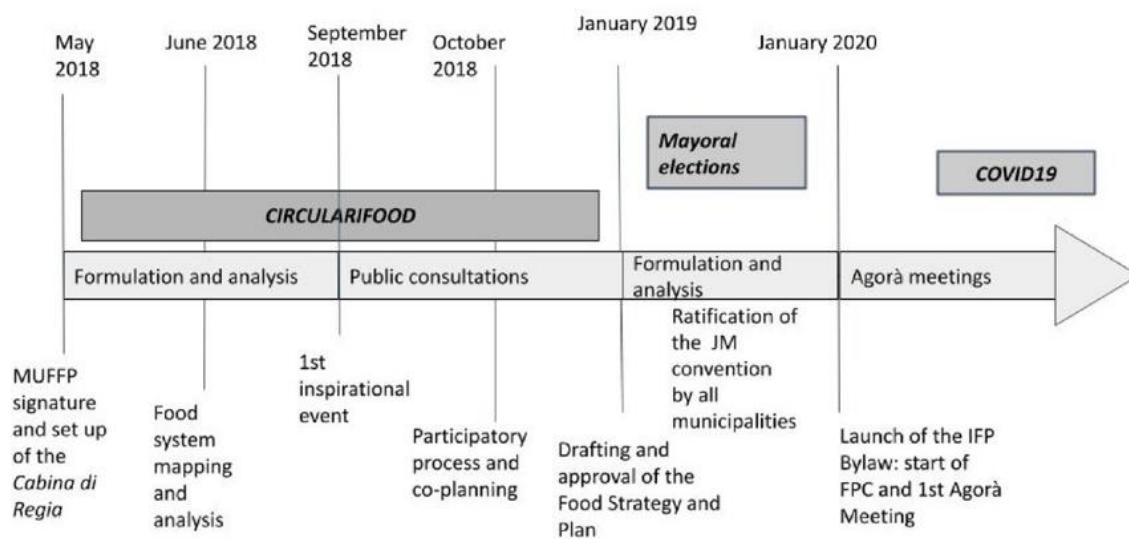


Figure 4. Timeline with phases and milestones of the Plain of Food until April 2020. Retrieved from Arcuri et al. (2022)

The first step of the process was the mapping and analysis of the regional stakeholders and involved actors. This phase was carried out by the *cabina di regia*, with consistent contribution from scholars from the University of Pisa. During the mapping more than 300 actors were identified, and the interrelations between several GISs' efforts were mapped.

To provide an example of these interactions in regards to the school-related projects, several of the above-mentioned GISs' actors were involved and collaborated with each other in terms of children and staff's education and urban gardening practices, access to healthy food, battle to food waste and solidarity in food distribution. Following the mapping, a series of events were held as public consultations and citizens involvement's moments. In September 2018, the *cabina di regia* organized an inspirational event to further involve citizens and present the results of the mapping and analysis. The presenters illustrated the good practices which had emerged during the analysis to 80 participants. The interviewees (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3, Interviewee 4,

Interviewee 6) who had attended this event affirmed that a good discussions sparked. The following events were territorial focus groups, which consisted in events organized in all the five cities in order to attract the more diverse stakeholders which did not take part in the GISs. In this context, the *cabina di regia* collected the points of views and values of citizens in regards to how the future food policy plan should have prioritized its efforts in each municipality and in the overall plan (Arcuri et al., 2020). This phase of the process was also important to continue the mapping of existing initiatives on the territory. Following the territorial focus groups, thematic focus groups were arranged. This time, the process of participation was organized in working tables composed by civil society actors, GISs, stakeholders and policy makers, with the aim to concretize the discussions and definition principles for the food policy, and co-plan the activities that had to be carried out. The dialogues ultimately congregated in the chart of principles, which envisioned food systems based on circularity, knowledge and consciousness, education, inclusion, territory and health (Arcuri et al., 2022). In January 2019 a final event was organized to draw conclusions on the project and present the Intermunicipal Food Policy (IFP) and Strategy which were subsequently published (Morano, 2021).

4.2.1.4 Governance model development, launch of the Plain of food FPC and initial projects

In order to make the IFP more effective, from February 2019 the *cabina di regia* worked to identify an institutional governance model which could be suitable for the territorial context. A point of departure which was shared among the actors involved was that in order for the food policy to be effective it first and foremost needed to be embedded in a constituted organ which could foster citizens and stakeholders' involvement and create ideas and projects spill over (Interviewee 3).

To this end, several food policy council models were analysed based on the Milan food policy experience (Està, 2016). The analysis of models was also inspired by preceding food policy councils' experiences in the region, such as the Livorno food policy council. As one of the main goals of the municipalities was to avoid fragmentation of efforts, the model that was finally identified had a rather rigid and formalized governance, which could legally bind the five municipalities together under a single Food policy council. Furthermore, one food council office which worked on the actuation of the food policy principles was established in Capannori administrative office. The model was formalized through a signed convention, which established a "*gestione associata*" (Joint management) of the functions, services, and an annual budget that the five municipalities allocated to the Plain of Food. This system of governance still today constitutes an unicum as it formally binds multiple municipalities under a common food council and hence induces them to find common solutions (Arcuri et al., 2022).

The convention also instituted the bodies of the Plain of Food: the Assembly of Mayors, the Council, the Agorà, and the formalized office in Capannori. The Agorà was developed to represent the

open assembly, where participation occurs through thematic tables which are led by expert coordinators, elected by members of the Agora (Interviewee 2). The themes for each table were decided during the CirculariFood project and are local production, lifestyles, access/food waste, school and food, urban gardens (Arcuri et al., 2020). The Assembly of Mayors, which represented the political decision-making body, was composed by assessors and/or mayors of the involved city. Finally, the Council, which has both participatory and decision making roles, was composed by the thematic tables' coordinators and institutional representatives from the five municipalities. The latter performed a linking role between the other bodies, by bringing the projects and ideas developed in the Agora in the institutional discussions. Finally, animation and coordination of the Agora and Council and facilitation of interactions with the mayors were designated responsibilities of the office in Capannori (Arcuri et al., 2022). The four bodies and their relations are visualized in *Figure 5*.

