



POLICY SILOS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE CITY-REGION FOOD SYSTEMS



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INTRODUCTION

"Food" is one of the most multifaceted aspects of human society, and is being shaped by policies in the health, agricultural, economic, social, environmental, labour, trade, urban development and educational sectors as well as the collaboration (or lack thereof) between cities and rural districts, between municipalities, regions and national governments, and between all sectors of society. The food system is also a major driver behind some of the greatest challenges human society is currently facing: it accounts for $\frac{1}{3}$ of greenhouse gas emissions, is the biggest single cause of biodiversity loss and soil degradation, human and animal rights abuses are systemic, while over-, mal- and undernutrition are among the leading causes of premature death and disease globally. This would call for an integrated approach - however, policy making and governance more generally are sharply compartmentalized in terms of policy areas (silos), both geographically, and between the different levels of government. This applies to the EU itself as well as to every other government level down to the municipalities. Numerous reports and resolutions, from within European institutions [and outside](#), have identified this governance process as one of the greatest obstacles for a food systems transformation aimed at replacing globalised structures and unsustainable production models with a more diverse, regionalised, sustainable food system.

CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE CRFS

The current food system and its policy environment are the result of numerous political decisions taken separately, over several decades in different policy fields such as agriculture, trade, social and labour regulations. This has resulted in shifting the European food system towards full commodification, enhancing the primacy of large over small companies, uniformity over diversity, and separation and competition rather than collaboration between stakeholders. Building a sustainable CRFS requires fundamental change after having reached this state. This cannot be achieved in the way that traditional siloed governance works - incremental and largely disparate changes made in separate policy arenas - but requires a whole-system view and concerted and coordinated action by all actors and at all levels. Otherwise, the deep contradictions between the existential needs and interests of different

stakeholders will derail the process – contradictions such as:

- Developing short food chains built on a great diversity of small, local operators - while long-distance transport is subsidized and the majority of financial support goes to large operators and towards further upscaling
- Moving towards true cost accounting and the resultant higher prices for farmers and other food producers in order to reward those producing and preserving public goods, while [8.6% of Europe's population lives in food poverty](#) and there is no accompanying social policy in place to ensure access to food for all
- Food is treated like any other commodity under the EU open market rules, putting a break on municipalities and regional public authorities who want to introduce sustainable and regional purchasing criteria, one of the great levers for setting a local food system transformation in motion
- Encouraging young farmers to enter the profession while they are being priced out of the land market due to the effects of fiscal and development policies

EXAMPLE OF CHALLENGE

A [recent analysis](#) by the European Commission showed how agricultural and climate policies are siloed and therefore incoherent. They found that Voluntary Coupled Support (VCS) is provided to support the production of fruits and vegetables, cotton and rice in Andalusia, whose production drives overexploitation of water resources. Furthermore, direct payments are given for agricultural activities on peatland/wetland, with no conditions for limiting damage (which results in high levels of GHG emissions). And measures for forest investment are potentially incoherent with market stability and food security as afforestation potentially converts land from agricultural uses into forests.



Executive committee of the [FPC for Upper Franconia, Germany](#), representing all parts of the food chain.
Photo: Andreas Harbach

EMERGING INNOVATION

Setting food policy was not a traditional role of cities, with food provision left primarily to the market under a policy environment determined by the higher levels of government. However, cities all over Europe, as well as in other parts of the world, have realised that they can play a key role in the transformation towards sustainable city region food systems, that this calls for new modes of setting policy, and have started creating new structures and approaches to this aim.

1. Local, regional and national food strategies

In many cities, regions and countries, sustainable food strategies, often developed in a participatory process, have proven to be powerful catalysts for creating a shared awareness and vision, a coherent set of mutually reinforcing policy measures as well as a network of actors committed to their implementation (see for example [France's National Food Plan "The Regions in Action"](#) from 2019, Wallonia's "[Manger Demain](#)" strategy from 2018 and Norway's [National Urban Agriculture Strategy](#) from 2021 - the German state of [Brandenburg](#) has just started the process in 2022).

2. Improved coordination of food issues

Some municipalities and regional governments, including Turin (Italy), Bordeaux (France), Cologne (Germany) and the Belgian province of Wallonia have all created offices of "food policy coordination" within their administrative structure, charged with coordinating the activities of all relevant departments and stakeholders and driving the implementation of their food strategies.

3. Food policy platforms

Collaborations between cities and their neighbouring rural districts on land use planning and joint food infrastructure development such as the "[Eco Model Regions](#)" in several German states, or between cities, research institutions, regional and national government in joint food policy projects such as the Dutch "[City Deal Voedsel](#)" have been successful in putting the food system on the agenda and creating momentum for transformation on the ground. Food policy councils, multi-stakeholder platforms for food systems change, have emerged in more than [100 European cities](#), mostly at the instigation of civil society but with the active participation of local governments and actors from the food value chain, and have played a crucial role in creating a space beyond the walls of sectors and silos. These local Food Policy Councils have started creating regional networks to replicate the effect at higher government levels, but this process is still in its early stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create either integrated food policies, or apply a „food in all policies“ approach - with the collaboration of all relevant departments and stakeholders.
2. Create institutions for cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration on food policy at all levels of government, where all relevant departments and stakeholders sit at the table.
3. Use these new structures to formulate a coherent vision of a desirable future and develop detailed, measurable strategies for how to get there.
4. Move away from treating food purely as a commodity and frame it in terms of human rights and public goods.