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by

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in Austin, Verenigde Staten

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Published Chapters

Four chapters included in this PhD thesis are reprinted from the following publications and manuscripts:

Chapter 2

Ulug, C. and Trell, E.M. (2020). 'It's not really about the food, it's also about food': urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development,* 12(2):127-142.

Chapter 3

Ulug, C. and Horlings, L. (2019). Connecting resourcefulness and social innovation: exploring conditions and processes in community gardens in the Netherlands. *Local Environment,* 24(3):147-166.

Chapter 4

Ulug, C., Trell, E.M., and Horlings, L. (2021). Ecovillage foodscapes: zooming in and out of sustainable food practices. *Agriculture and Human Values*.

Chapter 5

Ulug, C., Horlings, L., Trell, E.M. (2021). Collective Identity Supporting Sustainability Transformations in Ecovillage Communities. *Sustainability,* 13 (8148).

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Introduction: Collective action towards food system sustainability

1.1. Motivation and background of study

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*"What can I do to help?" The chatters continued. My question seemed to bounce off the tiled mosaic walls, off the shelves overflowing with spices, and off the sparkles of afternoon sunlight. The bustling cooks seemed too preoccupied with their own tasks at hand to delegate any more to me, a naïve bystander. Apparently, simply offering assistance is not how this place functioned. I eventually sat down at a table, joining a group chopping celery and listening in on their conversations. "Who is the leader on Sunday?" one woman posed. "There **is** no leader" another emphasized, "...but (so and so) helps lead," she quickly added. Apparently, there was a sense of order hidden in this chaotic kitchen, and yet, no straight answers. Alongside more chit chat, the next couple hours consisted of salvaging rotting avocados for guacamole, slicing despondent pears, and reviving them in a roasting oven – tasks (among others) that culminated in a feast ... a food waste feast. Despite arriving alone (and as a presumed outsider), I found myself eating among company – a custom I would soon learn was integral to the café's functioning and character. My dining companions included another volunteer (who helped out almost every week), and a sporadic visitor (I encountered him on his third visit). In a new city and an unfamiliar space, suddenly, no one was a stranger. There wasn't enough space for strangers here. Not one of the mismatched chairs was empty and even more diners squeezed together on couches – their plates overflowing as much as the cushions. Similar to the space, the meal, while full with creativity, lacked any coherence. Guacamole and pasta, stir-fry vegetables with baguettes. Rationality felt unwarranted, or even unwanted here, which somehow brought on a certain charm and magic. After eating, I followed another guest on the way out towards the towering piles of food at the entrance – these were the leftovers from cooking. Boxes of salad mix, brussels sprouts, orange juice, and heaps of bread – all for the taking. I would learn that it came from a grocery store in the neighborhood, a bakery in the city center, and the weekly market. If it was not for the café, it would all be thrown away. Better to go home with us.*

This was a passage of my observation notes from one of my first visits at the Free Café. The Free Café is a citizen-initiated project

in Groningen, the Netherlands, concerned with saving food that would otherwise be thrown away, to cook a free meal twice a week. However, more than a free meal, the Free Café is an example of how communities organize around issues of food system sustainability – or the lack of it within the industrial food system. This thesis is about how community-based food collectives, such as the Free Café, contribute to food system sustainability. The following sections will first provide the motivation and background of the study. Second, the main theoretical themes and debates in the literature around food sustainability and citizen action, will be presented. Afterwards, this thesis will describe the research contexts and methodology undertaken and end with an overview of the chapters.

1.1.1. *The failing globalized and industrialized food system*

The Free Café largely illuminates many non sequiturs embedded in our current food system. How is it possible for so much food to be thrown away? What about the millions of people going hungry every day? How can that be sustainable? Despite the mountains of food waste processed at the Free Café, for many, these questions remain "out of sight, out of mind". More than the food thrown away from supermarkets, food waste occurs throughout the food chain – from farms, where it might be "unfit" for transport, or production lines where it cannot be distributed (internationally) before the "sell-by" date. Food waste, however, is simply one symptom of challenges within our current capitalist, globalized, and industrialized food system – a system that is organized, not around a careful use of resources, environmental and social care, rather, around a perceived need to satisfy the accumulation of capital and a profit-making ethos (Holt-Giménez, 2017). Since World War II, the western world witnessed a shift – from food being produced on a small-scale with care for local communities, to food produced for a globalized market at an industrialized level, detaching and disconnecting food producers and consumers (Wiskerke, 2009; Campbell, 2004). This move, in combination

with a number of other developments (cf. Vivero-Pol et al., 2019) has resulted in a food system that is largely unsustainable, in terms of environmental degradation, public health, and social equitability (Peña et al., 2017; Ilieva, 2016; Nestle, 2002).

Many shortcomings of our global and industrialized food systems are arguably rooted in the global markets and governments which are failing to "service the common good" (Leitheiser et al., 2021; p. 23). Current capitalist economic systems are greatly intertwined with the development of globalized agriculture, as argued by literature on food regime analyses (McMichael, 2009; Friedman and McMichael, 1989). Features of our current corporate food regime can be defined to include the "global dispossession of farmers, reorganization of food supply chains, and centralization of agri-food relations" (McMichael, 2005; p. 295). Furthermore, due to the market concentration of global agro-chemical and seed companies, these industries assert their power over policy-making bodies, limiting governance towards food system sustainability (Clapp, 2018). Issues embedded in neoliberal structures have consequences on the local level, including, pesticide run-off in local water sources and the oversupply of cheap processed food products in supermarkets, which have also been linked to rising obesity and diet-related illnesses (Nestle, 2002). As agriculture systems today are engaged with producing food stuffs for (international) distribution markets, crops are engineered for travel-hardiness, and subsequently processed into chemical by-products and preservatives, also ignoring food's cultural value and appropriateness (cf. Vivero-Pol et al., 2019). Common industrial practices, such as monocropping and pesticide use, have been connected to environmental ramifications including soil depletion and the loss of biodiversity (Wingeyer et al., 2017).

Despite these issues in the food system, we are simultaneously seeing indications of resistance, innovation, and alternatives, in particular on the local level (Russell, 2019). Citizens and collectives are taking responsibility and action in the face of these issues and demonstrating the potential to trigger wider-scale social change, away from global capitalist (food) systems (Naylor, 2018;

Chatterton, 2016; Wilson, 2013; Pudup, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Mullaney (2014), for example, documents a case of Mexican maize farmers, who, despite being driven by governments to cultivate particular commercial varieties, are maintaining their locally-adapted maize strains, of cultural and ecological importance for the community and ecosystem. More examples of local actions are seen worldwide, for example through the international peasant movement, La Via Campesina, where activists rally against global food system control, while supporting local-level factions of farmers and citizens who resist global-industrial food systems through participatory democracy (La Via Campesina, 2009; Menser, 2008). Furthermore, there has been a response to globalized food provisioning from consumers themselves, taking action to purchase from local farmers and communities (Wiskerke, 2009). Such examples highlight how, ultimately, the narrative of the market as an all-encompassing force neglects to include developments emerging under the surface. In light of the above, this thesis enquires into the role of such collective initiatives towards contributing to food system sustainability.

1.1.2. *The rise of collective community action: potential change makers for food sustainability*

Citizen initiatives, also referred to in this thesis as community-based collectives, could be defined as engaged, often self-governing, community groups wishing to address (predominantly) local issues, often through drawing upon local (as well as external) resources and employing experimental means (Ubels et al., 2019). Not only have such initiatives seen a rise in recent years in the Global North, but local and national governments also increasingly recognize and encourage this shift in responsibilities taken on by citizens (Torfing et al., 2016; Van Dam et al., 2014; Sørensen & Triantafillo, 2009). The bottom-up approach promoted by such initiatives has been seen to foster citizen engagement, governance, and accountability (Okvat and Zutra, 2011). As they emerge on a local level, it is valuable to recognize the place-specific contexts

that enable these initiatives (Mehmood and Parra, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). Citizen collectives are often supported by their broader community and receive support such as funding and resources from local governments, volunteer assistance, and collaborations with other community groups (Bakker et al., 2012). That being said, place-based projects and practices are also not isolated and can build upon and benefit from wider multi-scalar connections (Baker and Mehmood, 2012; Seyfang and Haxeline, 2012). Furthermore, broader networks have been argued as essential for community groups wishing to effect change and build capacities in other communities through, for example, knowledge sharing, collaborating on common goals, and exchanging resources (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019)

Food and sustainability have been central concerns for many of such collectives, which aim to address a range of issues, such as food access and food security (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011; Armstrong, 2000), food system resilience (Helicke, 2015), food sovereignty (Sage, 2014), and food and social sustainability (Psarikidou & Szerszynski, 2012). The reliance and interdependence of our food systems with our natural environments and social needs makes sustainability especially a crucial factor to consider in thinking how our food is produced, consumed, distributed, and wasted. La Via Campesina, the international peasants' movement, assert that food system sustainability "lies on local and diversified agroecological production of food, and on the urgency to move from an intensive large-scale industrial agricultural system, to local and regional systems that are environmentally adequate and diverse" (La Via Campesina, 2009). More than simply concerned with the way food is produced, this thesis understands sustainable food systems as a way in which to re-structure our current globalized food system, in ways that integrate environmental, social, and economic elements, for a food system that makes room for public participation and decision-making (Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012; Feestra, 2002; Pretty, 1998). Therefore, the process of creating a more sustainable system of food provisioning, also necessitates rebuilding and reconfiguring (unjust) social and economic systems. Social, environmental, and economic

sustainability have been established as three core pillars in sustainability debates (Purvis et al., 2019; UN, 1992), which is also applicable to (sustainable) food systems (Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012). Considering the (righteous) critique about the economic pillar overshadowing the other two (Purvis et al., 2019), "economics" could also be viewed as more than a (conventional) "market"/capitalist discourse, rather, also an opportunity to grow alternative and community economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Taking that into consideration, these three pillars could be viewed as strengthening one another (Basiago, 1995; Hancock, 1993). Sustainable food systems are one way to initiate such complimentary relationships between the three pillars: when a small-scale farmer can earn a living wage through farming in an ecologically responsible way (ex. organically), and community members can afford to buy nutriously dense food, everyone wins – including natural environments, local economies, and community health (Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012).

While many local initiatives emerge from the awareness of the fissures and faults in our global food system, these endeavors also share a sense of collective agency to confront it. Common goals towards sustainable alternatives further build solidarity within collective groups, as well as a sense of identity and belonging (Fominaya, 2010; Holland et al., 2008; Saunders, 2008; Melucci, 1995). Feelings of a shared or collective identity could therefore also play a potential role in strengthening bonds within community groups and their ability to present sustainable alternatives (Westkog et al., 2018; Ergas, 2010). In chapter five, this thesis will further explore collective identity in community groups, underlining the benefits as well as the challenges that can emerge in working towards shared goals of sustainability.

As seen in the above description of the Free Café, the planning and execution of such food initiatives do not necessarily obey the same market "logics" as a conventional establishment. Community food collectives take a bottom-up grassroots approach to work among citizen networks (Seyfang and Smith, 2007), and often focus their efforts on a local level. The collective capacity of food initiatives has been framed and substantiated as an alternative to

mainstream food systems, as well as a means to resist "business as usual" (Tornaghi, 2017). The crux of many of these projects lies in their capacity to experiment with and redefine democratic forms of decision-making and citizenship (Leitheiser et al., 2021). Hassanein (2003) recognizes this through employing the term *food democracy* to describe processes of citizen participation and engagement in their food system. *Food citizenship* has similarly been described as the "practice of engaging in food-related behaviors ... that support, rather than threaten, the development of a democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system" (Wilkins, 2005, p. 271). These terms highlight the growing recognition of citizens and their role in decision-making in the food system, as well as acknowledging citizens' attempts to reconfigure the institutions that gave rise to unsustainable practices in the first place. Citizen action therefore could potentially have the power to, more broadly, reinstate democratic means in our society and generate awareness around alternative paths to sustainability (Gillespie & Smith, 2008). In this way, such initiatives challenge the very notions upon which our food systems have become defined, whether that is our neoliberal capitalist system (Vivero-Pol et al., 2019; Holt-Giménez, 2017; McMichael, 2009) or (neo)colonialism (Peña et al., 2017). Thus, exploring (forms of) citizen engagement around sustainable food can help understand the rise of collective action as well as illuminate potential alternatives towards sustainable food systems and societies. This thesis therefore finds it imperative to investigate the potential of community food initiatives and their implications for sustainable food systems.

The Free Café initiative referred to above is one of the examples of the community-based sustainable food projects this thesis will explore. Such initiatives, which may include collectives and projects in many different forms and settings, (e.g. urban and rural community gardens, ecovillages) are termed *community-based food collectives*. While (food system) sustainability has seen a range of responses, from different parts of society, many top-down approaches have been criticized as overly technocratic, and not sensitive to local needs (Ajl, 2021; Leitheiser and Follmann, 2020;

Stollmann et al., 2016). Furthermore, market solutions have been critiqued as reproducing the same inequalities and flaws that initiated these issues to begin with (Guthman, 2008). Rather than simply adapting current systems to address global challenges, such as climate change, there has been the call to question these very systems and create alternatives (O'Brien, 2012).

Therefore, this thesis explores collectives that seek and dare to present alternatives to our current global food system and often depart from the mainstream solutions to global food system sustainability. Following from the above, the main question of this thesis is:

How do community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability?

This thesis, focuses on three kinds of community-based food collectives: community gardens, a food waste initiative, and ecovillage communities (see Table 1.1 in section 1.3.2. below). All initiatives focus on contributing to the sustainability of different aspects within the food system – from food production and processing, to consumption and waste. More than being engaged in issues around food and agriculture sustainability, these collectives exhibit a diverse collection of innovative ways of working and organizing, based around collective decision-making. Such characteristics are considered to represent forms of citizenship and food system participation, which, as argued above, could be viewed as necessary for a greater shift towards sustainability and sustainable food systems.

1.2. Theoretical framework: how could citizens and local collective action contribute to food system sustainability?

The following chapters revolve around three main themes and broader debates in literature around food sustainability and

citizen action. While these topics emerged and were identified as key in the literature, how the three are interlinked, and how citizen collectives contribute to these debates, is not yet known. This thesis will look in detail into all three themes using emerging concepts (e.g. resourcefulness and foodscapes) and taking new, creative perspectives with more thoroughly-researched concepts (e.g. researching sustainability transformations through a collective identity lens), to explore the contribution of community-based food collectives to food system sustainability, as well as to frame these findings in broader theoretical and empirical debates These contributions and findings around these three themes will be returned to in the concluding chapter, chapter 6.

1.2.1. Spaces of possibility

Recognizing how our current (global and industrial) food system is laden with sustainability challenges, local initiatives attempt to provide innovative responses and potential solutions. This thesis explores how practices and activities that emerge "under the surface", and operate on the "fringes" could provide insight into how to open up "spaces of possibility" in imagining as well as carrying out alternative solutions towards more sustainable societies and food systems (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017).

   Community-based food collectives potentially could have the capacity to open up conceptual space, through pointing to the importance of re-thinking and re-framing what lies at the root of our (unsustainable) society (Grenni et al., 2020; Ives et al., 2020; Horlings, 2015; O'Brien and Sygna, 2013). In order to work towards food sustainability, it is necessary to re-think how we conceive of food and how it's valued (Sarmiento, 2017; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; Cameron et al., 2014; Cameron and Wright, 2014; Gross, 2009). In our capitalist system, food is arguably valued as a commodity – as something to be bought and sold, rather than a public good (Vivero-Pol et al., 2019). Solving contemporary environmental issues, therefore entails more broadly rethinking the reliance on our current capitalist systems (Collard

et al., 2018), and our globalized and technologically advanced food system (Holt-Giménez, 2017). This thesis explores how community food initiatives could help re-frame how we value food and economic practices through employing the concept of community economies. Community and diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006) provide a lens and language for economic practices that exist outside of the market. This thesis uses the lens of community and diverse economies to provide insight into how post-capitalist food systems can be imagined and materialize. Specifically, in chapter two, a food waste initiative, the Free Café, is examined to illustrate nuances and question the distinctions in capitalist, non-capitalist, and post-capitalist food systems. Furthermore, this chapter contributes to debates by examining inner-hierarchies in said "post-capitalist" initiatives – are they as idealistic as they claim? How can citizens contribute to a non-capitalist or post-capitalist food system, when living in a capitalist world?

While our (Western) society might marginalize practices that exist outside of "conventional" markets, re-framing their value to be based on community and environmental care, could bring community initiatives into view and promote a perspective beyond the market/state binary (Leitheiser et al., 2021; Vivero-Pol et al., 2019). However, the question remains, how can community food initiatives help provide concrete examples of "cracks" in the (capitalist) system (Holloway, 2010), and "spaces of possibility" (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017)? Furthermore, what does the mere presence of such initiatives indicate regarding gaps needing to be addressed (Kaika, 2017)? This thesis builds upon these perspectives to explore the budding role of community food initiatives for food system sustainability.

Community-based food collectives could potentially attempt to re-frame conventions through posing new and experimental ways of organizing. Such projects often begin on a small scale, stem from civil society, and work towards promoting community-level solutions (Mehmood and Parra, 2013; Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Such novel forms and processes have been argued to be more effective in enacting social and environmental change

(Baker and Mehmood, 2012; Seyfang and Haxeline, 2012). There is, however, the risk that community food initiatives replicate the same hierarchies seen in other (unsustainable) parts of society, reinforcing unsustainable processes (Sarmiento, 2017; Kelly, 2005). It is therefore relevant to ask how much of an alternative these initiatives actually pose, and whether they are, in fact, reproducing the (undemocratic) systems they attempt to challenge. The extent to which community collectives are embedded in greater global systems, and experience external stressors must therefore be taken into account. Through understanding the organization of community food initiatives through a lens of community and diverse economies in chapter two, this thesis explores potential inner-hierarchies within the organization of these initiatives.

1.2.2. Place-based action

The concept of *place* plays an important role in food, and has been regarded as especially valuable for understanding links between food systems and sustainability, as well as a means to challenge current global and industrialized food systems (Feagan, 2007). This thesis focuses on how place specifically brings into focus the physical elements of food and localized resources (Kneafsey, 2010; Wiskerke, 2009), as well as place-based social networks and governance (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019; Sonnino et al., 2016).

The role of place will be examined in the operation of community initiatives. Through using local resources to meet local needs, such initiatives could be considered as taking a place-based approach (Baker and Mehmood, 2015). Being place-based could have implications for initiatives' sustainability and resilience in their community through, for example, having stronger (local) social ties and greater resource independence (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). Through examining conditions and processes of *resourcefulness* in chapter three, this thesis explores the value of the place-specific

resources for initiatives' development. Resourcefulness, which describes a community's capacity to work towards positively adapting or transforming their relationship with their resource base, recognizes the role of place for enabling community-based initiatives as well as questioning the underlying structures and processes through which resources are acquired or distributed (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). This thesis will connect the relevance of place for sustainability and community food initiatives through examining how such initiatives resourcefully work towards sustainable food system change.

This thesis examines the place-based elements in sustainable food systems through the core concept of foodscapes, a social-spatial lens through which to view food (Spijker et al., 2020; Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017; Yasmeen, 1996). Place-based characteristics potentially contribute to sustainable food systems through, for example, circular agriculture and climate-adapted crops, as well as social aspects such as re-circulating wealth in local communities and preserving local traditions and rituals (WUR, 2018; Heatherington, 2014; Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012). However, similar to *local* (Kenis and Mathijs, 2014; Born and Purcell, 2006) there is the risk of interpreting *place* as a "catch-all" solution, or as an "end to a means". Kenis and Mathijs (2014) warn that the term (local) can "be conceived as an empty signifier …" and acquire "a substantive meaning through associations with other elements structuring the discourse around it" (p. 181). Therefore, there is a danger of falling into a language of dualisms, separating what *is* place-based vs. what *is not*, and assuming one as inherently better than the other (Robertson, 2018). This could have consequences, such as closing off initiatives from wider knowledge sharing and, potentially, greater scale change. Therefore, this thesis looks into *how* and *why* place plays a role in working towards more sustainable food systems. Using the concept of foodscapes, this thesis explores the sustainability value of food practices which are place-based and relationally networked. By "zooming in" and "zooming out" on (place-based and relational) food practices in chapter four, this thesis further highlights the implications of these characteristics for food sustainability.

Understanding place as relational can help highlight connections across scales (Robertson, 2018) and implications for enacting food system change beyond one place or context. Place-based food systems, from a relational perspective, includes networks of actors across the food chain. This thesis will build upon these discussions through exploring the value of bridging networks across places for contributing to wider-scale food system change. In sustainable food systems, relationality can be seen via trans-local governance (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019), or metabolic flows across space (Kasper et al., 2017). The concept of foodscapes highlights these interconnections at and between macro (global), meso, and micro scales (Mikkelson, 2011; Wegerif and Wiskerke, 2017). This thesis will explore how wider networks and interconnections in the food system bring to light opportunities to contribute to food system sustainability. Furthermore, in chapter four, the core concept of foodscapes is expanded upon to explore the added value of the interconnected and relational networks for sustainable food system change.

1.2.3. New sustainability debates and pathways

In past decades, the concept of sustainability has been popularized to point towards the urgency to move towards social and environmental health (Vinnari and Vinnari, 2014; Agyeman et al., 2002). However, more than an end-all solution, sustainability has been framed as an ideological practice (Davidson, 2010). In other words, a starting point to reorient our systems to a different "way of doing" things – in terms of environmental care as well as bottom-up processes and citizen participation. It is important to recognize new and promising frameworks that address critiques of sustainability and highlight the potential role of community food collectives for filling such gaps.

Sustainability has gained attention and priorities on a world stage, for example through the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, launched in 2015 (UN, 2021). These 17 goals strongly connect to food systems, for example SDG2: no hunger,

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

SDG8: decent work and economic growth, SDG11: sustainable cities and communities, and SDG15: life on land (Ilieva, 2019; Olsson, 2018). Despite their concrete application, the SDGs are still the result of a political process, during which the term "sustainability" can be molded in the eye of the beholder (Béné et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2020).

As a term, sustainability is at risk to be co-opted by neoliberal and corporate interests (Blythe et al., 2018). Some consider sustainability to be an "empty signifier" (Gunder and Hillier, 2009), that has "lost much of its transformative potential" (Rosol et al., 2017, p. 1710). Furthermore, sustainability has been argued to be tied up with global capitalism and greatly contested in planning domains (Psarikidou and Szerszynski, 2012). For example, solutions framed in terms of changing consumer practices through "green" consumption (Yan et al., 2019) have been criticized, arguing that green commodities only reproduce the individualistic and market capitalistic practices that are responsible for unsustainable development in the first place (Ajl, 2021; Guthman, 2008; Szasz, 2007). Scholars also contend that pressure from social movements can allow alternatives to emerge, alongside the state and the market (De Schutter et al., 2019). Applying a broader ideological and systematic perspective is therefore necessary for taking action and shifting our (global) food system towards environmental sustainability.

Community-based food collectives have themselves been positioned as innovative in addressing sustainability issues. Rather than following top-down benchmarks and policies, such initiatives have been argued to attempt to shape the agenda themselves (Kaika, 2017). This has increasingly attracted attention from (local) governments, through collaborations with such social and grassroots innovations (Moulaert et al., 2005; Boyer, 2015). In chapter three, this thesis explores social innovations in researching community gardens. Focusing on how such initiatives attempt to change rules and relationships in society, community gardens are a venue to explore how small-scale initiatives are a breeding ground, also for larger-scale innovation and sustainable change. Through for example, nurturing social diversity and

supporting citizen activities, grassroots innovations have been celebrated for contributing towards democratic societies (Smith and Stirling, 2016).

Authors have also criticized current sustainability debates, seeing the term as "an exercise in efficiency," in sustaining the current practices, instead of pushing to regenerate a new system, and, in the process, building upon opportunities to make it better (Duncan et al., 2020, p.4). While sustainability might be seen by policy-makers and researchers as a series of targets or indicators (i.e. Habitat III Programme, 2016), others argue that, in order to achieve more sustainable futures, we must also consider individual and collective values through a "deeper" transformation (Grenni et al., 2020; Ives et al., 2020; Horlings, 2015; O'Brien and Sygna, 2013). That is, questioning "the assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, loyalties and interests that have created the structures, systems and behaviours that contribute to anthropogenic climate change, social vulnerability and other environmental problems in the first place" (O'Brien, 2012, p.668). Food and food systems are not only heavily rooted in social and cultural values and traditions, they are also tied to concrete behaviors and practices, both of which are necessary for greater-scale sustainability transformations (Grenni et al., 2020; Wilber, 2000; Horlings & Padt, 2013; Ballard et al., 2010). In chapter five, this thesis specifically examines how sustainable values and practices in ecovillages could indicate sustainability transformations in such communities. Furthermore, while community food initiatives embed sustainability values in their organization and ideals, their collective identities potentially highlight differences and pose challenges for interactions with wider society (Westkog et al., 2018). Also in chapter five, this thesis elaborates on such challenges for food initiatives, in their attempts for facilitating sustainable change.

1.3. Research contexts and methodology

1.3.1. Research process

The case studies for this thesis were conducted sequentially, with the first study finishing before the second begun, and the second finishing before the third. This was partially a pragmatic choice, as the first two case studies were conducted during the author's Research Master studies in Groningen, the Netherlands. The initiatives chosen in Groningen had received attention in the city for their innovative organizational characteristics and approach to sustainability, which was sought for this research and found to be a suitable match. The sequence of the research allows each chapter to build upon one another in terms of content, beginning within the initiative and moving outwards. Starting with the Free Café in Groningen, the internal organization and governance of such initiatives were first investigated. Following this, the next study investigated the place-based enablers of community garden initiatives in the Netherlands. Community gardens were chosen due to their unique organizational structures and the distinctive forms found in various place-based contexts. The urban, rural, and peri-urban gardens were chosen, to also reflect the place-based differences of these initiatives. Following the first two cases, the third case study (represented in chapters four and five) focuses on ecovillages in the United States.

While the US was initially discussed as a research location because it is the author's home country, several factors solidified the decision to eventually focus on it, after completing data collection for the Dutch cases. Relative to the Netherlands, the US (especially in 2018, at the height of the Trump administration) is more politically conservative, which has implications for community initiatives, such as less funding and support from (local / state / national) governments. The dominance of the traditional conservative policies (around, for example, women's reproductive rights, immigrant rights, and climate change legislation) results in a tense political climate and therefore many reactionary movements from the progressive left (ex.

the Women's March, the March for Science, and the Families Belong Together march around immigrant rights). The lack of political support and belief around climate science especially politicizes initiatives working towards sustainability. Therefore, the alternative and politically engaged culture brewing in the United States provided an interesting and relevant location to further investigate community food collectives.

Ecovillages are under-researched organizational experiments which are now gaining attention with the popularization of sustainability movements (Lopez and Weaver, 2019). Through integrating sustainability principles into housing, resource use (ex. energy, water), and social life (ex. sharing, nonviolent communication, democratic decision-making), ecovillages provide insight into a multi-dimensional approach to sustainability transitions, of which food is a vital part. The United States differs from the Netherlands in terms of the density of space, which allows a greater diversity comparing rural and urban communities.

Further details of each specific case study are expanded upon below and in the respective empirical chapters (chapters two through five). Furthermore, reflections on the research process will be elaborated upon in chapter six.

1.3.2. Research locations and contexts

The empirical data informing this thesis was collected in the Netherlands and the United States, in rural and in urban contexts, between 2015 and 2018 (see Table 1.1). The two countries share many characteristics that make them, together and individually, unique research contexts. Both highly developed Western countries are also the two largest food exporters in the world (Humboldt, 2018), and could be seen as subscribing to a highly competitive capitalist food system (Holt-Giménez, 2017). While it is not the intention to explicitly compare these two contexts, below this thesis will briefly elaborate why they each present valuable attributes for exploring community food initiatives.

Table 1.1 *Fieldwork sites and methods*

Chapter	Fieldwork period	Cases selected and locations	Methods
2	November 2015 – August 2016	**Food waste initiative (NL)** The Free Café, Groningen	**In-depth, semi-structured interviews** **Participant observation**
3	May – June 2017	**3 community gardens (NL)** Pluk en Moestuin, Eenrum Doarpstun, Snakkerburen Toentje, Groningen	**In-depth, semi-structured interviews** **Participant observation**
4 & 5	May – August 2018	**3 ecovillage communities (USA)** Twin Oaks, Virginia Los Angeles Eco-Village, California Finney Farm, Washington	**In-depth, semi-structured interviews** **Participant observation** **Food mapping**

Community gardens and food waste initiatives in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has especially exhibited a growing number of local citizen initiatives, in domains such as, renewable energy (Zuidema and de Boer, 2017), housing (Boonstra, 2015), rural broadband connections (Salemink, 2016), and food (Veen, 2015). As the Netherlands and much of Western Europe has seen a slow withdrawal of the welfare state, opportunities have opened up, to make way for more citizen initiatives, increasingly taking over the roles of governments (Meijer, 2018; Boonstra, 2015). Food is especially on the agenda of these community groups, as a way to contribute to the social cohesion in their local environment, as well as sustainability challenges (Veen, 2015). This thesis researches a food waste initiative and community gardens in the (Northern) Netherlands.

The topic of food waste discussed in chapter two, has been garnering attention in recent years with as much as 30% of all food produced being wasted, on both, consumer and producer sides (Gustavsson et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2009). As a response to these challenges, community initiatives have begun to emerge. While food surplus "saving" has been tackled by dumpster divers or "freegans" (Gross, 2009; Clark, 2004), such actions have recently become more integrated into more formalized initiatives, which are rapidly proliferating (Spring and Biddulph, 2020). This includes food sharing apps (Davies and Evans, 2019), public fridges, and social supermarkets (Morrow, 2018; Holweg et al., 2010). With this growing recognition and development, this thesis reflects upon how food waste becomes an evolving arena for citizen action. Food waste is a complex issue that necessitates cooperation and re-organization from actors across the food system. Through the analysis of a food waste initiative, this thesis stresses how food system sustainability manifests throughout the food chain, and can inspire innovative solutions. This thesis investigates a food waste initiative in the North of the Netherlands, called the Free Café, which was described at the beginning of this chapter. Similar to the kinds of food waste initiatives described above, the Free Café attempts to challenge consumer perceptions of food as a commodity through self-directed citizen action. This initiative was specifically chosen, not only for its use of food that would otherwise be thrown out, but also for how the project connects the use of (food) waste with citizen participation and community cohesion.

In chapter three, this thesis explores community gardens in the Northern Netherlands. Community gardens can take on many forms, relating to different (community) goals and fulfilling different (community and place-specific) needs. Generally, community gardens are collectively cultivated spaces, which involve and educate local communities in food production, while providing access to fresh and healthy food (Ilieva, 2016; Kortright and Wakefield, 2011). This includes allotment gardens, where individuals each have their own plot and work alongside one other, as well as initiatives where individuals collectively

work on the same piece of land (Veen, 2015; Van den Berg et al., 2010). Community gardens are often praised for their benefits, which can include being a tool for community empowerment, in terms of providing opportunities as a social gathering place (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Glover, 2004), strengthening community cohesion (Firth et al., 2011), promoting intergenerational interaction (Milbourne, 2012; Glover, 2004), and transmitting food and agricultural knowledge (Pudup, 2008; Lautenschlager and Smith, 2007; Saldivar Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). Thus, through cooperation (typically between governmental actors and citizens), gardens facilitate the pooling of local resources, knowledge, and community support for their survival. In these ways, it is clear that community gardens have the potential to align with characteristics of sustainable food systems and are relevant for this thesis. Three gardens were chosen as study sites (see Table 1.1 above), including Pluk en Moestuin, Dorpstun, and Toentje. Rural, peri-urban, and urban locations, in the North of the Netherlands, were specifically sought out to explore differences across social-spatial scales – that is, the importance of the contextual environment for contributing to resourceful citizen action, as well as the contextual factors surrounding the necessity to carry out such actions to begin with. Furthermore, gardens which collectively worked the land and which exhibited "innovative" characteristics (being involved in other activities on their property, specifying a unique target group, conducting non-traditional ways of gardening) were also pursued. Potential initiatives (collected from colleagues and researchers) were contacted and asked about the above criteria and if they were willing to participate. Considering these characteristics, the list of eleven gardens was narrowed down to the three chosen.

Ecovillages in the United States

Chapters four and five center around research on ecovillage communities in the United States. Ecovillages are a form of

intentional communities (Sager, 2018), with a focus on sustainability and include characteristics such as decreased resource and energy use (Forde, 2017), recycled building materials (Pickerill and Maxey, 2009), as well as growing their own food and supporting locally-based and sustainable food systems (Brombin, 2015). Such characteristics are reflected in Gillman's (1991) landmark definition of an ecovillages as a "human-scale, full-featured settlement, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future" (p. 10). Food is an integrated element of ecovillages, being among the many sustainability challenges they attempt to address (Brombin, 2015; Ergas, 2010). Sustainable food practices are visible, for example, in ecovillages' use of permaculture, an agriculture design system, to integrate sustainability principles into their everyday lives and community (food) practices (Veteto and Lockyer, 2013). Working the land and harvesting and consuming the produce are ways in which ecovillages attempt to integrate food sustainability into their living and working environments. While ecovillages share characteristics of the other initiatives, such as collective decision-making, the commitment expected from members and alignment in values, presents them as a unique site to research food sustainability. Through focusing on ecovillages, this thesis hopes to illustrate how food is not only integrated in, but also inseparable from a more holistic sustainability transformation and can have impacts beyond the community itself.

The United States has a long history with intentional communities (ICs), which can be traced back the motivation of developing "utopian societies" founded on religion (in the 1890s), political / economic ideals (1930s/40s), or as an escape from modern technology (1960/70s) (Kanter, 1972). Today, IC movements are gaining traction, especially with more "mainstream" society, seen, for example, with transition towns and forms of co-housing (e.g. Boyer, 2018; Feola and Nunes, 2014; Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). The mainstreaming of these projects makes them a valuable case for investigation and how their practices

are adapted by other communities. Specifically, how can their food practices contribute to greater food system sustainability?

This thesis investigates three projects in the United States, including Twin Oaks in rural Virginia, Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) in Los Angeles, California, and Finney Farm in rural Washington State (see Table 1.1). These study sites were chosen based on being established, regarding a stable membership, longevity, and their active web presence (following from Boyer, 2015). Furthermore, ecovillages with prominent community food practices were sought out and selected, for example, growing their own food. After searching on web databases, such as Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) and the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), 21 relevant ecovillages were found, and the above three were selected, based on the criteria and willingness from the community to participate. Today, all projects have reported increased interactions with mainstream societies, which is relevant in understanding their potential influence on (mainstream) society and food systems.

1.3.2. Qualitative and ethnographic methods

In this PhD thesis, I use a combination of qualitative methods, including in-depth and semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and food mapping. Collecting in-depth information through interviews and observation data is vital for exploring participants' first-hand experiences, the reasoning behind these projects and how they functioned, as well as the wider influences of the initiatives. Food mapping supplemented interview data and helped to understand how food is connected to place.

An ethnographic approach was chosen for this research – attempting to take an "insider" perspective to view the initiatives as one of the participants. Ethnography can be defined as a "family of methods involving direct and sustained contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly *in its own terms,* the irreducibility of human experience" (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p. 5). More

specifically, this includes conducting participant observations – interacting with and participating alongside research participants in their everyday activities, to understand their lives, from their perspective. Ethnography is relevant for this research in understanding communities' daily rhythms, how they operate, and to place these in the broader contexts in which those arise (Wright, 2020). Ethnography is especially being turned to as a means to research climate change and sustainability (e.g. Chitewere, 2017; Crate, 2011; Orlove, 2005). Anthropologists' skills of "being there" (Roncoli et al., 2009), striving to understand local perspectives and knowledge (Crate, 2011), as well as connecting it to greater global contexts, have been noted as especially useful. Thereby I found it valuable to research communities organized around sustainability practices through ethnographic methods, to better understand how they confront and engage with discussions around (food) sustainability in their everyday actions. In this thesis I participated in and engaged in the daily operations of these initiatives, which allowed me to more easily observe immediate community dynamics and how collectives interact with their food system. Such a perspective was valuable in understanding internal community processes such as decision-making and membership procedures (chapters two and five), food practices (chapter two and four), how communities are embedded in and interact with their larger community networks (chapters three, four, and five), and community values and motivations (chapter five). These elements were all valuable in understanding community processes and their attempts towards building sustainable food systems.