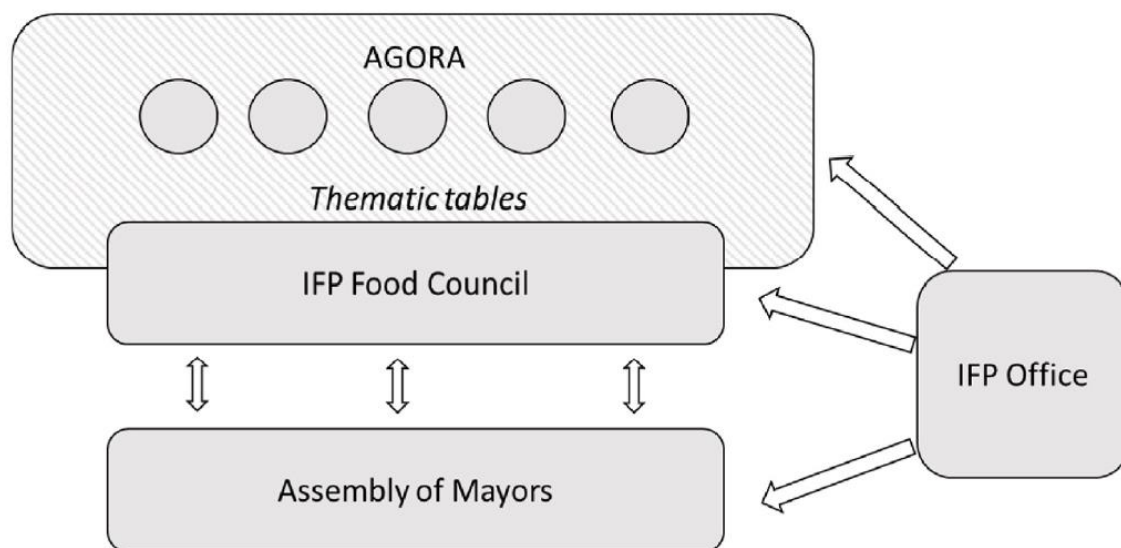


Figure 5. Governance model defined based on the Milan Food Policy experience. Retrieved from Arcuri et al. (2022)

In the months following the creation of the governance model, local elections were held in Capannori and the precedent mayor was re-elected. This played a crucial role in bringing forward the convention as the mayor's contribution and support to the development of the food policy council had been essential for the departure of the whole project. Consequently, in January 2020, the convention for the *gestione associata* was ratified by the five cities, and the Food Plain was officially launched.

Many of the projects forecasted were soon dismissed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit Italy in March 2020. However, the thematic groups adapted rather rapidly and

tried to maintain the initial lively participation by organizing meetings online and using social networks to spread information about the goals of Plain of Food and reach new participants. Furthermore, some noteworthy activities that were advanced by the Plain of Food during these complicated times include: a series of promotional campaigns on social media regarding the adoption of healthy lifestyles during lockdowns, daily suggestions on domestic farming and food-related practices as well as anti-waste practices; the promotion of local products for restaurants; the promotion of farmers' markets which allowed for them to remain open even during lockdowns; and the mapping of urban garden's initiatives (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4, Interviewee 5).

4.2.1.5 Recent events, and the European Food CLIC project

The emergence of the re-adapted initiatives due to the Covid-19 outbreak fostered the development and discussion of new ideas on how to bring forward the mission of the Plan of Food, especially in light of the systemic food-related problems evidenced by the pandemic (Interviewee 6). One growing belief was that in order to advance the impact of the council, all of the local stakeholders had to be involved and connected, starting from food production and procurement to food distribution. This paved the way for a new project called "Food Hub" which was financed by the regional Authority for Participation and was carried out from May to December 2021. This project sought to involve also conventional actors and companies not traditionally involved in sustainable practices and to diversify the participants. The ultimate aim of the Food Hub was to define a locally-based logistical model that coordinated the aggregation and distribution of products and allowed and encouraged all citizens to access local products. The Food Hub participatory project led to the production of a relevant document published in December 2021 which identified the type of professional figures necessary to carry out the role of "animators" for the community of the Plain of Food. The animators were deemed necessary to expand the voluntary-based work and professionally execute scouting, build connections and support the initiatives with efficient communication and knowledge of the territory. This document was said to be important as it provides guidelines for the type of professional figures which are currently missing according to several members of the Plain of Food (Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3). Despite this achievement, the concrete formation of logistical food hubs is still under discussion and has not been concretized yet.

In the past months, as the Plain of Food originated from projects in schools, a recurring theme reported by interviewees was also the need to improve school catering services. Throughout the last two years, a consistent work has been done by the thematic table of school and food to try to modify the current catering tenders contracts to account for the quality and provenience of food served at food canteens. The goal in this case is to develop a new framework to internalize the school canteens

as an “in house” services and create more favourable conditions for local producers to provide their own food, for instance, through participatory certifications. Although the idea originated bottom-up, more precisely from teachers and parents of children participating in the school and food thematic table, it has recently reached the city level with some municipalities currently conducting feasibility study on the newly developed tender contracts to evaluate if the options proposed by the Plain of Food are economically and logistically viable (Interviewee 3, Interviewee 5, Interviewee 6). However the municipalities did not respond jointly to the proposals, highlighting difficulties in moving forward projects at the city-regional level.

In March 2022, the office located in Capannori was dismissed, primarily due to the fact that an essential figure, and also initiator of the Plain of Food, had moved to Lucca’s administration office (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3). Although Lucca is part of the Plain of Food and is the capital of the city-region, no specific office was designated to have the same roles, causing a rather perceivable lack of central organizational body that could coordinate and guide the initiatives (Interviewee 3). According to some interviewees, this is also aligned with the overall lack of consistent resources and funds allocated in the management of the Plain of Food by the municipalities. Given that the participants are all volunteers, the annual shared budget invested by the five cities is quite limited and has so far primarily served the purpose of funding the participatory projects and constitution of the food council. Furthermore, regional funds were obtained ad hoc only for the participatory projects. This issues once again highlight the need for professional figures that work independently or within the administration offices of the municipalities with a specific focus on the Food Plain management so to avoid restraining transversal themes into pre-fixed sectorial discussions. Moreover, the lack of a central body, ultimately led to a gradual reduction in citizens’ participation.

However, overall the Plain of Food has demonstrated to have a solid structural base which could persist despite the online environment and the phase out of the office in Capannori. This has been attributed to the functionality of the governance model which had been built leveraging on strong bottom-up pressure and top-down involvement.

Finally, in May 2022 the last council’s meeting was organized in Capannori. The absence of official representatives from three of the five municipalities, including Lucca, demonstrated a reduction in the involvement also of the institutional side. Nonetheless, the meeting was viewed as the first step to reconvene the main components of the group and discuss some core themes to work on in the upcoming months. This was deemed particularly necessary in the light of the participation of the Plain of Food in the European Food CLIC⁹ project from September 2022 and the attached project

⁹ The Metropolitan Region of Amsterdam Food Policy Council and the Plain of Food of Lucca are both taking part in the European Food CLIC program described in subsection 4.1.1. The participation of the two councils in this

fundings. From the discussions emerged during the meeting, the way forward should include three crucial issues which also resonate the recent events above described: the recovery and support of local food supply chains through a more efficient logistical management; the development of collective catering services in particular in schools, and the recovery at its full potential of the lively participation that has characterized the first phases of the Plain of Food, with particular attention to existing practices. The administrations were also invited to play a more persistent role in trying to move forward jointly, as the inter-municipality aspect of the plan constitutes its main institutional legitimation.

