Unravelling the politics of urban food transitions. A governance approach on Alternative Food Networks.

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This contribution presents the analytical framework, research set-up and initial empirical operationalization of an early stage PhD research (Month 12) on the governance of Alternative Food Networks.

Alternative Food Networks are alternative modes of organizing actors, resources and processes of the food chain, linking more closely food production with consumption. Civil society actors, such as activists, citizens' groups, cooperatives, or several types of grass-root organizations, have an active role in catalyzing Alternative Food Networks. Such agents are often highly value driven, matching local action with wider aspirations of socio-ecological transition. Furthermore, such actors need to rely on supportive institutions for important aspects: among others, funding schemes, political visibility, recognition and support. However, the institutional environment with which alternative food initiatives are confronted, is not always favorable and accountable. Changes in political priorities, precariousness of land agreements, constraining regulations affecting bottom-up initiatives, are some examples of such tensions.

Disentangling the politics of urban food transitions, the research focuses on both, the internal governance dynamics of urban food initiatives as well as on the relation with key external agents and multi-scaled institutions. What are the internal incentives fostering organizational dynamics in grass-root urban food projects? What kind of relations and adaptations such initiatives develop with a wider range of institutional and urban actors?

The Brussels-Capital Region is the main empirical case study in which such questions are tested. The research starts from the analysis of key grass-root movements or intermediary organizations establishing alternative food projects. The GASAP movement, a spatially extended Community Supported Agriculture, and the urban agriculture organization "*Le Debut des Haricots*", are among the main cases selected. The research develops a diachronic analysis of such movements and their ways of developing and diversifying. Attention is paid to the horizontal relations with other initiatives or networks as well as to the areas of intersection with institutional agents, political programs, funding schemes, at the municipal, regional and wider institutional scales.

The empirical work is informed by a theoretical framework which identifies key governance tensions, i.e. organizational, institutional, power and spatial tensions. Organizational tensions refer to the internal governance dynamics of Alternative Food Networks, i.e. the need to foster trust and cooperative linkages among the participants. Institutional tensions connect to the external governance, highlighting frictions between the informal/customary rules of Alternative Food Initiatives and the broader system of multi-scaled institutions with which such initiatives interact. Institutional tensions are directly linked to power tensions, which concern the need for empowerment and representation of alternative food actors. Spatial tensions refer to frictions in the use of space, when Alternative Food Initiatives need to secure land, open new markets, or develop alternative supply systems.

This framework combines elements from different governance traditions, i.e. social innovation theories (González *et al.* 2010; Moulaert *et al.* 2005, 2010, 2013), sustainability transitions (Shove E, Walker G, 2007; Smith 2011) and the governance of Socio-Ecological Systems (Folke *et al.* 2005b; Cash *et al.* 2006).

Looking at governance relations from both, a bottom-up as well as from an institutional perspective, this research aims at bridging knowledge gaps in governance traditions, which mostly lack of such an integrated understanding. Furthermore, the research aims at opening new insights on institutional

tools or political arenas that better match the aspirations of bottom-up initiatives with the political economy of decision-making of relevant policy actors.

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