In all research sites, I carried out participant observation through volunteering in different food-related work areas, including helping cooking, gardening, and processing food. In the first two cases, volunteer work was more or less the limits of my interactions (aside from interviews). This includes visiting the Free Café approximately once every two weeks in a ten-month period (November 2015 to August 2016) and community garden visits and work days (May and June 2017). In the third case study, of the ecovillage communities in the United States, I lived with

each community for one month (May to August 2018). While I also was involved in the food-related work areas, staying in these ecovillages allowed insight into (formally organized) events, such as community meetings and conferences, but also informal and spontaneous activities. Such experiences were found to be invaluable in building trust with community members and research participants.

Food's visceral nature and its strong connection to place further inspired the use of visual methods in this research. In the third case study, of the ecovillages, I employed food mapping methods to explore food practices at ecovillage communities. Food-mapping has been described as a "experiential, learner-centered exercise" that initiates participants to reflect upon and broaden their food system perspective, while simultaneously mapping food facilities, stimulating a sensorial and spatial awareness of food (Wight and Killham, 2014, p. 315). Therefore, food mapping highlights the intertwining social and spatial nature of food, and has the potential to strengthen the role of the research participants as co-creators (Orrù, 2015). As literature on this topic illustrates, there is "no one right way to conduct" food mapping (Wight and Killham, 2014, p. 316; Orrù, 2015; Burgoine and Monsivais, 2013; Johansson et al., 2009). For the purpose of research in this thesis, I supplied participants with a map of their ecovillage (either provided by the community, or drawn based on material provided by the community), and asked them to indicate "where food takes place", probing for sustainable and unique food practices. While food mapping methodologies foreground place-based interactions (Orrù, 2015), in chapter four, I explore how mapping and analyzing food practices also has implications beyond its immediate (physical) environment.

In addition to the participant observations and mapping activities, I also conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members of the collectives. In-depth interviews help gain an understanding from the participants' perspective, while semi-structured interviews allow for a more open conversation, giving space for topics not otherwise addressed in the interview questions (Weiss, 1995). In this research, interviewees

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ranged from founders and initiators, to everyday volunteers and participants. Understanding different levels of participation was valuable to learn about a range of personal experiences (such as participants' motivations) as well as understandings of the project itself. Furthermore, understanding how participants held a range of roles in the initiatives provided insight into potential power hierarchies and tensions that might have arisen. As emphasized above, unique to food collectives are their experimental and innovative means of organization and governance. Interviewing participants about how their collective made decisions and distributed responsibilities was therefore necessary to understanding the functioning and nuances in their initiatives. The different levels of involvement among interviewees was also intended to gather different perspectives of the role of the initiative for the community, as well as its layered impacts. While certain interviewees were sought out in the course of this research (i.e. those involved in the initiation of the project), interviews were open to all participants who requested to be interviewed. All interviewees signed informed consent forms, stating that their participation was voluntary and they could stop the interview (or the recording) at any time. All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms, unless the research participant specifically requested their real name to be used. Additionally, the research conducted was formally approved by the Faculty of Spatial Science's research ethics committee, at the University of Groningen.

All interview and observation data was coded, using either Atlas.ti (chapters two and three) or NVivo (chapters four and five) coding software. Details on these coding methods are elaborated upon in the methods section of these respective chapters.

1.4. Overview of chapters

The thesis includes four empirical chapters, which collectively explore how community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability.

Table 1.2 *List of chapter titles and research questions*

Chapter	Chapter title	Research question(s)
2.	'It's not really about the food, it's also about food': Urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café	How are urban citizen collectives organized and governed, to better facilitate local action in food initiatives?
3.	Connecting resourcefulness and social innovation: exploring conditions and processes in community gardens in the Netherlands	Which conditions and processes of resourcefulness facilitate social innovation in rural, peri-urban, and urban community gardens in the North of the Netherlands?
4.	Ecovillage Food-(e)scapes: Zooming in and out of sustainable food practices	How are sustainable food practices both place-based and relational? And how do (such) food practices in ecovillage communities contribute to sustainable food systems?
5.	Collective identity supporting sustainability transformations in ecovillage communities	What can collective identity in ecovillage communities teach us about transformations to sustainability? And how can collective identity highlight challenges for ecovillages for initiating sustainability transformations?

Chapter two investigates a food waste initiative (the Free Café) in Groningen, the Netherlands, through the lens of Gibson-Graham's (2006) community economies. Analyzing community practices, this chapter looks to understand how the café is organized and governed, to better understand how diverse economic practices can materialize and their role toward sustainable post-capitalist societies.

Chapter three explores three community gardens in the north of the Netherlands. Through examining conditions and processes of resourcefulness, this chapter investigates enabling factors for social innovations. In creating novel practices and relations in society, community gardens have the potential to act as social innovations.

Chapter four and five bring this thesis to the United States, and explore three ecovillage communities – Twin Oaks in rural Virginia, Los Angeles Eco-Village in Los Angeles, California, and Finney Farm in rural Washington State. Chapter four uses a food-scapes lens to analyze (place-based and relational) food practices at the three communities. Through using social practice theory, this chapter "zooms in" on and "zooms out" of one (place-based and relational) food practice in each community. The chapter then conceptualizes how sustainable food practices are both, place-based and relational, while also highlighting the value of the foodscapes lens for food system sustainability.

Chapter five connects ecovillages to a greater movement of sustainability transformations. Using collective identity as a starting point, the chapter highlights how ecovillages' collective identities connect across objective and subjective dimensions of transformation, tying together values and behaviors. In the process, this chapter highlights sustainability challenges en-countered by ecovillage communities, towards their ambitions towards sustainability transformations. Lastly, chapter six will present the conclusions of the thesis.

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CHAPTER 2

'It's not really about the food, it's also about food': Urban collective action, the community economy and autonomous food systems at the Groningen Free Café

ABSTRACT

The Free Café is a citizen-driven collective in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands that serves a free meal biweekly, using food that would otherwise be thrown away. While principally attempting to create a space where financial pressures and social status are lifted, the group also works to raise awareness about the environmental and societal impacts of food. Using Gibson-Graham's (2006) community economies (CE) lens to analyse the Free Café, this chapter aims to understand how urban citizen collectives are organised and governed, to better facilitate local action in food initiatives. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, this research focuses on the daily practices, interactions, organization and challenges surrounding the Free Café, to draw lessons about urban collective action and CE. Though findings indicate internal conflicts and contradictions, through sharing its vision and opportunities, the café is found to be valuable to food-waste awareness-raising and experimentation towards sustainable post-capitalist societies.

KEY WORDS

2.1. Introduction

A restaurant where food is offered for free strikes a chord of cognitive dissonance for many consumers. *"Is it only for people who can't afford to buy food? Has the food gone bad? Do I want to be eating it?"* are questions one might ask when propositioned for a meal in such an establishment. These queries, raised by the idea of a free meal, open up interesting opportunities to start rethinking how we view food in today's society, what we consider to be "good" in everyday practices, and how such perceptions might change through local collective action.

The Free Café, an urban grassroots initiative in Groningen, the Netherlands, is potentially a place that encourages people to redefine how they view the economy, their own role in it and their normative conceptions of food. This volunteer-run restaurant and community space collects and cooks food that would otherwise be thrown away, to create a free meal twice a week. More ambitiously, the Free Café attempts to eliminate money from all café processes, not only relying on volunteer work and free food, but also other resources made available through the community. The café's local popularity shows that an initiative operating on the "fringes" can garner the means for survival and have a place in today's society.

Gibson-Graham (2006) see the intrinsic value and greater significance of exploring initiatives such as the Free Café. The authors propose a framework for autonomous community-driven initiatives as a means to explore diverse economic materializations for moving towards post-capitalist societies. These "community economies" (hereon CE) *"articulate a set of concepts and practices concerned with economic interdependence"* to *"offer potential coordinates for counter hegemonic projects of constructing 'other' economies"* (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 79). Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, p. xix) posit a performative process to conceive of the economy *"as a situated and diverse space of ethical decision making and negotiated interdependence with other humans, other species and our environment."* By doing that, the economy becomes, again, a space of agency (Constance, 2017).

A non-hierarchical collective might resonate with the inner-idealist, seeking to transform capitalist systems, however, there

is often more than meets the eye. Many researchers agree that, despite its innovativeness, the diverse and CE frameworks heavily lack addressing internal power relations in such collectives (Sarmiento, 2017; Kelly, 2005). Kelly (2005) specifically points to "*decision-making and resource allocation*" as practices that "*are seldom free from the politics of personal gain and a communitarian ethos is not always easy to maintain*" (p. 41). Following from this, it is essential to critically analyse decision-making and collective organization in CE.

The importance of developing diverse economies is especially relevant with a growing number of initiatives seeking to address inequities in local and global food systems. Faults of the global-industrialised food system range from environmental degradation due to pesticide use and monocropping (Wingeyer et al., 2017), diet-related health epidemics (Nestle, 2002) and human rights abuses of agriculture and food-chain workers (Madrigal, 2017). Many of these issues can be traced back to a food system that incentivises profits over environmental and social justice. Therefore, in order to create sustainable food systems, we must advance in the direction of alternative / post-capitalist societies and ways of organizing (Holt-Giménez, 2017; Peña et al., 2017; Patel, 2008). Citizen-led food movements are greatly endorsed as a venue of experimentation in order to move toward social and environmental change, also within global food systems (Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011).

The potential of CE to initiate a transition into sustainable agriculture and food systems has generated much interest. While Gibson-Graham's (2006) diverse economy and CE has been widely used in food system research (Naylor, 2018; Sarmiento, 2017; Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016; Dixon, 2010; Gross, 2009), the literature has focused primarily on food production practices (Cameron, et al., 2014; Cameron and Wright, 2014; Hill, 2014; Trauger and Passidomo, 2012) or meal-sharing (Veen and Dagevos, 2019). This study differs from the aforementioned research through using the CE lens for exploring an urban collective engaged in reducing food waste. This perspective not only emphasises the diversity of ways in which collective action can materialise throughout the food system, but also highlights collective action in the spaces not addressed by

governments or the market, despite, arguably, being a *by-product* of such practices (Holt-Giménez, 2017; Mount and Andrée, 2013).

Following from the above, by researching the Free Café through the CE lens, the aim of this chapter is to explore ways in which urban citizen collectives are organised and governed, to better facilitate local action in food initiatives, and, ultimately, influence food system sustainability. After exploring the Free Café with a CE lens, this chapter develops an argument about the ways local collective action, at urban citizen initiatives, contributes to responsible (local level) food-practices and illustrates the potential of CE for sustainable societies.

2

2.2. Theoretical framework

2.2.1. Community economies & local action

In the mid-1990s Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson began an on-going project to build a language around economic diversity, which came to be known as *diverse economies* (Larder et al., 2014). Gibson-Graham constructed what they called a post-structural political economy framework to re-conceptualise and redefine practices associated with the normative capitalist system. This restructuring differentiated from a regular market economy on three core points: transactions, labour and enterprise (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Diverse economies was conceptualised to broaden the boundaries across these three junctures to include non-monetary and volunteer-based practices (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

As a materialization of the diverse economies framework, Gibson-Graham (2006) developed the concept of *community economies*, which outlines counterhegemonic economic practices to work towards economic interdependence of "subjects, sites and practices" (p. 81). More than a specific *kind* of economic practice or vision, CE is an *ethical approach* to economic practices and constructions. The underlying principle in re-socializing economic relations privileges *"care of the local community and environment"* (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 81).

CE are a *site of decision-making*, where economic practices are seen as *"inherently social"* (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 87-88). The aspects of "practice" and "decision-making" are, conversely, also the main aspects of this approach that have been heavily criticised, and which this chapter seeks to address through the case of the Free Café. CE have been considered utopian and disconnected from practice (North, 2008) with some authors speculating whether "alternative" economic practices are necessarily "better" and encouraging the investigation of internal power relations, decision making practices and governance of researched initiatives to better understand the potential of CE (Sarimiento, 2017; Kelly, 2005; Samers, 2005). Furthermore, the CE focus of the "local" has been greatly critiqued for not being transferable more broadly (Sarimiento, 2017; Jonas, 2010; Kelly, 2005).

Critiques of the "local" scale of CE are also directed towards community action in general. However, while largely concentrated on local level impacts, collectives involved in "micro-transitions" may lead to tackling broader spatial and societal challenges (see, for example, the relevance / impacts of Dutch renewable energy collectives, Rijksoverheid, 2013). Recent years have seen an increasing number of local citizen initiatives and more formalised community collectives emerging in the Netherlands and beyond (Boonstra, 2015). Whether they focus on generating renewable energy (Zuidema and de Boer, 2017) or finding innovative opportunities for co-housing (Boonstra, 2015), local community groups are taking an increasingly important role in promoting and facilitating responsible, sustainable and resilient environmental practices at the community level. Furthermore, Dutch local governments and organizations are responding to this influx, through attempts to facilitate citizen initiatives, enhancing their impact (Bakker et al., 2012). However, attempts by local governments to embed collectives in their policy making must also be approached with caution and criticism. Citizen initiatives have been critiqued as *outsourcing* strategies by the government for civil society to take over responsibilities of the state, for example, in maintaining open green spaces (Rosol, 2012). While community action has benefits, on the local level and beyond, their presence, practices and facilitation efforts must still be executed and analysed critically.

Through focusing our analysis specifically on the organizational and governance aspects at the Free Café, this chapter attempts to address the above concerns when discussing the potential for CE. Throughout the discussion and concluding sections, the aim is to draw lessons that might be relevant for understanding the potential of local collective action (for sustainable food practices / system) beyond the Dutch context.

2

2.2.2. Food waste initiatives: Living indicators of the global food system

Food waste is an issue that has more recently attracted the attention of environmentalists, policy-makers and consumers-alike. Approximately 1/3 of all food produced on the planet is wasted, resulting in about 1.3 billion tons of food waste a year and detrimental social and environmental impacts on a global level, and within communities (Gustavsson et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2009). To address issues of food waste, initiatives including "social supermarkets", food banks and food sharing apps have emerged from both civil society and governments (Michelini et al., 2018).

However, these projects could be seen as "band-aid" solutions, addressing the results of food waste, rather than the *causes,* which stem from both producers and consumers, necessitating collaboration from the market, state and civil society (Gustavsson et al., 2011). In an increasingly industrial and globalised food system, food is more likely to travel long distances due to international trade, negatively impacting food freshness and necessitating chemical additives to prolong shelf life (Gustavsson et al., 2011). Furthermore, industrialised food production has increased the amount of inexpensive food products in developed nations, making it easier for consumers to over-purchase and hoard food, activities linked to food waste (Griffin et al., 2009). Thus, on producer and consumer ends, food waste is argued to follow from our *capitalist* food system, which, like all capitalist systems, is based on the necessity to overproduce (Holt-Giménez, 2017).

Consequently, by addressing the problem of food waste, initiatives such as the Free Café arguably not only *rely* on capitalist practices

for surplus food, but also *fill voids* created by them. Mount and An-drée (2013) see the validity of bottom-up initiatives in food system governance, terming them forms of *"'post neoliberal' food governance"* visioning the potential for civic action *"in the local space vacated by broader liberal agendas"* (p. 588 & 580). Accordingly, the mere *presence* of citizen initiatives point to symptoms of flaws in the existing state of affairs. Kaika (2017) terms these activities *living indicators,* issues where urgent action is needed, indicated "from below" by (local) citizen-action. In contrast to top-down technological measure-ments and institutional benchmarks, the idea of living indicators emphasises the significance of citizen initiatives as revealing gaps to be addressed for development of more just *and* sustainable so-cieties. The relevance of living indicators are further pronounced in the quest for visioning how to work towards and achieve urban sustainability (Williams, 2010). With the current political climate, defined by extremes, the experimental space for less formalised undertakings is expected to grow, resulting in a greater emergence of a diversity of initiatives as well as governance models (Marsden and Franklin, 2013; Fickey, 2011). The above highlights the relevance of researching decision-making processes underlying the (creative) potentials of citizen groups, notably in taking on roles not typically addressed by governments (Marsden and Franklin, 2013). Thus, focusing on the Free Café as well as similar citizen initiatives, in particular the ways they are organised and governed, not only sheds lights on living indicators *"from below",* but also provides direction for local government support and facilitation.

2.2.3. From theory to practice: Exploring community economies at the Free Café

Contemporary food systems are strongly embedded in global eco-nomic models and connected to modern (urban) lifestyles. While alternative food networks are touted as a replacement to industrial modes of production, many argue that they in fact *reproduce* neolib-eralisms (Guthman, 2007; Allen et al., 2003). However, discarding customary neoliberal jargon could potentially take the conceptual

power away from such processes and, instead, contribute to widening the capacities for other initiatives (Harris, 2008). Gibson-Graham's (2006) lens similarly encourages developing a language around post-capitalist practices, reframing how they are conceptualised, as a way to expand the potential of autonomous spaces, including those around food (Davies et al., 2017; Wilson, 2013).

CE begin with three main entry points: the *re-framing* of economic practices, *re-subjecting* of ethical economic subjects, and collective action throughout these (Trauger and Passidomo, 2012; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). In the process of *reframing* economic practices, four points of discussion emerge, meant to "*inform an ethics and politics of the community economy*": 1) what is necessary, 2) how social surplus is appropriated and distributed; 3) how social surplus is produced and consumed; and 4) how commons are produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 88). More than guidelines, these coordinates or "concerns" are meant to help guide the language of how CE could be developed through collective action.

While these four coordinates focus on specific economic acts, they, more importantly, each foreground governance and democratic decision-making processes around these practices. Thus, a closer examination of the organization and governance of local initiatives should lend a critical analysis of CE in practice. The second and third coordinates of CE, for example, are based on decision-making processes around social surplus, which could include critically questioning inclusion / exclusion in governance processes, non-exploitative conditions of surplus appropriation and societal destinations of surplus distribution (Hill, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2006). Additionally, the focus on governing the commons, or communal resources needed for the survival of CE (Gibson-Graham, 2006), lends a discussion to the accompanying material dimension, how collectives inhabit a space. These lines of inquiry further align with Wilson's (2013) interpretation of the poststructuralist political economy, which "*seeks to understand how the material interacts with the social and political*" (p. 726). In Wilson's (2013) analysis of autonomous food spaces, the author explores these spaces' potential to "*facilitate a deviation from mainstream (territorial level), processes for the de-commodification of food (material level) and practices that form new social relations (social*

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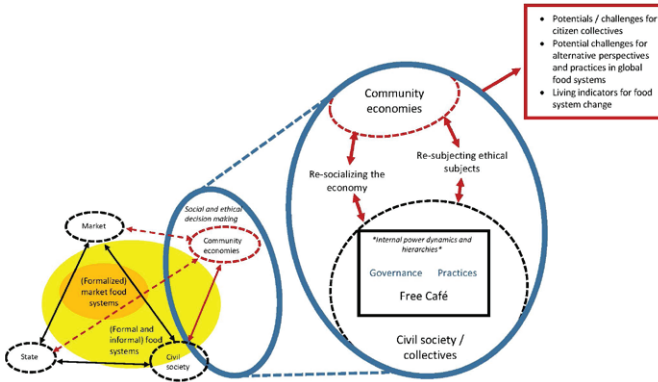
Figure 2.1 *Conceptual model (inspired by Renting et al. 2012).*

level)" (in Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016, p. 928). The argument is, exploring also the physical space created, used, and/or modified by the citizen collectives reveals important information about the values, identity and ways of working – in short, the ways the collective "materialises".

Building off of Renting et al.'s (2012) work on civil society-based governance mechanisms, we add CE to the picture (see Figure 2.1) to help visualize CEs' contribution to the nuanced role of civic initiatives, in relation to market and state actors. In this chapter we first explore the way the collective functions. The empirical results section of this chapter first focuses on how the economy is *re-socialised* at the Free Café through the *social organization*, highlighting themes such as inclusion/exclusion, hierarchy (or the lack of) and participants' roles and responsibilities (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Following the organization section, this chapter will more explicitly explore *decision-making processes* of the collective to gain a nuanced understanding of its governance. Throughout, the discussion will highlight enabling, as well as restricting factors faced by the collective.

Secondly, this chapter analyses the Free Café through "*resubjectification*". Gibson-Graham, 2006) argue that "*to change ourselves*

is to change the world, and the relation is reciprocal," necessitating an inwards analysis of individuals' experiences within CE (p. 127). Therefore, this part of our analysis directs attention to the participants of the café, in particular the fluidity of their roles and how collective practices were constructed around food (waste) and an ethical consciousness is expected to emerge.

2.3. Research methods and context

The Free Café is located in Groningen, the provincial capital and largest city in the North of the Netherlands comprised of ~ 200,000 inhabitants, approximately one quarter of whom are students. Despite its small size, Groningen's vibrant city life, left-wing politics and young population, contribute to the municipality's willingness to experiment and make space for citizen-initiated projects (Meesterburrie and Dupuy, 2018).

From 2014 the Free Café at Tuin in de Stad (Garden in the City) was open for meals every Wednesday and Sunday. After May 1st 2016 the café re-located to Backbone050, where it is open every Wednesday to date (2019)[1]. Volunteers pick up food the day before, start cooking at 14:00 and serve the meal at 18:00. One of the authors visited the Free Café approximately once every two weeks, from November 2015 until August 2016. The nature of these visits varied between volunteering in the kitchen and eating with friends – intentionally visiting the café in different roles to reflect on the potentially different experiences. Volunteering consisted of helping to prepare meals (including cutting produce, cooking and baking), washing and drying dishes and cleaning up the workspace. The participation was essentially entirely self-led, with no-to-little instruction from others, in line with the spontaneous nature of the café. By spending time volunteering and engaging with the community, the author conducted participant observation (Bernard, 2018). This method enabled gaining an inside perspective of the café's routine and planning

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1 Since data collection ended, a second Free Café location opened at *Edanz*, a former elementary school-turned neighborhood education and creativity center that hosts other events, such as meditation and art classes.

procedures, to understand the context, different roles, practices, expectations and interactions, as well as provide a background for subsequent interviews.

In the ten months of data collection, approximately three to five informal discussions would take place during each observational visit (once every two weeks). Notes of these meetings were summarised and analysed parallel to interview data. Additionally, seven semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews with café organisers and volunteers were conducted (see Table 2.1). Participants for (formal) interviews were selected based on personal observations and tips from organisers. While the goal was to interview people with various levels of involvement, those who had (at one point) been involved in decision-making processes were prioritised. However, within this group, interviewees spanned different ages and livelihoods, reflecting diverse motivations and perspectives on the role and relevance of the café for the community. The level of involvement of the interviewees is distinguished in the text below by using the terms *organiser*, *volunteer* and *visitor*. An organiser is an involved participant often responsible for opening and closing the cafe, and, thus, has a key to the space; a volunteer works at the café without responsibilities outside of day-to-day tasks (e.g. cooking or picking up food); and a visitor comes to the café, but does not help out. However, every role is dynamic, thus an organiser can come to the café as a visitor or a volunteer. Interviews were specifically useful to learn about motivations for participation, insights into organizational procedures and impacts of the café and its place in the community.

It should also be noted that many interview participants describe the Free Café as having an open atmosphere, where it is typical to strike up a conversation with strangers. This ease helped the researcher create contacts at the café. Café participants were happy to assist in data collection and often offered suggestions of potential interviewees. Prior to each interview the researcher asked participants to sign a consent form, stating the research purpose and that the interviews are voluntary, confidential and anonymous. All interviews and observations were coded, initially deductively, based on the aforementioned CE coordinates (what are the café needs, how

Table 2.1 *Interviewees*

Name	Age	Date of Interview	Role at the Free Cafe	Everyday life role
Elias	60	8/5/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor and sporadic volunteer at Backbone	Copywriter, creative writing coach
Henk	27	3/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor but has not attended the café since it moved to Backbone	Planning student
Anna	26	8/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone	International Relations student
Steve	47	8/6/2016	Sporadic volunteer at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone	Capable, but refuses to work
Celia	52	15/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone – often led the cooking at both locations	Chemistry lab technician
Peter	53	30/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone – assisted with cleaning and food collection	Self-employed PC repairman
Robin	24	26/6/2016	Organiser at Tuin in de Stad, visitor and sporadic visitor at Backbone – assisted with food collections and opening and closing the cafe	Psychology student

is social surplus appropriated / distributed, produced / consumed, how is the commons sustained), foregrounding issues around the café's organization and governance. Using inductive codes based on the internal power dynamics and hierarchies within these practices, the analysis cross-examined the data thereafter.

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2.3.1. The Free Café: an introduction

The Free Café was developed by Iris and Rebecca[2] – two art students at the Minerva Art Academy in Groningen. They had the idea for a place that exists without money and without boundaries between people. Seeing food thrown away at the end of a market-day at the Vismarkt, a tri-weekly food market in the city center, they connected their socially-motivated idea to the environmental concern of food-waste and a space of a café (TEDxUniversity of Groningen, 2015).

In 2014 Rebecca and Iris found a location for the café at Tuin in de Stad, a plant nursery and community space, 10 bike-minutes west of the Groningen city center. With support from interested community members, the team built a brick and mortar location adjacent to the nursery, consisting of an existing greenhouse and a kitchen constructed from found and donated materials. The existence of the café was disseminated throughout various networks in the city, including students from the Minerva Art Academy (and eventually other studies), curious patrons from Tuin in de Stad's established customer network, and, ultimately, the general public when local media picked up on the phenomenon (Bakker, 2015; Jonker, 2014). Today (2019), the Free Café attracts a diversity of participants and its success is evident through the café evenings – 40 to 80 people typically cram together for a free meal twice a week.

Since its fruition, the Free Café has encountered several changes: firstly, it expanded its food collection sites, from the Vismarkt, to grocery stores, bakeries and neighbouring farms, and secondly, the organization changed. In autumn 2015, Rebecca and Iris announced their plans to start "De Wandeling" – a spin-off café (Annot, 2016). The initiators' break from the Free Café signalled the necessity for involvement from other community members. A group of approximately fifteen dedicated volunteers became involved in the collective through attending meetings, picking up food, and, perhaps most importantly, opening and closing the café. As an effort to add some structure, the owners of Tuin in de Stad required the Free Café to designate one person responsible for opening and closing. Along

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2 All names are changed to preserve anonymity

with those responsible for food pick-ups, the café "openers and closers" were negotiated through a Facebook-group.

In early 2016 the café received news that the land where they resided would soon be turned into apartments. Tuin in de Stad had occupied the plot temporarily, with permission from the municipality, since a housing company that owned the land had to cease construction due to the 2008 economic crisis. When the economy recovered in early 2016, the municipality notified Tuin in de Stad that they must vacate the plot by August 1st, and the latter asked the Free Café to leave three months prior, on May 1st, 2016 (Henk Interview, 2016).

While the organisers of the café knew their residency was temporary, this news was, nonetheless, shocking. The café was notified to leave a few weeks prior to the exit date and, by posting on the Free Café Facebook page and reaching out to their networks, they attempted to find a new location without missing a week. Café organisers, including interviewees Peter, Celia and Anna, were successful and hosted the first week of the new café, termed "*Restant Restaurant*" ("Leftover Restaurant"), on Wednesday May 4th at "Backbone050". Backbone050 (or "Backbone" for short) is a former school located in the neighbourhood Vinkhuizen, five minutes further west from the previous café location. Since the school closed in the 1980s, the space hosts a range of socially-based initiatives such as theatre groups and youth programs (Backbone050, 2016).

2.4. Free Café and community economies

The following section analyses the Free Café through the framing of the CE. Focusing on how the economy is "re-socialised" through the organization and governance of the collective, as well as "re-subjected" in producing alternate subjectivities of its participants, this section seeks to highlight a critical analysis of alternate economic spaces and the implications for local collectives, such as the Free Café.

2.4.1. Re-socialised economic practices

Social organization

The Free Café was created from the principle that it would be built (and run) "without money", assuming that when money is not involved, hierarchy and issues, associated with more top-down institutions, would disappear. This assumption raised a number of questions in this research, specifically how the initiative was organised and if the absence of money would result in a "lack of hierarchy". If CE are visioned as a gateway to more just and sustainable societies, such questions are also relevant, as is the distribution of power and privilege in such initiatives, in practice.

While many volunteer-run initiatives rely on structured labour to keep members accountable, the Free Café has always been "loosely organised". Besides designating a participant to open and close the space, no additional "formal" roles were created. Steve, a regular volunteer, describes café procedures as *"really a sort of anarchy,"* where there are enough people to prepare the food and clean up, but no structure was ever implemented.

The ostensible lack of order allows café procedures to prioritise creative experimentation over established conventions, potentially also contributing to the charm of the café. Elias, a long-serving volunteer, states:

> It was sometimes kind of a miracle that with minimum organization, or no organization, for so long, there were almost always people just coming, saying "well is there anything to do?" and it just worked.

Despite the lack of formal roles, many participants would help out and eventually find a niche in the café based on personal preferences, reflecting how a structure did creep into the Free Café organization. Peter, an organiser accountable for opening and closing the café, noted that, though he enjoyed his responsibility, he finds it necessary to be replaceable and that *"it's important that we are not dependent"* on one person. At one point, a small group of café participants took on

too much responsibility, resulting in many becoming exhausted and relinquishing their involvement, leaving the café with a deficiency of volunteers. While, before, many volunteers came through word of mouth, after this shortage the group made an intentional effort to diversify roles and seek volunteers through advertising on social media accounts and around the café to ensure the collective's longevity. Thus, the lack of reliability points to a drawback of volunteer-based non-capitalist initiatives and relying solely on spontaneity (Firth et al., 2011), and a potential challenge in CE and the long-term durability of them.

The absence of money, a key characteristic of the Free Café, re-conceptualises the economy through voluntary action, saving food that would otherwise be discarded, and not accepting payment for meals. The intention to create an inclusive and open environment at the café is intertwined with the "without money" principle and attempts to redistribute power to the community. Henk [organiser] illustrates:

> For us it was the idea that there is a place everybody feels welcome, where no money is involved, because when there's no money involved there's no distinction, there's no hierarchy.

This ideal is imbedded in café structure, as well as materialised throughout practices around food. For example, when cooking, no formal meal planning is implemented. Celia, one of the organisers and a regular cook, explains:

> We just use our imagination … there's no hierarchy, it's just everybody who likes to do something with it [the food], just does it.

The lack of formal hierarchy in the café could be contrasted with market economies, where, it can be argued, there is a greater prevalence of hierarchies in monetary and labour relations (Wilson, 2015), for example, between employer and employee or customer and business owner. Thus, by challenging these relationships, the café attempts to create a space without explicit hierarchies, and, consequently, alternative ways to interact and connect. This is

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likewise illustrated by the blurring of formal roles between visitors and volunteers. Robin, a student involved in the early development of the café, observes that *"most of the people I saw at the café, sooner or later I also found in the kitchen."* While both extremes of involvement are present, no one is obliged either way. Regardless of discernible roles in the café, one's value does not change based on the responsibilities they carry out. Robin, an organiser at Tuin in de Stad and later visitor, reflects:

> When I came to the café from the first moment on, I wasn't valuing in my mind someone who was chilling on the couch, cleaning dishes, making food, smoking a cigarette outside, or reading a book differently. My valuing of people works quite even and same ... because none of your members is more important than another member.

Thus, in some way, the Free Café attempts to challenge the valuing of labour and quietly deconstruct notions of value, an element also found in other alternative economic spaces and movements (Fickey, 2011; Jonas, 2009; North, 2007). Distributing responsibilities among involved actors reinforces such customs and maintains the non-hierarchical structure, to allow ownership and control to be shared as well.

In the same vein, many participants greatly emphasised the Free Café's inclusiveness as one of its defining features. For example, Celia [organiser] noted that, though she enjoyed cooking, *"if there are enough other people to cook then I step aside because I want to give everybody the opportunity to do something,"* demonstrating how volunteers are integrated into the café's operation and given a place in the initiative. While this intention might hold true, the authors also noticed a tendency of organisers and veteran volunteers to take over cooking duties, while the prep-work was left to more "novice" volunteers, illustrating a subtle hierarchal structure and division of roles in the café's kitchen. While this could be the volunteers' choice, the overvalued absence of structure could be discouraging for those not accustomed to the café's practices, or those uncomfortable taking initiative, and thus result in unintentional exclusivity. Regardless of

formal processes impeding participants from joining the collective, relying on well-intentioned volunteers ignores an explicit system of checks and balances. Thus, to some extent, the Free Café still reproduces power relations seen in more "mainstream" or "market" economies, despite operating in a "non-capitalist" space.

Overall, the intentions of the social organization of the café could be summarised as being non-hierarchical and inclusive, albeit chaotic. While, the first two, might be in-line with evidence of other CE, they are, nevertheless, debatable. Is the lack of organization or formality simply a disguise for the ever present and more informal hierarchies? The potential disparity between intention and practice will be deconstructed further in the following section on decision-making.

Struggles with decision-making and fragmentation

Throughout discussions with interviewees, many understood the lack of formal governance processes and hierarchical roles to be defining characteristics of the Free Café. While, perhaps, all participants are envisioned as equal in café activities and decision-making practices, the spontaneous, unstructured chaos left many frustrated with the organization style, as also suggested by interviewees.

While the Free Café collective held regular meetings in the initial launch and first transition period (after the departure of the original founders), many respondents dismissed these meetings as ineffective or unproductive, downplaying democratic means at the café, and contributing to a gradual dissolution of formal roles in decision-making processes. Despite their impracticality, several organisers, including Elias and Peter, mentioned that meetings are still *"interesting to hear what other people are thinking,"* implying that it was a space where participants had a voice. As an alternative, decisions became more frequently made through digital platforms, such as a Facebook group message among café organisers. Not only does this medium assume a certain financial status and technological capacity, but unlike the "real life" meetings, these groups were also not openly advertised, and therefore not open to the general public.

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Yet, many interviewees noted the convenience and depth the digital platform allowed, not possible in physical meetings through, for example, ensuring that everyone can voice their concerns – without time limits and overpowering personalities. Consistent with the nature of the Free Café, the Facebook messages were also described as chaotic, with multiple groups existing simultaneously, and many group members failing to respond.

Decision-making changed more drastically after the café moved to the Backbone location, resulting in a so-called "stress-induced hierarchy". While a larger group was involved in meetings at Tuin in de Stad, after the relocation, this group condensed to four to six people who negotiated decisions among themselves. Celia [organiser] states:

> At Tuin in de Stad we had a larger group that was responsible, and we had a lot of meetings, but when you have ten people, you have ten different opinions, so sometimes it was hectic.

Peter [organiser] agrees, noting that before "*it was always a bit unclear who was the organiser*" for opening or closing the café a given evening. However, other participants, such as Henk [organiser at Tuin in de Stad], found the new, smaller group limiting and "*not really open to let people be a part of the project*". He witnessed this surfacing in the café's relocation to Backbone:

> There were five or six people who found the new place, Backbone … There was no meeting or discussion about where to go, what to do, where and how – they thought, we just continue without involving people and so there was a small tiny group … for me that was really disappointing. I really wanted to involve everybody within the Free Café so everybody who came at six … and now, the Backbone crew closes that door.

While involving all Free Café participants follows the initial ideals, the short notice for the relocation limited such processes. As Steve [volunteer] explains: "*after 3 or 4 months, getting started again is much harder than keeping going because now we have all the contacts with the*

supermarkets, with the bakeries, with each other and all that". Such contacts were essential to maintain as they *"are counting on [the Free Café] as well"* to take care of their waste, illustrating how the Free Café relies on a tenuous group of (external) actors and processes for its existence. However, even with the collective managing to locate a new space, retain the food suppliers and preserve the initiative, the relocation nevertheless transformed the weekly dinners.

The material consequences of the hurried decision-making processes emerged with the relocation to the Backbone050 location. There, the collective was permitted to occupy the space indefinitely and rent-free, in agreement with the coordinators of the foundation. While the kitchen at Backbone was superior in terms of facilities and spaciousness, many visitors complain that it lacks the same atmosphere found at the Tuin in de Stad location.

In addition, compared to the space they built themselves, participants were lent a shared space in an existing building and, consequently, found that they had less control and autonomy in personalizing it. Peter [organiser] illustrates:

> What I find important is that we can give such a place [the shared Free Café space] our identity and that's a problem there [Backbone050] … I don't feel that this is our place.

The appearance and atmosphere at the two locations differed drastically – the café area at Tuin in de Stad, built by community members using reclaimed materials, allowed the café to embed the same ideals it stood for. Many participants commented how the Tuin in de Stad location felt *gezellig* – a Dutch word roughly translated to the feeling of being cosy with friends, with the dining area meant to feel like a "living room" (Figure 2.2a). This further embeds the idea of the café being "without money" as Peter, one of the organisers, explains, *"when you go to friends, you get food there … you don't have to pay for it,"* also highlighting the added social potential that can exist in non-capitalist spaces.

In contrast, visitors can freely inhabit the large space in Backbone (Figure 2.2b), so, even if the actual number of visitors remained comparable, the space felt emptier.