4.2.2 Dynamics and evolving roles of grassroots initiatives for sustainability

In light of the above-described developments, the following subsection seeks to explain the dynamics among actors involved and particularly the evolution of GISs' role using the proposed analytical categories. To do so, main turning points described in the storyline have been examined in terms of out-scaling, upscaling, capture and constituency dynamics.

4.2.2.1 Out-scaling and scaling through

In the years prior to the formation of Plain of Food, the legal predisposition of the Tuscany region to collaboration and participation with civil societies had set in motion a series of projects leading to a significant **network out-scaling** of sustainable practices. Notably, the legal structure was assisted by the particular socio-cultural context of the Plain of Lucca and, more specifically, of the municipality of Capannori. Here the long associative tradition and the significant presence of the renowned organization Slow Food had allowed for the collaborative-prone context to meet with spreading commitments to change the conventional food system. In addition to Slow Food, the area saw the co-existence of several other renowned food related non-profit organizations, such as Legambiente and Caritas, which in the context of a small-municipality already constituted powerful bottom-up actors.

Over the years grassroots' pressures to create a more aware and pro-active territory, in the perspective of a regional food sovereignty, had particularly infiltrated the municipal administration of Capannori. These efforts came to a concrete realization with the Slow Food school project *Orti in Condotta*. Given the territorial and cultural context, the infiltration can be explained as a slow permeation of values that were rather automatically conveyed from powerful GISs to institutional actors (**scaling through**) via direct collaboration, and which enacted a gradual policy spill-over. To

project was discovered after the beginning of the present research, and further demonstrated the alignment of the two food councils in trying to link bottom practices to local institutions and policy makers.

provide an example, *Orti in Condotta*, originally started by Slow Food, led to rethinking not only school policies, but also urban planning, to develop plans which took into account the allocation of public spaces for gardening use in the proximity of schools, environmental policies, in relation to waste management, and social policies, as for the case of redistribution of food excesses.

4.2.2.2 Constituency: constituent power

Given this context, the launch of the CirculariFood project was particularly related to a form of dialectical development in which grassroots initiatives for sustainability and the administration of Capannori had exchanged knowledge and influenced each other about the necessity to open a dialogue on local food policies that reflected the importance of a more sustainable food system. Although the project was started and developed by Capannori's administration, as stated by interviewee 7, GISs had continuously pressured institutions to connect and create systematic connections among stakeholders, civil societies, and policy representatives. As reported by the initiator, interviewee 3, the administration had primarily seized a latent opportunity by organizing the project CirculariFood, which also benefitted from significant support from research institutes. In line with what emerged to be a necessity to co-design food policies and to maintain a systematic dialogue with civil societies, the result of the CirculariFood project was the Plain of Food policy council, "an instrument in the hands of administrations" that promoted citizens participation in policy discussions (Interviewee 1). For these reasons, the governance model constituted in the Plain of Lucca can be defined as an hybrid bottom-up and top-down model.

Other than the organization they represent, it important to keep in mind that much of the process described was ideated and carried out by key figures from the administrative offices in collaboration with GISs' actors. In particular, one officer working in the administration of Capannori acted as a catalyst, merging the experiences and insights gathered over the years of collaborative projects and leveraging on her position and knowledge working at the Secretariat Office of the Mayor (Interviewee 3). Likewise, several other actors participating in the process contributed by representing multiple positionalities at the same time; researchers, school teachers, entrepreneurs, city counsellors that were also GISs members or had worked with them (Interviewee 7). As for the previous case study, these figures can be defined as food champions or policy entrepreneurs in that they can make use of their positionalities to ultimately enact larger scale processes.

Moreover, the particularity of the Plain of Lucca is that several members had a shared and clear understanding of the meaning of participation thanks to previous projects. Participation was envisioned as a moment of dialogue where citizens and institutions could meet and identify experts coming from civil societies that would share their knowledge and discuss, allowing all other

participants to consciously co-create and propose policy changes or projects (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 7). Hence, the development of a model of systematic and organized citizens participation, embodied by the Plain of Food's governance model (subsection 4.2.1.4), can represent an example of **constituency** in that using citizens' agency in policy shaping is not only instrumentally used to bring forward innovations/practices, or to capture values/legitimization, but it is a political goal in itself. The constitution of the Plain of Food evidences the intentions of actors involved to bring participatory models into the local administrations for the sake of active citizenship, meaning to attribute political power in the hands of citizens. According to a previous research on the Plain of Food, "the interviewees unanimously acknowledged **that implicit goals are related to the very idea of integration and governance innovation.**" (Arcuri et al., 2022). The newly created governing body leveraged on political agency of citizens to trigger governance innovation and to continue reproducing political involvement. The counterparts constituted by the five municipal authorities promptly responded to the opportunity created by administration and GISs, and committed to the project by signing the Joint Management.

4.2.2.3 Constituency: constituted power

The constituency process that led to the constitution of the Plain of Food was enacted by the collective efforts of an heterogenous constituent group, led by the *cabina di regia*, to which the constituted institutions responded positively. The role of the administration of Capannori, frontrunner of the project, is hard to separate from the constituent power, as the process was led by officers who were able to enact change thanks to their hybrid positionality. Following the Plain of Food's creation, the responsiveness of institutional actors started to decrease. Interviewee 4, contested the overall lack of continued political support by the five city boards, "*the Plain of Food cannot 'do' itself, it can propose changes that then need to be taken up by the political counterpart [...]. The demands and stimuli that came from the Plain of Food and which could concretely have an impact were ignored in the end [...]. You can tell you have such an important, participated instrument, but then going from an external aspect to a more concrete action is another story*". This evidenced that participation over time partially took the form of a "*mechanism that goes in circle without leading to any concrete result*" in terms of policy change, and hence the project lost some of its initial grassroots legitimization (Interviewee 2). For instance, the deadlock in the formation of food hubs and the lack of consistent joint efforts to renovate school catering tenders had disappointed GISs' expectations. Furthermore, the gradual reduction of political responsiveness was also demonstrated by the dismissal of the office in Capannori and subsequent lack of investment in human resources.

An explanation for the gradual withdrawal of engagement of municipal administrations, after their initial strong support, is the rigidity of bureaucratic structures of the public administrations, which are hierarchically organized, and compartmentalized in sectors hardly communicating with each other. This ultimately leaves little space for experimentation of transversal policies such as food policies, so that if ideas are not translated into specific administrative procedures they hardly ever reach any concrete result (Arcuri et al., 2022), and over time lead to loss of political interest by institutions. However, this issue itself constitutes one of the structural lock-ins that ultimately the Plain of Food aims to modify by triggering creation of innovative models into the city administrations. In accordance with Alexander (2013), the existing administrative structures hinder the innovative process because they set the frame within which grassroots contributions can be shaped, but they also constitute the locus where bottom-up pressures can trigger large-scale change.