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Figure 2.2a and **2.2b** *The Free Café locations at the Tuin in de Stad (left, source Marin Leus, 2015) and Backbone050 (right, source: author).*

Through the relocation of the Free Café, visitors, volunteers and organisers began to question the identity of the café and the crucial elements for its survival. It became apparent that, while many participants claim that the café is inherently both: a social meeting place and an environmental initiative, some participated for the social aspects and others based on environmental concerns and food saving, For Henk [organiser at Tuin in de Stad], for example, the food did not matter since he visited the café mostly for the social interaction. *"If there's only soup, yeah, I don't care, I just eat soup and when I'm back home, I cook my own meal,"* he explains. While this perspective assumes participants do not attend the café due to food

insecurity, the example also illustrates how the social atmosphere of the café is intertwined with its purpose as a food-waste initiative. Alternatively, Anna [organiser at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone] states, *"it's a bonus that it's a social event, but the main part for me is the food saving."* These differences, along with the lack of a formal structure also potentially result in a feeling of transience in the collective. Elias [Tuin in de Stad organiser] elaborates, saying:

> There are some ties between people ... but it's not really a community. I used to think that every now and then but then I see it changes too much ... the group of people is changing all the time.

This quote illustrates a level of fluidity and fragmentation the café experiences. However, while the "Tuin in de Stad era" Free Café never returned, the new spin-offs located at Backbone and de Wandeling not only still exist today (2019) but are arguably equally as "successful" on their own. Thus, perhaps, such struggles are not to be discounted and overlooked, rather viewed as opportunities for further transformation. Despite its challenges, Gibson-Graham (2006) remind us *"building community economies will always be a process of experimentation, choices, and failures, as well as successes, and indeed that success and failure are subject to interpretation"* (p. 191). Despite the idealism of collective action, interdependent collectives could be equally successful "cracks" in the system (Holloway, 2010), compared to a chaotic and disjointed whole. The dispersal of café participants to these other initiatives suggests the necessity to visualise the flexibility of the Free Café and its associated activities through a relational perspective (Holloway et al., 2007). Meaning, the café practices do not occur in a "bubble" and nevertheless still interact with the greater city of Groningen and its inhabitants – potentially raising awareness but simultaneously creating dependencies between the "autonomous" system and its wider context.

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2.4.2. Ethical food subjects: Re-subjecting at the Free Café

Gibson-Graham's (2006) focus on the politics of the subject necessitates the transformation of the self as well as building capacities to "acquire those mental and emotional elements required to build an alternative space instead of a mere confrontation with capitalism" (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016, p.923). While the absence of monetary transactions connects the Free Café to the CE, cultivating subjects who are open and actively working towards economic constructions beyond capitalism is vital for maintaining the collective, meeting their goals and constructing spaces of possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006). This section focuses on how a shared consciousness among cafe participants emerges through involvement in the initiative.

Many participants with pre-existing experiences of disengaging from capitalist society (for example, squatting or being unemployed), connect their motivations to the Free Café. For example, Steve, a volunteer, notes:

> Making more profit … is completely stupid, but that's how our [mainstream / capitalist] system works and there's nothing I can really do about it, I just don't participate. And in a thing like this [the Free Café], I love to participate.

According to Steve, little can be done to change the "system", except, perhaps, not participating. The Free Café, however, provides an opportunity to contribute to developing an alternative.

While food saving sets the Free Café apart from other food-related establishments, the meals mimic a "normal" experience in that they are served in three "standard" courses (soup and bread, main course dishes and dessert), a format followed in order to make the free meal feel "as rich as possible," according to Celia [organiser], alluding to how sensorial indulgence can compensate for the absence of money. Contrary to a typical restaurant experience, at the Free Café it is perfectly normal to visit alone, sit at a table and meet other strangers. The authors often noticed this unique feature, either as visitors arriving alone or witnessing guests openly integrate strangers into

their mealtime conversations, an example that the café became "a place where engagement with the stranger is enacted ...the place of exposure ... [and] the crossroads where those who have nothing in common meet to construct community" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, citing Nancy, 1991). Sharing a meal, thus, points to ways in which the Free Café attempts to "resocialise economic relations" creating a community at the café (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016, p. 923).

Many guests are additionally confronted with the café's unconventional nature when offering money at the end of their meal and learning their payment is not accepted, an experience witnessed by the author when dining with a friend on her first visit. Said companion insisted the group stay to assist with washing dishes after eating, as a way to "repay" the café in another manner. While there is no obligation, acts of reciprocity and opportunities for participation (volunteering or eating) further broadens the Free Café's resource base. This further highlights the praxis embedded in autonomous spaces where "the process is as important as the outcome of resistance" where embedding reciprocity and resourcefulness into norms and procedures constructs a community based on solidarity (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p. 738).

As evidenced through observations, many clientele eventually accept the practices / norms described above and become accustomed to the café's departure from more traditional establishments. This adjustment is evidence of the Free Café as a space of self-formation, an integral characteristic of the community economy framework. Through this process of "re-subjecting," participants internalise practices of the economy, to become, what Gibson-Graham (2006) term, ethical communal subjects. Relating to food, Sariemento (2017) coins the phrase ethical food subjects, meaning, the embodied understanding and awareness of food issues (ex. food insecurity, inequality around accessibility, environmental implication), but also one "who is subject to the ways in which their food practices impinge on the livelihoods, well-being, and life prospects of these myriad others" (p. 488, italics in original). Transgressing social barriers, omitting conventions of paying for food and, simultaneously, introducing ideas of eating food "waste" are examples of ways in which the café attempts to contribute to a "micro-transition" towards unorthodox

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social, food and economic practices. The introduction of ethical food subjects can help us understand how these practices become embedded in the community, indicating the impact of the café on its participants and in the community in raising awareness around food-waste and unconventional economic models.

While the data above indicates the existence of a shared consciousness around food and economic practices in the café, we argue for the necessity of such a mentality for the sustainability of the initiative, especially throughout the transition phase (i.e. looking for a new space). The principles described above (meeting strangers, not accepting money for meals and eating food "waste") are consistent in all versions / locations of the Free Café (at Tuin in de Stad and Backbone) and could be considered core components of the café, as discussed by participants.

While, as illustrated above, the relevance of the physical space should not be undervalued, at the core, it is a social project. The unique values, and acceptance of these through café participants is indicative of the project's survival – as a collective. While Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest the potential for change among economic subjects, necessitating a shared set of values could indicate unintentional exclusion, for those that don't and are not willing to align themselves with such an initiative. This could prove challenging for such citizen food initiatives and the greater potential of a "micro-transition" toward ethical and sustainable food and economic practices.

2.5. Local collectives: Impacts and changes?

While a complete food system overhaul is a daunting task, working on a small scale allows citizen-based initiatives to experiment with local-level change. Despite starting amongst friends, Free Café's popularity is evident among Groningen residents, as well as from city officials and other Dutch towns that have since mimicked the project (Stadslandbouw Dordrecht, 2016). The café's success, however, could also be attributed to its alignment with the municipality's commitment to community food involvement and its support

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for citizen-driven initiatives through the municipality food policy and regional food vision (Gemeente Groningen, 2013; Steel, 2010). While expenses such as rent and utilities are required for such local initiatives, municipal regulations were adjusted to pay the rent thus to some extent ensuring the longevity of the initiative. The close interaction and collaboration, formal connections and resources made available (directly and indirectly) by the local municipality as well as businesses raises questions about whether the Free Café in fact exists within or outside the "mainstream" capitalist system. This differs from many autonomous citizen projects, for example freegans or dumpster divers (Gross, 2009), which might position themselves in opposition to governmental bodies (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). The cooperation and further experimentation of citizens and officials reveal an interest in citizen-driven food system engagement and the potential for their growth.

An oft-cited critique of CE, and local initiatives more generally, is their limitedness to the local scale. However, by framing the non-capitalist space in the context of active citizenship, there is a greater potential to initiate interaction with local officials and governments (Boonstra, 2015). Furthermore, while many local governments utilise "sustainability" and "creativity" to disguise market-led responses to urban environmental sustainability (Lederman, 2015), this research illustrates otherwise. Reflecting on how governments are planning in an age of active citizenship provides the opportunity to imagine how a non-capitalistic future can be materialised, through such citizen initiatives. Our findings indicate that local initiatives like the Free Café provide a space to participate, experiment and address societal and environmental concerns of the community. Ultimately, the café is an opportunity for citizens to engage in sustainable and socially-just practices, and produce "living indicators", best illustrated by the words of Anna, for whom the Free Café is a "movement against ...that element of society that is overproducing". Collecting and serving food otherwise destined for the bin, the Free Café attempts to raise awareness around and mitigate food waste, allowing thing opportunity to "forge new identities, which can rebuild solidarities and teach about the multiscaler workings of economic globalization" through autonomous action

(Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p. 736). It could be argued that re-conceptualizing food waste attaches value to something dictated as "trash," confronting consumer perceptions of what "good" food is, and redefining food as well as economic practices (Gross, 2009). This could be conceptualised as a micro-transition that allows citizens to challenge intertwined dominant structures through everyday practices, whether it is an excessively wasteful food system or capitalistic economy (Hassanein, 2003). Occupying a space to cook and serve food to the public, without involving money, provides the means to re-conceptualise the economy and open up a space of possibility and transition. This interpretation aligns with Wilson's (2013) study on autonomous food spaces, where "food is both a site and the means for building worlds beyond capitalism" (p. 734). Food and customs around food are essential in engaging citizens and constructing a space without money. When asked about the role of food at the café, the majority of participants agreed that "it's not really about the food, it's also about food ... without food it wouldn't be what it is," Peter argues, illustrating how food and food saving are inherent to the café's impact. Although all respondents manifested an interest in food served at the café, food system change was not the primary grounds for involvement, rather, most participants appreciated the social atmosphere. However, the central role of food in creating such atmosphere cannot be undervalued. The analysis of the Free Café highlights struggles of such initiatives, including the temporality of space, volunteer deficiencies and internal conflicts, employing the CE lens generates a language around these "other" economies, as well as ascribes value and builds a space for those participating in these alternatives.

2.6. Conclusion

Inspired by Gibson-Graham's (2006) idea of CE, this chapter explored an urban citizen initiative – the Free Café – as a case of "re-socialised" economy. The chapter discussed CE through focusing on three core points: the social organization, the decision-making and the "re-subjection" or the emergence of a shared consciousness

among participants in the Free Café context. Aiming to exist without money and saving food that would otherwise be thrown away, the Free Café is an example of a food-based citizen initiative that attempts to balance its idealist intentions with pragmatic actions e.g. actions for carving out a place for itself in the context of the city of Groningen.

While the aim of the collective is to be "non-hierarchical", the findings of this research illustrate that, as the initiative evolved and the initiators stepped down, decisions were increasingly made by a smaller, self-selected group of people. This contradiction between the initial intentions of the participants of the café for a "spontaneous, non-hierarchical, informal" space and the daily "operational" realities of the collective was one of the most prominent paradoxes which emerged from the findings of this study. Initially, the initiative seemed to be operating under a sort of informal spontaneity, which was also emphasised by the respondents as an important characteristic of the café. However, after observations and participation in café activities, an underlying structure / organizational reality emerged. Participants seemed to prefer certain roles in the daily activities of the café, and, perhaps more importantly, there seemed to be a difference between who is more or less "in charge" or feels responsible for e.g. opening up the space. While this "structure" was never explicitly negotiated or implemented, it, rather, emerged and became one resembling a hierarchy over time. With internal and external stressors, such as differing motivations and a forced relocation, the collective also became gradually more fragmented. These findings illustrate the need to take a critical view of the "unintended" hierarchies and power relations that may exist in CE. While it may be necessary for a group to take the lead in order to safeguard the survival of an initiative, creating a hierarchy might be challenging when it "simply emerges", is not negotiated with other group members, and clashes with their expectations and ideas.

Through analysing CE in a food-waste initiative, this research addresses a gap in the literature where diverse urban food (sharing) interventions *remain largely invisible* (Davies et al., 2017, p. 136), also highlighting how resourceful community groups emerge in the space not addressed by governments and capitalist markets

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and mobilise citizen action for food system change. However, the position, potential contribution, and role of such initiatives is far from straightforward, as the presence of "autonomous" initiatives necessitates interaction with pre-existing (capitalist) "systems". In the case of the Free Café, this is specifically seen in their reliance on surplus (industrial) food, which also underlines the nuances around "alternative" or capitalist/non-capitalist food systems (Veen and Dagevos, 2019; Sharp et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2014; Wilson, 2013). However, rather than understanding the potential of food-waste initiatives such as the Free Café through this dualism, perhaps the weight of the Free Café lies in its existence as a "living indicator" (Kaika, 2017), pointing the attention to the wastefulness of the capitalist/mainstream food system and to the necessity to take action.

This chapter opens up the box to many more questions for further research including the role (and potential) of citizen action in a transition to post-capitalist sustainable food systems and economies, whether and how to replicate and expand such projects, and the spatial/material dimension of CE. Local community-based food system practices could provide a direction for exploring materializations of non-capitalist spaces (Dixon, 2010). While the Free Café is viewed by many visitors, volunteers and the city government as an example of how a non-capitalist and more sustainable future could be materialised (Deuten, 2015), unearthing internal power relations and external constraints is necessary for recognizing the nuances surrounding local collective action and when discussing their potential role and contributions to a transition to a sustainable future.

Finally, the potential role of this and similar citizen initiatives in a transition towards more sustainable futures is well captured in the concept "spaces for possibility" by Marsden and Franklin (2014). By coming together at the Free Café, the visitors, volunteers and organisers have the opportunity to contribute to co-creating a vision and practices for a sustainable future. Even the smallest acts of coming together, experiencing different (economic) realities and reframing what is considered "good food", are opportunities for experimentation and inspiration for change. As Robin [organiser at Tuin in de Stad and, later, visitor] admits:

> Most people will tell you that you're not thinking straight and that this [the Free Cafe] will not work. From the point of view that you can inspire people ... [the Free Café] is quite valuable I would say – it creates more than the action in itself, it's more than the event itself.

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Connecting resourcefulness and social innovation: Exploring conditions and processes in community gardens in the Netherlands

Abstract

Resourcefulness, a community's capacity to engage with their local resource base, is essential in contributing to resilience, the potential to adapt to external challenges and shocks. Resourcefulness and social innovation have some overlapping qualities, however the academic connection between the two concepts is yet to be explored. Social innovations include new practices, ideas, and initiatives that meet societal needs and contribute to social change and empowerment. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, this study researches conditions and processes of resourcefulness in facilitating social innovation in rural, peri-urban, and urban community gardens in the North of the Netherlands. Comparing differing contexts, five main enablers for altering social relations and community empowerment have been identified: 1) clear goals and motivations; 2) diversity in garden resources; 3) experimental knowledge processes; 4) strong internal support and recognition; and 5) place-based practices. Above all, this research stresses the importance of defining resourcefulness as a process and foregrounding the place-based contextual nature of innovative collective food system practices.

Keywords

3.1. Introduction

The past decades have seen rapidly changing rural and urban environments, due to processes of urbanization and globalization. In the midst of global changes, many Western European contexts are increasingly focusing on local citizen initiatives, which attempt to reconfigure the built environment and take up social responsibilities, to meet community needs (Meijer 2018, Boonstra 2015). These grassroots activities, initiated by citizens, entrepreneurs, or other local stakeholders, have been framed as forms of community-led planning, contrasting government-led spatial planning and characterized by place-based, informal practices (Meijer 2018).

Local citizen action could be viewed through the lens of social innovations, which is defined as community action that constructs new rules and social relations to meet societal needs and leads to social change and empowerment (Bock 2012, Moulaert et al. 2005). Social innovations' focus on changing relationships redefines the potential role of citizens in society, as well as their capacity to improve their living environment based on local needs. International institutions, such as the OECD (2017) and the European Commission (2013) further endorse benefits of social innovation, in supporting adaptability to changing societal contexts and trends. While social innovation is relevant to both urban (Moulaert et al. 2005) and rural (Neumeier 2012) contexts, the social issues addressed and accompanying means of community action and organization, differ, and must be taken into account. Bock (2016) stresses the need to understand these specific contexts and conditions that stimulate local action for social innovation.

Theories on resourcefulness provide a pioneering perspective to investigate practices that enable social innovation. Resourcefulness has been defined as a community's capacity to engage with their local resource base as a means to address the unequal distribution of resources (Franklin 2017). Moreover, resourcefulness privileges civic engagement and traditional knowledge exchange, and, similar to social innovation, attempts to empower local communities (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Identifying assorted conditions and processes in which resourcefulness operates would greatly benefit planning

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and policy research. Furthermore, despite their overlapping qualities and socially relevant potential, the academic connection between social innovation and resourcefulness has not yet been made.

Through characteristics described above, community gardens have potential to act as social innovations and provide insight into aspects and conditions of resourcefulness. Namely, citizen collectives that typically initiate community gardens attempt to create new rules and social relations around food system practices and the roles of citizens, involving and educating their local community in food production, while also providing access to fresh and healthy food (Ilieva 2016). More than meeting this range of needs, community gardens are unique in that they provide a *nexus* of different functions in one venue, also bringing together citizens with different motivations, thus being a place for a range relationship building (Veen 2015). Such gardens are also a collectively cultivated space (of municipal officials, policy makers, and citizens), necessitating the pooling of local resources, knowledge, and community support for their survival. Community gardens, however, are not without critique, whether they are argued to be tools by the state to pass on responsibilities to civil society (Rosol 2012), or operating within both radical and neoliberal spheres (McClintock 2014). On a more local level, community gardens have been controversial in unintentionally leading to social exclusion, for example, when non-residents lead projects in other low-income or primarily Black/Latino neighborhoods (Poulsen 2017, Kato 2013). Furthermore, while gardens are a meeting place, it is often for those with similar values and interests, thus communities *within* the space perhaps work along one another without forming a cohesive community (Veen 2015). These examples highlight the power hierarchies and internal divisions that can exist in such spaces, which must also be examined critically (Tornaghi 2014).

Through shaping the built environment, community gardens are praised as a tool for community empowerment, in terms of providing opportunities as a social gathering place (Kingsley and Townsend 2006, Glover 2004) and strengthening community cohesion (Firth et al. 2011), therefore provide the ideal venue to explore the connections between theories of social innovation and resourcefulness. Additionally, most studies examine community gardens in an urban

context, potentially due to the prevalence of accessibility of resources and organizational capacity (Armstrong 2000). This research broadens the focus to also include rural and peri-urban agriculture, also aligning with ways that community gardens potentially introduce creative strategies and relations to fit the needs of society, at different social and spatial scales.

Exploring social innovations in community gardens, not only highlights their potential role in empowering communities, but also how changing relations between community actors could result in developing a place-based, socially and environmentally equitable food system; we refer here to the rapidly increasing literature on this topic (see: Tornaghi 2017, Poulsen 2017, Carolan 2017, Kneafsey et al. 2017, Opitz et al. 2016, Veen 2015, Firth et al. 2011, Pudup 2008).

This research aims to identify conditions and processes of resourcefulness used to facilitate social innovation in urban, peri-urban, and rural community gardens. Gardens provide a physical venue to explore these theories empirically, providing insight into the differentiated social and environmental capacities and how communities access them. By an explorative comparison of three gardens in various settings in the North of the Netherlands, contextual differences will be highlighted, which will result in place-based recommendations grounded in contextualized community practices.

This chapter will, firstly, elaborate on theories of social innovation and resourcefulness, and the added value of connecting the two. Secondly, this chapter will give a short overview of each of the three cases and the methods used to research them. Thirdly, the results will be explained, of each case in-depth. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the results in the context of debates on place-based social innovation and end with conclusions and recommendations for further research.

3.2. Theoretical framework

3.2.1. Social innovation

Social innovation is a broad term that refers to ideas and initiatives that, not only, highlight opportunities for social change, but also

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novel methods of altering small and potentially large-scale relations. Historically, social innovation was envisioned as a venue of collective action, ultimately transforming top-down structures to participatory configurations (Moulaert et al. 2013, citing Chambon et al. 1982). Furthermore, social innovation has been approached from a multi-dimensional and multi-sector perspective, through its appearance in fields of business and economics, in terms of strategic behavior, as well as fine arts, in regards to the creativity potential in the topic (Moulaert et al. 2005). This chapter will, however, align with the integrated approach proposed by Moulaert et al. (2005), which emphasizes how the "social change potential of new institutions and practices promote responsible and sustainable development of communities" (p. 1976).

Bock (2012) identifies three main qualities of social innovation: firstly social innovation occurs in a distinct social context, thus, must somehow interact with that context; secondly because innovations are based on social circumstances, they promote socially responsible behavior that is relevant to their societal context through some sort of participatory means; and finally, social innovation is pertinent to community development and has potential to result in empowered communities through inclusive collective action (Bock 2012). Similar to the definition proposed by Bock (2012), Moulaert et al. (2005) discuss three main dimensions of the concept: 1) meeting basic needs that are otherwise not addressed; 2) reconstructing social relations; and 3) empowering community, giving them capacity to meet said needs and potentiating social change. Social innovation can be further divided into micro (relations between individuals), meso, and macro (relations between social class and groups) levels, where, "opportunity spaces at micro scales may make creative strategies possible at macro scales," thus all scales are necessary in social innovations (Baker and Mehmood 2015, Moulaert et al. 2013, p. 17).

While these are the broader conditions or components of social innovation, Baker and Mehmood (2015) identify two specific catalysts: meeting societal needs and times of crises. When faced with the spatial-material impact, as a result of a crisis, local communities are motivated to act and contribute to social change in their direct

environment, further highlighting the contextual importance for motivating action (Baker and Mehmood 2015, Bock 2012).

The place-based material relevance of social innovation could play a significant role in promoting social and ecological objectives in sustainable development (Mehmood and Parra 2013). In comparison to more top-down approaches, social innovations, or "grassroots innovations" operate on a community level, work towards environmental sustainability solutions for civil society as well as deliver intrinsic benefits to initiate more systemic change (Seyfang and Smith 2007). Collaboration with (national level) top-down institutions is also emphasized, in order for social innovations to achieve greater impact and possible replications across various spatial scales (Baker and Mehmood, 2015, Seyfang and Haxeline 2012). However, scaling size does not necessarily translate to scaling impact, and, in a development context, scaling up could result in for-profit organizations exploiting vulnerable communities, thus does not apply to all social innovations (Matthews 2017). Furthermore, for many, social innovation has become a "buzzword" that has lost its value in facilitating change, and thus, also its legitimacy (Bock 2012; Pol and Ville 2009). If the term remains abstract and disconnected from practice, it not only weakens the concept, but could have potentially detrimental impacts on the vulnerable groups it is meant to assist (Grimm et al. 2013). Grimm et al. (2013), however, highlight the importance of the local context and multi-level governance for overcoming these challenges, which will be further addressed in this chapter.

Prioritizing place-based projects, social innovation provides opportunities for fostering sustainable development on a local and global level, for example, by addressing environmental and social concerns through food system developments (Maye and Duncan 2017, Kirwan et al. 2013). Community gardens, thus, are a relevant representation through their capacity to stimulate social cohesion (Firth et al. 2011), improve rainwater drainage (Wortman and Lovell 2013), filter air pollution (Taylor and Lovell 2014), provide fresh food access (Kortright and Wakefield 2011, Corrigan 2011), and support workforce training opportunities (Vitiello and Wolf-Powers 2014, Pudup 2008). Furthermore, positioning community gardens

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in planning theory and disciplines adds a place-based applicability for such bottom-up projects.

3.2.2. Resourcefulness

In order to withstand social, economic, or environmental obstacles, a degree of resourcefulness is needed by communities. Resourcefulness refers to communities' capacities to access material and non-material resources (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012).

Resourcefulness, a relatively new and promising concept, has gained attention through its relationship with *resilience,* which has been defined as the quality of being able to adapt to challenges or "stability of a system against interference" (Lang 2010, p. 16). Despite its rising popularity, resilience remains a contested concept with multiple meanings. In tracing the origin of the term resilience, Walker and Cooper (2011) critique its more recent use in complex systems theory. While resilience was seen as a logical step towards adaptive capacities in ecological domains (Holling 2001), complex adaptive systems do not necessarily have the same flexibility when applied to market logics, and could potentially result in neoliberal operations (Walker and Cooper 2011). Weichselgartner and Kelman (2015) further criticize the term in its technical-reductionist application. Meaning, when administered by scientists and policy makers, resilience often fails to incorporate the differing geographical and socio-cultural contexts, in terms of the local knowledge that exists (Weichselgartner and Kelman 2015). Furthermore, resilience focuses greatly more on *adaptation* instead of *transformations* necessary to combat large scale global issues, such as climate change (Kenis and Lievens, 2014). In order to overcome these risks, the authors recommend a focus on bottom-up processes and knowledge co-production (Weichselgartner and Kelman 2015). MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) echo similar concerns about the externally defined, top-down nature of resilience. Resilience is often imposed onto supposedly vulnerable communities "from outside" usually without much preference to the community members' ideas and priorities or without making use of their lived experiences (Van der Vaart et al. 2015, cited in Trell et al. 2017). Other

scholars have responded to the critique by using the term "evolution-ary resilience" suggesting that it is not about a return to normality, but about the ability of complex social-ecological systems to change, adapt, and crucially, transform in response to stresses and strains (Davoudi 2012, p.302). Authors focusing on community resilience (e.g. Brice and Arconada 2017, Forrest et al. 2017, Van der Vaart et al. 2015), have emphasized the need for trust and exchange between professionals/policy makers (and their expert knowledge) and point to the relevance of capacities present at the local level.

MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) have suggested resourcefulness as an alternative concept for resilience. In this context, resource-fulness underscores local knowledge exchange in communities and seeks to address unequal resource distribution, while empowering communities' capacity to confront these issues through democratic means (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). In contrast to resilience, resourcefulness concentrates on the community level, reflects a process instead of an inherent quality, and expresses an unabashedly normative dimension in addressing issues of inequality, through the focusing on redistributing materials and recognition of self-worth (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) propose that resourcefulness consists of four specific aspects: resources, skill sets and technical knowledge, indigenous and 'folk' knowledge, and recognition. While the local context is prioritized in this definition, resourcefulness acknowledges that global factors are intertwined with the local, and, thus, also play a role.

Ganz (2000) views resourcefulness analogous to ideas of strategic capacity, where ample resourcefulness could potentially offset an organization's lack of resources. Analyzed through social movements, Ganz (2000) operationalizes strategic capacity by analyzing three influences within the dimensions of an organization's leadership and organizational structure: salient knowledge and the use of the local environment, heuristic processes and creative thinking, and moti-vation (Ganz 2000). Within these three elements, the effectiveness of strategic capacity hinges on the role of the local environment in leadership and organizational structures. Highlighting knowledge transfer within these elements is therefore essential in determining the resourcefulness of an organization.

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Resourcefulness could, arguably, be compared with a number of terms, such as civic engagement (Adler and Goggin 2005), collective efficacy (Sampson et al. 1997), or social cohesion (Forrest and Kearns 2001). Similar to Norris et al.'s (2008) interpretation of community resilience, resourcefulness is a broad, umbrella term, relating different community adaptive capacities. Furthermore, there is a risk of the word being too vague or losing meaning due to the current gap in empirical research of the concept or lack of a compelling definition, as also seen with resilience. Resourcefulness, however, differentiates itself by foregrounding the *material* dimension, linking actors to place-based material resources and knowledge. Thus, a discussion on resourcefulness, opens up a connection to resources, beyond simply social connections.

It has been suggested that resourcefulness is a novel practice and place-based approach and that place based practices of resourceful communities can potentially result in social innovation (Horlings 2017). The concept is also essential when considering solutions to climate change. Franklin (2018) stresses the importance of situating resourcefulness processes in a physical space, as the concept endorses a place-based nature. Investigating resourcefulness in terms of community environmental practices drives a context-specific dialogue. What is lacking from such a discourse, however, is empirical work documenting resourcefulness processes, and how the concept is materialized in differing contexts – a gap this research will address.

3.2.3. Operationalization: Conditions and processes towards social innovation

Social innovation and resourcefulness overlap on several points – their commitment to novel developments, environmentally and socially sustainable futures, and empowered communities. While both are seen as processes, there is often an associated end-result – such as an empowered community or equal distribution of resources (Baker and Mehmood 2015, MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, Moulaert et al. 2005). Despite the gap in literature linking social innovation and resourcefulness, previous enablers of social innovation have
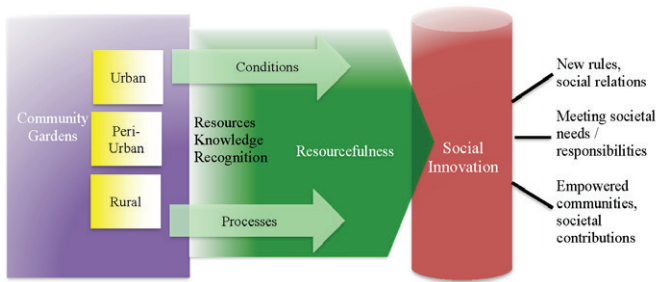
Figure 3.1 *Conceptual model (source: author)*

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been identified, such as having a diverse set of resources (Baker and Mehmood 2015), organizational capacity (Lang 2010), and the temporal and spatial character of acquiring and distributing resources (Walker and McCarthy 2010).

Resourcefulness is operationalized here as a condition and a process – inspired by MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) and Ganz (2000) – and includes material and non-material resources, knowledge transfer, and recognition that exist in the respective gardens (see Figure 3.1). While knowledge could also be considered a resource, including it as its own separate component further emphasizes its importance. The dimension of resources highlights the core emphasis on unequal distribution of goods, but also includes non-material qualities, such as social relations, and, more specifically, "organizing capacity, spare time and social capital" (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Furthermore, the authors highlight the necessity of technical skills, as a basis for communication, and local knowledge, in order to properly develop context-specific solutions (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Resources studied include material resources, such as land and gardening tools, and non-material resources, such as formal and informal networks, social relations, spare time, and organizing capacity.

Knowledge transfer includes making use of local as well as institutional knowledge and skills. Moreover, this study focuses on knowledge backgrounds of garden participants, as well as knowledge networks, emphasizing learning processes that occur at the gardens and how knowledge is exchanged – not only technical skills, but also

local, context-specific knowledge. This includes how knowledge, both general and food / agriculture-specific, is shared amongst participants in the initiatives, as well as to the outside community.

In this sense, knowledge is relational, or fluidly constructed through place-based social relations (Horlings et al. 2017). Exchanging knowledge across disciplines in a non-hierarchical manner is expected to foster creativity in social innovations (Horlings et al. 2017). Local knowledge, a key component of resourcefulness is also expected to take center stage in social innovations, which can function as a "site of social learning" (Baker and Mehmood, p. 327).

In line with MacKinnon and Derickson (2012), this research examines the "recognition" that exists in the garden, defined as "a sense of confidence, self-worth, and self-community-affirmation" (p. 265). This draws on theories of Honneth, as interpreted by Buchholz (2016). Through investigating processes of recognition, this research seeks to understand techniques used by the organization to create a shared understanding of self-worth (in and out of the initiative), while additionally exploring how the garden is perceived and recognized by the community and government.

Social innovation is operationalized in this chapter by using a hybrid of Bock's (2016) and Moulaert et al.'s (2005) perspectives – as initiatives that include new rules and social relations, meet societal needs and responsibilities, and result in empowered communities and societal changes and contributions. The focus on new rules and social relations will investigate innovative ideas, thus, how resources, knowledge, and recognition present new and different mechanisms within organizations. Societal needs and responsibilities will explore how the garden organizations interact with larger communities, but also methods used by initiatives to meet the needs of their members. Lastly, empowerment is essential in evaluating the impact of community gardens, but, at the same time, is the most difficult to operationalize. This research will evaluate this component by asking participants about changes in their own lives or communities, potentially resulting from the garden. The resourcefulness component of recognition is expected to be vital in determining community empowerment as participants' mobilizing capacity is a determining factor in contributing to greater societal change.

Social innovation and resourcefulness are both stressed as operating in a specific context and embedding a place-based nature (Baker and Mehmood 2015, Bock 2012, MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Thus, investigating social innovation through resourcefulness conditions and processes further applies a place-based focus to social innovation, linking it to practices and a physical space.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Research context

All three cases investigated are located in the North of the Netherlands (see Figure 3.2). The Netherlands and Europe are currently seeing a push for "active citizenship" and the creation of a "participatory society" through citizen-driven initiatives, which are believed to promote a sense of civic responsibility and involvement in aspects of governance, creating new relations, and ultimately resulting in a more cohesive society (Boonstra 2015). Relations between government institutions and civil society play an important facilitating role in social innovation, whether it's through embracing interaction with local actors in order to expand initiatives into greater society (Seyfang and Halextine 2012), or seeing new forms of governance as a tool for up-scaling initiatives (Baker and Mehmood 2015). In order to explore differences across social and spatial scales, cases were chosen in rural, peri-urban, and urban contexts.

In a rural context, this study investigates a community garden located in the village of Eenrum, one of the northern most municipalities of De Marne, in the province of Groningen. This garden, the Pluk en Moestuin ("Pick and Vegetable Garden"), is run by a group of five to ten people, mostly middle-aged women from the area. Diverting from perhaps more "traditional" rural allotment style gardens, the Pluk en Moestuin cultivates a collective plot of land using permaculture methods. Produce from the garden is also shared among its members, often eaten in a together. Entering its fifth season (2017), the garden and its collective volunteers branched out by

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Figure 3.2 *Map of gardens (source: author)*

beginning a school garden in the village the previous year (2016). Once a week the group leads a class of school children, teaching them about cycles and processes of growing food. The garden's interaction with the community, through the school, as well as its use of "novel" practices, such as permaculture techniques and sharing produce amongst participants, makes the space ideal for investigating social innovation and resourcefulness.

The second garden, Doarpstun Snakkerburen, is situated in the former town of Snakkerburen, a town that has since been integrated into the fringe of the city of Leeuwarden, thus representing a peri-urban community garden. Starting in 2001 and boasting about 70 volunteers, the garden is the largest and oldest of the three researched (Kennisnetwerk krimp Noord-Nederland 2015). All of the produce is grown using organic methods and sold at a volunteer-run garden shop at prices that rival those of conventional supermarkets (Veen 2015). The Doarpstun further broadens its impact by engaging adults and children in community activities, such as festivals, concerts, educational projects, and an annual summer musical (Kennisnetwerk krimp Noord-Nederland 2015). The garden's location, scale, and history contrasts that of the Pluk en Moestuin (and, as will be described, Toentje), rendering it an attractive case for comparison.

Thirdly, Toentje, the urban garden, is a collaboration between the Municipality of Groningen and the local food bank. This initiative not only attempts to address issues of fresh food access through a volunteer-based garden, but also emphasizes a circular economy approach through "climate-friendly" techniques, such as using renewable energy (Toentje 2017). Through the project's bottom-up attempts to tackle issues of food access and environmental sustainability, Toentje could be categorized as a social innovation. The collaboration with the municipality is relevant to the "hands-off" approach taken by the municipality of Groningen, which attempts to play a facilitating role in citizen projects, emphasized throughout the city food vision, Groningen Groeit Gezond (Groningen Gemeente 2013). While the vision's main goal is to create a more sustainable urban food system, it acknowledges this must be done by making room for initiatives, cooperating with citizens and consumers (Groningen

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Gemeente 2013), aspects also seen in previous literature on social innovation (Baker and Mehmood 2015).

3.3.2. Methods

This study utilized a combination of participant observation and in-depth interviews to investigate conditions and processes of resourcefulness in community gardens. Additionally, this research used a multiple case study approach, to gain an in-depth understanding through various data sources (Yin 1994). The differing contexts provide insights into how rural, urban, and semi-urban gardens and communities differ, and what is shared in terms of elements of resourcefulness and social innovation.

Engaging in participant observation was used to gain a broad understanding of the organization of the community gardens and its members, as well as understanding specific gardening practices, beliefs, and values. The author conducted participant observation by volunteering in each garden four to five times in a period of two months in the late spring of 2017. This method provided the optimal opportunity to understand day-to-day gardening practices and speak with other volunteers. Participants often spoke candidly of their personal life, motivations for volunteering, and benefits their garden work brought them. Such conversations aided the understanding of the operation of individual gardens and broadened this research's perspective of how the initiative contributes to the communities, also as an example of a social innovation. Participant observation also functioned to validate information and build a context for the interviews.

Interviews provided a more in-depth understanding of inner logistics of each gardening project. For each case, two to three interviews were conducted (eight overall) – with the initiator, a volunteer in an organizing role, and, if necessary, a third volunteer in the garden. Interviews focused on relevant backgrounds and motivations of participants, especially experiences that led to garden participation or initiation. These different perspectives provided the researcher an understanding of how participants accessed resources

Table 3.1 *Themes and sub-themes of resourcefulness and social innovation, guiding the data analysis*

Concept	Aspect	Features
Resourcefulness (*conditions*) Pre-existing properties that existed in the garden	Resources (*pre-existing*)	Material (land, seeds, tools) Non-material (networks, social relations, time, organizing capacity)
	Knowledge (*pre-existing*)	Technical knowledge (formal trainings, existing institutions) Local knowledge (backgrounds)
	Recognition (*initial responses*)	Social (solidarity) and legal (rights)
Resourcefulness (*processes*) Processes of how enacted and practiced in the gardens	Resources (*processes*)	Material (land, seeds, tools) Non-material (networks, social relations, time, organizing capacity)
	Knowledge (*exchange, sharing*)	Technical knowledge (formal trainings, existing institutions) Local knowledge (backgrounds)
	Recognition (*feedback, support received*)	Social (solidarity) and legal (rights)
Social innovation	New rules, social relations	What is being done differently (socially, gardening practices, relationships with different actors)
	Meeting societal needs, responsibilities	What are the needs of community and how is the garden meeting those needs?
	Empowered communities, societal contributions	Contributing to changes in individuals, community, society Role of garden in lives of participants

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in their environments applied previous (personal and professional) backgrounds to the, gardens, and how these were received by the community. All interviewee names listed in this chapter are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Observations and interviews were transcribed and coded based on the operationalization of resourcefulness and social innovation discussed above, see Table 3.1 for an overview of the themes and sub-themes investigated. Specifically, interviews with initiators were useful for understanding pre-existing resourcefulness conditions

used to help form the garden, such as accessing the land and navigating grant proposals, while interviews and conversations (during observations) with volunteers provided insight into garden processes, such as knowledge exchange, social connections made in the garden, and broader contributions of the garden in the lives of participants. .

3.4. Results

3.4.1. *Pluk en Moestuin, Eenrum: Using permaculture practices for community building*

The Pluk en Moestuin is a collective of approximately eight women from Eenrum, and the surrounding villages. Eenrum, a village of about 1,300 inhabitants, has its own school, sports clubs, and general practitioner, thus, more services than most in this depopulating region, according to respondents. While the village is considered quite active, none of the activities suited Brenda, the initiator of the garden. As an attempt to gain more connections in her immediate environment, Brenda submitted an advertisement in the local paper and began recruiting interested community members for a community garden.

Conditions of resourcefulness were specifically seen through gardening and organizing knowledge backgrounds of garden participants. When each participant contributed based on his or her strengths, the collective was able to organize the garden to suit their goals. For example, Emma, also an organizing member, drew from her informal background in agriculture and permaculture methods, while Brenda capitalized on her networks in the village and previous experience organizing social projects and coaching citizens to start their own.

Brenda, Emma, and the gardening collective located a plot in Eenrum that technically belonged to the municipality, but was being neglected by its current caretakers. The municipality agreed to pay the rent, as long as the group took care of the land. A community organization in the village granted the collective further finances for accessing building materials, and, once the garden was more

established and laid out their clear goals, they were able to become a stichting, or foundation, permitting them rights from the municipality and opportunities to access more funding. Brenda's background in collaborating with governmental organizations was vital throughout this communication and establishing the garden.

Unlike more rural traditions of allotment or home gardens, this project experiments with permaculture methods. In addition to creatively reworking natural systems to build productive and permanent structures, permaculture gardening also integrates a social aspect. Brenda notes how this method practice, unique to the rural community, encourages more social interaction in that:

> Permaculture is more than only gardening. Permaculture is also a community and sharing. It's about sharing and doing it together.

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The Pluk en Moestuin incorporates the community elements of the practice by harvesting produce to cook a meal together, either at the members' houses, or in the garden, bringing a more personal connection. This illustrates the socially and environmentally intertwined nature of the garden, and how gardening and eating together initiates changing relationships among the participants.

While the village and municipal governments willingly fund the project, not all feedback for the Pluk en Moestuin is positive. For example, the gardening collective had previously received negative feedback from neighbors in the community, due to the "strange" permaculture methods.

The project's perception of being "different" did contribute to difficulties in recruiting more participants and potentially up-scaling to involve the entire village, a disappointing realization for the initiators. However, expanding was not the main objective of the garden and, focusing on social cohesion among involved participants was a more attainable goal. Conversely, events, such as open days, helped communicate the garden to the community, opening social networks, as well as defining it as a space for exchanging gardening knowledge.

In addition to the permaculture garden, the collective at the Pluk en Moestuin began a garden at the neighboring school the previous year

(2016). Through weekly classes, the collective teaches 11-12 year old students about food and gardening, beginning with seeding and planting, and hosting a cooking lesson towards the end of the growing season. In these classes, volunteers provide students with a hands-on learning experience, and, indirectly, also boost their confidence. Brenda explains how one parent confided in her:

> "What you did to my girl, was great. It made her stand and she was so insecure and now she is there." She has changed so much in a year! [...] So it brings a lot for the children.

The garden's impact on the children evidences how recognition materializes in the space. Furthermore, as the parents witness their children develop and gain confidence and receive garden produce the students bring home, to some extent, the garden does expand into the larger community.

In sum, the garden collective at the Pluk en Moestuin exhibits resourcefulness through utilizing formal trainings (such as group facilitation), as well as more informal backgrounds (in agriculture, for example). While the initiative draws resources from government organizations (with grants and land), they have learned to be quite autonomous and, as Emma states, "we've done quite a lot ourselves, actually." Social innovation is manifested in the Pluk en Moestuin through addressing social responsibilities, such as educating youth and contributing to social cohesion among its members. Even though the garden received negative feedback from the community, their strong internal network supported their efforts and gave members the motivation to continue to experiment with the gardening and the school garden. Beginning a relationship with the school, the collective provides students with an education, alternative to what they would receive in the classroom, learning about natural processes, and, in the process, gaining confidence in other aspects of their lives.

3.4.2. Doarpstun, Snakkerburen: Culturally embedded organic gardening

In the province of Friesland, just north of the city of Leeuwarden, is the *Doarpstun.* This garden began in 2001 when a group of villagers from Snakkerburen wanted to transform a neglected plant nursery into a communal green oasis. The initial collective had four main goals: to use organic methods, sell produce at low prices, host educational and cultural activities, and expand the gardening area. While only one of the original initiators is still involved, the garden has grown to about 70 volunteers, with workers also coming from Leeuwarden and neighboring villages, and hosts a play and cultural activities on the grounds every year.

The current volume of volunteer support could be attributed to the *Doarpstun*'s collaboration with *WellZo,* an organization that matches potential volunteers with organizations seeking workers. Previously in 2008, many garden participants lost interest, resulting in a lack of volunteers. Subsequently, the garden partnered with *WellZo* as a way to maintain a sufficient help and now receives 20 of its 70 participants through the organization. Connections with such operations are an example of resourcefulness processes in the garden.

The collaboration between *WellZo* and the *Doarpstun* is especially useful for those not otherwise able to hold a steady job, but still seek structure and connections in their lives. Glenda describes that there is:

> [...] a group of volunteers who need a bit of *ondersteuning* [support], a bit of structure, that's good for them, and a place where not that much is asked of them. We have Robert, he is making our coffee and tea, and that is it. And for him, that's okay. He's using a lot of medicines, he's depressive, psychosis, but he's coming here before 8 o'clock in the morning. Before we come, the coffee is ready! And he's doing the washing up and he's doing this and great! We're glad Robert is here.

In addition to working in the garden, volunteers, also engage in other projects, depending on their capacities and skillsets. Thus,

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in terms of resourcefulness, the *Doarpstun* utilizes human capital available through the volunteers and, consequently, reciprocates volunteers by teaching them new skills. Philip, an organizing member, states:

> When somebody new comes here, there is a lot of investing in this person, not only trying to learn (*sic*) him / her the skill needed in the garden, planting techniques, how you hoe, how you do this, how you do that, but also look at this person and what his or her needs are.

Thus, the organizers of the garden prioritize investing in people, and also address needs of the volunteers, whether that is finding community support or maintaining steady work. Since beginning the partnership with *WellZo*, the initiative has not had trouble recruiting volunteers, thus this relationship is seen as vital for the garden in maintaining their volunteer base and addressing their social goals.

In addition to running the garden, the *Doarpstun* also invests in cultural activities, for example a theatre production every summer. Through these activities the garden becomes a venue of interaction for the villagers and socially embedded in the community, attracting residents from Leeuwarden and beyond. The culturally intertwined nature of the play ultimately aids the garden's resourcefulness, by opening up social spaces for participation, illustrating the *Doarpstun's* social and cultural impact.

The influence of the garden is not limited to the play and development of its volunteers, but also to other community and food system developments. For example, a former garden volunteer acquired his own plot in the city of Leeuwarden to begin a permaculture garden. During the course of this research, he and the *Doarpstun* initiator met to explore potential collaborations between the two. Thus, while the garden has reached its limits of physical expansion, the knowledge and skills acquired by volunteers continues to extend beyond its boundaries.

The collective at the *Doarpstun* exhibits *resourcefulness* through maximizing community and governmental programs, building

on the knowledge and skills of its volunteer base, and expanding social networks through cultural productions. While the garden has had issues in the past (recruiting volunteers and receiving noise complaints), these issues are solvable through negotiating with community institutions and stakeholders. *Social innovations* are also seen in the *Doarpstun* through connecting villagers in Snakkerburen, contributing to the social cohesion of the village, addressing developmental needs of volunteers, as well as healthy food access of the customers, and empowering participants to have the capacity to continue to address the goals of the garden and community.

3.4.3. Toentje, Groningen: Community and institutional collaborations for fresh food access

Toentje, located in the city of Groningen, is the brainchild of Jesse. After leaving the local supermarket one day, he was struck by the magnitude of processed food that filled the carts of other shoppers and thought "why don't people choose healthy food on a tight budget?" After some contemplation, Jesse drafted a business plan for a garden that grows vegetables for the foodbank and presented it to the municipality. Coincidentally, the municipality had recently finalized a new Armoedebeleid, or Poverty Policy, which also included the idea to create a garden for the foodbank. This fortuitous match led to fruitful collaboration between the municipality, Jesse, and the foodbank.

The initial collaboration with the municipality greatly benefitted Toentje in opening access to other networks, aiding the garden's resourcefulness. Not only did the municipality provide the organization with initial funding, but they also collaborated in finding a suitable piece of land to cultivate. Jesse mentions the success of the project was partially due to "the synchronicity of all of this" and specifically that "the municipality has a vision on these kinds of subjects and on local food and on city farming, and the combination of city farming and health care." Manon, the volunteer coordinator, elaborates by saying:

> The Groningen city [...] gives us room to experiment. If you
> work in a smaller village town, they might be more conser-
> vative ... [here] people know about innovation. There's room
> to experiment.

However, this relationship is not always ideal. After cultivating a
plot of land for two years, the municipality asked Toentje to leave
in order to build new apartments. While their contract is now for
two and a half years, the garden recognizes the scarcity of land in
the city and is hesitant about a repeat occurrence.

While expanding, Toentje continues to build off of their initial
connections as well as create new networks in the community, as an
attempt to become more autonomous. Currently, 95% of their fund-
ing comes from the municipal government, which the organization
strives to lower to 50% through diversifying their income streams.
Meeting this goal takes a certain degree of creativity and willingness
to experiment. Jesse discusses his approach:

> I just search for the people who know it and just start to
> collaborate [...]. So if I don't know anything about a certain
> subject, I just look for, 'hey who in my environment knows
> a bit about this stuff?'

Thus, through this strategy, social networks are maximized to
access community resources and diverse knowledge reservoirs.
Toentje has also been involved in other side-projects, including a
community-run restaurant, growing hops for local breweries, and
an urban honey business. Thus, Jesse's approach has worked, as
these other initiatives also contribute to Toentje's goal of being more
financially independent. While the municipal policy explicates the
need for a garden for the foodbank, Toentje implements the idea, but
also asserts itself as (partially) independent. Thus, Toentje operates
outside of more traditional governmental boundaries in addressing
community needs.

These boundaries are further extended as Toentje looks to poten-
tial collaborators for expanding to small villages in the province.
Coincidentally, the municipal foodbank director also manages those

in the rest of the North of the Netherlands, giving Toentje this opportunity. Through trial-and-error Jesse has continued to contact other potential collaborators, including the Dutch health insurance company Menzis, and the University of Groningen. Working with these institutions contributes an international component, where the garden is not only a venue for local knowledge exchange, but also creates new institutional relations among a range of local and global actors, for example via exchanging knowledge.

Similar to the previous two gardens, Toentje is supported by a team of 30-35 volunteers that also work in the garden. Jesse notes that:

> The people who work at Toentje range from "ex-homeless" to "ex-pat" so that's the balance we have, and that's our power as well, that's our strength. We don't have "one type" of volunteer from one place in society [...] and that's what makes us different.

Thus, the social contribution of the project extends to the participants, who benefit from the diversity that exists among them, an identified condition for resourcefulness. A diverse set of volunteers not only ensures that different skillsets and interests are integrated into the organization, but also introduces participants that might not have otherwise met.

To sum up, Toentje exhibits characteristics of resourcefulness through creating broad and diverse social networks, with formal as well as more informal institutions. While these partnerships are not always successful at first, learning from their mistakes aids the initiative in developing new, creative relationships. Through these collaborations, the garden generates innovative relations between governmental bodies and citizen initiatives, in order to meet social needs of fresh food access for food bank recipients. Similar to the Dorpstun, Toentje also prepares garden volunteers for the workforce by providing structure and training. The garden is further building upon these relations and expanding to other communities in the province, thus, potentially out-scaling and addressing food access in other localities. See Table 3.2 for a more detailed overview of resourcefulness and social innovation in all three gardens.

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Table 3.2 Results of resourcefulness and social innovation in community gardens.

	Pluk en Moestuin, Eenrum	Doarpstun, Snakkerburen	Toentje, Groningen	All gardens
Resourcefulness Conditions	**Resources:** Motivation to create connections with other villagers; close-knit village enabling local collaboration **Knowledge:** (see all gardens) **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Purchases tools and materials with money from shop; uses WellZo to help recruit volunteers; personal management style necessary to coordinate volunteers **Knowledge:** (see all gardens) **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Motivation to provide healthy food to those in need **Knowledge:** Connections with international actors **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Received funds to initiate the garden; motivated to improve social cohesion **Knowledge:** Builds on personal and professional backgrounds of participants **Recognition:** Governmental recognition (in form of grants and land)
Resourcefulness Processes	**Resources:** Continue to apply for and receive subsidies from village councils; resourceful gardening practices (e.g. seed saving); adjust permaculture practices to clay-like soil; seek collaboration with community organizations in village (e.g. local school); volunteers mainly based in locality **Knowledge:** Teach students in community through school garden; expand ideas through collaborations with other gardens in province **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Collaborate with neighboring farmers for mulch and materials; hold fundraisers when necessary; cultural activities connect other villagers to the garden space, embedding the garden in the community **Knowledge:** Stay organized with an annually updated "seed and plant plan"; educate school groups **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Involve community members in process of starting garden; collaborate with province for expansion; create collaborations with local and international actors; "mouth to mouth" volunteer recruitment; use social networks to up and out scale **Knowledge:** Expanding knowledge, for example, to other towns in the province **Recognition:** (see all gardens)	**Resources:** Receive continued funds from municipality; motivated to provide healthy food to those in need; collaborate with municipality to locate and acquire land **Knowledge:** Teach participants gardening knowledge by showing; learn about gardening and organizational techniques through "trial and error" **Recognition:** Have received negative feedback from neighbors, but also positive feedback from greater community; considerable support within organization

	Pluk en Moestuin, Eenrum	Doarpstun, Snakkerburen	Toentje, Groningen	All gardens
Social Innovation	**New rules, relations:** Changing the institutional relationship with the school and citizen organization **Meeting social needs:** Greater focus on cohesion in community than food access; addresses food and garden education with school students **Social contributions:** Teach and empower students in school garden	**New rules, relations:** Play and cultural events further embed the garden in the village community **Meeting social needs:** Sells fresh, local food at affordable prices; addresses individual mental needs of volunteers **Social contributions:** Invests in volunteer mental health, provides structure in their lives	**New rules, relations:** Success of collaborations have resulted in expanding to other localities **Meeting social needs:** Donates local food to foodbank participants; prepares participants for workforce **Social contributions:** Expands message of garden to other regions; provides participants with workforce ready skills	**New rules, relations:** Changing relationships with local and (in some cases) national or international institutions; willing to experiment with different and more sustainable gardening practices **Meeting social needs:** All gardens increase social cohesion in community **Social contributions:** All gardens build community and social cohesion, provide gardening knowledge, and equip the community with access to a physical, green space; teach participants about sustainable food systems

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3.5. Discussion

3.5.1. Conditions of resourcefulness to support social innovation

Through identifying conditions and processes, this research has identified five enablers of resourcefulness to stimulate social innovation in community gardens.

Directive power and motivation

While conditions varied greatly among the gardens, all collectives exhibited a clear motivation and directive power, defining clear goals. In most cases, there were only one or two main initiators, which, perhaps, made defining the organization's objective more manageable. This also points to the importance of place-based leadership, for initiating new activities, supporting knowledge transfer, and motivating and aligning people around a joint goal (Roep et al. 2015, Horlings 2010).

Community gardens can potentially serve a variety of needs, however, when initiators narrowed their goal to a specific contribution, the collectives gained a clearer direction for goal-setting. This finding aligns with that of Seyfang and Haxeltine (2012), who emphasize the importance of developing short term and achievable expectations in grassroots initiatives, especially in the out-scaling of these projects, towards more long-term goals. Furthermore, the garden initiatives' motivations prioritized local environmental needs, a scale that perhaps gives them the capacity to embed themselves in their direct community. Such positioning appeared to be vital, prior to attempts of expanding or up-scaling. Effectively, a clear, locally relevant motivation prioritizes accessing resources available in the direct environment, and, through this interaction, identifies potential routes to contribute to social needs, a key component of social innovations.

Using diversity in garden resources

Organizational diversity in resourcefulness processes was also found to be valuable in contributing to the social innovation of the initiatives. This was seen in processes, including through funding sources, initiative participants, and other ventures of the garden collectives.

While all three cases utilized government finances and support (including grants and land access), each also pursued other funding sources. This includes, for example, organizing a *rommelmarkt* (garage sale) at the *Doarpstun* or starting a community-run restaurant at *Toentje*. While Walker and McCarthy (2010) illustrate that governmental grants do not necessarily increase the success rate of an initiative, the authors recommend that organizations develop locally based funding sources, as this not only contributes to the long-term resilience of the initiative, but also works to gain support and nestle it in the community, a notion realized in the gardens researched (*Toentje*, for example, aims to become more autonomous from municipal financing). Through various funding sources, these initiatives become more independent, but also transfer power from the government to the citizens, empowering the community to address social needs through collective action, aligning with aspects of social innovation (Bock 2012, Moulaert et al. 2005).

In addition to diversifying their funding, all three gardens emphasized the importance of a diverse set of volunteers, either with differing professional and personal backgrounds, skills and capacities, or individual interests. By diversifying the participant pool, the gardens match individuals to a variety of roles, skills, and needs of the organization. Furthermore, by engaging a diverse public, the organizations expand their own social networks, contributing to the gardens' potential expansion and further integrating them in the community. This component also highlights a unique quality of community gardens as spaces that have potential to bring together participants of a range of backgrounds, also the reciprocal advantages of building new relationships and social capital in these communities – for the participants as well as the organizations (Firth et al. 2011).

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As a strategy to diversify funding and volunteer pools, the gardens also diversified their ventures by engaging in non-garden activities and projects, thus becoming further embedded in the community fabric. Walker and McCarthy (2010) see similar results, when "an organization's embeddedness in the local institutional environment supports [its] survival" (p. 330). Thus, by experimenting with other methods of reproducing the space, the garden collectives engage with the community to spatially transform their built environment, based on their contextual needs. As a result of diversifying funding sources, garden participants, and projects in the garden space, the initiatives were able to expand their networks, creating new, and perhaps more effective connections and impacts.

While the diversity of funding sources and knowledge greatly benefitted gardens studied, arguably a baseline of knowledge and skills were necessary across the board. For example, if communities did not have the capacity to navigate the bureaucracy of applying for and receiving grants, such initiatives would not have come to fruition. This also begs the question, what exactly would be resourcefulness and what is fundamental knowledge or skills?

Experimental knowledge processes

Key to social innovations are the "innovative" and creative processes that they promote. In relation to resourcefulness, these practices were greatly materialized in the knowledge processes in the gardens.

In all cases, few participants had agricultural backgrounds, rather, most learned how to work the earth from others. This finding does not necessarily discount the value of local traditional knowledge, emphasized by Calvet-Mir et al. (2016). Rather, it recognizes that community gardens' use of other kinds of knowledge, organizational skills, and capacities to learn, could potentially offset the importance for previous agricultural knowledge.

Experimental and reflective techniques were visible throughout participants' actual work in the garden as well as in their planning and collaborations (ex. altering lessons at the school garden based on the previous year or making changes to the annual plant and

seed plan). Regularly reflecting on organizational and learning processes illustrates processes of innovation as well as processes of resourcefulness. This finding aligns with Beers and van Mierlo (2017), who illustrate the importance of reflexivity in contributing to innovation, emphasizing the importance of knowledge processes.

While experimentation in the garden is invaluable in contributing to it as a social innovation, this characteristic contains the risk of reinforcing the concept as a "buzz word" and highlighting the "pro-innovation bias" (Bock 2012, Sveiby et al. 2012) Thus, it is an appropriate reminder to consider the more nuanced contributing factors, but also consequences of social innovation.

Strong internal support and recognition

Resourcefulness highlights the importance of recognition in organizations, through support from the greater community, as well as support within the organization. Strong internal support, especially emphasized among garden volunteers, potentially relieved pressures of out-scaling, leaving room to address the initiative's initial needs and, furthermore compensated against negative external feedback.

Nevertheless, community recognition and support in the garden spaces should not be discounted. Backing from the community has strong implications for social innovation in the space, as when a community supports the garden, it can also reap the benefits, through the garden's physical space, or the social networks embedded in it. For example, after relocating *Toentje* realized a few of their new neighbors were originally opposed to the garden due to their unmet concerns of a playground in disrepair. Initiating a dialogue with the community helped *Toentje* influence the municipality to fix the playground, gaining neighborhood support in the process. In this way, community support benefits both parties, and recognition processes could potentially prevent exclusionary processes of such collectives.

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Place-based practices

The gardens illustrate the *place-based* or contextually-dependent nature of resourcefulness. Each garden exhibited disparities that could be attributed to their specific rural, peri-urban, and urban differences. For example, the rural (and peri-urban) gardens struggled more in recruiting volunteers than the urban garden, possibly because those in smaller villages had space to maintain home gardens, as suggested by participants. Rural contexts also resisted more against unfamiliar gardening practices, such as the permaculture garden, which, perhaps, also clashed with rural gardening traditions. Additionally, the urban garden also had more difficulty maintaining a permanent location than the other two. Land tenure is a common issue for urban community gardens, with evidence that gardens themselves can even increase property values, resulting in detrimental effects for their own longevity (Voicu and Been 2008).

The gardens illustrate the relationality of practices beyond geographical boundaries. For example, *Toentje* taps into more international and national institutions, such as the University of Groningen and *Menzis*, perhaps due to their connections in the urban environment. While the *Pluk en Moestuin* also maximizes their network, the small scope, perhaps, initiates collaborations more on a regional or municipal level. That being said, the networks in Eenrum are also closely knit, where, for example, children of garden participants attend school in the village and also work in the school garden. These diverse scales further highlight the range of social innovations, and the importance of considering the local context with such initiatives. While there is a greatly "growth-based" bias of social innovations (Sveiby et al. 2012), the place-based emphasis re-focuses the impact of small-scale initiatives, like the *Pluk en Moestuin,* for their local community. Resourcefulness, thus, potentially brings attention to community-based change instead of that at a more abstract level.

Highlighting the place-based elements of social innovation and resourcefulness further stresses the importance of a context-dependent approach, not only to determine specific community needs, but also how to utilize the local environment to address these needs.

3.6. Conclusions

This research explored the connection between social innovation and resourcefulness through empirical evidence based on rural, peri-urban, and urban community gardens. Five main aspects were determined to be essential in facilitating social innovations through conditions and processes of resourcefulness, including: 1) defining a clear motivation and directive power of the initiative; 2) utilizing a diverse resource base (multiple funding streams, a heterogeneous group of volunteers and knowledge, and alternative community ventures), to further embed the initiative into the community; 3) creative knowledge processes and the capacity to experiment; 4) internal support and recognition within the collective and 5) place-based (context-dependent) practices. Through these results, this research found that resourcefulness, in contributing to social innovation, should be stressed as a *process* and as *place-based.*

Processes of resourcefulness show *how* a community can be resourceful and how they learn, instead of maintaining pre-existing community characteristics. These processes have the potential to redistribute agency to communities, who have the opportunity to become more or less resourceful, and increase their capacity for social innovation. Furthermore, conceptualizing resourcefulness as practices exercised by communities, strengthens capacities for social innovation, empowering communities to address local needs. However, the ways in which social innovations materialize are not exclusively positive, thus, it is important to heed attention to the unintended consequences of such projects.

Proposing resourcefulness as a process is also relevant for discussions on resilience. While resourcefulness, unlike resilience, more explicitly privileges civic engagement and traditional knowledge exchange, when stressed as a process, its use is even more valuable as an alternative to resilience, in empowering local communities (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). Resourcefulness, however, is but one aspect that contributes to resilience, and empirically analyzing other aspects would be a valuable contribution for future research.

Another potential for future resourcefulness research would be to explore the connection between bonding and bridging social

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capital. While Robinson and Carson (2016) provide a comprehensive overview of connections between various community capitals and resilience, this has yet to be investigated in terms of resourcefulness. Specifically, this research saw bonding and bridging social capital not only as a resource the gardens accessed, but also tied to internal community recognition (Putnam 2000).

This research has illustrated that resourcefulness is not only a process, stemming from the immediate community, but these processes also hinge on the physical space in which they are based. This result supports Baker and Mehmood's (2015) assertion that "social processes occur through and are shaped by material forms that constitute and are constituted in place-specific settings" (p. 327). What this research also stresses, however, is how the place-based nature of resourcefulness can be used to focus social innovation on a local scale. Resourcefulness processes in the gardens also determined the direction in which the spaces developed, whether that means by, for example, expanding physically (as seen at the *Doarpstun*), or broadening institutional ties (seen at *Toentje*). While much research focuses on social processes in community gardens, whether it is social capital or social cohesion, this research further connects these spaces to the material conditions in which they take place. Operating in different contexts, the gardens made use of differing resource bases and spatial and social environments, resulting in a range of societal contributions. Comparing diverging urban, rural, and peri-urban sites demonstrated that there is no "one-size-fits-all" equation for enabling social innovations through resourcefulness. Rather, the richness lies in the diversity of surrounding and interacting environments.

While community gardens may seem to be small and, perhaps, insignificant to some, their value is enhanced when framed as social innovations. This perspective not only stresses the creative planning that goes into community gardens, but also the range of functions that one space contributes to community life. At the core of social innovation is the idea that "new" practices and relationships facilitate potentials for "bettering" society. When such experimental practices expand, they have the potential to strengthen their societal impact. This research has highlighted, in several initiatives, attempts

to up and out scale practices in community gardens, including physically extending the garden property, branching out to create satellite gardens in other locations or reaching different populations through community and school educational programs. Given these examples, we expect that further research on social innovation and resourcefulness will provide a fruitful avenue to increase our insight and contribute to debates on food planning and community initiatives.

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Ecovillage Foodscapes: Zooming in and out of sustainable food practices

ABSTRACT

This chapter uses foodscapes as a lens to explore the potential of ecovillages' food practices towards enhancing sustainable food systems. Ecovillages are collective projects where members attempt to integrate sustainability principles into daily community life. In these communities, food acts, not only as an element of social life, but also as a venue through which to interact with mainstream food systems and society. Yet, how food practices at ecovillages contribute to sustainable food systems remains vague. This chapter proposes foodscapes, as a lens, for exploring the sustainability potential of place-based food practices in ecovillages, while also directing attention to how these practices intersect with networks at broader social and spatial scales. It asks, how can we better understand and draw from sustainable food practices, when considering these as both, place-based and relational? And what is the potential and the role of ecovillage communities to contribute to broader sustainable food system change? Drawing on ethnographic and food mapping methods, the chapter explores selected food practices at three ecovillage communities in the United States. Using social practice theory for "zooming in" on place-based practices and "zooming out" to examine relational networks, we investigate how these communities create internally sustainable food systems, while externally bridging themselves with broader urban and rural communities. Through viewing ecovillage food practices as place-based and relational, we develop a broader and spatially-focused understanding of food system sustainability.

KEY WORDS

Foodscapes, ecovillages, sustainable food systems, social practice theory, sustainable food practices

4.1. Introduction

The urgency to transition to a more sustainable food system is well acknowledged among scholars (De Schutter et al. 2019; Firth et al. 2011; Pudup 2008; Vivero-Pol et al. 2019). This has been largely pointed to as failings in the current globalized and industrialized food system span across sectors in society (Madrigal 2017; Nestle 2002; Wingeyer et al. 2017), resulting in unsustainable behavior that prioritizes efficiency and high-profit margins over care for local communities and environments (Morgan and Sonnino 2010). For consumers, consequences of a more industrialized food system include less trust and greater exposure to high-calorie and low-nutrient foods, while for producers, this means heavy investments and complying with standardized regulations in order to access markets (De Schutter et al. 2019; Renting et al. 2003). Many authors (e.g. Feagan 2007; Swagemakers et al. 2019) identify the need to reconnect food better to *place* in order to move towards more sustainable food systems. In this chapter we focus on the role of ecovillages in their attempts of shifting in the direction of sustainable food systems. Such communities can be considered flagship contexts in which sustainability and care for place in relation to food production, among other aspects of community living, take center stage.

Ecovillages are collective settlements that attempt to incorporate sustainable practices as an integral part of daily life, focusing on sustainable community and environmental development (Gillman 1991). This, in addition to how these communities are connected to and embedded in place, make them especially relevant for sustainable food system development. While Brombin (2015) demonstrates food to be valuable *within* ecovillage communities to "create new forms of sustainability" (p. 469), Ergas (2010) emphasizes ecovillages' potential for generating *external* sustainability impacts, around urban environmental action. Ecovillages, which are considered advanced in place-sensitive sustainable food practices, could provide insight into how to cultivate innovative sustainable food practices within communities *and* at a greater scale. As Brombin (2015) explicates, in such communities, food practices are examples of the "way in which the values linked to the idea of sustainability

and self-sufficiency translate into concrete practices" (p. 475). The central questions addressed in this chapter are: how can we better understand and draw from sustainable food practices, considering these as both, place-based and relational? And what is the potential and the role of ecovillage communities to contribute to sustainable food system change?

Sustainable food systems are characterized as food systems that prioritize environmental, social, and economic health, through connecting producers and consumers, reducing harmful external inputs, and promoting affordability and accessibility throughout the food chain (Blay-Palmer and Koc 2012; Feenstra 2002). Importantly, sustainable food systems emphasize a connection to place (Feagan 2007; Wiskerke 2009), where "a place-based approach ... implies going beyond the 'local'" (Swagemaker et al. 2019; p. 192). A sustainable food system could be founded upon relative social and spatial connections, able to initiate change beyond its local context, and therefore consisting of food practices that are place-based and relational (Sonnino et al. 2016). A relational approach is necessary to understand how practices, performed in a certain location, have influence beyond those geographical boundaries and result in sustainability impacts at different scales. Relationality in sustainable food systems can materialize via trans-local governance (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino 2019), or metabolic flows across space (Kasper et al. 2017). In order to understand the potential of ecovillages, we specifically employ and combine two core components, which link to characteristics of sustainable food systems – care for place and relationality. Those core components are: foodscapes and social practice theory.

In this chapter we connect the concept of *foodscapes* to social practice theory (SPT), contributing to theoretical discussions of the *place-based* and *relational* nature of sustainable food systems (e.g. Kasper et al. 2017; Sonnino et al. 2016; Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017). As a spatial-social lens through which to view food practices, foodscapes enables researchers to highlight how food systems can be both, place-based and relational (Johnston and Goodman 2015; Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017). When highlighting these relational components alongside the place-based aspects, foodscapes encourages

researchers to emphasize linkages, blurring pre-conceived categories, such as producer / consumer, conventional / alternative, and urban / rural and to embrace more "unexpected and diverse relationships" (Sharp 2017; p. 5). Sustainable food systems, which often incorporate circular and ecological flows of resources and networks, could benefit from the interconnectedness of the foodscapes lens (Heatherington 2014). Taking such a broad and holistic perspective is considered to reveal a multiplicity of dimensions and activities that shape our food system and inspire potential pathways towards sustainable change (Feenstra 2002; Sonnino and Marsden 2006).

Similar to foodscapes, SPT emphasizes broader contextual relationships (Nicolini 2012) in close combination with a focus on place-based elements of practices, such as materials and competencies (Shove et al. 2012). SPT outlines a research approach of *zooming in* on internal place-based (food) practices, and *zooming out* to show how these (food) practices connect to wider networks across scales (Nicolini 2012), to help grasp elements that shape food practices and explore their role and relevance for sustainable food system change. While foodscapes literature remains overall theoretical, in this chapter we draw from SPT as an empirical entry point to help further unpack the place-based aspects and relationships in our data analysis. Following this, below we will analyze core sustainable food practices in three ecovillages and explore how these practices connect to and influence places and relations beyond the ecovillage context and implications such practices might have for food system sustainability. Applying SPT in the context of ecovillages provides in-depth insight into how sustainable patterns and innovations manifest in communities, a research gap indicated in SPT research (Daly 2017).

The data informing this chapter was collected in three ecovillages in the United States in 2018: Twin Oaks in rural Virginia, Los Angeles Eco-Village, and Finney Farm in rural Washington State. After linking foodscapes with SPT below and discussing their relevance for exploring sustainable food systems and practices, we will turn to these three ecovillages to analyze one central food practice in each. The subsequent discussion will highlight the relevance of SPT and foodscapes, for researching food system sustainability as well

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as the potential role of ecovillage communities for sustainable food system change.

4.2. Theoretical Framework: Grounding foodscapes in Social Practice Theory

Foodscapes, drawing from the "*-scapes*" suffix, can be defined as a social and spatial lens in which to view food – with attention specifically to *place* as well as *relationality* across scales (Appadurai 1990; Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017). More than relying on physical spatial data, *foodscapes* as an analytical lens also enables researchers to engage with the complex social world that shapes and is shaped by such spatial environments, across the food system (Miewald and McCann 2014). The place-based elements in foodscapes not only refer to the natural and built environment, but also social and cultural components, including intersecting place-based habits, practices, and traditions. Connecting these social and physical aspects make foodscapes a particularly valuable concept in discussions on sustainable food systems. Foodscapes, therefore, is operationalized in this chapter as the intersection of food, people, and place (Spijker et al. 2020; Yasmeen 1996) that can be envisioned as three multi-colored spectacles that reveal an interconnected landscape of place-based food practices.

While social practice theory (SPT), similar to foodscapes, encompasses social and material elements, it, more specifically, zooms in on specific practices, emphasizing the relevance of that practice within a network of connections. Social practices consist of the "inter-connectedness of many elements – forms of bodily activities, mental activities, things and their use, background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how and notions of competence, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz 2002; p. 249). We follow from Shove et al. (2012), who specify practices to consist of materials (ex. objects and infrastructure), competences (ex. knowledge and skills), and meanings (ex. significance and motivation), with the interaction of these resulting in a practice. While SPT is useful for unpacking how practices emerge, change,

and are sustained, it, above-all, reflects the values and structures that bring them into being (Shove and Walker 2010). Understanding how sustainable practices materialize in ecovillages, therefore, could contribute to understanding how to initiate a broader sustainability transformation (Feola 2015)

This chapter focuses on sustainable food practices, or food practices that support a caring relationship between humans and their natural ecosystem (Hassink et al. 2020). Food practices can include a range of ways that humans handle food, including food production, processing, distribution/retail and consumption, which are, together, part of an interconnected chain (Erickson 2008; Spaargaren et al. 2013). While we recognize that the notion of sustainability is at risk for being co-opted by top-down and neoliberal interests (Blythe et al. 2018; Leitheiser and Follman 2020), we understand the term as underlining the need for a value change away from unsustainable overconsumption, resource depletion, and social and economic injustices (Vinnari and Vinnari 2014). However, we seek the concept's value beyond one place and context, and rather point our attention to cross-cutting impacts across scales. Sustainability encompasses how "social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems" and, therefore, social and environmental benefits are mutually reinforcing (Agyeman et al. 2002; p. 87). In this chapter, we understand (food system) sustainability to include environmental, social, and economic spaces (Blay-Palmer and Koc 2010), while also making room for political and intellectual participation (Feenstra 2002). Recognizing the role of power, we align with Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003), that socioenvironmental sustainability "are fundamentally political questions," with environmental and social struggles often intertwined (p. 910). Rather than viewing such conceptual spaces as operating separately, we conceive them to act in conjunction (Psarikidou & Szerszynski 2012), for example, small-scale production markets supporting environmental practices and local economies, based on opening space for consumers and producers to take action in their food system (Goodman and DuPuis 2002).