4.2.2.4 Constituency as a “permanent state of becoming”

It should be noted that concrete results have been achieved to some extent, especially in regards to school catering tenders in Capannori and Lucca; which is where large civil society components and private business were highly involved and the mayoral support was already strong. The political agency of heterogenous grassroots, where largely distributed, hence created a force which challenged institutional resistance to change.

The **constituency** process is in a **permanent “state of becoming”** (Pel, 2015) in that it is a mechanism that requires continued political agency of grassroots actors and responsiveness of institutions. To infiltrate through political agendas, GISs might leverage on specific issues which can more easily attract institutions (strategic capture), as for the case of the school theme. However, their aim to maintain a role in the policy shaping is ultimately demonstrated by persistent collective political pressures. The ever-evolving process of constituency also involves the institutional decision making counterparts’ responsiveness, which might, depending on their farsightedness, view the interaction with citizens as an opportunity to create a base of political consensus or as a bottom-up pressure to silence.

Table 8 summarizes the main events and related GISs’ evolving roles and dynamics.

Plain of Food	
Storyline (Event)	Dynamics
Regional participatory law and key food-related GISs actors widespread presence	Out-scaling
GISs collaborated with local administrations for different projects. In particular the Orti in Cultura project	Scaling through
Heterogenous participation of GISs on the territory pressured, before and during CirculariFood, administrations into creating a body that supports political agency.	Constituency
Political agency is maintained over time.	Constituency

Table 8. Summary of the key events in the storyline and relative dynamics

4.3 Comparing the case studies

The following subsection dives into what emerged to be the primary similarities and differences of the two presented case studies in order to outline the main factors that triggered and impacted GISs' evolutions.

4.3.1 Similarities

4.3.1.1 *Compartmentalised administrative offices and resistance to change*

One key obstacle for the scaling of both food policy councils' propositions was the rigid compartmentalisation of administrative offices. With remarkable similarity, interviewees from both food policy councils highlighted how complicated it was to convey comprehensive and transversal understandings of food policies into the existing administrative sectors. As food policies are an innovative field which is not formally contemplated by slow-changing institutional structures, oftentimes efforts to contribute to food systems were simply categorized under already established sectors, as for instance Health and Nutrition or Urban Greening.

4.3.1.2 *Food champions/policy entrepreneurs as initiators of innovative processes*

The key role of food champions and policy entrepreneurs has been extensively evidenced in the subsections 4.1 and 4.2 . However, it is important to notice the similarities between the two contexts. Both MRA FPC and Plain of Food councils were initially ideated and pushed through by individuals with particular features: personal values and motives as drivers, belonging to multiple positionalities at the same time and an extended network of acquaintances.

4.3.2 Differences

4.3.2.1 Contextual factors

The importance of contextual factors has been evidenced by Andreoli et al. (2021). Furthermore, the case studies reflect the evolutions of GISs' roles within two highly diverse administrative and cultural contexts which created consistent divergences in their developments.

The Metropolitan region of Amsterdam encompasses the area surrounding of one the biggest cities and capital city of the Netherlands, Amsterdam. This logically implies an extended distribution of grassroots initiatives and hence fragmentation of efforts, and a more complicated system of administrative actors, as the region includes 35 separate authorities between municipality and provinces. The city-region benefits from a diffused sustainability-driven culture, which strongly affected the diffusion of sustainable practices. Differently, the Plain of Food is located in the area of the Plain of Lucca. The city-region is in all respects considerable as an integration of five small municipalities, which have historically been unified under the same administrations, and hence retain a rather high degree of dependence from one another and particularly around the capital city of Lucca (Regione Toscana, n.d.). Furthermore, the Plain of Lucca area represents a particularly rich context in regards to activities related to themes of gastronomic and landscape preservation.

Overall the significant differences in contextual factors and in particular the different cities' sizes, and administrative authorities involved have definitely impacted the developments that led to the food policy councils' formations. In the case of the MRA FPC, the distance between administrative authorities and civil societies, and the geographical extension of the area, resulted in a rather difficult context to scale through in autonomy and a necessity to, more or less directly, affiliate with funding institutions such as the *Voedsel Verbindt* foundation. The MRA FPC infiltration required several strategic attempts to move through institutions and leverage on different political collaborations to gain recognition. This was further reinforced by the reportedly persistent tensions between the municipality of Amsterdam and the province of North Holland, primary players in the regional context (Interviewee 2). Regarding the cultural aspect, the framing of food related problems might have taken different understandings due to the sustainability-driven culture, which enriched the visions but also complicated the process of engagement of GISs in the MRA FPC. Differently, the geographical proximity of local institution to GISs in the case of small municipalities has strongly facilitated their mutual influencing, especially in the case of Capannori. Furthermore, the presence of the regional Participatory Law allowed for a gradual adaptation of the concerned cities to participatory projects and active citizenship. In addition, the intermunicipal dimension of the Plain of Food finds its origin in an historically unified area, which despite the topographic and economic differences is still perceived

as such. Food culture, territorial ties and local commitment to citizens participation from administrations were key component and main pre-requisites for the foundation of the Plain of Food.

4.3.2.2 Institutional authorities' (in)dependence

In the case of MRA FPC, the process of conceptual and practical formation of the food policy council derived from a bottom-up input coming from two food champions (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). Furthermore, MRA FPC has demonstrated in several situations its strong positionality as an independent actors, working outside governmental reach, and striving to maintain its core grassroots' values (Internal document 10, Personal communication, Interviewee 2). The autonomy from institutional control allowed for greater freedom in interpreting the grassroots participation, as was demonstrated by the co-existence of forms of activism against and collaboration with dominant actors. However, this reasonably also slowed the process of establishment of a structured and professionalized entity, primarily due to lack of resources.

Differently, the Plain of Food represents a hybrid model of bottom-up and top-down formation of a food policy council (Interviewee 3, Interviewee 7). Consistent with the discourse about the administrative contexts (subsection 4.3.2.1), the Plain of Food benefitted from the proximity and values- alignment of the administration of Capannori and dominant GISs. This factor allowed for a limited but continued financial support and hence faster development of a governance model that could integrate an adequate form of participatory policy-shaping. However, the dependence from local administrations evidently influenced the framing of problems and discussions within the council, which have been mostly defined by the main GISs involved and ultimately in alignment with existing political agendas. This could finally generate exclusive dynamics where the shared leadership between the main GISs and governance actors hinders a functional and true participation of other members.

5. Discussion

The previous section presented the storylines and evolutions of GISs in the formation of the FPCs. The results evidenced a multiplicity of evolving roles played by GISs over time, which encompassed collaborative, activist and strategic behaviours. Consequently, the following section seeks to: firstly, delve into specific factors and characteristics of GISs that affect the approaches undertaken to scale their impact (sub-section 5.1), secondly, discuss the key take-aways from the analysed two case studies to see the contribution of the present research to the existing theoretical frameworks (sub-section 5.2), and thirdly, outline some recommendations for future research and limitations (sub-section 5.3).