Building on this perspective, we view sustainable food systems as consisting of sustainable food practices and encompassing a broad

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range of relations across spaces and scales. Such practices are sensitive towards and care for their socio-environmental contexts, while the relations make visible connections and interdependencies of specific place-based resources. The sustainable food practices studied in this chapter include food processing (Twin Oaks), retail/distribution (LAEV), and production (Finney Farm) practices, and are elaborated upon in Table 4.2, in section 4.3.2. below. Each category of activities involves specific actors (ex. farmers or consumers), with certain resources, knowledge backgrounds, routines, and patterns, which they draw upon to fulfill their respective practice (Spaargaren et al. 2013). Connecting individual food practices to a flow of activities can help understand the broader logics informing the food chain as interconnected. Following from this, we highlight the relevance of practices being relational and thus "understood as part of a nexus of connections" (Nicolini 2012; p. 229). The idea of an "organized nexus" echoes Schatzki (1996), who views practices as coordinated doings and sayings (Warde 2013). Through repeated performances by individuals, such actions are reinforced and sustained (Schatzki 1996), and through social organization and coordination, practices become intertwined with their social contexts (Warde 2013). To explore this so-called interconnected nexus, Nicolini (2012) details an approach that involves "zooming in" to document the dynamics and effects of local practices, and "zooming out" to make sense of these practices and translocal interconnections.

However, food practices, specifically, could be considered "weakly organized and weakly regulated", meaning, disorganized and subject to unexpected fluctuations (Warde 2013; p. 27). Foodscapes, however, promotes a focus on interdependent food practices, rather than one, e.g. consumption (Winson 2004), to highlight how food practices are dynamic (Panelli and Tipa 2009). While practice theory recognizes the value of place, foodscapes more explicitly embraces how food practices occur in and are shaped by place, foregrounding place-based interactions. Moreover, "tracing" these interactions highlights the presence of networks, across scales. Focusing on the notion of foodscapes, can potentially help understand changing social and spatial practices around food, especially in attempts to transition to sustainable food systems (Grin 2011; Shove and Walker 2010).

Building upon Nicolini (2012), this research applies foodscapes as a lens which highlights the relevance of both "zooming in" on place-based food practices and "zooming out" on relational networks. This aligns with the core ideals embedded in sustainability as a concept, to not only support immediate social-ecological environments, but also wider communities (Horlings 2018). Furthermore, exploring the ways sustainable food practices can be simultaneously place based and relational helps to understand their relevance and role in food system change. To explore the foodscapes of ecovillages, we will zoom in on and zoom out of selected central food practices at ecovillage communities with the aim to explore how such practices contribute to sustainable food systems.

4.2.1. Zooming in on place-based sustainable food practices

Through "zooming in" on sustainable food practices at the ecovillages, this chapter will first explore their *place-based* characteristics, which include physical-material elements (e.g. localized plant varieties and seasonal production), as well as social relations (e.g. local economies and knowledge, self-reliance).

Our analysis highlights the physical elements through place-based or "nested" resources that exist in a certain spatial context, for example where food is grown (Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017). However, to acknowledge that place is more than the local scale (Born and Purcell 2006; Kenis and Matthijs 2014), we emphasize social relations and the relational aspects as part of the place-based characteristics of foodscapes. Therefore, we understand place as a combination of physical and social components, including a collection of different values, meanings, relations, and interactions (Massey 1991). Social relations are highlighted through *actors* and *actions* in food practices. Food is, after all, a material substance we acquire preferences for and learn about through *doing* (Carolan 2011). Furthermore, practices are not simply created, rather emerge and are established in cultural contexts (Warde 2013).

Our *foodscapes* analysis foregrounds social and cultural contexts embedded in food practices. Foodscapes can be seen as shaped

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by cultural, political, and social practices, which intersect with the material environment (Adema 2007; Johnston and Goodman 2015). Johnston and Goodman (2015) emphasize this multiplicity, defining foodscapes to include "cultural spaces and practices of food as well as the material realities" (p. 2). Foodscapes connects to the physical-material qualities of food practices, through foregrounding the contexts where food is produced, distributed, and consumed (Johnston and Goodman 2015). This is seen, for example, when food, itself, is the research subject with "food biographies" or "following food" (Cook et al. 2006; Smith and Jehlička 2007), tracing food products' histories and origins. As indicated above, foodscapes' intertwining social and material elements are valuable for connecting to "a deep commitment to a particular place" and contributing to sustainable food systems (Heatherington 2014; p. 24). When "zooming in", this chapter uses foodscapes, as a lens to draw out the place-based qualities of food, through emphasizing social relations and materials in food practices, as well as grounding insights and entry points towards sustainable possibilities.

4.2.2. Zooming out of relational sustainable food practices

Through "zooming out" and viewing sustainable food practices in their embedded contexts, we focus on their relational aspects. Using foodscapes as a lens, we underscore the necessity to think through potential opportunities, connections, and actors across the food system and bring to light relational elements embedded in food in order to better understand food system sustainability. Zooming out of food practices enables researchers to extend beyond food as a place-based phenomenon, with the assumption that such focus alone is not sufficient for a transformation towards sustainable food systems.

Highlighting relational interconnections in food practices could help think through strategies for sustainable food system development. To foreground interconnections, Nicolini (2012) recommends researchers to follow a "trail of connections between practices and their products" using practice theory, which this chapter will draw on through analyzing externally networked food practices (p. 219).

In this chapter, we address this by foregrounding social relations and contexts embedded in food practices.

Foodscapes is useful for such an analysis, in that "as a concept and set of practice ... [it] encourages us to spatialize our analyses, drawing attention to the ways that food cultures operate and travel across different, multiple and shifting scales" (Johnston and Goodman 2015; p. 2). This definition highlights the importance of scale, also relevant for researching sustainable food practices (Eakin et al. 2017). Foodscapes simultaneously encompass the macro (global), meso, and micro scales (Mikkelson 2011), through coexisting at these different scales, and being interconnected and shaped by activities that occur at these scales (Wegerif and Wiskerke 2017). Interconnections in foodscapes can be analyzed, for example, through the transmission of Traditional Food Knowledge (TFK), which "can support the continuity of cultural heritage through time and place" (Kwik 2008; p. 62). The relational framing is especially appropriate in ecovillage communities, where food production systems strongly support and are connected to local consumption needs. We employ a foodscapes lens to bring to light how ecovillages connect to and influence wider landscapes through their food practices. Thus, through the foodscapes perspective we emphasize food practices as interdependent components in the food system, working together.

4.3. Research context and methods

4.3.1. Ecovillage context and case selection

Ecovillages are considered "human-scale, full-featured settlements, in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world, in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future" (Gillman 1991; p. 10). Considered as a type of intentional community (IC), ecovillages more specifically focus on environmental sustainability (Litfin 2014; Meijering et al. 2007; Wagner 2012). ICs have historically attempted to retreat from society, in order to maintain community ideals, and self-sustaining and autonomous practices (Ergas 2010;

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Kanter 1972; Meijering et al. 2007). Despite their earlier desires to be physically and/or psychologically isolated (Ergas 2010; Meijering et al. 2007; Schehr 1997), ecovillage communities also interact with and, to some extent, depend on neighboring communities and services. Thus, while wishing to escape society and dominant, often unsustainable, ways in the mainstream, ecovillages are simultaneously grounded in their broader social and physical environment.

While often romanticized as a place to generate solutions to global environmental change, ecovillages have been criticized as not sufficiently addressing radical transformations, especially in regards to social environmental justice, for example, reproducing white privilege or failing to address dismantling market capitalism (Chitewere 2010; Fotopoulos 2000). Chitewere (2010) specifically notes that "instead of a focus inwards on personal or neighborhood concerns to be sustainable, ecovillages must focus their lens outward into the larger community" (p. 339). More recently, ecovillages today have been documented as more willing to embrace their relationships with wider communities, especially through attempts to "[experiment] with new forms of living and transferring this knowledge and experience to other contexts" (Avelino and Kunze 2009).

This research explores food practices at three ecovillages in the USA. The United States was chosen as a research context due to its unique social and spatial diversity. A country facing declining rural regions (Swenson 2019) and one of the deepest political polarizations in decades (Pew Research Center 2019) has seen diversity and inequality magnified by place. This research includes three spatially distinct sites – the conservative rural South, the progressive urban Southern California, and the environmentalist rural Cascadia – and attempts to highlight how all three undertake diverse endeavors toward food sustainability in their local community.

Ecovillage communities were selected using two prominent online directories – the Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) and the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN)[3]. Factors considered include that the ecovillage was established, in terms of members, longevity, and web presence, to ensure an active community (Boyer 2015). An

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3 See FIC Communities directory, available at: https://www.ic.org/directory/ and GEN directory, available at: https://ecovillage.org/projects/

Table 4.1 *List of Ecovillage communities*

Characteristics	Twin Oaks	Los Angeles Ecovillage	Finney Farm
Location	Virginia, rural	Los Angeles, CA, urban	Washington State, rural
Founding year	1967	1993	1989
Number of residents	100	40	8 (plus volunteers)
Other characteristics	Income sharing, operates tofu and hammock businesses	Located in diverse urban neighborhood, established food-sharing hub for residents and non-residents	Initiates food justice education programs and infrastructure in rural community

established community is essential as 90% of ecovillages disband in the first five years (Christian 2003). The prominence of community food practices was also crucial for site selection, including growing their own food and facilitating interactions with outside communities through food practices.

This search identified 21 relevant ecovillages, from which three were selected, based on the above criteria and their willingness to participate. The three selected were diverse in terms of size, location, and include rural and urban contexts, as illustrated in Table 4.1 and described below. A diverse selection highlights different narratives and meanings of food in place. While the urban case might stimulate more networking connections, acquiring locally grown food in the Los Angeles metropolis poses complications. The opposite could be said about rural communities – regarding connections across scales and community roles in initiating rural sustainable action. Characteristics of these communities and food practices are elaborated upon below.

Twin Oaks: Community-supported tofu and gardening

Located in rural Virginia, Twin Oaks is an intergenerational, egalitarian income-sharing commune. In exchange for working 42 hours a

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week at the community's income-earning and domestic areas, members receive everything to cover their basic needs, including food, housing, healthcare, and an allowance of $100/month. Community businesses include a hammock and furniture company, wholesale seeds, and an organic, locally sourced tofu business. Twin Oaks' food infrastructure includes an extensive vegetable garden, fruit orchards, chickens, and dairy cows. Otherwise, the community purchases food from restaurant supply stores, receives food that would otherwise be thrown out, and trades with nearby communities. Twin Oaks is an example of a large-scale and successful rural eco-community.

Los Angeles Eco-Village: Urban gardening and food lobby

Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) is located in LA's densest urban neighborhood, Koreatown. This community utilizes its urban setting to act as a demonstration and incubation space for community organizations and projects, including a consumer food co-op. Other food practices at LAEV include organic fruit trees and vegetable gardens, beekeeping, chickens, and weekly community potlucks. LAEV provides insight into sustainable food practices in denser urban ecovillages.

Finney Farm: Rural food justice community programs

Finney Farm is a self-described anarchist group in rural Washington. The collective purchased their land in the early-1990s and is now home to eight residents and a revolving door of volunteers and interns. This community supports nearby rural communities by strengthening rural home-production and processing capacities and hosting an established volunteer program and food workshops. Though the community has been offered opportunities to grow in size, they remain intentionally small, in order to conserve their 90 acres (36.4 hectares) of second-growth forest. Finney Farm is an example of knowledge sharing in small-scale collectives.

4.3.2. Methods: Ethnographic, in-depth interviews, and food mapping

This study takes an in-depth, qualitative approach, employing ethnographic methods. Ethnographic studies seek to understand daily lives of participants, also participating in the same daily rhythms, through participant observation (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2004). Participating in daily community practices provides "on the ground" insight into the communities' food systems and the social structures surrounding them, making "visible what is largely invisible in people's everyday practice" (Forde 2017; p. 83). Past ethnographic ecovillage research illustrates this method's suitability, notably how communities are already living an "examined existence" (Lockyer 2007; p. 152). Meaning, ecovillages and ICs operate based on what they wish to change from mainstream society, resulting in reflecting on and embedding intentional meaning into their practices.

The first author conducted participant observation and stayed in each community for one month. To provide transparency, she explained the research aims and intentions to all community members at the beginning of each stay. The first author also volunteered in food-oriented areas, including the gardens, kitchens, and food processing facilities. Two of the communities (Twin Oaks and Finney Farm) offer more formalized visitor and intern programs, and while LAEV does not, the ecovillage still offers housing for researchers and interns. Observations investigated food practices, including production, consumption, processing, and waste, highlighting the nexus of food, people, and place. The researcher used a field diary to document all notes, including passing occurrences, informal conversations, and personal reflections, using a semi-structured diary format to detail reflections of events and interactions.

In addition to observations, this study included 37 in-depth interviews with ecovillage residents and visitors. This includes 16 at Twin Oaks, 11 at LAEV, and 10 at Finney Farm, with participants ranging from 17 to 81 years old (at the time of the interview), and an average age of 43 years (across all communities). Also across all communities, 16 interviewees identified as male (43%), 17 as female (46%), two as agender or neutral (5.5%) and two who preferred not to

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answer (5.5%). Participants were selected based on their role in the community, prioritizing those involved in the food areas (ex. garden managers, food buyers) and in leadership or organizing roles (board members, founders, long-term members). While many interviewees were identified by tips from other participants, interviews were open to all who offered. All interviewees participated voluntarily and were given and signed informed consent forms. All names are changed to pseudonyms, with the exception of Lois, the founder of LAEV, who requested her name be used. Interviews were especially useful to learn how participants viewed their food system, its role in their community, and external connections and networks, which were not clear from observations.

To kindle discussions of community food practices, visual mapping methods were also implemented. Food-mapping methodologies have been used by foodscape researchers to foreground place-based interactions (Burgoine and Monsivais 2013). Mapping in food research initiates participants to reflect upon and broaden their food system perspective, while simultaneously mapping food facilities, stimulating a sensorial and spatial awareness of food (Wight and Killham 2014). This research conducted mental mapping exercises by presenting participants with a printed community map (either provided by the community or drawn by the researcher) and asking them to identify unique food practices, to draw out place-based activities. Mental mapping provides insight into how daily practices connect to place, the relation between these places, and what is shared among individuals (Trell and van Hoven 2010). This activity functioned as a prop to guide interviews, asking how communities engage with food, as well as personal perspectives of the role food plays in the community.

While the data collection witnessed a wealth of sustainable food practices, within each ecovillage we were able to identify one sustainable food practice, which appeared to be central within the community itself as well as have a central function forming a basis for their food-related interactions beyond the community. We prioritized food practices that interview participants recognized as central to community life and their surrounding environment. At Finney Farm, all participants identified seed saving to be central

to the community's social practices and strongly embedded in their environment. For interviewees at LAEV, the food lobby was a leading and innovative food practice in the community, especially for aligning with the community's sustainability ambitions. Food processing at Twin Oaks recurred and was dominant in participants' food maps through the ways it intertwined and linked with the majority of other community food practices (ex. gardening and cooking). Table 4.2 below lists the central sustainable food practices and their connections to sustainable food systems.

Interview and observation data was first analyzed based on codes that focused on place-specific and externally-connected food practices (including production, processing, consumption, and waste-related practices). Following the first round of coding, the first author identified themes based on literature on foodscapes and SPT. This includes the social and spatial elements (ex. the role of place), as well as the role of knowledge, materials, and meaning in each selected food practice (Shove et al. 2012).

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Table 4.2 *Sustainable food practices explored in this chapter*

Practice researched	Examples of similar and related (sustainable) practices and initiatives	Contributions and relevance to sustainable food systems
Food processing (Twin Oaks)	Fermentation Canning Dehydration	Facilitates eating homegrown products year round Autonomy from industrially processed food Fewer artificial additives Prevents food waste
Cooperative food retail and distribution (LAEV)	Food cooperatives Community supported agriculture (CSA) Food hubs	Collective purchasing Direct purchasing from local / small holder farmers Limits food miles Encourages democratic decision making
Seed saving (Finney Farm)	Seed libraries Seed banks Seed exchanges	Protects heirloom varieties Promotes agricultural biodiversity Minimizes reliance on industrial seeds

4.4. Ecovillages: building internally sustainable and externally networked food systems

4.4.1. Food processing at Twin Oaks: A relational food system approach

Industrial food processing results in artificial additives in our food supply (Geyzen et al. 2012) and the deskilling of consumers throughout the food chain (Kwik 2008). For those producing raw food materials on a small scale, processing facilitates eating homegrown products year-round, and increases autonomy and self-reliance in a sustainable system of provisioning. Though technological innovations in food processing have, arguably, contributed to food becoming a global commodity, small-scale food processing and preservation supports sustainable food systems.

At Twin Oaks food processing is closely intertwined with other food practices in the community (e.g. dependent on garden produce and consumption habits) and is an example of a holistic approach, relying on other activities throughout the food chain. Twin Oaks engages in a range of food processing practices, including deep freezing, fermentation, canning, and dehydration, to help extend the life of garden produce.

Internal social and spatial interactions of food processing

At Twin Oaks, place-based knowledge is necessary for food processing, to ensure the continuity of this community practice. Food processing competencies are passed from one Food Processing Manager (FPM) to the next. In the community, labor is divided into different work areas, led by management teams, in domestic and income-earning areas. The FPM oversees processing activities and passes on their experience through word-of-mouth, written logs, and archived materials. Jessica, the current FPM, notes:

> [The previous manager] had written up in the food processing binder ... "Canning tomatoes at Twin Oaks" ... when we were

> dealing with these 25 bucket harvests, it was great to just have these [local instructions] … as opposed to looking that up online and [having] to multiply by 100 at least.

Feeding over 100 people at Twin Oaks underscores how knowledge and practices must be adapted for place. Having such knowledge in the "minds of a group's collective memory" highlights the role of the ecovillage collective, in perpetuating such practices, and preventing deskilling seen in contemporary food systems (Kwik 2008; p.63). It is thus necessary to maintain knowledge for carrying such practices out. If knowledge is not properly exchanged internally, competencies are potentially lost (noted by interviewees), putting ecovillages at risk for mainstream deskilling.

While food processing must "take place" at Twin Oaks, unlike many work areas, the processing lacks its own physical workspace, which is a cited frustration for the FPM. The FPM must, instead, coordinate with cooks, to reserve the industrial-scale kitchen of the main community house, Zhankoye, or ZK. Food processing at Twin Oaks, therefore requires both a spatial and temporal synchronicity. While the practice could be vulnerable to tenuous fluctuations, the flexible use of physical space highlights the resourcefulness of the community.

The central location of ZK facilitates different elements in the food system to work together (see Figure 4.1a), also benefitting food processing practices. ZK also houses many community food practices and activities and is embedded within the community's food landscape (among orchards and grazing pastures, in Figure 4.1b). For food processing, this means shorter traveling distances between facilities and working groups. The centrally located food infrastructure stresses how place can enable integrating sustainable food practices with community life.

Changes in Twin Oaks' food processing practices shed light on meanings of food in the community. Twin Oaks previously grew and canned their own tomatoes, which interviewees perceived as being more autonomous and reliant on their own production systems. However, as a result of less garden and processing labor, they halted tomato production and now purchase commercial sauce. As stated by Timothy, a community member for 23 years:

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Figure 4.1a (*left*), *whole community, including the main community kitchen at ZK (red circle), and* **Figure 4.1b,** *food activities in the central community area, as annotated by interview participant, Mary.*

> Some people are like "why don't we have local tomato sauce?"
> And I'm like "why don't we grow our own tomatoes so we don't
> have to buy tomato sauce?"... The cost of trying to buy organic
> tomato sauce, which we use a lot of, is prohibitive.

Timothy emphasizes the contradiction – community members request organic products over the current "conventional" sauce, to align with their values around sustainability and self-reliance. However, by purchasing the "more sustainable" items, they must exchange money and still rely on the mainstream economic systems Twin Oaks attempts to avoid. Beginning to rely on store bought products, Twin Oaks witnesses, what members dub, the "capitalist washing" of their community, a trend which extends beyond the community's food system, for example, also into the community's use of modern technology. Members cited changes in their food system (also including the increased purchasing and consumption of factory farmed meat) when expressing fears that their community values are becoming diluted by an encroaching mainstream society. The growing tendency to outsource resources could be evidence of Twin Oaks' diminishing connection with their food system and their place-based relationships.

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Zooming out: food processing as a platform for external collaboration

Through connections made with the neighboring community, Twin Oaks members initiated a "food rescuing collective," where they collaborate with other ICs and the local food bank to impact food sustainability on a broader scale. Realizing the local foodbank is oversupplied with many almost-expired supermarket donations, a Twin Oaks member, Paul, coordinated with the foodbank to intercept and re-distribute the food to other rural ICs in the county. To prevent spoilage, this community network collectively processes and re-distributes the excess, applying the rationalities of Twin Oaks' internal food processing practices, to a broader scale. Mary, a librarian, farmer, mom, and 17 year-long member of Twin Oaks describes:

> We got 8 pallets of strawberries. A smaller group couldn't possibly do anything with that but … [the FPM] organized this big food processing effort and people processed strawberries around the clock and we had frozen strawberries and strawberry pies and jams and strawberry daiquiris and we had this whole stash of them for the winter too.

Involving the whole community in these efforts supports developing, as stated by Paul, "food processing capacity[ies], internally." He elaborates:

> Often times there's a supply much greater than we can deal with immediately consuming. We're working to … draw labor from other communities … to process food

Such collaboration is valuable for the network of starting ICs, as the surplus can "supplement their income" and provide for their basic needs, as stated by Paul. By using food that would be discarded, the initiative addresses issues of overproduction, also highlighting how ecovillages interact with industrial and global-scale food systems. Aided by the collective labor and physical infrastructure available, this partnership builds upon place-based resources and further strengthens the network of rural ICs and experiments of collective and sustainable living. This initiative demonstrates how food practices benefit the immediate community, while providing resources for building capacities at a greater scale.

Internal food processing practices at Twin Oaks afford capacities for external collaboration. Interviewees emphasized food processing's role in addressing community goals, including connecting to sustainable food systems, avoiding the exchange of money, and promoting autonomy and self-reliance. Outside of the community, food processing practices initiated by Twin Oaks members salvages surplus food, turning waste into resources, which then recirculates among external (IC) networks. This connects rural ICs, building upon local knowledge and resources, and potentially creates a web of mutual support, strengthening rural livelihoods.

4.4.2. The Food Lobby at the Los Angeles Eco-Village: outreach for an urban resource center

The food-related practice observed at LAEV centers around the so-called Food Lobby. Comparable to both formal and informal food cooperatives and community supported agriculture (CSA) schemes, the Food Lobby is member-operated and possible through collective purchasing power, aligning with sustainable food systems through purchasing directly from local farmers, limiting food miles, and encouraging democratic decision-making (Tremblay et al. 2019).

The Food Lobby consists of a bulk room and a weekly vegetable box. After visiting farmers' markets on Sundays, a local organic vegetable farmer delivers leftover produce, which is divided into $10 shares. An organic distributor in Oregon supplies the bulk room, which includes staples such as grains, beans, dried fruit, nuts, and coffee (bought from local roasters). In the words of Marilyn, the Workshift Coordinator:

> [At] the [conventional] store ... you see all this crap you don't need ...but ... [the bulk room], is like a condensed version of the most basic necessities that have been agreed upon by everybody, so it streamlines your food experience.

As such, the bulk room is seen to represent a healthy and sustainable alternative, while also reflecting the democratically-determined selection of foods by program participants.

While the Food Lobby is open to members outside the ecovillage, all participants (who receive discounts) must volunteer to maintain low overhead costs. This project can be seen as an example of limiting wasted produce and providing also urban dwellers access to affordable local organic vegetables, connecting to environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

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Zooming in on spatial and social components of the Food Lobby

The bulk store of the Food Lobby is located in a vacant apartment unit at LAEV, which previously hosted a person displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Once they departed, discussions emerged for addressing the community's own emergency preparedness, through a food supply, which the Food Lobby still embodies today. The vegetable distribution occurs in the community's communal lobby area (hence the name), which otherwise hosts meetings, conferences, and a bi-weekly Saturday tour. However, in the absence of planned events, the space often remains vacant, apart from residents' intermittent foot traffic. Sunday afternoons, the farmer delivers vegetable crates, which volunteers sort into equal shares. The sorting sessions allow for sharing experiences and knowledge, with much of the conversation centering around the vegetables themselves, for example, making zucchini bread and refrigerator pickles, and other strategies to manage the surplus. Sorting in the hallway or lobby areas illustrates, similar to Twin Oaks, a flexible use of space in ecovillages and the visibility and centrality of sustainable food practices in such communities.

The spatial and temporal moment of the bulk room store and Food Lobby initiate what many interviewees commented to be a "social scene". Both are "open" at corresponding times, when volunteers, customers, and ecovillage members are known to trickle in and informally converse in the shared spaces. Located at the building's entrance, the space enables social interactions within the initiative and for non-participating residents, arguably raising visibility and awareness of the initiative.

The Food Lobby's social components highlight how members' lifestyles, interests / values, and competencies are integral to their participation and relevant for building sustainable food systems. Members' lifestyles reinforce their participation in the program, through their food preferences and collective cooking and eating practices –which arguably also support sustainable food alternatives. Many participants, who live at LAEV or other ICs, commented that they share the weekly box, finding it's too large for one individual. Interviewees cite collective cooking, shopping, and eating practices to support the Food Lobby's collective purchasing. Thus, evidence

not only suggests that collective processes support sustainable food provisioning, but also that food provisioning made available through the Food Lobby initiates collective food practices. Marilyn elaborates how personal interests and values also motivate participation, which "has to be a unique combination of someone who needs it financially, who cares about food, who cares about food justice". Issues of food justice were echoed by other interviewees, illustrating members' structural urban food access concerns that reach beyond the community. In addition to these aspects, participants also emphasized the necessity to align cooking capacities, time to cook, as well as time to pick up the box. Kelly, a LAEV resident, comments how the box's contents discourage her participation, saying "it's a very low amount of things that I get [at the Food Lobby] because it is a lot of like hippie food." "Hippie food", in this sense implies, for example, organic vegetables and whole grains, emphasizing principles of health and sustainability. According to Kaufman (2018), this notion has influenced mainstream diets since 1960s. However, "hippie food" has, at the same time been criticized for giving an impression of moral superiority and elitism (Guthman 2003). In addition, as our interviewee Kelly points out, hippie food can be overly pragmatic and bland in taste, therefore not appealing to many customers (herself included). While access to the Food Lobby could incentivize members to expand their tastes and creative cooking aptitudes, perhaps there are also limiting factors for participation in the program, which will be elaborated upon in the following section.

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Zooming out: Food Lobby expansion potentials and limitations

The Food Lobby fits into LAEV's attempts to "reinvent what it means to live in a city" – through living more sustainably and being a demonstration project for LA. LAEV fills the role as a demonstration project in a variety of ways, not only through the physical interventions they carry out on their own property but also their awareness-raising attempts in the neighborhood. A good example is the gray water irrigation systems in the community. LAEV organized workshops around the installation process to

assist individuals to replicate the procedure in their own home. The community further fulfills their goals in relation to being a demonstration project by capitalizing on external networks and resources to incubate projects through the nonprofit Cooperative Resources and Services Project (CRSP). CRSP acts as the fiscal umbrella for social justice and environmental sustainability-based initiatives, including the LA Bicycle Kitchen, Cafecito Organico, and Greywater Action. The Food Lobby is a similar incubation project, addressing urban food access.

Interviewees hinted at goals of the Food Lobby's expansion, towards a more formalized food cooperative, implying it move to a larger and more accessible space. This ambition has, simultaneously, been criticized. Lois, the founder of CRSP and LAEV, reflects:

> A lot of people [members] don't like that [the possibility of moving the Food Lobby] at all. They like the intimacy of it here. I like it too but I think that it should grow.

Lois' quote echoes contradictions at LAEV and other ecovillages – balancing desires to be autonomous and focus on their own community, with aspirations for wider influence.

The interviewees list the Food Lobby's specific product selection as a potential barrier for engagement in their central LA neighborhood, Koreatown. While aiming to offer staples, members reflect that food available could signify "hippie" or "white person" food, deterring the ecovillages' predominantly Latino and Korean neighborhood. Corey, the Food Lobby Food Buyer, expands:

> A lot of the people in the neighborhood are from Central and South America and we don't carry the foods that they like to eat, other than a few kinds of beans. So, they've tried shopping here, but it hasn't been a great experience for them.

Intentionally low costs are overshadowed by other social and cultural barriers, limiting involvement from diverse cultural backgrounds. While many consumers eat foods based on taste and familiarity, food also provides a connection with cultural and ethnic

heritage (Fuster 2017), pointing to the *cultural* meanings of food and the relevance of its context. Interviewees also cited language and cultural differences as a reason why LAEV has difficulty involving their neighborhood. While many residents wish to engage with their community, many simultaneously hesitate at the risk of coming off as patronizing. Kelly describes:

> I feel like if we reach out to our immediate neighbors and we're like "look what we're doing over here, we're a bunch of white people and we live ecologically, don't you want to do what we're doing?" It feels really condescending to me.

Sara, a LAEV resident, also remarks that she would "like to know how to form relationships with [their neighbors] first and then introduce them to the ecovillage" but feels "the best way to form that relationship would be to learn the language that they're most comfortable with." LA's encroaching gentrification was also often raised in interviews. Residents, while cognizant of the ecovillage's demographics and potential to contribute to gentrification in their neighborhood, actively attempt to counteract such forces, through offering affordable housing and bilingual education. Interviewees also described neighborhood interactions to include painting street murals with their neighbors and hosting meetings for local action groups (ex. Koreatown Popular Assembly and LA Tenets Union). These examples illustrate how LAEV is not only active in their community but also, and importantly, aware of their nuanced role in their neighborhood and in the city. At LAEV, food activism helps contribute towards their goals for establishing a platform for engagement and action in their community (which they have seen success and interest in), however, can also reveal potential blind spots, requiring members to reflect upon their own position in the community.

In sum, the Food Lobby is an example of a community developing creative and sustainable solutions for urban food provisioning (i.e. overconsumption and food access), based in collective community action. The bulk room and vegetable box limit packaging waste and enhance the wider community's access to sustainably sourced

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products through their collective buying power. The vegetable box provides a venue for a local farmer to sell leftover produce, reducing food waste. While LAEV and the Food Lobby strive to maintain an accessible product, the celebrated intimacy could discourage certain populations, and implores the question of *who* is this sustainable alternative for?

4.4.3. Seed saving at Finney Farm: Dissemination across scales

Saving seeds for future use protects heirloom varieties and is relevant to sustainable food systems. When a seed is not propagated, circulated or stored properly, it risks declining germination rates and contributing to a loss of biodiversity, which is occurring at an alarming rate in a period of unsustainable industrial agriculture and climate change (Wiskerke 2009). On a local scale, community groups rally for seed diversity and sovereignty by creating seed banks, libraries, or exchanges (Helicke 2015). Seed saving at Finney Farm aligns with the above goals for building sustainable food systems through propagating seeds for their own garden use and their seed distribution outreach program, the Seed Distro.

Finney Farm began seed saving through curating their garden for their Pacific-Northwest climate – reducing external inputs and highlighting the role of place in building the community's sustainable food system. Seeds were first distributed to family and friends, and then at an annual local barter fair. Witnessing the seeds' popularity, the community up-scaled the operation, and now grow, package, and freely distribute 10,000 packages of organic, heirloom, open-pollinated seeds. Seed distribution aligns with Finney Farm's goals of community education and outreach, as stated in their bylaws, connecting seed saving to goals that extend beyond the community

Zooming in on spatial and social components of the Seed Distro

Seed saving at Finney Farm happens in the communal garden, the community house (for drying and storage), and the barn (for drying

and storage). Food practices are foregrounded in common areas. While the communal areas are open to all residents, they are most heavily trafficked by the interns and volunteers, who stay in the community house, and when residents engage in food-related tasks, such as canning, dehydrating, which also occur in the community house. However, as with the dynamic nature of the community, the use of these spaces is flexible depending on current residents and projects. These communal food spaces are integrated into the developed area of Finney Farm, in line with their "permaculture zones". Jamie, a long-term community member, who also leads many garden and seed projects, elaborates:

> We really want [the gardens] all to be community centered and we want people to have to pass through that space in order to get essentially anywhere. So it's really intentional.

Through designing community and food areas with this approach, food meanings are integrated into the community landscape, raising residents' awareness of the community's food system. Christi, a long-term resident, highlights the importance of the space, saying that for "a lot of people who are drawn to being here and living here, it's just as much about the beauty and serenity of it as it is about having the space to farm". Jamie illustrates these permaculture zones when mapping community food practices (Figure 4.2). Thus, seed saving's physical place foregrounds how sustainable food practices are integrated into Finney Farm's community life.

The Seed Distro connects to social activities, including knowledge sharing and communal labor. Competencies necessary for seed saving extend across the food system, and build on knowledge of other food practices, such as gardening. During her stay, the first author observed intentional teaching processes, for example, farm workers being given instructions for harvesting plants that had "gone to seed". When community members were unavailable, experienced volunteers would explain it to others, illustrating how a knowledge hierarchy facilitated efficient gardening and seed saving work. Similar to Twin Oaks, the collection and transmission of knowledge in the community proved vital for carrying out activities

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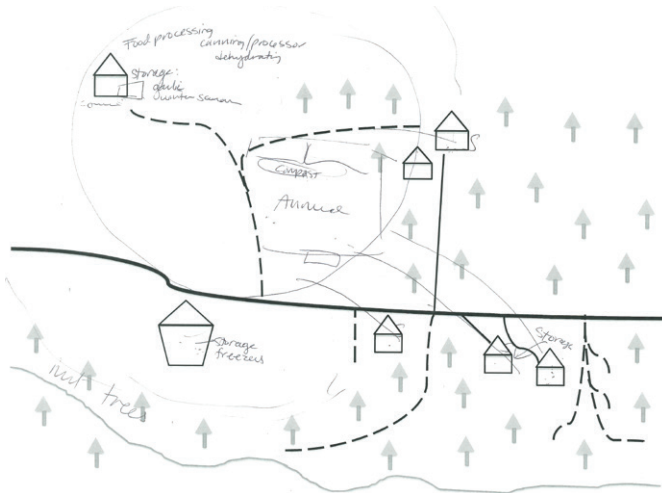
Figure 4.2 *Jamie's map of food practices at Finney Farm*

related to maintaining a sustainable food system. However, Richard, a Finney Farm member, emphasizes how gardening is merely one component of the community experience, stating:

> We can provide everything from really sort-of hands on knowledge in the garden ... and also how critical thinking applies to that and how communication applies to that. I mean, there are just so many layers. For me it's just a really organic experience.

Therefore, gardening and seed saving can be considered means through which the ecovillage communicates their broader ideals. Internal knowledge exchange also illustrates the community's wider impact, through teaching volunteers, who eventually depart and bring these competencies with them.

Together, Finney Farm residents package dried seeds in the wintertime, which interview participants describe as an opportunity for the community to unite. Val, who grew up on the farm, states:

> If we didn't have the garden and the seed distribution thing, and all the things we do for our community, we wouldn't have our community ... we wouldn't all have kinda a main goal.

The Seed Distro addresses the underlying mission of Finney Farm and benefits residents, in contributing to community cohesion and offering an opportunity to participate in socially and environmentally responsible action.

Zooming out: The Seed Distro's dissemination across scales

When developing their operation, the community applied for and received an $1,800 grant from a local food co-op – external funding that helped widen the scope of the project. Jamie, the program's driving force, notes that this grant "connected [them] with other recipients of the grant ... to make these networking connections". As a result, Finney Farms' seeds are distributed through food banks, which more efficiently connect the community with the food-insecure populations they wish to target. Widely popular, the community notes in an online promotional video "food bank recipients were frequently specific in their gratitude" otherwise "resort[ing] to dollar seed packets from Walmart that they knew were inferior". Many community residents similarly cite the value of the program for their immediate rural community, which is a USDA-designated food desert. Freely distributing seeds directly to members of the community or through institutions, Finney Farm provides an alternative to mass-produced and less locally-adapted products. Thus, resourceful networks across scales allow the community to preserve their local biodiversity, resist large seed companies and build capacities for a place-based food system.