5.1 Characteristics of GISs that affect scaling dynamics

5.1.1 Multi-positionalities and hybrid roles of food champions/policy entrepreneurs

The analysed case studies evidenced the importance of individuals, denominated as food champions or policy entrepreneurs, in triggering the processes that then led to the creation of the food policy councils. In line with this finding, Aldrich & Fiol (1994) identify the role of “charismatic leaders” in grassroots initiatives as those who understand the interest of contrasting players and frame their movements’ agendas so to attract different and opposing actors. Charismatic leaders have been recognized for their capacity to use symbolic communication and high level of abstraction (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Unsurprisingly, the key figures found in MRA FPC and Plain of Food had a large network and were recognized for their communication skills.

However, the present research also highlighted the importance of charismatic leaders/individuals due to their multiple positionalities, which allow them take hybrid roles. The particularity of these figures lies in their ability to leverage on their multiple positionalities to infiltrate their ideas and/or projects within different and at times “opposing” (as identified in the Multi-Level Perspective) organizations. More specifically, the food champions and policy entrepreneurs had more or less direct ties with institutional authorities (or even worked within a municipal office in the case of the Plain of Food), but were also personally involved with grassroots movements. In this sense, their relation to GISs is mostly demonstrated in terms of alignment of personal values and motivations. For instance, by working in urban gardens (MRA FPC) or supporting GISs’ activities (Plain of Food). In the case of the Plain of Food, the presence of several hybrid figures participating in the council also allowed for the continuation of the process of food policy-shaping. This is because due to the multi-positionality of a great number of actors there was a shared tendency to seek common grounds and avoid silo thinking.

This finding leads to two key considerations: that the distinction between grassroots and regime actors becomes less and less defined when there are individuals that share some of their multiple

positionalities, and that the **multi-positionality** of actors creates an important avenue for scaling; and consequently, that the **human and relational aspects** hence play a critical role in triggering innovative and scalable practices at a local level.

5.1.2 Grassroots initiatives for sustainability as heterogeneous groups

FPCs not only comprise of individuals with hybrid roles, but also assemble highly diverse groups of GISs (Boden & Hoover, 2018). Due to the intrinsic heterogeneity of FPCs, it is often complicated to evaluate scaling dynamics, as distinct GISs might follow different pathways (Hermans et al., 2016). Self-evidently, the goals and approaches of GISs interacting in a shared space such as a food policy council are not unified. However, it is important to see their collective efforts; as was shown by the case of the Plain of Food, the commitment to continue bringing forward the evolving synthesis of all of the heterogenous contributions is ultimately what represents a constituent power.

In this regard, research on grassroots (Lam et al., 2020; Hermans et al., 2016; Pel, 2016) generally fails to explore GISs' scaling in contexts where a multitude of diverse groups convenes, and rather focus on specific movements or innovations. This might undermine the role of civil society in its complexity and multi-dimensionality. It is necessary to also observe GISs' practices in their heterogeneity in order to broaden our understanding of grassroots forces not only in terms of well-defined, monolithic blocks, but also in their chaotic and contrasting interactions and attempts to find common syntheses to their various propositions.

The current analysis allowed for a more holistic perspective to emerge, and it ultimately contributed by: first, questioning **how to define** grassroots initiatives, which means challenging the understanding of grassroots in terms of monolithic groups with similar goals, and second, bringing analytical frameworks into the interactions of **heterogeneous grassroots groups** attempting to change the food system.

5.1.3 Role of political agency of grassroots initiatives for sustainability

As seen in both case studies (subsections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2), GISs actors made extensive use of their political agency to increase their effect. Taking into account that food policy councils are, by definition, platforms for interaction and hence avenues for popular engagement, the case studies revealed a shared sense of ownership to the project of development of both councils, particularly in the instance of Lucca. The MRA FPC's capacity to collectively think and influence policy decisions was proved in numerous scenarios, including active participation in policy-shaping. However, the in the propositions of members of the Plain of Food were closely tied to the idea that sustainable food systems could be built when citizens and food-sector stakeholders regarded themselves as active

decisional actors and so maintained ongoing participation. Hence, this latter case showed a political agency aiming to expand political engagement.

Still, political agency should not be understood in solely terms of knowledge about policy-shaping or direct ties with politicians or city councillors. The political agency of the actors participating in the Plain of Food was demonstrated in the effort itself to discuss and collectively create values or meanings that could then be transferred to institutional actors. This is because, where diffused, grassroots' propositions automatically permeate into institutional arrangements. In line with Alexander (2013), laws and norms were shaped by social actors as legal concepts are in themselves social constructs.

Hence, recognizing political agency of grassroots initiatives does not mean confining it to the existence of a body such as a food council, but rather **to understand grassroots as constant potential policy shapers**. The collective political participation for the purpose of changing institutional arrangements in favour of increased policy agency is a distinct specific dynamic, which was here defined as constituency.

5.2 Main takeaways and theoretical contribution

GISs participating in both case studies experience similar difficulties in infiltrating food policies into the resistant political agendas and rigid administrative systems. However, what the two cases primarily differ on is the structuration of a direct channel for bottom-up policy shaping. Despite its shorter time-span, the Plain of Food has developed a structured participatory governance model, which over time has persisted both in terms of participation and continued recognition. Constituency dynamics have emerged predominantly in the case of the Plain of Food, whereas in the case of MRA FPC the GISs efforts can be framed more in terms of upscaling.

One consequent consideration is that constituency dynamics may more easily develop in a context where local actors are able to co-participate in the bottom-up pressures so that they allow GISs to infiltrate from within institutional structures. The stronger bond of trust between actors which characterizes small municipal contexts could be playing a significant role. Differently, where local entities resist values' infiltration, due to distance between GISs and administrative offices, GISs might need to first instrumentalize their participation and collaborate to scale through institutions or radicalize through activism. As described in subsection 4.1.2.5 these options constitute two rather different upscaling dynamics that can however develop simultaneously; on the one hand, institutionalization is the goal and hence collaboration is preferred, on the other hand, upscaling via activism can provide a more consistent social base and larger impact, but might slow down the process

of confrontation and trust building with institutional actors. These two approaches can be distinguished and denominated as collaborative upscaling and activist upscaling.

Despite the conceptual distinctions between upscaling and constituency, as already explained, these dynamics are neither mutually exclusive nor set in stone. The process of constituency, in terms of deliberate intention to change policies for the sake of civil involvement in policy-shaping, was also evidently one of the core goals of the co-founders of MRA FPC (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 4), and the struggle to avoid capture by dominant actors demonstrated a long term determination to maintain a genuine participation. It was the strong resistance of dominant actors in integrating bottom-up policy inputs, and the lack of persistent participation due to the above-mentioned factors, that forced GISs first to instrumentalize their political agency to upscale.

Finally, it is useful to discuss the contribution that the present research can make to the existing theoretical frameworks of scaling. As explained, heterogenous GISs often scale through different and, at times, mutually influencing or co-existing dynamics. Examples can be provided for each case study. In the case of the Plain of Food of Lucca, network out-scaling triggered an infiltration of values into the community and created common understanding with hybrid actors working in municipal offices, which ultimately allowed for collaboration and GISs' projects scaling through institutions. These dynamics then set the pre-conditions to a constituency process of political participation. In the case of the MRA FPC, the moment of foundation of the council saw a co-existence of what could be viewed as collaborative upscaling with provincial actors, but also values capture to extend the legitimization of the regional network, hence institutions' own agendas. Ultimately, the co-existence of these two dynamics renders the values' capturing not undesirable for GISs, but to some extent an internalized strategy to upscale.

These examples evidence how applying analytical categories independently from one another limits the comprehension of complicated evolutions. As alternative approach to understand these categories, the researcher proposes to see them as components of an interpretative spectrum based on seven determinants: location expansion, network expansion, values expansion within community, collaboration with institutions, activism against institutions, instrumental political agency, political agency as a goal. These determinants have been developed based on the characteristics of the existing analytical models with the addition of values expansion within community, which was derived from results of the present study. In *Table 9*, the determinants have been defined for each analytical category. To construct a nuanced spectrum, “++” has been used to indicate primary determinants, whereas “+” indicates secondary determinants of the analytical category. The elaboration and

allocation of primary and secondary determinants reflects the researcher’s own interpretations of the analytical categories.

	Geographic expansion of initiative	Network expansion of initiative	Values expansion within community	Activism against institution	Collaboration with institution	Instrumental political agency (mean)	Political agency (goal)
Geographic out-scaling	++	+					
Network out-scaling	+	++	+				
Upscaling				++	++	++	
Scaling through			+		++	+	
Collaborative upscaling					++	+	
Activist upscaling				++		+	
Constituency				+	+		++

Table 9. Nuanced spectrum of analytical models of GISs’ scaling

Collaborative upscaling and activist upscaling have been added as sub-categories of upscaling, following what has been discussed in subsection 5.2.1. Furthermore, constituency has been included as a novel analytical category to account for political aspects and, in particular, to create a categorization for GISs’ use of political agency with the aim to expand political engagement of civil societies in policy shaping. The distinction between upscaling and constituency is ultimately primarily useful to add the conceptualization of bottom-up political involvement as a goal to fulfil political agency, rather than a mean to advance initiatives.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

The present study yielded a series of reflections regarding important characteristics of GISs and the theoretical approaches used to analyse them. Hence, some correlated recommendations for future research are presented here.

Firstly, aligned with Andreola et al. (2021), future studies should make sure to maintain contextual factors well embedded into any GISs’ scaling analysis. As demonstrated by the present study, the role of cultural, socio-demographic and legal characteristics highly affected the development of the food policy councils.

Secondly, in both case studies the success factor was determined by the critical role played by hybrid figures, hence future research should focus on the role of social and human factors. In particular, it could be interesting to analyse the motives, roles and positionalities of food champions or policy entrepreneurs triggering impactful processes. Evidencing the characteristics of impactful

hybrid figures could not only shed light on the motivations that facilitate the transference of localised values, but it can also partially overcome the divisive perspective between grassroots and established actors as members of opposing forces.

Thirdly, the political component should be further framed and incorporated into sustainable transition studies to account for grassroots initiatives' role in affecting shared ideologies, policies and social norms.

Fourthly, more studies may want to observe heterogenous grassroots collaborating to account for the different dynamics that might unfold and that ultimately force diverse actors to find syntheses of their different proposals.

Fifthly, research focusing on scaling dynamics should expand the understanding of existing analytical models and consider their mutual influence. As emerged in the present study, GISs might trigger changes through ambiguous evolutions which can incorporate several interpretative models, even simultaneously. One interesting inquiry for future research could be to analyse if different scaling dynamics can have a specific order of action that leads to more successful outcomes.

Lastly, more research addressing sustainable transitions should be conducted in the Global South and, in particular, when considering the political dimension, in Latin America, where literature already explores the role of civil societies in policy shaping (Azzellini, 2016; Ciccariello Ciccariello-Maher, 2013; Jiménez Martín et al., 2017).

5.4 Limitations

The primary limitations of the present research concern the following. First, due to the limited amount of time, each case study's legal and socio-cultural context could not be explored in depth. The factors included in the analysis were restrained to those that emerged through background data collection and preliminary interviews. However, the discursive and open-ended interviewing modality allowed to obtain relevant information about the context throughout the whole interviewing process. Second, the storylines were primarily focused on grassroots perspectives of the events. Although different actors were interviewed and information was, where possible, cross-validated with documents, the majority of interviewees were representatives of GISs. Hence, this produced an overall partial interpretation of the developments. Third, as the research is interpretative and based on only qualitative data, biases of the researcher could also affect the overall comprehension of data. In this regard, the research should be seen as a first draft of a new framework, namely the constituency framework, that still needs further corroborating.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to contribute to the existing academic debate on grassroots initiatives for sustainability and their role in sustainable transitions. In particular, the research question was the following: *How do grassroots initiatives for sustainability scale their impact through food policy councils?*

The analysis conducted lied on two critical assumptions: first, that grassroots innovations' scaling dynamics could foster multiple, nuanced interpretations, hence necessitating the application of several theoretical models; and second, that the notion of innovation could be complemented to account for other types of contributions of grassroots organizations, in particular in policy shaping. To test these assumptions, the study was conducted with a novel type of case study fostering interactions of diverse groups: the food policy council.

Data was collected and analysed inductively, via documents collection and open-ended semi-structured interviews, to allow for contributions and inconsistencies of the theoretical frameworks to emerge. Furthermore, the primary method used to analyse data, the event-structure-analysis, permitted the researcher to clearly identify the events and consequent dynamics in a causally logical manner, reducing as much as possible biases. The results of the analysis allowed to answer the first two sub-research questions, exposing the specific case studies' outcomes: namely, the storylines of the food policy councils and the GISs' roles in their formation. The discussion then highlighted key factors affecting GISs' scaling dynamics, based on the comparison between case studies, and dived into the theoretical contribution of the research. In regards to the former, three factors emerged as critical: first, the multi-positionality and hybrid role exerted by the initiators and/or participants of the food policy councils; second, the level of heterogeneity of grassroots initiatives; and third, the political agency demonstrated by GISs and whether it was instrumental or constituent. The latter point introduced a first contribution to the theoretical framework in that it suggested in itself an alternative option to the notion of innovative change in favour of political change.