Finney Farm members and outside participants additionally table at events to distribute seeds and provide information about their project. As stated by Christi:

> I've gone several years to that [Environmental Law conference] in a row and to meet people who were there the year

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before and have stories about the seeds that they've planted and friends that they've sent the seeds to that they're growing in Florida.

Residents connect the dissemination and impacts of their actions and the opportunity to participate in larger causes of seed diversity and sovereignty. Seed saving exemplifies how one action can be integral in building what Christi describes to be "its own little unique system" on a place-specific scale, while having the potential to propagate meanings of food sustainability across scales.

That being said, the values central to Finney Farm do not always align with the values held by their broader communities (ex. regarding political or religious views). Interviewees recognized that opposing values were inevitable and attempted to look past such differences unless they conflicted with their outreach projects. For example, a Finney Farm resident referenced a nearby food bank, run by a church, that required potential beneficiaries to have a private interview with the minister in order to access the food. While it was unclear what this interview exactly entailed, Finney Farm was skeptical of potential religious pressures put on by the church and did not agree with this procedure. The ecovillage still sought opportunities to support this area (finding other venues through which to distribute seeds), however, in this instance, the disagreement in how things should be done deterred Finney Farm from initiating a partnership with the church. This is an example of how differing values and principles could impact Finney Farms' wider networks and relationships.

Seed saving at Finney farm is valuable for residents, their rural area, and outside communities. While the physical place of Finney Farm germinates capacities in growing the seeds and involving residents, the community's collective knowledge and labor drives the project to initiate a wider-scale impact. Thus, the integration of physical and social resources is integral in how the Seed Distro is based in the community and extends outwards. Dissemination, intrinsic in spreading seeds across scales, makes the practice of saving seeds an example of how internal food practices contribute to greater food system sustainability.

4.5. Discussion and conclusions

This chapter sought to analyze sustainable food practices in ecovillages as both place-based and relational and to explore how such practices contribute to sustainable food systems. By using such an approach, the aim of the chapter was to better understand the potential contribution of ecovillage food practices for food system sustainability. The studied food practices highlight place-based networks, resources and knowledge, as essential for ecovillages' contribution towards sustainable food systems. When tracing ecovillages' food practices and their impacts through "zooming in" and "zooming out", we illustrated how such locally embedded practices influence sustainability within the ecovillages, while simultaneously extending and contributing to the sustainable food systems in their broader communities.

4.5.1. Place-based and relational food practices

One of the two core concepts informing this chapter – foodscapes – enabled us to draw attention to how individual practices might simultaneously be both place-based and networked, facilitating a more nuanced analysis of ecovillage food practices. Our findings illustrate that, while ecovillage food practices emerged locally, each community also acted as a hub, initiating impact on a wider scale for their food system and community. Finney Farm exemplified how a sustainable food practice (seed saving) developed for an internal need, and, through networks and care, expanded beyond its initial local context, to provide resources to the broader community. Empirically "zooming in" and "zooming out" inspired by Social Practice Theory (Nicolini, 2012) enabled us to explore both, place and relationality, complimenting the theoretical foodscapes lens.

The relationality of food practices was largely witnessed through the dynamic connections that ecovillages sought out and built up with their neighbors and communities. Based on feedback from their wider community, ecovillages initiated tailor-made programs as solutions to unsustainable gaps they witnessed needing to be

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addressed. At Finney Farm, for example, residents connected their farm's seed growing capacity with their surroundings' need for fresh and healthy food access. Furthermore, established community relationships provided opportunities to expand their projects, including contacts with local and statewide community groups (i.e. food banks), other ICs, and local farmers. These connections opened possibilities for community partners to support the ecovillages' projects, while also benefiting themselves (for example, having an outlet for surplus food, or receiving free seeds). Therefore, when compared with Chitewere's (2010) critiques of communities' limited inward focus, our findings illustrate how ecovillages have evolved, to taking on greater responsibilities and actions towards social and environmental change. Through responding to mainstream activities and depending on place-specific resources, sustainable food practices in ecovillages are dynamic and relational. Viewing food practices relationally helps trace relationships and resources, for opportunities to challenge unsustainable practices towards more sustainable alternatives.

Interactions with mainstream actors, however, were not unproblematic. At Twin Oaks, for example, several members feared that increased resource exchange with the mainstream could indicate the community succumbing to a market capitalist system, which is what many members wished to avoid. Ecovillages also recounted practices of neighboring communities based in values that differed their own, for example, Finney Farm's experience with the nearby church, as described above. Such instances underline differing community values, priorities, and perceptions about their identity, and therefore difficulties for initiating and maintaining external relationships. While this could point to a barrier for ecovillages' actions, it must also be recognized as an inevitable challenge in initiating greater-scale impact and change, especially in more mainstream society.

Nevertheless, all ecovillages researched actively attempted to be present and influence the public by acting as "demonstration projects" for mainstream society. For example, LAEV is intentionally socially and spatially integrated into their urban environment, and attempts to enhance local contact through involvement in their

community. Their visibility increases the value of internal practices, modeling what is possible by "being the change they seek" (see also Ergas 2010; p. 40). Thus, practices occurring within the three ecovillages are intended to have further impact through trickling outside of the communities through such interactions. Similarly, communities' openness around their food practices enabled inter-action and participation – witnessed by communities hosting public events and sharing resources with the public (ex. free seeds, access to the food lobby), which could indicate the communities' influ-ence for their surrounding communities (cf. Westkog et al., 2018). However, food practices revealed nuances (i.e. internal tensions, contradictions, and competing visions) within these communities, including food purchasing decisions and perceptions of expansion. For example, public actions were not always received favorably within the ecovillages, as many residents saw these as impeding on their privacy. Such internal disagreements suggest tensions in ecovillages playing a potentially larger role in sustainability transformations and point to the compromises and flexibility that may be needed between collective actions and individual views.

Additionally, place-based food knowledge was essential for communities' internal food practices as well as a wider impact on sustainable food systems. Findings revealed that ecovillages accumulated knowledge and competencies (ex. about place-adapted seed varieties), which were enacted through collective practices (ex. gardening and saving seeds). Through then hosting public knowl-edge-sharing events (ex. workshops and conferences), ecovillages expanded their network and developed themselves as social hubs. Meaning, the ecovillages are strongly nested within their larger community, and play a role in accumulating and disseminating knowledge and competencies around sustainable food practices. Similar to Calvet-Mir et al.'s (2016) findings of local ecological knowledge's transmission through home gardens, ecovillages' phys-ical and social place played a vital role in exchanging knowledge.

The prominence of knowledge exchange activities, such as work-shops, internships, and trainings, highlights the value of ecovillages for sharing different kinds of, perhaps innovative, knowledge beyond their immediate community. This research witnessed

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ecovillages open, for the broader public, to provide such services as well as to specifically promote and teach their sustainable food practices, which were often later applied by individuals outside of the community. The relevance of sharing such knowledge on e.g. food processing is heightened by "deskilling" witnessed in modern unsustainable agro-food systems (Jaffe and Gertler 2006). Offering a physical and social place to exchange knowledge alternative to mainstream discourses "represent[s] a challenge to dominant development trajectories and to conservative doctrines of necessity and inevitability" (Jaffe and Gertler 2006; p. 158). Results illustrate that, through providing such a place, ecovillages confront conventional knowledge, and support knowledge around sustainable place-based practices. Knowledge sharing is therefore one way in which ecovillages highlight the importance of relational networks and place for contributing to food sustainability.

4.5.2. Ecovillage foodscapes and sustainable food systems

Foodscapes illuminates a landscape of interconnected food practices. Sustainable food systems emphasize a place-based approach, with shorter physical and mental distances, and the connecting and intertwining of practices around social and environmental care. Employing the foodscapes lens at ecovillages highlights how communities oriented around sustainability utilize their social and spatial resources to craft places that foreground these values, for example being resourceful and integrating food into living environments (Ulug and Horlings 2019). Furthermore, what this chapter contributes is evidence of the added value of the interconnected and relational networks for sustainable food system change.

Viewing ecovillage food practices in relation to their wider communities, through the foodscapes lens, supports place not being limited to the local context (Born and Purcel 2006; Kenis and Mathijs 2014). Through food practices, we see how ecovillages are embedded in external communities as resources centers, with their place-based quality simultaneously employed to enact change at a greater scale. Therefore, the foodscapes lens aligns with the

relational perspective of place, which contends that it is "in and across places that food actors come together" (Sonnino et al. 2016; p. 486). That being said, we also recognize that, similar to local (Born and Purcel 2006; Kenis and Mathijs 2014), place-based food practices and food systems are not, by default, sustainable. Rather, the focus on "'place' brings to the fore a more nuanced emphasis on the socio-environmental specificities of food and agriculture," also helping trace resources, knowledge, and meanings (Lever et al. 2019; p. 98). For example, in Los Angeles, water travels for hundreds of miles, making many forms of water-intensive agriculture unsustainable (Pincetl et al. 2016). Tracing such practices and resources can help inspire creative sustainable alternatives, such as installing gray water irrigation systems, as seen at LAEV. This chapter highlights how places are embedded with implications. While the ecovillages researched are open to public visits and interactions, they, potentially present accessibility barriers for those with diverging values or lifestyles. Therefore, through the foodscapes lens' focus on social relations, we can better highlight such nuances and better ground sustainability impacts in concrete practices, also following from Robertson (2018).

Throughout this chapter we have illustrated the value of the foodscapes lens to better understand the role of ecovillages for sustainable food systems. Using the foodscapes lens, we frame ecovillages' sustainability impacts across scales, connecting local community action to globally-scaled issues. For example, at Twin Oaks, residents used place-based resources to address the external issue of food waste in a nearby town. While food waste can be linked to overproducing global economic systems (Holt-Giménez 2017), it manifests on a local level and can inspire local action (Ulug and Trell 2020), also breaking down dualisms between a simply "global" or "local" food system (Hinrichs 2015; Morgan et al. 2006). The initiatives in this chapter show communities taking on action, with impacts that echo across different levels in their food system.

Furthermore, the foodscapes lens foregrounds, not only food's relationships with place, but also the encompassing multi-scalar systems and institutions (Miewald and McCann 2014). Transitioning to a sustainable food system is argued to necessitate a transformation

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of power relations and political participation, towards more democratic forms (Blythe et al. 2018; De Schutter et al. 2019; Hassanein 2003). Ecovillages, which have a potentially confronting relationship with their surrounding communities, are useful to illustrate such interactions, seen, for example, with the creeping changes towards the mainstream at Twin Oaks and the neighborhood dynamics at LAEV. Recognizing how environmental change is intertwined with social struggles (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003), the foodscapes lens highlights how food and social relationships are tied to place, to help provide a more nuanced understanding of sustainable food system change, one where the material resources as well as the social dynamics play a role.

Ecovillages are an example of how to expand the space for adaptation, through sustaining resourceful environments, bringing small-scale practices and initiatives to fruition, and expanding their reach. Examining community practices provides an understanding of the place-based context where they materialize. Drawing out specific elements lends insight into how practices can be translated to and influence more mainstream society. That being said, this research does not envision ecovillages as a catchall solution, rather, a source of inspiration and insight into how resourceful collective practices contribute towards more sustainable societies. Furthermore, while this research focuses on one practice in each community, we also witnessed many food practices which did not extend beyond the ecovillage context, for example, garden produce, which was largely consumed internally. Interviewees emphasized that their community food practices often mirrored daily community operations and processes, with their internal food systems reflecting the self-reliance and autonomy of their community. However, participants acknowledged challenges for navigating and engaging with globally-scaled food systems, to ultimately initiate a transformational food system beyond self-sufficiency.

Throughout this research, many themes arose beyond the scope of this chapter, which we hope will be incorporated into future research. Foremost, we found many contradictions between community members' identity and ecovillages' goals towards more sustainable food systems and societies, briefly touched upon in

this chapter. These could be challenges to communities' attempts towards wider-scale transformation and should therefore be further researched.

Through combining the foodscapes lens and SPT, this research explored food practices at ecovillage communities and unearthed how food, not only bridges ecovillages with more mainstream society, but also illuminates how ecovillages are fertile ground for developing sustainable food systems and societies.

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Collective identity supporting sustainability transformations in ecovillage communities

Abstract

Ecovillages are collective projects that attempt to integrate sustainability principles into daily community life, while also striving to be demonstration projects for mainstream society. As spaces of experimentation, they can provide valuable insights into sustainability transformations. Through shared values and interpersonal connections, ecovillages possess collective identities, which provide a platform for enacting their ideals. However, many ecovillage residents question how to best enhance their role as models, resources centers, and pieces of a greater movement toward sustainability transformations, while simultaneously preserving their unique community and identity. In relation to the above, this chapter addresses the questions: what can collective identity in ecovillage communities teach us about objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations? And how can the perspective of collective identity highlight challenges for ecovillages for initiating sustainability transformations? Sustainability transformations encompass objective (behaviors) and subjective (values) dimensions, however the interactions between these spheres deserve more scholarly attention. Using ethnographic data and in-depth interviews from three ecovillages in the United States, this chapter reveals the value in collective identity for underscoring belonging and interpersonal relationships in sustainability transformations. Furthermore, the collective identity perspective exposes paradoxes and frictions between ecovillages and the societal structures and systems they are embedded within.

Key words

5.1. Introduction

Multiple scholars have called upon the necessity for societal transformations in order to address current sustainability challenges, such as spatial inequalities, poverty, resource depletion, climate change, ecological hazards, and food insecurity insecurity (O'Brien 2012; Pelling 2010). This so-called "transformative turn" in sustainability research attempts to address the unsustainable systemic roots in our society and confront different kinds of knowledge and experiences (Dentoni et al. 2017).

Ecovillages, or intentional communities (ICs), can be considered as "frontrunners" and spaces of experimentation in sustainability transformations (Escribano et al. 2020; Pisters et al. 2020). Intentional communities refer to communal living arrangements, more broadly, with sub-categories also including religious communities and communes (Meijering et al. 2007). Ecovillages focus specifically on sustainability and living in a way to reduce their environmental impact (Gillman 1991). The Global Ecovillage Network, a network that provides a database as well as knowledge sharing opportunities, has recorded over 1,000 ecovillage communities wordside, with 109 registered in the United States (GEN 2021), and many more unregistered. Ecovillage sustainable food practices, have, for example, gained prominence in sustainability debates (Brombin 2015; Ulug et al. 2021), through centering food systems around local communities and environmental care (Blay-Palmer & Koc 2010). Rather than being concerned with the "symptoms" of unsustainability, ecovillages also address structural roots by reorganizing their labor systems, challenging capitalist notions of property, and confronting patriarchal structures – therefore classifying them as transformative or radical alternatives (Temper et al. 2018). Despite their innovativeness, ecovillages are still underresearched in geography (Lopez and Weaver 2019).

Transformations focus on upending business-as-usual and point to drastic measures necessary for society to tackle global challenges such as climate change (Feola 2014). We align this chapter with the transformational adaptation approach, which could be defined as a radical system change, challenging the status quo, and implementing new regimes (Blythe et al. 2018; Feola 2014; Pelling

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2010). We specifically contribute to discussions of how concrete behaviors and values can support sustainability transformations (Ballard et al. 2010; Horlings & Padt 2013; Wilber 2000) as well as challenges for communities. Transformational adaptation especially "requires a cultural shift from seeing adaptation as managing the environment 'out there' to learning how to reorganise social and socio-ecological relationships, procedures and underlying values 'in here'" (Pelling 2010, p. 88). Transformational adaptation is not solely concerned with sustainability indicators, rather, is categorized into complimentary "inner" and "outer" dimensions (see: Ballard et al. 2010; Horlings 2015a; Wilber 2000). The "outer" dimension refers to "objective" behaviors and practices, while the "inner" or "subjective" dimension refers to motivations, beliefs, and values, on an individual or collective level (Wilber 2000). Recognizing both dimensions acknowledges humanity's role and responsibility in climate change responses (O'Brien 2010).

Despite the growing interest in the subjective dimension of transformations and the wealth of research on the objective dimension, there is little understanding how these spheres interact (Ballard et al. 2010; Horlings 2015b). Climate change will induce social and economic burdens that require a combination of awareness, engagement, and planning capacities (Ballard et al. 2010), in subjective and objective realms. Greater insight into interactions across spheres can therefore bring perspective into addressing sustainability transformations, as well as recognizing "how humans both create and respond to change" (O'Brien 2009, p. 1). The aim of this chapter is to better understand interactions between subjective and objective dimensions of sustainability transformations, through the lens of collective identity.

Collective identity can be described as a sense of "we-ness" based on shared attributes, experiences, and culturally-dependent characteristics (Snow 2001). Composed of shared values and action in collective groupings (Fominaya 2010; Melucci 1995), collective identity gives weight to both objective and subjective dimensions of transformations and can help explore how these dimensions simultaneously manifest (Temper et al. 2018). Specifically, collective identity recognizes the role of social connectedness for taking

action on shared ideals and ambitions. An emerging body of research recognizes the value of (collective) identity for sustainability transformations (Brown et al. 2019; Temper et al. 2018) and socio-ecological change (Leap and Thompson 2018), however the connection between collective identity and objective / subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations has not yet been made.

The concept of collective identity has been thoroughly studied in the context of social movements (Fominaya 2010; Melucci 1995), and ecovillages (Ergas 2010; Westkog et al. 2018), where it is found to be integral as a "dynamic force for change" (Holland et al. 2008, p. 97). While collective identity in ecovillage communities can help motivate members to act on their sustainability-related values, such ambitions face challenges when attempting to initiate a sustainability transformation in both dimensions – negotiating collective values and sustainable behaviors (Ergas 2010; Westkog et al. 2018). Ecovillage communities, which take on sustainability-related actions, based upon sustainability-related values, relate to both subjective and objective dimensions of sustainability transformations (Pisters et al. 2020). Therefore, this chapter situates ecovillages as a space to explore both dimensions of sustainability transformations. By also exploring challenges for initiating sustainability transformations, we aim to highlight potential tensions that can arise in communities.

Our central questions are, what can collective identity in ecovillage communities teach us about objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations? And how can the perspective of collective identity highlight challenges for ecovillages for initiating sustainability transformations? Through a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation carried out in 2018, this chapter explores sustainability practices and collective identity at three ecovillage communities in the US, including Twin Oaks in rural Virginia, Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV), and Finney Farm in rural Washington State. This chapter will first elaborate on the sustainability transformation perspective and connect transformations to collective identity. The empirical section will explore sustainability transformations in the ecovillages, and thereafter apply a collective identity lens to transformations in communities. We will end with a discussion drawing out the relevance of collective identity for

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subjective / objective dimensions of sustainability transformation, as well as challenges that surface in ecovillages.

5.2. Theoretical framework

5.2.1. Sustainability transformations

Transformations encompasses alterations in physical forms and systems (IPCC 2018). Unlike incremental adaptation, which have been criticized as insufficient for combating global challenges such as climate change, transformational adaptations have been defined by their large scale and intensity, novelty to a site or system, and ability to occur in or be transferred to different places (Kates et al. 2012). Furthermore, transformations are "an internal shift that results in long-lasting changes in the way that one experiences and relates to oneself, others, and the world" (O'Brien & Sygna 2013, p. 1). In this chapter we employ and build upon O'Brien's (2018) definition, which highlights three-tiers: (practical) concrete actions and interventions; (political) structures, norms, rules, and institutions; and (personal) values and worldviews. The outermost personal sphere can potentially influence the previous two spheres, shaping behaviors and institutional structures "from inside out" (O'Brien & Sygna 2013), and has been considered vital for sustainability transformations (Gillard et al. 2016).

Sustainability transformations specifically aim to study the "dynamics, barriers, and processes that move *systems* in the direction of sustainability" (Anderson et al. 2019, p. 3). We conceptualize this "direction" of sustainability to include supporting "social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems," (Agyeman et al. 2002, p. 87), as well as steering values away from overconsumption, resource depletion, and social and economic injustices (Vinnari and Vinnari 2014). Through, for example, collective ownership of resources, ecovillages strive to collectively reflect upon and commit to sustainability ideals (Chitewere 2017), and could provide insight into initiating experimental spaces of transformations.
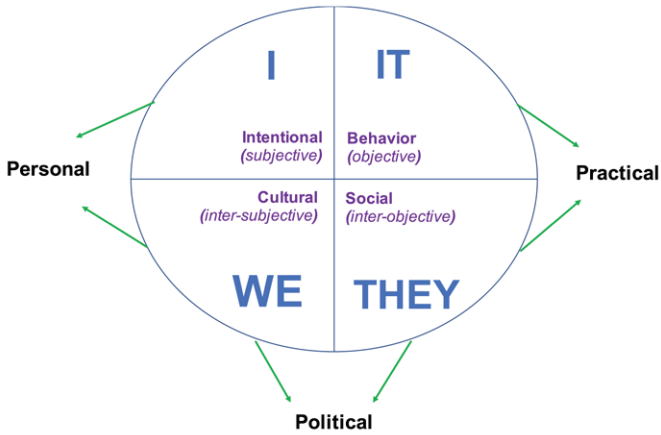
Figure 5.1 *Operationalization of sustainability transformations, combining O'Brien's (2018) transformation framework and Wilber's (2000) All Quadrants All Levels (AQAL) model.*

In this chapter we combine O'Brien's (2018) transformation framework with the subjective and objective dimensions in Wilber's (2000) All Quadrants All Levels (AQAL) model. We apply this updated model (see Figure 5.1) to the ecovillages studied, to help ground community activities in sustainability transformations theory. Wilber's (2000) AQAL model designates the "I", "WE", "IT", and "THEY" dimensions of transformation. The IT (objective) and THEY (inter-objective) quadrants correlate to O'Brien's (2018) practical sphere, concentrating on actions, skills, and behaviors, at an individual (IT) and collective (THEY) level. The I (subjective) and WE (inter-subjective) quadrants are comparable to O'Brien's (2018) personal sphere, focusing on "inner" characteristics, such as values and worldviews, also at an individual (I) and collective (WE) dimension. The THEY and WE dimensions also relate to O'Brien's (2018) political dimension, through their focus on collective systems, structures, and norms. Thus, the WE links to the political and personal spheres, as it represents both, collective framings, as well as how these are formalized in institutions. Combining both models provides a framework through which to position ecovillages' (objective) actions and (subjective) values, as

well as how the communities relate to (mainstream) institutions, in their attempts to initiate sustainability transformations.

Ecovillage communities can help understand "on the ground" sustainable practices and how these are linked to the subjective dimension of transformation. The subjective dimension highlights internal changes of individuals and collectives, including changes of values, beliefs, and worldviews, through "deep learning" and creating new relations (O'Brien & Sygna 2013; Pisters et al. 2020). Exploring "subjective worlds" in ecovillages also helps to understand values, attitudes, and beliefs which lie at the root of our (unsustainable) systems (Ives et al. 2020; O'Brien & Sygna 2013). Alongside system changes, sustainability transformations require perspective changes of the ways in which we interact with and conceive of the world – from one embedded in growth and consumerism, towards a paradigm of intentionality, supporting human and planetary health and well-being (Ives et al. 2020). In ecovillages, the subjective dimension could materialize through a "deep experimentation with the self" towards "self-improvement, self-development, and / or self-transformation" (Sargisson 2007, p. 396-397). In this context, gardening could be viewed as an example of a spiritual practice, connecting human / natural worlds and subjective / objective dimensions (Sargisson 2007).

Interactions and alignments between the subjective and objective dimensions have been under-researched in transformations literature (Ballard et al. 2010; Horlings & Padt 2013; O'Brien 2009). The greater focus on the objective dimensions has been argued to "downplay the importance of the subjective" (O'Brien 2010, p. 1). As found with resilience, objective factors (i.e. observable indicators) cannot sufficiently explain potential discrepancies, notably individuals' capacities to adapt and respond to risks (Jones and Tanner 2015). Only together, can these dimensions understand climate change responses within the context of values and worldviews (O'Brien 2010), therefore recognizing climate action as carried out by specific (human) agents (Gillard et al. 2016; Temper et al. 2018).

Sustainable (food) practices in communities similarly connect to notions of autonomy and self-reliance (Spijker et al., 2020), a potential venue through which ecovillages act upon their sustainability

values. Ballard et al. emphasize how agency, or the capacity to act, is "not simply a personal or social construct, but occurs at moments, often fleeting moments, when individual and collective, subjective and objective factors come together" (2010, p. 14). Greater public awareness, for example, can help facilitate agency and involvement (Harrison et al., 1994). Agency not only helps activate the individual and collective but is necessary to carve out opportunities for acting upon global environmental change (Macnaghten et al. 1995), and is often overlooked in systems perspectives – adjusting attention to "the who and why rather than the how and when" (Gillard et al. 2016, p. 258). Therefore, a combination of knowledge and self-responsibility could inspire individuals and communities to act, and connect objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations. This chapter will further explore how ecovillages connect their (sustainable) values and behaviors, through their collective identity.

5.2.2. Collective identity and its relevance for transformations

Through inspiring action around shared values, collective identity is a concept relevant for transformations (Holland et al. 2008; Melucci 1995; Taylor & Whittier 1992) which has been linked to ecovillage communities (Ergas 2010; Westkog et al. 2018). Collective identity in social movements is identified via three main dimensions: cognitive frameworks, collective action, and belonging (Holland et al. 2008; Melucci 1995), through which it is visible in subjective and objective dimensions (Wilber 2000).

Firstly, cognitive frameworks refer to shared meanings, enacted through community practices and behaviors (Fominaya 2010). These are similar to collective values and worldviews, and correlate to the subjective dimension of transformation, also as they mediate practices and "influence the construction of narratives and place identities" (Horlings 2015a, p. 166). Cognitive frameworks, championed by Alberto Melucci (1996), emphasizes collective identity as a *process* of negotiation and understanding, allowing for nuances in meaning-making, rather than a singular set of beliefs (Fominaya 2010). Ecovillage values support ecological and social sustainability

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and connections to the natural world (Pisters et al. 2020). Secondly, collective action actively manifests collective processes (Holland et al. 2008; Polleta & Jasper 2001), boosting an individual's collective impact (Melucci 1995). Collective action is reflected in the objective dimension of transformation, through practices and behaviors. Ecovillages exhibit collective action, shifting environmental stewardship and action from the individual to the collective (Anderson 2011). Lastly, belonging refers to a shared sense of connection, and is reinforced through shared practices and values (Polletta & Jasper 2001). Belonging is comparable to social consciousness, which is described as "awareness of being part of an interrelated community of others" and has been shown to contribute to transformations, through heightened pro-social behaviors (Schilitz et al. 2010, p. 21). Interpersonal connections are essential for uniting collectives and generating commitment among members (Gamson 2001).

Collective identity in ecovillages potentially provides insight into interactions between subjective and objective dimensions of sustainability transformations. While practices and behavior change are more visible, "a move toward activism is 'more grounded in one's sense of connectedness, one's identification with morality, and one's sense of larger meaning and purpose'" (Berman 1997, as quoted in Schiltz et al. 2010, p. 21). Therefore collective identity uniquely emphasizes interpersonal connections for prompting social change. Belonging, empathy, and trust recognize emotional experiences for informing behavior change, and have been linked to climate change responses (Brown et al. 2019; Leap and Thompson 2018). Ecovillages can potentially motivate sustainability action, through such community bonds, which this chapter will explore through collective identity.

However, collective identity is not to be romanticized in communities. Gamson reminds us that the "merging of individual and collective selves is rarely if ever complete ... however much we may identify with a movement, we have other sub-identities built around other social roles" (2001, p. 45). This points to challenges when linking collective and individual identities – a tension also seen in ecovillages (Anderson 2011). Collective identities are pluralistic and not solely based upon individual identities (Polletta & Jasper 2001).

Blythe et al. (2018) similarly cautions assuming transformation will be universal across social groups. It is therefore crucial to understand community motivations and effectiveness in enacting change – in subjective and objective realms.

Identities formed in relation to difference (Holland et al. 2008) present a paradox for groups attempting to initiate wider-scale change. This contradiction is relevant in ecovillage communities, which define themselves relative to the mainstream, while attempting to influence it (Ergas 2010; Westkog et al. 2018). Westkog et al. (2018) and Ergas (2010) research nearby mainstream communities relative to the creation of collective identities at ecovillages. When examining interactions between ecovillages' collective identities and dominant structures, Ergas (2010) confirms such paradoxes, finding that communities adapt to the mainstream society while also challenging structures in their everyday actions. In examining relations between the ecovillage and its local community, Westkog et al. find the ecovillage is "a project and locus for identity construction, heavily informed through interaction with the outside world" (2018, p. 14). These studies caution closing (identity) gaps between ecovillages and mainstream communities, which "would also mean losing its ability to promote an alternative to mainstream lifestyles" (Westkog et al. 2018, p. 17). We expand upon these papers through employing collective identity as a lens to understand challenges encountered by ecovillages for sustainability transformations.

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5.3. Methods and case descriptions

5.3.1. Methods

Case selection

This study researches collective identity and sustainability transformations at three ecovillages in the United States – Twin Oaks in rural Virginia, LAEV in Los Angeles, California, and Finney Farm, in rural Washington state. In order to reflect the diverse American landscape, this research includes communities located in the rural and (overall)

Figure 5.2 *The three ecovillages studied with their location in the United States (source: author).*

conservative South, urban (progressive) Southern California, and rural (environmentalist) Pacific Northwest (see map, Figure 5.2).

These ecovillages were chosen based on how established each community was – a combination of their longevity, number of members, and web presence (see Boyer 2015). The case selection prioritized communities that exhibited practices around sustainability, within the community, and with external communities – characteristics relevant for sustainability transformations. The prominent online directories, the Fellowship for Intentional Community and the Global Ecovillage Network, were utilized to search and select the communities. Ecovillages being listed in these indexes also indicate connections or the wish to be connected to broader community networks. A search resulted in 21 relevant ecovillages, which was narrowed to three, based on the above criteria and those willing to participate. Table 5.1 presents the three selected in terms of size, location, and length of establishment.

The aim of the research was originally to focus on the ecovillages' sustainable food practices and potential for wider scale change. However, when inner-struggles reappeared in the data analysis,

Table 5.1 *List of ecovillage communities*

Characteristics	Twin Oaks	Los Angeles Eco-Village	Finney Farm
Location	Virginia, rural	Los Angeles, CA, urban	Washington State, rural
Founding year	1967	1993	1989
Number of residents	100	40	8 (plus volunteers)

collective identity inductively emerged as a pressing issue in the communities and valuable to explore further. It became evident that, across all ecovillages studied, communities' aspirations for wider-scale change conflicted with the communities' desire for intimacy and for maintaining their unique identity. Thus, collective identity was found to be relevant, not only for explaining how communities operate, but also for making sense of barriers residents described experiences with mainstream society. After this trend resurfaced, the first author analyzed interview and observation data, with codes based on the operationalization of collective identity detailed above and the objective / subjective dimensions of transformation, using NVIVO coding software.

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Methods

This study utilizes ethnographic methods to research three ecovillage communities, employing participant observation and in-depth interviews. Ethnography is celebrated as a means through which to research climate change (e.g. Chitewere 2017; Crate 2011). As stated by Roncoli et al. (2009), ethnography takes advantage of anthropologists' ability of "being there", to connect different (local) understandings and ways of knowing. Tsing (2005) argues that ethnography can analyze spaces or "frictions" of difference, between the local and global. Therefore, anthropologists play a role looking at place-based research in communities and connecting these to

globally-focused discourses, both necessary for global challenges such as climate change (Crate 2011). Ethnography is suitable for researching ecovillages as these communities could be considered as living an "examined existence" (Lockyer 2007, p. 152), acting upon elements to intentionally change from the mainstream. Studying ecovillages through an ethnographic lens reveals a "cultural critique" (Marcus and Fischer 1986), illustrating the social world surrounding daily practices (Chitewere 2017). Therefore, ethnography reveals nuances and challenges surrounding communities.

The first author conducted ethnographic fieldwork, staying at each selected community for one month, summer 2018. During each stay, she volunteered in work areas focused around daily life and food, such as gardens and kitchens. The author plugged into visitor activities, more formally at Twin Oaks and Finney Farm, and when opportunities arose at LAEV (ex. helping organize a community conference). Observation notes documented community practices, from work areas and daily life, including passing conversations, events, and reflections, in a semi-structured diary format.

Additionally, the first author conducted 37 in-depth interviews with community members and visitors, with 16 at Twin Oaks, 11 at LAEV, and 10 at Finney Farm. Interviewees were 17 to 81 years old and an average of 43 years old, across all communities. 16 participants identified as male (43%), 17 as female (46%), two as agender or neutral (5.5%) and two who preferred not to answer (5.5%). Participant selection hinged upon their role in the community, with those in leadership or organizing roles (board members, founders, long-term members) specifically sought out. All interviewees signed informed consent forms, stating that they participated voluntarily. Names of all interviewees are changed to pseudonyms, unless the interviewee specifically requested their real name to be used. All research conducted (including informed consent and data management) has been approved by the research ethics committee of the authors' home institution.

Interviews helped understand participants' interpretations of their community's identity and community strategies for transformation. Interviewees' honesty and openness was especially valuable for unpacking contradictions and (inner) conflicts between

mainstream lifestyles and their individual beliefs and community values.

5.3.2. Case descriptions

Twin Oaks

Twin Oaks comprises of 100 adults and children, located in rural Virginia. It is the oldest of the communities researched, with roots from earlier communes in the 1960s (Kanter 1972). Its formation was inspired by the structured labor system in B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, based on members completing 42 hours of work, still existing today (Kuhlman 2007). The community's labor distribution system values all work – in income-earning and domestic areas – equally, and exemplifies Twin Oaks' egalitarian values. Twin Oaks' economic endeavors comprise of a tofu business, hammocks, seed growing, and book indexing. While community businesses ensure their financial stability, the majority of labor is household work, such as gardening, tending to the dairy cows, cooking, and cleaning. All members receive their basic needs, including food, housing, healthcare and a monthly allowance of $100. Remaining income is reinvested in the community.

Throughout most of the year, Twin Oaks hosts a three-week visitor program. In this program, visitors plug into labor areas and follow orientations to learn about community life – including orientations about the legal system, the labor system, and values. The visitor program helps to educate those interested in the life of the community, as well as supports potential members to explore whether living in the community is a good fit. Twin Oaks is also a member of a larger communal, income-sharing network in North America, the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC). The FEC provides advantages to communities, including access to an emergency health care fund, recruitment support, and labor exchanges (Environment and Ecology, 2021).

Twin Oaks is made up of a range of ages, also including young children, teenagers, and older adults. One of the resident houses is

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specifically built to accommodate older generations, to make it possible for community members to live their last days on the property. While this research did not conduct any surveys on class, race, or education level, many residents were observed to hold a university degree. Twin Oaks recognizes the low number of People of Color (POC) in their community, which has remained consistently under 10 and has led to difficulties for these members to feel heard, in their community and in the broader community movement. The ecovillage is taking action through initiating a group of Racial Equity and Advocacy Leaders – a team responsible to lead community meetings on racial justice and implement policies towards racial diversity and education (Twin Oaks, 2021)

Los Angeles Eco-Village

Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) is located in one of the densest and most diverse urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Koreatown. Comprised of former-apartment buildings, LAEV's property includes 40 housing units across three buildings, a lush courtyard and front gardens, shared work spaces and equipment (i.e. tool sheds). LAEV also helps operate the neighborhood "Learning Garden", an educational garden and example of ecovillage partnerships with neighborhood organizations within their local community. Such efforts align with the ecovillage's vision to create an eco-neighborhood, with long-term goals including becoming a car-free neighborhood.

Additionally, LAEV participates in larger networks, including the Global Ecovillage Network, as well as the more local Los Angeles Intentional Community Summit. Both are opportunities to discuss working within their community, as well as wider knowledge sharing.

While LAEV was found to be the most racially diverse of the three communities, approximately two-thirds of their members were observed to be white. Ecovillagers' profiles differ compared to their neighborhood, which mostly consists of residents with a Korean or Central / South American background. That being said, community members are aware of this difference and actively engage with their neighbors and attempt to overcome social and cultural barriers,

for example bringing instruments for a weekly jam session on the sidewalk – an occasion many neighborhood children were observed to join. Many members at LAEV were also witnessed to be involved in professions relating to sustainability – either larger international projects (ex. non-governmental organizations) or local initiatives (ex. bike advocacy and water conservation). The majority of members were observed to be in their 30s-40s, however there were also a few young children and older residents (the eldest being 81).