Finally, the contribution to the theoretical framework, which was summarized in *Table 9*, comprehensively answered the third research question and ultimately the main research question. Grassroots initiatives for sustainability scaled their impact through food policy councils by leveraging on their capacity to evolve through different roles. This meant undertaking collaborative, activist and strategic tactics. The use of multiple analytical models and critical assumptions allowed to investigate these roles and evidenced the limits of the theoretical frameworks. In particular, the results demonstrated the need to frame dynamics in more nuanced interpretative models, hence validating the first assumption. Furthermore, the political contribution of GISs proved to be important and consistent in both case studies, enriching the notion of grassroots innovations scaling with also

grassroots initiatives' values and political propositions' scaling. A relevant conceptual addition is the distinction between political agency in terms of mean used towards a specific end (upscaling, eg. to embed a vision or practice, see subsection 4.1.2.4) or as a goal in itself (constituency, eg. to promote political participation and expand political agency, see subsection 4.2.2.2). In accordance with these findings, *Table 9* proposed a reformulation and contribution to the existing theoretical frameworks, which needs to be corroborated by further research.

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Annex

Annex 1. Interview guide example

Consent:

- Do I have your permission to record this interview? This will only be used to facilitate transcription and will not be shared.
- All information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially, and that only the researcher will have access to the information and interview's recording/transcript.
- In the results section of this research your identity will remain anonymous.

Introduction

Introduction explaining the aim of the research. Inform the interviewee of the document I have created based on Halliday et al. (2019), which starts drafting the main phases of the FPC creation. Highlight that the present interview is open-ended and that I would like him/her to feel free to share any information and interpretation of events leading to the formation of the food policy council freely, emphasizing what he/she deems important.

Introductory questions -Questions on the structure and internal dynamics of the FPC

- What is your role in the FPC?
- Who started the MRA FPC? Who had the idea first and how was it developed?
- Can you tell me some more information about the
- Which actors are currently involved in the FPC?
 - Could you give me their contacts.
 - How are municipal actors involved?
 - How are business actors involved?
 - Could you provide examples?

Main questions – grassroots' role and evolutions in FPC formation

- Which grassroots organization do you work in?
- Were you involved in some grassroots organizations prior to MRA FPC project initiation?

Now I will show you the timeline I constructed and you can tell me if there are other additional relevant events and maybe we can analyse the role of grassroots throughout this series of events:

- Which types of propositions do you think were brought forward by the grassroots group you were part of in the formation of the MRA FPC?
 - This question could be referring more generally to the broader group of grassroots. From the run up to a Food Vision event on.

- Which primary obstacles would you say MRA FPC faced during these years since the first pilot project and the Rup to a Food Vision in 2012?
 - o In terms of interactions and resistance between civil societies with:
 - Municipal actors
 - Banks and private financing actors
 - etc
- How did grassroots propositions evolve over time?
 - o How did the loss of the Green left party in 2014 affect grassroots scaling?
 - o In 2016/2018 period it seems like there has been an increase of civil societies activities in the context of sustainable food systems. If any, what role did the MRA FPC play?
 - o How were the Flows of Food conference in 2017 organized?
 - o What about the “We Make the city” events in 2018?
 - Which type of role did grassroots play in this context?
 - o How were grassroots groups involved in the launch of the MRA FPC?
 - o How did the new elections and the winning of the green party affected the scaling of the sustainable projects you had planned?
 - Why was the Food Vision not endorsed by major stakeholders such as Flevoland and North Holland provinces and the Robebank?
 - o How were grassroots initiatives involved after the formation of the food policy council?
 - o Does the MRA FPC have a legal entity now?

Closing questions – Grassroots current role in MRA FPC

- What do you think is the role of grassroots initiatives in MRA FPC today?
 - o Meaning, how do they interact with other actors?
- Any further information that you might want to share regarding the role of grassroots initiatives now and/or in the formation of the food policy council?

Annex 2. Coding examples on Nvivo: Context, Event, Outcome

Context - FPC legal ambiguity

Reference 1 - 1,74% Coverage

That shows that shows our like, like Intra-scales. But also there are other MRA themes, that it's really somewhere in between. One thing, one thing, I guess one thing important is that it takes, it takes a lot of social capital, networking. I think that's what MRA Means. Arnold and Jeffrey have a lot of free time. They know a lot of people. So they navigate. They have passion to form a food Council. And they want to be like the steering organization. So they also don't want to be part of official organization, because

Francesca Fiore 16:01
otherwise they would take a stance.

interviewee 3 16:04
Exactly. So they're voluntarily to be at this play at these dates somewhere in between. So, one interpretation, one interpretation will be that yeah, like, it's like, no, it's not a legal entity, we don't think... it's actually the other way around, that it takes more social capital to stay in between.

Reference 2 - 0,94% Coverage

But but sort of also like how can I say it? for now food council so it took a long time for food council to establish this legal entity right? so last year we realized at some point there's very little things we

Event - 2012 Run up to a municipal food vision

Reference 1 - 1,83% Coverage

Reference 1 - 1,83% Coverage

the actual document. I guess I was, I agreed with mostly everything that was written down. So from like, that perspective, I guess it was a pretty good like, overview of all the different dimensions that should be included in the food policy, and it was like from that perspective, I think it was actually quite good. But I guess it was too. It was written down as if it was like a theoretical exercise. It was not good enough embedded embedded in the things or didn't relate to the things that actually were already happening. As if there was no food movement yet, and it was just a description of what it should what food policy should look like, from a theoretical standpoint. So what I noticed that from after it was launched, I think most people were pretty optimistic about the contents. They