Finney Farm

Finney Farm accommodates eight residents and a revolving door of volunteers and interns. The community was founded in 1989 by self-described anarchists, with roots in environmental activist movements, such as Earth First!. The group established the Salmonberry Community Land Trust as the ecovillage's legal body.

Located in rural Washington state, Finney Farm consists of 105 acres (42.5 hectares), 90 (36.4 hectares) of which are second growth forest under conservation. The remaining developed area of the property includes scattered tiny house cottages (where residents live), approximately five acres of communal garden areas, a repurposed barn, and a larger community house. Today, Finney Farm honors their activist roots while priding themselves on their strong relationships with nearby communities.

Finney Farm connects to larger networks through local community organizations (ex. radio station and schools), as well as internships and educational opportunities through the websites WWOOF, HelpX, and WorkAway. Many members that eventually live at the community are introduced to Finney Farm through these educational outlets.

The age composition at Finney Farm was found to be relatively young, including families, and no one over the age of 50. While community members recognized the importance (racial) diversity in their community, their small population perhaps limited the extent to which this could be achieved. Overall, community members worked either in education or construction with many commenting that it was difficult to find employment in their rural area.

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5.4. Results

5.4.1. Sustainability transformation in ecovillage communities

Throughout all ecovillages researched, three transformation dimensions emerged, aligning with O'Brien's (2018) spheres of transformation. The original focus of this research, around food sustainability, provided prominent examples of food-related sustainability practices, for example organic food production and consumption. This section will outline how ecovillages illustrated potential and inspiration for sustainability transformations.

The practical sphere

First, we witnessed localized strategies, or ecovillage actions for their immediate community, correlating with O'Brien's (2018) "practical sphere". For example, all ecovillages attempted to be "models" for mainstream society, to inspire further action. This includes growing and processing their own food (for self-consumption and distribution), as well as hosting public tours and conferences – examples witnessed in all ecovillages. All ecovillages studied recounted interactions with their immediate neighbors. LAEV, for example hosted a number of local action groups (ex. around immigration rights and bicycle activism), DIY grey water installation and bicycle maintenance workshops. Finney Farm described building community gardens at schools and prisons and distributing free seeds. Twin Oaks welcomed many visitors on their property, including through hosting the Communities Conference, one of three summer conferences meant to educate and network those interested in communal lifestyles. These numerous activities work towards the communities' goals of education and outreach of their sustainable alternative lifestyle. Sustainability practices also involved taking responsibility and asserting self-reliance. For example, while communities praised the idea of recycling, many did not trust the efficiency of municipal recycling programs, and, instead installed composting toilets or composted food scraps. Thus, communities

questioned mainstream sustainability definitions and sought their own solutions.

The three sites also differed in approach. Twin Oaks' members described themselves as not actively advertising and rather becoming "grounded in the reality of [their] own land," focusing on big picture goals, as stated by Community and Visitor Outreach Correspondent, Veronica. LAEV's urban context was described by participants as fundamental to the project's outreach and accessibility goals. Their dense neighborhood and the city's high concentration of international press, give LAEV "the potential to influence the whole world from this little two block neighborhood" as stated by Lois, LAEV's founder. LAEV's urban setting exposes and, arguably, more directly confronts them with the status quo in their everyday activities. Ecovillage members recognize the importance of their daily sustainability practices for creating impact outside their community.

The political sphere

The political sphere materialized through attempts to influence structures in and outside of their community (O'Brien 2018), including strategies for enacting systemic changes (ex. policy), expanding (ex. buying land, supporting other ICs), and incubating projects (ex. sustainably-sourced businesses). For example, Twin Oaks assisted revising the US 501(d) tax status. While the 501(d) is typically applied to religious or apostolic communities, Twin Oaks broadened the definition to also include granting income sharing communities as tax exempt. This policy amendment set the precedent for other ICs to apply for this status, and allowed a (financial) "sense of security … increase[ing] collective prosperity," as noted by the Legal Manager, Pat. This tax exemption is an example of how Twin Oaks creates lasting effects in (mainstream) systems and opens legal capacities and opportunities for other (income sharing) communities to be more autonomous (Lushin 2018).

LAEV confronted municipal policies through "pre-legal" activities, that is, projects that are neither illegal, but also not yet legal. Many pre-legal activities (which were legalized) – including mulching,

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graywater collection, and backyard chickens – support sustainable (food) systems, through reducing harmful external inputs inputs (Blay-Palmer and Koc 2010). However, pre-legal activities must be enacted with caution, as blindly acting upon one's values could result in unjust and unsustainable practices. In the political sphere, ecovillages played a role shaping policy and community action, through influencing change from the local to the national-scale.

The personal sphere

Lastly, ecovillages supported transformative changes through members' experiences and motives, aligning with O'Brien's (2018) "personal" sphere. Individual residents recognized their "cultural baggage" – that is, how they're shaped by past experiences in mainstream society, despite being discontent with it. After time in their ecovillage, interviewees acknowledged a mental shift, in their own lives, or in others. Hank, a resident of Finney Farm reflects:

> Before I lived here, I wanted the same as everybody else, the "nice things" in life. But living out here I realized, there are more important things … like, reducing your carbon footprint.

By "nice things", this interviewee refers to material wealth and consumer goods, promoted by mainstream society. Instead of seeing their lifestyle as "backwards" (ex. no indoor plumbing, and limited electricity), Hank learned to shift his perspective to appreciate a more intentional and sustainable lifestyle (ex. awareness of water and energy usage). Living at Finney Farm helped re-frame Hank's experiences in a larger context, and understand how his priorities and values have changed. Such a sentiment was echoed in other communities.

In the next section we will revisit ecovillages' attempts to support transformation, through the lens of collective identity.

5.4.2. Collective identity supporting sustainability transformation

Below, this chapter will connect the three dimensions of collective identity (cognitive frameworks, collective action, and belonging) to sustainability transformation practices at ecovillages. It should be noted that overlap was found across sub-categories of collective identity.

Cognitive frameworks and values

Cognitive frameworks refer to shared values and worldviews and connect to the subjective dimension of sustainability transformations. Shared values materialized formally in community documents, for example in bylaws and articles of incorporation, which were drafted upon communities' formation and direct their development. Veronica, who leads the Values Orientation at Twin Oaks, describes their bylaws to:

> [Lay] out, all different aspects of living, interpersonal relationships, sustainability. Those are two very big ones ... if people want to make changes, we can make changes, and it's sort of tethered to those cultural ideas.

Therefore, those two elements (interpersonal relationships and sustainability) helped to map Twin Oakers' behaviors. Guiding documents also outlined ecovillages' aims for influencing mainstream society, for example, the creation of new egalitarian communities (at Twin Oaks), or education and outreach (at Finney Farm), indicating their intention towards (wider) sustainability change. Though all communities described collective values, behaviors were not specified in written documents. Jamie, a Finney Farm member, describes their bylaws as a guide, allowing flexibility in community endeavors. She elaborates,

> If our ideas [in the bylaws] are about stewardship, being a homestead, and doing social and education outreach, then our all of our actions need to be in line.

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Therefore, the community traces their actions back to their founding ideas and values. Finney Farm works towards strengthening their food system, as a means to achieve community goals, connecting community values with action. Twin Oaks' policies stated a similar construction. Thus, ecovillages develop frameworks where appropriate sustainable behaviors are expected to follow their communities' sustainability values.

Shared values were not consistent within ecovillages. Twin Oaks member, Veronica, distinguishes between "stated" versus "lived" values – what community members say versus what they do. The topic of buying and eating factory farmed meat, in particular, raised questions and conflict internally. Veronica elaborates, saying:

> For some people, their stated values match up, for some people they match up some of the time and for some people, their stated values never match up. So, with this, my stated value is I want to eat home grown healthfully … and my lived value is I'm only human and I only do that a certain amount.

Therefore, when the food buyers purchase factory farmed meat, contradicting the values of the community, Veronica finds that "it's not respectful of the bigger reality of the community and our values" and therefore abuses the responsibility to make decisions which do align with Twin Oaks' values. This conflict also resurfaced in other interviews. While no community-wide solution was found, individuals reacted to the situation in their own way. Penelope, the ex-garden manager, posted a note on the forum in the community area, which resulted in some diminished purchasing (according to interviewees). Jessica, one of the diary managers, turned her efforts to work with the cows and the dairy program, hoping local meat production would reduce meat purchased from factory farms. A number of members, including Veronica and Penelope also mentioned the necessity to "pick their battles". The inevitability of disagreements therefore points to the necessity of communication, as well as a certain degree of flexibility. For example, many members stated simply making the personal choice not to eat factory farmed meat, as it was labelled when served.

Across other communities, interview participants were aware of subtle and unintentional barriers, creating a self-selected group and preventing communities from diversifying. Sara, a member at LAEV describes:

> Living in an intentional community, you're ultimately living in a bubble of likeminded individuals. As far as I know, there isn't anybody too outside of my political beliefs here.

While this "bubble" helps the community achieve goals around sustainability, within the ecovillage, it poses challenges when trying to impact those that do fall outside more such worldviews. For example, unintentional exclusivity could present hierarchies and social barriers for external communities (Ulug et al. 2021). Therefore, aligning values can connect members, while also preventing communities from diversifying. For ecovillages hoping to initiate sustainability transformations, this might require their "bubble" to burst.

Collective action

Collective action refers to community activities, carried out in line with community values. While collective action is linked to objective dimensions of transformations (through activities and behaviors), it extends across objective and subjective dimensions. Participants across sites recognized that their community promotes activism around their (sustainability) values, for example building community gardens. LAEV member Ari indicates,

> [Environmental and social sustainability and justice] are all notions that I feel that I've always been aware of and found very important but through being here in community … I feel that I've gained access to a language or a structured way to employ this.

For this participant, the ecovillage presents a unique site to explore a spectrum of participation opportunities.

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Collectivism strongly linked sustainability action and values across ecovillages and was viewed by community members as a means to disrupt individualistic ideals. Throughout interviews, residents connected these values as a means to challenge the status quo, that is, a capitalist system based on growth and exploitation. Twin Oaks member Veronica, states:

> In mainstream American culture we are not taught cooperation ... we are taught individualism ... we all have what I call a cultural hangover ... of what we are conditioned in mainstream culture, and the more you live this way, the more your worldview shifts to be more cooperative and egalitarian.

Collectivism, as emphasized in communities, challenges mainstream cultures and contributes towards sustainability – a value also documented in other studies on sustainability transformations (Temper et al. 2018). The above quote stresses the "protected" space for community ideals to materialize as behaviors and the role of the physical and social environment for transformations. Multiple respondents described the United States and LA as especially individualistic and promoting an unsustainable lifestyle. In their bounded, collective space, ecovillages distinguish from mainstream conventions and redefine sustainable behavior change in their specific context.

Community decision making illustrates how values of collectivism and cooperation link to community-level action. Participants described decision making as thinking at a "community level", instead of individual needs or goals. LAEV resident, Sara describes the process as follows,

> Making a decision together, is miraculous ... it's like "is it good or bad for the community?" "Is it good or bad for me?" the second, does not have a place here. " Is it good or bad for the community?" does have a place here.

Community meetings offer essential opportunities to discuss viewpoints and make shared decisions, prioritizing community values

and connecting those to concrete actions. Through decision-making, residents experience what is at the core of community life and "what it means to cooperate" (Yolanda, LAEV interview). Embedding themselves in the ecovillage, members learn about others' ideals as well as actual practices. Opening discussions point to flexibility in communities' collective identity. Decision-making fosters the exchange of knowledge, and, in turn, can help members hold one another accountable to their values and practices, thereby connecting across objective and subjective dimensions.

Ecovillages' collective actions included participation in rallies and protests, and, more prominently, alternative means of organizing their lives, through labor systems, sharing space and resources, and committing to sustainability principles. Participants emphasized shared values of cooperation and collectivism to, not only, stand in contrast to the mainstream, but also to indicate ecovillages' intention to challenge such systems, found to be integral to ecovillages' identity.

Belonging

The element of belonging brought together the above aspects of collective identity, relevant across objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations. Across the communities studied, interviewees stressed joining their ecovillage for a sense of belonging and interpersonal connections. Timothy, a 23 year-long member at Twin Oaks, states,

> A number of people come to community [and] ... don't think about the fact that they're also creating a worker owned cooperative ... Their focus is the ... relations they have with each other.

This quote summarizes how connection and belonging enable and facilitate collective action, within and outside their community. Ecovillage food practices often provided a space for participation and community bonding, around shared values (Brombin 2015). Long-time Finney Farm member Jamie remarks,

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> Food ... plays a large role because it's where we gather. It's ... ways in which we connect with each other and, if you're gardening, it's like you're working together, and you're growing these things which is very bonding and collaborative ... we have this extra layer here because we're doing this bigger, different thing.

The "bigger, different thing" refers to community education and food access outreach programs. Performing sustainable food practices reinforces collective values around environmental care and offers opportunities for community members to exchange knowledge and build interpersonal relationships. Food practices were a bonding mechanism, as well as a behavior, in itself, contributing to sustainability.

However, exclusion in interpersonal relationships presented a challenge for all ecovillages. Lois, of LAEV states, "conflict and divisiveness took their toll on me, and others in the community." Pointing to the importance of managing interpersonal relationships within the community, before considering the role of ecovillages towards greater-scale transformations. Communities attempted to intentionally address these issues through trust-building community retreats and conflict resolution committees.

To summarize 5.4.2., while multiple values and identities existed across communities, ecovillages' collective identities surfaced from a desire to "do things differently". Connecting ideals to concrete actions, community structures facilitate cooperation in the community, linking collective values and behaviors. Despite interpersonal conflicts, a sense of belonging strengthens communities and their collective power.

5.5. Discussion: implications for sustainability transformations

5.5.1. Collective identity & transformations

Collective identity is relevant for connecting discussions of sustainability transformations to ecovillages and sustainability-focused

initiatives (O'Brien 2018; Pelling 2010). As detailed in the introduction and theory sections, the more fundamental and lasting transformations "happen" when the underlying values, beliefs and ideals shift in a way to support certain practices and behaviors. While the aim was not to prove that ecovillages as such are transformative, rather the community practices of the ecovillages studied reveal them as a source of inspiration and experimentation for transformative change.

Collective identity revealed mechanisms that bring together objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations. While shared values in communities largely corresponded to the subjective dimension, and collective action to the objective, the element of belonging was found to contribute to understandings across objective and subjective dimensions. Feelings of belonging have been pointed to as a source of motivation for collective action (della Porta 2008), which was also seen in this research to bring community members together, to act upon shared ideals. Belonging highlights the role of emotional dimensions of sustainability transformations, such as empathy, which has been found to contribute to sustainability when individuals hold inclusive identities (Brown et al. 2019). Belonging could thus be seen to play a role in facilitating interactions between objective and subjective dimensions of transformations.

The importance of belonging was especially witnessed and understood through food practices in ecovillage communities through bonding over mealtimes and garden work. Food was found to be valuable for motivating members to enact practices around sustainability and self-reliance, and engage with their greater community. Food provided a platform to experiment with sustainability transformations, connecting shared values to on-the-ground practices. It has potential to act as "both an unexplored *means* to change and an *end* in itself" (Ives et al. 2020, p. 211). Reorganizing (food) systems towards sustainability, (re-)shapes communities' lives, therefore also working towards an alternative to the mainstream (Avelino & Kunze 2009; Spijker et al. 2020).

The focus on collective identity in ecovillages underlines the societal drivers of radical change (Gillard et al. 2016). For example, while disagreements surfaced from variations among individuals' values,

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the desires for social connections motivated members to overcome such discrepancies. Ecovillages' shared willingness to "do things differently" could be connected to an "oppositional consciousness" (Mansbridge and Morris 2001). That is, the collective capacity of groups to "attempt to create alternatives to the hegemonic system" (Temper et al. 2018, p. 754). This could be a way in which ecovillages' shared perspective connects their values to action relevant for transformations. The shared experiences seen in collective identity was therefore found valuable to help form *narrative pathways* (Riedy 2016) in communities, with values and worldviews framing debates (Anderson et al. 2019), towards transformative futures.

5.5.2. Sustainability challenges: frictions with the mainstream

Viewing ecovillages through the lens of collective identity, two challenges for communities surfaced: maintaining their internal community cultures and identities and remaining open and accessible for interaction with the mainstream. These tensions largely stemmed from community-members interacting with mainstream actors, thereby indicating that challenges lie in navigating sustainability transformations relative to the societal structures and systems they are embedded within. Cases in this research align with Escribano et al., who found ecovillages to be "more dependent on the world they intend to change than they would like," often out of the necessity of operating within a market-based society (2020, p. 12). Collective identity could result in "the creation of boundaries that insulate and differentiate a category of persons from dominant society" and while it may facilitate groups, such as ecovillages, to enact and trigger change, such groups often remain isolated based on their otherness (Taylor and Whittier 1992, p. 122). Intentional communities, Sargisson argues, "need this self-estrangement in order to self-identify" (2007, p. 417). Participants in this research similarly reported hesitation or even frustration when attempting to reach out to their more "mainstream" neighbors. Living in an ecovillage *and* engaging with outside communities necessitates communicating with those that share, but also differ from the

community's values and worldviews. Community members were aware of differences and their own tendency to operate in a "bubble". Overcoming the social and cultural barriers between ecovillage communities (and collectives more broadly) and mainstream society points to a challenge in addressing sustainability transformations.

Researchers have recently documented increased interaction between ecovillages and the mainstream, resulting in decreased differences between (more sustainable) ecovillage lifestyles and neighboring communities, and the diluting of ecovillage values and practices (Anderson 2011; Westkog et al. 2018). Ecovillages in this research commented that their community values have watered down, especially since the proliferation of the internet and "sustainability" in the mainstream. Ecovillages must reach a balance between opening up to mainstream society and preserving their community identity, perhaps with what Sargisson calls, boundaries that are "punctured and kept porous" (2007, p. 417). Maintaining values and worldviews and connecting them with sustainable practices and behaviors are vital for ecovillages as well as for sustainability transformations, in order to lead a change "from the inside out" (Ives et al. 2020; O'Brien & Sygna 2013). For ecovillages, the challenge lies in keeping their (sustainability) practices from being co-opted by mainstream influences, while, simultaneously, being adaptive and open to avenues to engage with their local communities.

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5.6. Conclusions

Our aim in this chapter was to explore 1) what collective identity in ecovillage communities can teach us about objective and subjective dimensions of sustainability transformations and 2) how collective identity highlights challenges for ecovillages for initiating sustainability transformations. We found that collective identity underscores belonging and interpersonal relationships, for sustainability transformations in the ecovillages studied. Furthermore, objective and subjective dimensions were visible in how values such as collectivism and environmentalism are translated into practices. Ecovillages in this research illustrate how values can be cultivated

alongside behavioral change. Viewing ecovillages through the lens of collective identity foregrounds their defined ideologies – the ways in which intentionality in such communities guides the "how" and "why" of their actions.

Collective identity was found useful for highlighting barriers towards sustainability transformations in the ecovillages studied. Collective identity informs how communities attempt to differentiate themselves from mainstream society, despite being confronted with pressures to adapt to it. While ecovillages were previously concerned with "escaping" technology and maintaining community ideals and autonomous practices (Kanter 1972), today we witness a rapid evolvement of community identities and cultures. Despite the prevalence of topics such as sustainability and feminism in mainstream society, we encourage a critical eye around the co-opting of values, and examining practices and values *not* adopted by the mainstream. Confronting power relations is essential for tackling environmental and social challenges in sustainability transformations, such as intersectionality in communities (Temper et al. 2018). Diversifying ecovillages from their well-established homogeneity (white, middle class, and highly-educated) (Lopez and Weaver 2018), for example, is a vital step to avoid replicating privileged societies and to initiate a larger movement (Chitewere 2017), where collective identity could be a critical investigative tool (Malin and Ryder 2018).

Ecovillages have potential as valuable sites of experimentation for sustainability transformations (Boyer 2015; Pisters et al 2020; Westkog et al. 2018), and provide policy makers an example for transformations towards sustainability. However, economic challenges such as high rent and costs of living (Escribano et al. 2020) necessitates opportunities and resources, such as community land trusts (seen at LAEV and Finney Farm), to make (physical) space for urban and rural initiatives. Localized projects provide insights into meeting (local) needs and how transformative change emerges "from below" (Boyer 2015; Temper et al. 2018). We therefore encourage researchers and policy makers to support such radical collectives for transformations towards sustainability (Temper et al. 2018). Transformation is "concerned with the wider and less easily visible root causes of vulnerability" (Pelling 2010, p. 86). Acknowledging

fringe projects could unveil their potential as breeding grounds for experimental practices (Sargisson 2007) and identify gaps in our unsustainable society.

There were several limitations in this study. Firstly, only three ecovillages were researched for this chapter, all of which were based in the United States. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all ecovillage communities. Secondly, the research period lasted only one month in each community, relying especially on interview data. This provided a limited snapshot of the ecovillages' identity – one that did not span across the community's existence, rather the one which was witnessed during the research period.

Ecovillages face challenges in preserving their fundamental values while also achieving their desired sustainability impact. Collective identity proved useful to highlight how community bonds enable connecting community values and practices, while initiating sustainability transformations.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to provide insight into how community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability. These initiatives are defined in this thesis as collective citizen groups that are organized around improving food system sustainability in their local community. However, little is known about how these collectives are internally organized and governed (Kelly, 2005) and the place-specific resources that enable these initiatives (Mehmood and Parra, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). Knowledge gaps are also identified regarding the potential of the sustainable food practices – for local impacts as well as changes on a broader scale (Brombin, 2015; Renting et al., 2012) and, furthermore, how these sustainable practices connect to values in communities (Ballard et al., 2010; Horlings, 2015). Following from the above, the main question this thesis sought to explore was, *how do community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability?* This thesis illustrated how bottom-up food initiatives contribute to food system sustainability through experimenting with internal organization and governance and building on place-based resources, while also externally networking beyond their immediate environment and community. The findings of this thesis point to the growing potential and role of citizens and citizen-initiated action for sustainable food systems, as well as for introducing and propogating innovative organizational models, nuances, and debates into civil society and policy realms.

To answer the main research question, this thesis examined three types of community-based food collectives: a food waste initiative, community gardens, and ecovillage communities, in the Netherlands and the United States. These assorted initiatives and contexts were chosen to explore different aspects of the food system– from food production to waste. Each type illustrates the potential of resourceful communities for crafting place-based sustainable solutions within their context, while also understanding their role in a greater movement towards food sustainability. Using an ethnographic approach, the researcher participated in the daily rhythms of these different community initiatives, complimented

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by participant observation and interviewing community members and volunteers.

This concluding chapter will first summarize the findings of the different chapters of this thesis and set these in the context of broader scientific debates, emphasizing the relevance of the three main topics presented in the introduction: *spaces of possibility, place-based action,* and *new sustainability debates and pathways.* An elaboration on the positionality and reflection on the methods conducted throughout this research will follow. The concluding section will end with suggestions for policy and research.

6.2. Summary of findings

In the preceding chapters, several perspectives were chosen to explore community-based food collectives, to better understand the contributions and roles of these initiatives for food system sustainability. Below is a summary of the main findings from each chapter.

Chapter two aimed to explore how local citizen collectives are organized and governed, in order to best facilitate local action around food sustainability in urban food initiatives. This chapter builds upon Gibson-Graham's (2006) concept of community economies, and explores a local Dutch citizen initiative, the Free Café in Groningen, the Netherlands. The Free Café is a food waste café, where participants collect food that would otherwise be thrown out, to create a free meal for community members twice a week. The community economy re-frames and validates practices existing outside of market relations to be, instead, based on social and environmental care (Gibson-Graham, 2006). While the Free Café considered itself to be "non-hierarchical", the research witnessed organizational changes in the project, revealing an underlying power structure embedded in the initiative. This points to the necessity to critically analyze, also the more idealistic initiatives, for hidden power relations, which might otherwise be overlooked. Understanding the governance processes and "inner hierarchies" in community-based initiatives can help understand how they contribute to a food system that is democratic, participatory, and sustainable. Furthermore, this

chapter highlights how "alternative" and "autonomous" (food) collectives can be intertwined with (and rely upon) "mainstream" society and food systems in complex and unexpected ways. This chapter concludes that we must look past dualisms, such as "capitalist" and "non-capitalist" or "autonomous" and, instead, highlight the nuanced roles and contributions of food initiatives, for example, how they point to gaps in our (capitalist) systems and can inspire action for other possibilities and more diverse economies. The Free Café was found to be an example of how a post-capitalist experiment can materialize, as well as be recognized by municipalities as a valuable contribution to citizen engagement with (food) sustainability issues. Lastly, this chapter highlighted the relevance of citizen initiatives for raising awareness around food waste and engaging in food system sustainability.

Chapter three explores connections between conditions and processes of resourcefulness, for social innovations. This chapter frames community gardens in the Netherlands as social innovations through their ability to create new (social) rules and relationships for solutions towards social change. Resourcefulness can be defined as ways that community groups engage with their resource base (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). Analyzing empirical evidence at gardens in the North of the Netherlands, this chapter identifies five ways in which processes and conditions of resourcefulness facilitate the gardens to be social innovations: 1) defining a clear motivation and directive power of the initiative; 2) utilizing a diverse resource base (such as, multiple funding streams, diverse groups of volunteers and knowledge, and alternative community ventures), to embed the initiative into the community; 3) creative knowledge processes and the capacity to experiment; 4) internal support and recognition within the collective and 5) place-based (context-dependent) practices. Overall this chapter emphasizes how resourcefulness must be stressed as a *place-based process.* Exploring gardens in different rural, urban, and peri-urban contexts, and witnessing how these gardens drew upon different place-based resources reinforced the placed-based processes and contextual nature of resourcefulness. Resourcefulness was found to be valuable for, not only, contributing to understanding enabling processes of social innovations, but also

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helping to describe the actual on-the-ground processes being experienced by communities and how they build their own capacities towards contributing to change in their environment, for example, towards sustainable food systems.

Chapter four focuses on food practices in ecovillage communities (Nicolini, 2012; Shove et al., 2012) illustrating the relevance of viewing sustainable food practices as both place-based and relational (Sonnino et al., 2016), and how these practices contribute to sustainable food systems in ecovillage communities in the US. Through "zooming in" on place-based practices and "zooming out" on relational connections, this chapter employs a foodscapes lens (Spijker et al., 2020; Yasmeen, 1996; Wegerif and Wiskerke, 2017), highlighting social and spatial components of food. Through focusing on the relevance of both, place and relationships, the foodscapes lens is found to be valuable for identifying sustainable practices in communities and how they are connected to larger networks. Foodscapes especially foregrounds how food practices occur in and are shaped by place to help reveal a landscape of interconnected food practices. This chapter illustrates how ecovillage communities in the US, and in particular their sustainable food practices, do not occur in isolation, rather, the communities build upon external resources and have the potential for greater (external) impact. The results specifically highlight place-based knowledge, resources, and (wider) networks to contribute towards sustainable food systems in these communities – both elements of the foodscapes lens. While ecovillages possess capacities for developing sustainable food systems internally, through interactions with their larger networks, they are able to achieve a greater-scale impact – either through engaging with external communities, or acting as "demonstration projects" for mainstream society. The foodscapes lens reveals how food helps bridge ecovillages with external communities, and extend their sustainable impact beyond their place-based context.

Chapter five directs attention to the role of collective identity in ecovillages for sustainability transformations drawing from the data collected at the three ecovillages in the U.S. Collective identity can be described as a sense of "we-ness" based on experiences, and culturally-dependent characteristics (Snow, 2001), and is made up

of collective values and action (Fominaya, 2010; Melucci, 1995). Sustainability transformations consist of both "objective" (concrete behavior changes and practices), and "subjective" (inner values and worldviews) dimensions, which are both considered necessary to initiate transformations towards sustainable societies (Ballard et al., 2010; Grenni et al., 2020; Horlings & Padt, 2013; Wilber, 2000). The concept of collective identity was found to be beneficial to draw connections between subjective and objective dimensions of sustainability transformations. Ecovillages, specifically, illustrate how value *and* behavior change can be cultivated alongside one another. This was seen through bonding mechanisms that brought the community together and built interpersonal relationships. Food was found to be a valuable avenue for experimenting with (sustainability) transformations. Food facilitated community bonding (ex. collective gardening and cooking and working towards a common goal). Focusing on collective identity highlighted challenges towards sustainability transformations, most notably regarding divisions between ecovillage identities and mainstream society. Ecovillages face the contradiction of, on the one hand, maintaining their internal community cultures (distinguishing from the mainstream) and, on the other hand, attempting to remain open and accessible, to influence mainstream society. Such challenges highlight how identity and culture play a role in sustainability movements. Themes such as inclusion / exclusion are should be considered when scaling up ecovillages and other community initiatives. These findings are valuable to consider when, more broadly, aiming to understand sustainability transformations in communities.

In sum, the preceding chapters lead to answer the main research question of this thesis, *how do community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability*? In the answer to this research question, this thesis points to the definition of food system sustainability as laid out in the introductory chapter, that is, the restructuring environmental, social, and economic food system components, to make room for a food system that prioritizes public participation and decision-making, while simultaneously reconfiguring (unjust) social and economic systems (Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012; Feenstra, 2002).

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The three main themes laid out on the introduction chapter, were found to provide insight into the contributions of food collectives for food system sustainability. These themes, regarding citizen action and the potential of such action and initiatives towards food system sustainability, include: 1) spaces of possibility, 2) place-based action and practices, and 3) sustainability debates and pathways. Firstly, such food initiatives open up democratic, participatory spaces which expose experimental modes of (food) governance. This includes types of decision making that celebrate attempts of being autonomous from capitalist systems and dominant forms of power. Secondly, community-based food collectives connect to place-based resources, link with place-based networks, and enhance place-based governance. Engaging with place highlighted the importance of material and non-material resources for sustainable food system change. Furthermore, place-based action was found to require careful negotiation, balancing goals, opinions, and priorities, within the collective, as well as with external local communities. Lastly, community-based food collectives were seen to widen debates of sustainability. Rather than follow top-down prescriptions, initiatives signal a changing tide in conceptualizing sustainability, using collective action to politicize debates towards sustainable change. These contributions will be reflected upon and connected to broader debates in the discussion below.

6.3. Discussion

6.3.1. Spaces of possibility

As emphasized in the introduction, a shift to a more sustainable food system also entails creating new "spaces of possibility" – including forms of organization and governance, and re-thinking and re-framing societal values. This stems from the argument that the current capitalist and neoliberal systems, as well as governments, have failed to address calls towards establishing a more social and environmentally equitable food system (Vivero-Pol et al., 2019). This section will outline how creating new spaces of possibility

in community-based food collectives is seen to contribute to food system sustainability.

Spaces of possibility can be described as new and innovative ways of working, and imagining possible alternatives (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017; Harvey, 2000). The community initiatives studied illustrated examples of citizens envisaging their projects on a small scale, turning them into a reality, and, in the process, showing what is possible. The Free Café in the Netherlands is a unique model of the creation, relevance, and potential of such spaces of possibility, for example, envisioning a world without financial logics as a guiding principle. The Free Café, wishing to make an example, does not use money itself, however, after getting publicity, the municipality agreed to pay their rent. While the café has not been able to escape the financial system, raising awareness in organizing a project without money has garnered attention from the municipality to expand what is possible for the collective. The Free Café built relationships with community members to assist with their execution, for example in contacting businesses for food waste, as well as covering their operation expenses, therefore also illustrating processes of resourcefulness (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). The municipality provided resources for the café, and the café carried out sustainable food waste solutions and attempted to enhance social cohesion in the city, arguably fulfilling roles otherwise carried out by municipal workers. While such efforts could be seen as attempts by local governments to "outsource" their responsibilities (Rosol, 2012; Fyfe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2005), evidence in this thesis shows how initiatives, such as the Free Café, were, at the same time, self-directed, run by volunteers, and could determine their own course. Similarly, collaborations between local citizens and policy makers helped realize possibilities at Toentje, a community garden in Groningen. The garden was initiated from a citizen's desire to get healthy food into the hands of food bank recipients. Working with the municipality granted Toentje the land to grow produce for the initiative, as well as financial resources necessary to fund the project. The examples of the Free Café and Toentje illustrate that, through such collaborations, "small-scale" and inventive solutions can grow and address sustainable food challenges, such as raising

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awareness around food waste and access to healthy and sustainable food. Furthermore, the examples from the empirical data, of the Free Café and Toentje also illustrate overlaps between theories of community economies and social innovation – aligning with Gibson-Graham and Roelvink's (2009) conclusion that community economy initaitives and social innovations can help open up "a politics of 'other worlds'" (p. 17). Therefore, community economy initiatives and social innovations, both as bottom-up initiatives, can open up spaces of possibility through collective citizen action, and illustrate the potential to initiate greater change through collaborating with local governments.

The value of community initiatives as spaces of possibility is made relevant through emerging literature on the commons and the "urban commons" (Eizenberg, 2012; Huron, 2015; Tornaghi, 2017). Spaces of possibility link to urban commons through imagining alternative futures (Huron, 2015). Furthermore, the commons directly underline the role of democratic governance for bringing those alternatives into reality. Many authors have referred to the commons as a way to transition beyond capitalist systems (Caffentis and Federici, 2014; Chatterton, 2016; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Furthermore, calls for democratic forms of governance have been echoed by those working towards sustainable food system change (Hassanein, 2003; Wilkins, 2005). Commons can include both material (ex. water, land) and non-material (ex. knowledge, language, education) resources (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). A material commons emerged in the initiatives, through the spaces they hosted, and played a large role in their impact. The physical shared-space, where members held joint-responsibility, was found to be valuable in the ecovillages for hosting meetings, workshops, and conferences, also for external initiatives and action groups. The Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) propety, for example, is owned by the Beverly Vermont Community Land Trust and governed by a combination of ecovillagers, neighborhood residents, and professionals in the field of housing and community development. Through their community land trust, LAEV holds space for democratic governance in the city. This group as well as the residents themselves make decisions about the properties and their use, prioritizing supporting issues such as

environmental sustainability, affordable housing, and immigration rights. The Koreatown Popular Assembly, an immigration rights response network, for example, held their early meetings at LAEV and have since grown to build stronger connections across the neighborhood and community. Holding a space can open the initiative to a range of activities, also including the Food Lobby – a member operated consumer food co-op located in LAEV, as described in chapter four. Urban food commons (Morrow, 2018), or community-governed food resources embedded in cities, specifically connect to perspectives that view food as a human right (de Schutter, 2014) and a public good (McClintock, 2014). In building capacities for governance, such as the examples described above, the food initiatives studied were found to be valuable in creating a physical and intellectual space to explore possibilities to contribute to food sustainability.

More than the ability of the initiatives studied to make space for a commons, they were seen to engage in processes of "commoning", described as a "a relational process – or more often a struggle – of negotiating access, use, benefit, care, and responsibility" (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016, p.195). Sharing food, for example, was a joint theme throughout the collectives studied – whether it was the "food waste" at the Free Café, communal meals at the Pluk en Moestuin, or the community potlucks at Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) and Finney Farm. Sharing food was observed as a way in which to redefine and revalue food as a common resource, as opposed to a commodity to be bought and sold (Vivero-Pol et al., 2019). Throughout all the cases, the sharing of food was found to contribute to the social cohesion of community groups. Creating a space where food can be valued and governed as a commons opens spaces of possibility towards alternative narratives, and a more democratic and just food system (Vivero-Pol et al., 2019).