Reference 1 - 1,66% Coverage

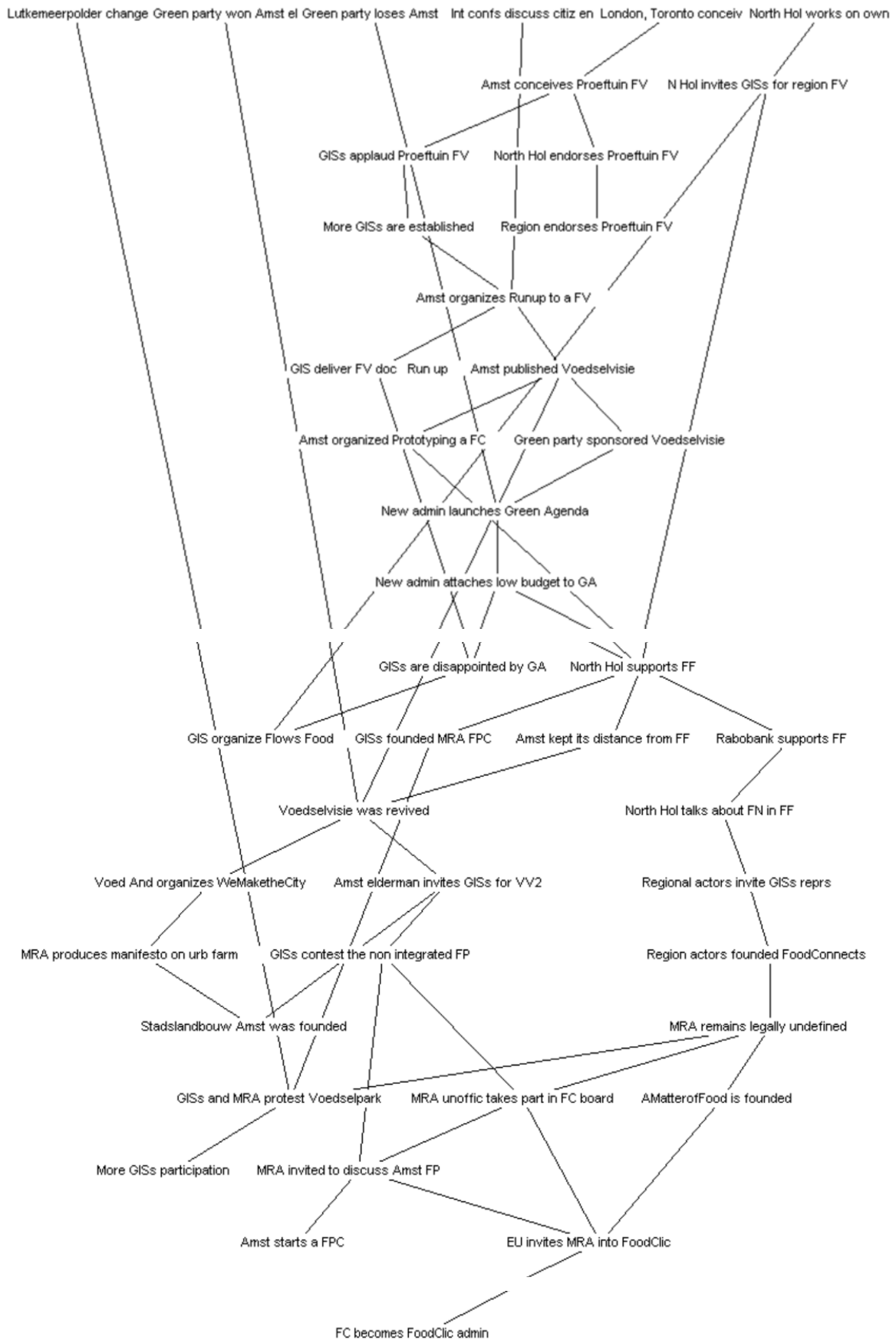
Well, I think at least there's been there is a kind of infrastructure now. So organizations it's easier for organizations to join forces. For example, for example, like what's happening now in Letkemer polen r. I'm sure it was easier to get people involved because there were also already all kinds of relations. So So when, for example, they decided well, should be probably is a good idea to send a letter to a local press. Think within let's say one day, they had like 2020 or 50 signatures of relevant people. So there is kind of, we know each other it's easier to connect, because all the work that has been done, I think that's one of the at least one of the

Annex 3. MRA FPC, List of events in chronological order (2007-2022)

- London and Toronto establish food policy councils and food visions
- Amsterdam city council conceives a top-down food vision called "Testing ground Amsterdam" (Proeftuin)
- Provincial authorities endorse "Testing Ground Amsterdam"
- Region authorities endorse "Testing Ground Amsterdam"
- GISs applaud "Testing Ground Amsterdam" food vision
- International conferences discussed the topic of citizens engagement in food networks
- More GISs are established
- Amsterdam organizes "Run up to a food vision" conferences
- GISs self-organized to produce a policy document and delivered the bottom up document to Amsterdam municipality
- Amsterdam municipality did not communicate to the community its changes to the document
- GISs were disappointed and reluctant to further collaborate
- Municipality publishes final document "Voedselvisie"
- Amsterdam municipality organizes Prototyping a food council
- Green party loses municipal elections
- Newly elected administration modifies the document and publishes the Green Agenda
- New administration attached low budget to the new food vision
- Budget was directed primarily towards health sector
- GISs representatives organize "Flows of Food" conferences
- Province of North Holland and Rabobank support Flows of Food conferences
- North Holland representatives talk about creating a food network
- GISs actors founded MRA Food policy council
- Amsterdam kept its distance from Flows of Food
- Green party won the municipal elections
- Amsterdam municipality revived Voedselvisie
- Alderman invites representatives of civil societies to discuss food vision
- Civil societies are disappointed and contest the non-integrated food policy
- Urban agriculture groups unite and form urban agriculture Amsterdam foundation
- Provincial politicians from North Holland and Flevoland provinces invite GISs' representatives to discuss food network
- Regional actors found Food Connects Foundation

- Voedsel Anders organized "We Make the city" events
- MRA FPC participated in "We Feed the city" within the "We Make the city" events
- We make the city attracted several (100) people, curious about MRA
- within we make the city MRA FPC produced a manifesto about urban food policy and urban farming
- MRA FPC decides not to become official part of Food Connects
- MRA FPC representatives take non-official roles in the board of Food connects
- Activists (MRA FPC is an official member) protest for Lutkemeerpolder
- Voedselpark project attracts attention and expands GISs reach
- Amsterdam municipality starts a municipal food policy council
- A matter of food foundation is founded
- Food connects officially takes up the role of program manager in Food CLIC project
- MRA FPC tries to professionalize and institutionalize

Annex 4. MRA FPC, Storyline developed with ETHNO software



Annex 5. Plain of Food, List of events in chronological order (2007-2022)

- Several food-related GISs develop due to cultural reasons
- Tuscany region issues Regional Participatory law
- Capannori organizes participatory projects of different nature
- Livorno develops a FPC, which then is dismissed
- Schools in Capannori are involved in participatory projects
- “Orti in Condotta” project starts in Capannori
- Capannori and Lucca mayors sign the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)
- Capannori decides participatory project to develop a food policy chart
- Sociolab was hired in the project
- CirculariFood project starts officially
- GISs share ideas for the food policy chart
- Food chart is published
- Cabina di regia elaborates a governance model
- Intermunicipal Joint Management is established
- Capannori’s mayor is re-elected
- The 5 municipalities ratify the convention
- Plain of Food is launched
- Plain of Food official office is created in Capannori municipality
- Cities assign limited resources to the management of the Plain of Food
- Covid 19 starts
- Promotional campaigns and projects are conducted online
- Food hub project is carried out
- GISs rethink school catering tender contracts
- Municipal institutions support the proposal by integrating the matter in their discussions
- Plain of Food office is removed
- GISs participation decreases overall

Annex 6. Plain of Food, Storyline developed with ETHNO software