While the community initiatives attempt to distance themselves from global and industrialized food systems, this research repeatedly saw that, in practice, these collectives are very much intertwined, and even rely on, such systems. In the case of the Free Café (chapter two), the initiative was dependent on "waste" from the local fruit and vegetable market, as well as bakeries and supermarkets, for its "supplies". Distinctions and contradictions between their autonomy

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and involvement in market capitalism resurfaced in the context of the ecovillage communities in the United States. Twin Oaks, arguably, credits their longevity and high quality of life to their successful economic endeavors – their tofu and hammock businesses. In these cases, autonomy perhaps does not mean "independent from", rather "the ability of people to self-organize" (Wilson, 2015, p. 55). This sentiment builds upon Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), who consider autonomous geographies as "spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation" (p. 730). Discussions of autonomy in food systems surface in debates on food sovereignty, and are considered central in peasant studies (van der Ploeg, 2008), highlighting "equity, social justice and ecological sustainability" (Pimbert, 2009, p. 3). In exploring autonomous food spaces, Wilson (2013) concludes that the autonomous perspective emphasizes an inclusive range of food practices which "can all contribute to a different politics of food" and "a lens of autonomous is not universal or homogenizing" (p. 729). Meaning unlike discussions of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), autonomy makes visible a range of food activities, with a strongly normative focus towards democracy and justice. This interpretation is also suitable when applied to the collectives studied, such as the Free Café or Los Angeles Eco-Village, where governance processes direct the initiatives' actions toward their environment and food system. In that sense, processes embedded in the collectives help carve out a space in society to ground possibilities for food system practices. Ecovillages, such as Twin Oaks, could be criticized as "buying in" to capitalist economic systems. Economic investments in their community businesses seemingly contradict the non-capitalist focus of autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Wilson, 2013). However, the "capitalist" practices described above have also allowed Twin Oaks to gain financial security and support other egalitarian communities. Twin Oaks supports such communities financially, in providing small grants, as well as through labor exchanges, therefore widening their networks' capacity for experimental sustainable practices. Therefore, the value of these initiatives being "autonomous" is connected to their ability to govern

themselves, and generate awareness around food system sustainability. Autonomy, for communities could accordingly be "best expressed as a desire, as opposed to complete reality" (Wilson, 2013, p. 728).

To summarize, community-based food collectives can be seen as contributing to food system sustainability through opening "spaces of possibility". This was illustrated in this thesis through means of democratic governance and is relevant for debates around the commoning of resources. At the same time, community initiatives are inextricably intertwined with mainstream systems and institutions and a "purist" view of them operating as "autonomous" is unrealistic and perhaps unnecessary. The creation of spaces of possibility is relevant for imagining innovative projects on a small-scale and turning it into a reality, raising awareness around the unsustainability of current food systems and societies, and demonstrating sustainable alternatives. Community groups therefore illustrate the spaces of possibility that exist within or beyond their social system how to *imagine* what is *possible* and act upon their ideologies in creative ways.

6.3.2. Place-based action

Another area of contribution of this thesis revolves around place-based action and practices for sustainable food systems. More than just a physical arena, place entails a social component, and personal attachments (Collinge et al., 2011). This thesis contributes to literature on place-based action, specifically through applying the concept of resourcefulness (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012; Franklin, 2018) in the focusing of place-based resources and social networks embedded in the community initiatives. Furthermore, this thesis employs the foodscapes lens (Johnston and Goodman, 2015; Wegerif and Wiskerke, 2017) to analyze sustainable food practices through their place-based and relational components. These discussions on place-based action were found to highlight the ways in which community-based food collective contribute to food system sustainability.

Resourcefulness, which can be defined as a community's capacity to engage with their local resource base, highlights the place-dependent

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resources necessary for a community's development, as well as the ways in which a community makes use of their local environment (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). This thesis observed resourcefulness playing a role for communities' capacity for social and environmental change, for example, in the community gardens researched in chapter three. The urban garden (Toentje) made connections with international institutions in the city of Groningen, and the rural garden (Pluk en Moestuin), partnered with a neighboring school to initiate a greater social impact. Focusing on how initiatives build upon elements embedded in place highlighted how they can engage with their local community in a meaningful way. Processes of resourcefulness can also be seen in the community economies of Free Café in chapter two. The initiative has been able to operate without money, due to the support they've collected from their community. Resourcefulness is especially valuable for studying community food initiatives, not only because these initiatives typically work on a local level but also because sustainable food systems encompass a material component, located in a certain place. For example, Finney Farm, in chapter four, developed a seed distribution program for seed varieties developed for their Pacific Northwest climate, in the United States. Therefore, both the material and social components of resourcefulness are valuable to recognize the potential of community food initiatives for sustainable food system change. Furthermore, this thesis highlighted how resourcefulness is an adaptive and shifting process. Therefore, it must be recognized how such place-based capacities can be strengthened. Place-based policies are a platform through which to strengthen place-based development and are relevant for local food initiatives (Barca et al., 2012). Such policies "recognize that the institutions embedded within places, as well as locally embedded knowledge and action, are the appropriate cornerstones upon which to build local prosperity" (Beer et al., 2020, p. 17). Valuable connections between people and place, witnessed in this thesis, include contributions to social cohesion in their community (through for example community potlucks at the ecovillage cases or work days at the community gardens), as well as initiatives acting as knowledge hubs, among local communities and neighboring institutions.

The focus on foodscapes brings to light the role of place in food systems research. Through using the foodscapes lens, this thesis aimed to highlight the value of place, as well as the importance of (relational) networks for sustainable food system change. Chapter four revealed that, though place-based elements bring attention to local resources and communities, openness to wider networks and communities works to initiate change at a greater scale. This chapter therefore underlines the importance of viewing place from a relational perspective which "emphasizes the importance of discourses and power relations that are not inevitably bound to a specific scale, but which may be networked in both time and space" (Horlings, 2018, p. 305; Sonnino et al., 2016). The relational perspective in sustainable food systems can emerge through networks of governance (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino 2019), or metabolic flows across space (Kasper et al. 2017). Similar to resourcefulness, foodscapes helped illuminate how initiatives are place-based, but also how scales build networks and reach (external) communities beyond the "local" (Mikkelsen, 2011). Chapter four specifically underscored such internal and external social relations in ecovillages. That is, relations in communities, as well as the political and power dynamics embedded in food and food systems itself (Miewald and McCann, 2014; Johnston et al., 2009). Revealing place-based meanings of food underscores social dynamics and power relations rooted in food and food sustainability (Peña et al., 2017). Using a foodscapes lens, this chapter highlighted the diverse power relations and meanings food can have for communities. For example, ecovillage members at Twin Oaks described how their community stopped growing tomatoes and instead began purchasing conventional tomato sauce. This tendency, along with the purchasing and eating of more (factory farmed) meat was reported by participants to reflect a larger trend of mainstream capitalism seeping into their community. Community members reflected upon their food practices, as a way their community contributes to sustainability and sustainable food systems. Would purchasing organic tomato sauce be more sustainable, or would that still contribute to the capitalist food system the community wishes to avoid? In this sense, sustainability, is understood as ultimately political (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). Directing attention to social

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and spatial aspects of food, the foodscapes lens brings these nuanced and politicized discussions in food to the surface. The foodscapes lens helps understand place-based challenges across communities and contexts, and was found to be valuable to recognize different ways in which communities attempt to contribute sustainable to food system change.

The value of place in community food initiatives is heightened and recently celebrated through discussions of localizing governance through a new municipalism approach (Russell, 2019; Featherston et al., 2020). New municipalism is an approach of "retaking sovereignty at the metropolitan scale" (Agustín, 2020, p. 58). Recent years have seen new municipalism grow into a social movement in cities across the world where local governments are elevated as venue for social change (Thompson, 2020). New municipalism emphasizes civil society's role in urban governance, including greater control of local resources, such as water and energy (Colau, 2017), as well as broadly placing citizens at the frontlines of democracy (Agustín, 2020). Community food initiatives researched in this thesis could also be viewed as a means through which to support and build capacities for democratic processes. For example, chapters four and five illustrated how the ecovillages researched collectively lobby for issues in their local areas. Through their (internal) community processes (ex. decision making), ecovillages build governance capacities which had impacts beyond their community. For example, LAEV was involved in the process of forming the movement for neighborhood councils in the city of Los Angeles, and today are regular participants of their own, Rampart Village Neighborhood Council. The neighborhood is recognized by Agustín (2020) as a strong driver in municipal participation as it is "where a sense of community belonging is strong and movements are organized" (p. 59). More importantly, ecovillages rally for the same kind of democratic and participatory processes realized through new municipalism movements. In ecovillages, as well as other community initiatives studied in this thesis, democratic processes were a common thread implemented by communities for building their initiative as well as in their attempts to counter global food systems, seemingly out of their control. The re-politicization and democracy in the food system

has been praised as a vital piece in the puzzle in working towards sustainable food systems (Hassanein, 2003; La Via Campesina, 2009; Menser, 2008). Findings in this thesis expose community food initiatives as a promising starting point in building capacities for new municipalism movements in their abilities to strengthen local-scale governance, and find community-based solutions, rooted in place-based practices.

Overall, zooming in on place-based action highlights the value of community food initiatives for sustainable food system change. More specifically, place-based action was witnessed through collectives drawing upon place-based resources, connecting to place-based and relational networks, and establishing place-based democratic governance processes. Place as a concept also brought nuance and conflict to the surface in the analysis of the initiatives, highlighting how communities must continuously negotiate with their place-based communities and contexts, for example, balancing various goals, opinions, and priorities.

6.3.3. New sustainability debates and pathways

In addition to attempting to initiate food system change, the findings of this thesis indicate that (through their practices) the collectives researched were actively engaged in redefining debates around what sustainability means. It is therefore also necessary to reflect upon the meaning of *sustainability* and in particular how citizen initiatives contribute to debates in challenging existing definitions, as well as creating new ones.

Community-based food collectives researched in this thesis were found to re-politicize debates around sustainability. Sustainability has been criticized as being co-opted by top-down and neoliberal interests (Blythe et al. 2018; Leitheiser and Follman 2020). The emergence of new frameworks and concepts (e.g. Duncan et al., 2020; Sage et al., 2020) point to a new era of sustainability initiatives. The initiatives researched in this thesis support, for example, food system transformations and moving towards a "'second generation' food movement" (Sage et al., 2020, p. 7). Meaning, (food)

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sustainability has been frequently framed as an individual lifestyle choice (ex. green consumerism), rather than a social movement with ambitions of global environmental and social change (Chitewere, 2017; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). This was recognized in the initiatives studied as many participants hesitated to use the term "sustainability", finding that it has been watered down by governments, and "green washed" by corporations (Jackson, 2009). More than a "locavore" emphasis, food movements hold potential to initiate a more structural change (DeLind, 2010; Holt-Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). The collectives studied in this thesis reflect attempts to re-politicize food and address structural injustices embedded in the communities. This was witnessed through, for example, at the garden Doarpstun Snakkerburen (in chapter three). More than growing local and organic food for the community, this initiative also provides structure and support in lives of their volunteers, who are often otherwise unable to hold a steady job. Similarly, Finney Farm, in chapter four, initiated a free seed distribution program, strengthening food access and growing capacities in their USDA-designated food desert. The community uses food and food access as a vehicle through which to address structural issues, such as poverty, in their rural community. Sustainable food systems and practices were found to be more than an end in itself, rather, also a means to experiment towards more just and sustainable societies.

Repoliticization of food and sustainability, however, also faces risks and challenges, as observed in the course of this research. In communities with many shared values and ideals, differences and internal disagreement still existed. Such challenges were highlighted through the concept of collective identity in chapter five, which saw internal tensions within communities. While community initiatives often connected their work to larger efforts around food sustainability, environmentalism, and social justice, some members had stronger desires to initiate a larger movement, while others preferred to focus their energy on an intimate and perhaps more insular community. Therefore, while collective identity brought members of the ecovillages together around shared goals, there was still a large degree of diversity within these communities, also presenting barriers to wider-scale change (chapter five). This challenge

of wider-scale change and transformation is also relevant to social innovations, which build upon local characteritics and values, and therefore are not always transferrable to a different contexts (Smith et al., 2014). The local characteristics in social innovations was elaborated upon in chapter three, which illustrated community gardens in rural, peri-urban, and urban contexts. While up and out-scaling such initiatives could align with their broader goals, it might not necessarily benefit their local community. This thesis argues that community food collectives could be viewed as initiating new and alternative pathways for sustainability change. Rather than focusing on top-down imposed targets and benchmarks, sustainable collectives illustrate how citizens can take the lead, set the agenda, and show what is possible, while simultaneously having the capacity to politicize sustainability debates. The initiatives studied were all self-directed, seeking out their own resources and finding their own unique way to contribute to sustainable change. For example, Twin Oaks in chapter four, applied their internal food processing capacity to address food waste challenges at a greater scale through processing food that would otherwise be thrown out by the food bank. All initiatives researched were found to address sustainability in their own way – adapted to and embedded in their local community. Community members at Los Angeles Eco-Village (LAEV) emphasizes the ecovillages' attitude of "DO now, apologize later", urging acting upon conscious, healthy activities, instead of following top-down rules and regulations. Communities were found to acknowledge the impact of their own actions over decisions made by top-down institutions, and found their own agency in contributing to sustainable change.

The contribution of these initiatives to new sustainability pathways is well articulated through their role as, what Kaika (2017) calls, "living indicators". Living indicators could be described as forms of citizen action that reflect failings in the state of affairs. Meaning, the existence and experimental practices of citizen collectives hold weight in pointing to (sustainability) gaps in our current society and potential, experimental ways forwards. More importantly, living indicators simultaneously *challenge* "business as usual" (Kaika, 2017). It is through processes of dissensus and

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critiquing existing sustainability policies as insufficient for addressing global environmental change, that living indicators signal what is actually *needed* as well as *how* solutions can be realized (Kaika, 2017). The notion of living indicators was highlighted through how the Free Café brought attention to an excessively wasteful food system, built on a capitalist (food) system and therefore on the necessity to overproduce (chapter two). The ecovillage communities, in chapters four and five, attempted to act as "demonstration projects", in order to model alternatives to mainstream society and embed environmentally and socially responsible practices into their everyday lives. Communities conducted sustainable practices, regardless of local restrictions, and, in turn, attracted the attention of local policy makers to such issues. This was observed, at Los Angeles Eco-Village, in installing gray water irrigation systems and hosting chickens in their backyard (which, at the time, was not only a rare sight, but also illegal). Do-It-Yourself gray water irrigation systems, for example, steps around "unreasonable" municipal permits and bureaucracy while demanding action for sustainable water conservation (Sherman, 2015). Through communities' efforts in initiating sustainable change, such collectives reveal where power lies and create a space to negotiate it (Melucci, 1998). As stated by Sikkink (2002), "the power to shape the agenda, or to shape the very manner in which issues are perceived and debated, can be a deep and substantial exercise of power" (p. 304). Therefore, through bringing attention to issues around food and sustainability, the community initiatives align with Sage et al.'s (2020) conception of food initiatives that dare to experiment with "new" and "other" forms of sustainability transformation. That is, a form of sustainability change that does not shy away from challenging corporate capitalism and addressing the roots of unsustainability and inequality (Blythe et al., 2018; Feola, 2014; Pelling, 2010). Theories of social innovation and community economies, which are both concerned with addressing marginalization and fostering social justice, are therefore relevant for and can also contribute to sustainability transformations (Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2009). For, Twin Oaks member, John, food was seen to be a necessary way to do so. As he states:

> We [Twin Oaks] grow a little less than 1/2 of our own food ...
> I think from the political mindset of challenging capitalism
> in its current form is making people aware that the current
> division of labor in society only exists, or can only continue to
> exist on the backs of overexploited cheap migrant laborers ...
> Somehow being involved with the food system here, whether
> it's cooking, cleaning, and growing, is very important for me
> because I think it shapes the world for the better ... If this
> community didn't accomplish that, in terms of food, then
> I would see this community as presenting much less of an
> alternative to mainstream society.

Understanding experimental sustainability pathways can help better identify research and policy recommendations. For example, the initiatives studied demonstrated promise as well as challenges of collaborating with governmental institutions. The Dutch initiatives, for example, in chapters two and three, were granted resources such as space, funding, and volunteers, from municipal governments. While this allowed them ease in their operation, it could arguably keep them obligated to the aims of such institutions, rather than laying their own path. The ecovillages studied in the United States attempted to be financially autonomous, operating free from grants and their obligations – often intentionally for this reason. Nevertheless, both kinds of initiatives hold their advantages and work within their means.

In sum, the community-based food initiatives researched in this thesis illuminate new pathways to sustainability. Such a pathway addresses sustainability issues, through bottom up, community-based, democratic, and collective means. In confronting sustainable change, this means directly challenging concentrated power and privilege, embedded, for example, in commodity traders or corporations which have slowly contaminated political systems (De Schutter et al., 2019). Strategies for these pathways to sustainability, as identified in this thesis, include commoning (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016) and commoning governance (Leitheiser et al., 2021), and organized and networked place-based action – which also has a broader impact beyond the local scale (Ulug et al., 2021). Such

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sustainability pathways are already visible through movements such as Extinction Rebellion, La Via Campesina, and Transition Towns. These organizations take local action while also putting pressure on policy makers for more structural change. In light of literature that highlights the unsustainability of technocratic and top-down roadmaps to sustainability (Holt-Giménez, 2017; Leitheiser and Follmann, 2020; Stollmann et al., 2016; Vivero-Pol et al., 2019), community-based alternatives widen sustainability debates and demonstrate capacities for experimentation. The value of community-based food collectives is echoed in the sentiment that "if we cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them then it is unlikely that planetary-scale thinking will entirely resolve our global predicament" (Sage et al., 2020, p. 3). A new sustainability pathway is needed – one that is willing to experiment with out-of-the-box practices. Therefore, based on the discussion above, community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability through contributing to experimental and innovation pathways – relevant beyond food system change, and also towards greater social transformation.

6.4. Positionality and reflection on methods

In this section I aim to position myself as a researcher, as well as reflect on the methods conducted in this thesis. Specifically, I will discuss the objectivity of this work, how my own position affected the results, and the importance of the methods employed for researching food system sustainability and citizen initiatives.

Through situating my positionality and role as a researcher in this thesis, I contend to the fact that, ultimately, this knowledge is neither universal, nor objective (Rose, 1997), or, as Bourke (2004) argues "to achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity" (p. 3). Nevertheless, throughout the process of researching sustainable collectives, I still attempted to remain critical of them, which, at times, was challenging. In particular, during my fieldwork in ecovillages in the United States, research participants as well as others who I

encountered could sense my personal investment. That being said, my personal motivations to research sustainability are linked to scientific understandings of the value of sustainability and sustainable change. I believe that academic research and science have a role and responsibility in enacting change towards more sustainable societies. As argued by Lockyer (2007), "such engagement [around sustainable initiatives] opens up spaces to analyze processes of cultural change and transition that are of fundamental interest to social and behavioral scientists and of direct import to policy makers concerned with the sustainable use and conservation of natural resources" (p. 538). As a social researcher, I felt responsible to highlight different perspectives and understandings in communities and bring such findings to the forefront in academic discourses. In this sense, for me, involvement in and critically analyzing the role of community food collectives are in itself "a form of ethical political action" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 113).

Furthermore, I found the expectation of objectivity in my ethnographic work as especially challenging in light of building trust with communities. I built trust through volunteering with community initiatives (also contributing to their own goals), as well as through interactions outside of direct community ambitions (ex. drinking tea and going on walks together with community members). Building trust was also aided by the topic of this research and especially sharing meals with participants. In conducting fieldwork, I found it important to implement a more personal approach, in being transparent about myself and my research, and not shying away from personal interactions. Such encounters could be described as being driven by an ethics of being "empathic and interactive rather than extractive and objective" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p. 732). While such an approach helped gain trust in communities, I found it overall important to initiate interactions with communities from the intention of care opposed to calculated target, therefore seeing the research as a process, rather than an end result (England, 1994). I also experienced challenges, as many participants were often too busy for casual interactions. Meeting and engaging with new participants therefore necessitated me to maintain a level of endurance and constantly put myself out of my comfort zone. This challenge became

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easier to overcome over time, especially after developing a clear script for myself and my research. Building trust while remaining critical was challenging, however, I found it helpful to remain curious, not take anything for face-value, and speak with different participants (also informally) to gather a range of perspectives.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge and reflect upon my positionality as a researcher in order to communicate the context in which this research emerged as well as account for external influencing factors. Differently positioned subjects, including research participants and myself, have "distinct identities, experiences and perspectives, shaping their understanding of and engagement with the world – subjectivities, imaginaries, interests and knowledge" (Leitner et al, 2008, p. 163). Leitner et al. (2008) elaborates how positionality develops from relations between differently positioned subjects, for example through power relations between "researcher" and "researched".

The research in this thesis was conducted in the Netherlands (chapters two and three) and the United States (chapters four and five). When engaging with research participants in the Netherlands, I confronted cultural and language barriers, differing from my native English language and American culture. While I spoke Dutch during observations and (casual) conversations with participants, I found that Dutch participants could better articulate themselves in English than I could in their language. For this reason, all interviews were conducted in English. This undoubtedly had implications for how research participants expressed themselves. Despite an overall confidence with the English language, a few respondents still found themselves struggling for the appropriate words. Nevertheless, my conversational Dutch still proved useful when volunteering and conducting observations in these cases. When volunteering at gardens with fewer international visitors (ex. in the villages of Eenrum and Snakkerburen) my noticeably foreign accent sparked the curiosity of initiative participants, leading to broader conversations of shared global sustainability challenges. Despite potential barriers between myself and the participants, as individuals, our shared and differing understandings of sustainability issues brought a sense of solidarity and validation between us. Being regarded as a relative outsider

arguably served as an advantage in this research, as it offered a "fresh" external perspective.

Chapters four and five were based on fieldwork conducted in American ecovillages. I attempted to entrench myself in these communities through participating in community activities and following the daily lives of residents. Undeniably, I benefited from the fact that I am white, middle class, and educated and therefore could fit into what has been considered the homogenous population of these communities (Lopez and Weaver, 2018). This, in addition to an alignment in cultural background, values, and worldviews, could indicate that I possessed an "insider" position, in my ability to connect with the communities (Chavez, 2008). While I experienced benefits, such as being able to quickly gain trust and access in communities, I also found it challenging to not slip between the two roles – focusing on my research versus getting caught up in community life, for myself as well as within the community. For example, there were instances where community members overlooked my intentions and purposes as a researcher and, instead regarded me as a volunteer worker. While this made it easier to build rapport and arguably provided me a more "authentic" experience, at the same time, it potentially distracted me and subjected me to the same inner-hierarchies experienced in the community (for example between provisional and official members). Such an experience has also been documented by other researchers, who attribute their insider-status as positioning them too much within social groups (Kusow, 2003). Additionally, similar backgrounds kept participants from describing topics (i.e. sustainability) as they assumed that I possessed sufficient background knowledge, which has also been documented by others (DeLyser, 2001; Miller, 1997). Nevertheless, despite staying in these communities and connecting with them, I was not an official member and therefore could also be considered an "outsider".

Lastly, I would like to reflect on the value and challenges of the methods employed in this thesis specifically food mapping and ethnographic fieldwork.

Food mapping was valuable to understand daily community food practices, in how food was encountered and organized within the

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community. In the literature, there are few documentations of such methods, which include children's food experiences in schools (Earl, 2018), urban ecology (Edwards and Mercer, 2010), and food consciousness (Wight and Killman, 2014). In chapter four I used food mapping to understand ecovillages' sustainable food practices by asking participants to annotate food practices on a map of their community. After participants illustrated their food practices, we would discuss their notes to open a discussion about their community food practices. These conversations were found to be the most valuable component of the activity – they helped participants think about their food practices and connect them to the physical space of the community. Therefore, food mapping could also be seen as useful way to engage with place for transformative sustainability research (Horlings et al., 2020). Food mapping, in the end, functioned as a prop to open up broader discussion of food's connections to place, communities, and how community life was very much intertwined with how they fed themselves. While the maps were interesting relics, their greatest value was for enhancing the conversations and interviews, rather than being a product in themselves.

I would like to reflect upon challenges and lessons learned from the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in the United States, at the three ecovillage communities: Twin Oaks, Los Angeles Eco-Village, and Finney Farm. I stayed at each community for one month, expecting this to be enough time to build relationships and trust with the community, understand how the community functioned, and collect sufficient data. Ethnographic studies, however, potentially last much longer, from a few months to several years (Emerson et al., 2011). Due to the limiting (three year) PhD contract, the necessity to visit multiple communities, and the communities' own limits for visitor terms, it was found to be most practical to spend one month in each ecovillage. However, as a result, the time building relationships in the communities was experienced as rushed. In hindsight, it would have been more advantageous to spend either a longer period with one community or a longer time at all of them. The intensive fieldwork period also left me feeling exhausted and lost in mountains of data. It was challenging to winnow many extensive interviews and observation data into a couple short chapters. I would have

liked to include more voices of participants and often felt frustrated cutting out text to fit journal word limits. Speaking with colleagues, I learned that many experience similar struggles that are well-known when completing a publication-based thesis. Looking back, I could have made decisions that would abate such challenges, for example choosing fewer cases and conducting fewer interviews.

6.5. Suggestions for policy and research

6.5.1. Policy implications and recommendations

While the emergence of community food collectives signals an undercurrent of change from civil society, there is space for policy makers to play a role in strengthening these developments. Food has been increasingly a subject of local policies, through for example Food Policy Councils (Leitheiser et al., 2021) and Urban Food Strategies (Cretella, 2019; Smaal et al., 2020). This thesis has highlighted the growing role that civil society already plays and potentially can take for fulfilling goals around food system sustainability. Following, are a few policy recommendations based on the evidence presented in this thesis of ways in which the impact of community-based food collectives can be elevated via policies, contributing to (food system) sustainability.

Support place-based policies

Firstly, this thesis identified the importance of place for community food collectives and food system sustainability (see chapters three and four). There is growing attention for place-based policies, which pay specific attention to the uniqueness of places, recognizing local institutions and embedded knowledge, and building upon material qualities, and emotional attachments of a place (Barca, 2009; Barca et al., 2012; Beer et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2018; Collinge et al., 2011). Evidence in this thesis stresses that community food initiatives build upon the importance of local and place-based resources

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and knowledge in order to contribute to sustainable food systems (chapters three and four). Strengthening policies that support place-based communities, for example, connecting them to (place-based) knowledge institutions (see Rodríguez-Pose, 2013), could in turn also provide more stability for community groups and enhance their (sustainability) impact across places. That being said, there must also be care for and attention to the place-specific qualities and wishes of the community. Trust in community groups can be fragile and must be handled with sensitivity, especially coming from more top-down institutions.

Provide assistance in securing land access

Secondly, this thesis documented community initiatives facing difficulties with land access and tenure. Secure and stable access to land is vital for community initiatives to have a place to flourish. This was seen primarily in urban contexts, (such as the Free Café and Toentje in Groningen, the Netherlands) where the initiatives were forced to relocate to make room for housing developments. Urban community gardens are especially vulnerable to displacement, as healthy, unpolluted soil is scarcer in urban environments.

Creative solutions for securing land were witnessed at ecovillage cases in the United States. Finney Farm and Los Angeles Eco-Village purchased their land, and established community land trusts (CLT). CLTs are democratically controlled non-profit organizations, which buy pieces of land to fulfill societally focused goals. This often includes providing affordable housing and access to land for those unable to afford it with current housing market pressures. This is a potential model that can be supported by governments. However, this means that community groups must still find ways to purchasing land, which can be challenging if property prices are already prohibitive.

While not researched in this thesis, examples of communal housing corporations, seen in the Netherlands, provide insight into how community groups could purchase property, with support from policy makers. De Tortel Tuin (De Tortel Tuin, 2021) and de

Nieuwe Meent (De Nieuwe Meent, 2021) are two collectives, based in Amsterdam, which have begun crowdfunding campaigns to establish housing corporations, based around principles of urban permaculture (de Tortel Tuin) and commoning (de Nieuwe Meent). Both initiatives also receive support from the municipality of Amsterdam as well as banks that are willing to grant them a loan. Municipalities and banks willing to experiment with sustainable grants and lending schemes could therefore provide creative institutional arrangements to give space to ecological intentional communities.

Build capacities through food strategies

This thesis witnessed internal tensions, hierarchies, and conflicts within initiatives (chapters two, four, and five) and therefore recognizes the importance of participatory as well as reflective governance processes. Urban food strategies and food policy councils are increasingly being recognized as a venue through which to create democratic, participatory, and sustainable food systems (Cretella, 2019; Smaal et al., 2020; Leitheiser et al., 2021). To contribute to wider policy discussions around sustainable food systems, this thesis supports food strategies as an appropriate venue through which community-based food initiatives can be strengthened and support their sustainability goals.

Stimulate networks and the work of umbrella organizations

Strong networks and venues for knowledge sharing were found to be essential to the success of community food initiatives. Networks could be strengthened by governments, either through financial support or knowledge exchange. Examples of how to build cooperatives and networks among citizens are seen with energy initiatives, such as GrEK (Groninger Energie Koepel, 2021) in Groningen. Here, the project provides knowledge and support for villages and neighborhoods that wish to save energy together. A similar model

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could be followed for citizens that wish to contribute to sustainable food systems in their direct living environment. Such organizations could materialize as Food policy councils, as described above, or through an initiative similar to the Neighborhood Garden Solidarity Networks (*Buurttuin Solidariteit Netwerk*) in Amsterdam (Buurt Groet 020, 2021). Ecovillage and intentional communities also provide examples of larger networks, for example the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN, 2021) or the Transition Town network (Transition Network, 2021). These organizations function as larger "umbrella" networks, with smaller, regional, self-governed chapters. While most work is done on a local level, the larger organization can help scale up lessons learned and communicate them to other sectors.

6.5.2. Future research recommendations

There were many opportunities for future research, that were out of the scope of this thesis. Firstly, ecovillages and intentional communities were witnessed to be a promising site to further research post-capitalist initiatives, for example through the community economies framework. The communities researched in this thesis often networked with a larger group of intentional communities in their immediate environment, for example through trading resources and labor. One participant regarded these as "clusters of communities", which could be viewed as examples of small-scale networks of community economies. Researching how networks of initiatives trade and share resources, outside of market conventions could provide valuable insight into how post-capitalist futures can materialize.

Additionally, chapter four developed the foodscapes lens into a means through which to view community food practices – emphasizing their social and spatial components. This lens was found to be useful for analyzing how food practices are place-based and relational, and the importance of both for contributing to sustainability in food initiatives. Foodscapes has been emerging as a promising concept that could provide future applications for food system sustainability. It would be beneficial for future research to build upon more creative ways to conduct foodscape mapping, to further

unearth the sustainability value of the foodscapes lens. This could include drawing from practices of deep mapping, to reveal layered understanding of place-based resources, but also social narratives and histories (see: Roberts, 2016; Humphris et al., *forthcoming*).

Lastly, as discussed in the discussion section (6.3.2.), the emergence of new municipalism movements could open up new avenues for citizens to share knowledge and ideas, and contribute to sustainable food system change. Local democratic networks, seen in New Municipalism, share goals with those in food sustainability. Future research could look into, for example, overlap between these movements and how they can potentially strengthen one another.

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APPENDICES

English summary

Industrialization, globalization, and urbanization have resulted in drastic changes in the global food system. These changes have led to a disconnection of food producers and consumers, and from that has come a series of unsustainable ramifications for the environment, public health, local communities and economies. With markets and governments failing to assume responsibility, citizen groups are responding and taking action towards food system sustainability. More than only emphasizing sustainable food production and consumption, food system sustainability also encompasses ways in which to re-think and re-structure globalized food systems, to better combine and account for its environmental, social, and economic elements, simultaneously making space for public participation and decision-making (Blay-Palmer and Koc, 2012; Feestra, 2002; Pretty, 1998).

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the emergence of citizen groups working to address food and sustainability-related issues in their community and beyond. This research terms these groups community-based food collectives. Such collectives are often self-governing initiatives and attempt to contribute to sustainable change on a local level. Local governments are increasingly taking notice of such initiatives, and their experimental and innovative means of addressing sustainability challenges. However, little is known about the potential of such community-based collectives for achieving sustainability goals and influencing food system change on different scales. Therefore, the question this thesis asks is how do community-based food collectives contribute to food system sustainability? In addition, little is known about how these collectives are organized and governed and how place-specific resources enable the existence, as well as the societal and sustainability contributions of these initiatives (Mehmood and Parra, 2013; MacKinnon and Derickson, 2012). This thesis also addresses and explores the potential of sustainable food practices of community-based food collectives – for local impacts as well as changes on a broader scale (Brombin, 2015; Renting et al., 2012) and how these sustainable practices connect to values in communities (Ballard et al., 2010; Horlings, 2015).

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To answer the above research question, three kinds of community-based collectives were researched, in the Netherlands and the United States. These include a food waste initiative, in Groningen, the Netherlands, three community gardens in the North of the Netherlands, and three ecovillage communities in the United States. This thesis chose to analyze collectives with a range of organizational and governance styles, which address specific place-based sustainability needs in their (local) communities. An in-depth ethnographic approach was taken, through researching these community initiatives through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and food mapping methods.

The chapters and findings are summarized below:

Chapter two focuses on the organization and governance of a community food collective by investigating the Free Café, a food waste initiative in Groningen, the Netherlands. This chapter examines the initiative through a lens of community economies, reframing community economic practices, to include those outside of capitalist markets. Despite the café considering itself to be "non-hierarchical", the research period observed changes to the organization and governance of the initiative, indicating a hierarchy and inner-power relations. While the Free Café could be considered a citizen experiment, attempting to exist outside of capitalist relations, this research revealed that nuances around power still exist, as well as how lines around "capitalist" and "non-capitalist" or "autonomous" are in fact quite blurry. This chapter illustrates the Free Café as a relevant example of local citizen action around food waste and food system sustainability.

Chapter three explores enabling factors of community-based food collectives, through examining conditions and process of resourcefulness in community gardens in the North of the Netherlands. Framing community gardens as social innovations, through their creation of (new) social rules and relationships toward social change, this chapter simultaneously explores how resourcefulness can enable social innovations. Community gardens specifically illustrated how

resourcefulness is a place-based process. Resourcefulness was found to be valuable for understanding enabling processes of social innovations. The concept therefore describes the actual on-the-ground processes experienced by communities, as well as how communities build capacities contributing to change in their environment and towards sustainable food systems.

Chapter four investigates food practices in community food collectives. This chapter specifically analyzes place-based and relational food practices in three ecovillage communities in the United States. A foodscapes lens, grounded in social practice theory, is used to "zoom in" on and "zoom out" of social and spatial food practices, and explore how ecovillage contribute to sustainable food systems. The findings shed light on the role of place-based knowledge, resources, and (wider) networks for contributing to sustainable food systems in these communities. Furthermore, the foodscapes lens exposes how food can be used to bridge ecovillages with external communities, also extending their sustainability impact beyond their place-based context.

Lastly, chapter five examines the role of collective identity in community-based food collectives for sustainability transformations. Ecovillage communities are examined to illustrate how their collective identities are linked to both value and behavior change, in subjective and object realms of sustainability transformation. Above all, bonding mechanisms were found to bring the community together and contribute to shared goals of sustainable (food system) change. However, challenges were also found in communities' attempts to maintain their (internal) community cultures while also contributing to (external) changes in the mainstream, pointing to the relevance to examine inclusion and exclusion in sustainable communities, especially in the scaling up and out of initiatives.

Overall, the above chapters contribute to three main theoretical themes and debates discussed in the introductory and concluding chapters: spaces of possibility, place-based action, and new sustainability debates and pathways.

The findings from the thesis indicate that community-based food collectives could be seen as opening spaces of possibility, through means of democratic governance and commoning of resources.

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While such initiatives are very much intertwined with mainstream and capitalist systems, they can help us imagine how small-scale and innovative projects can become a reality. Furthermore, such initiatives raise awareness around the unsustainability of current (food) systems and demonstrate how to enact sustainable alternatives.

Community-based food initiatives were found to initiate place-based action through drawing from place-based resources, connecting to place-based and relational networks, and establishing place-based democratic governance processes. Place, as a concept, was found to be valuable for highlighting communities' negotiation with their place-based communities and contexts, for example, balancing various goals, opinions, and priorities.

Lastly, community-based food initiatives signal a changing tide in sustainability pathways and debates. Rather than emphasizing technocratic and top-down action, such initiatives were found to address sustainability issues through bottom up, community-based, democratic, and collective means. Through these actions, such initiatives can be seen to set the agenda for more structural and radical change, therefore politicizing debates towards sustainable (food system) change.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Dit proefscript onderzoekt voedselburgerinitiatieven die bijdragen aan duurzamere voedselsystemen. Deze initiatieven zijn op zoek naar een alternatief voor het globale en industriele voedselsysteem dat destructieve gevolgen heeft voor het milieu, de volksgezondheid en lokale gemeenschapen ontwricht. Burgers nemen het heft in hun eigen hand om oplossingen te zoeken voor deze rampzalige gevolgen. Voedselburgerinitiatieven zijn zelfgestuurde gemeenschappen die problemen van voedselduurzaamheid aanpakken in hun directe gemeenschap. In deze thesis zijn deze bottom-up initiatieven onderzocht met de centrale vraag: *hoe dragen voedselburgerinitiatieven bij aan meer duurzamere voedselsystemen?* Om een beeld te krijgen van deze gemeenschappen, hun governance, hun hulpbronnen en hun potentieel voor een meer duurzame wereld zijn drie soorten initiatieven onderzocht in Nederland en Amerika. Drie belangrijke bevinden van het onderzoek:

Ten eerste, de experimentiele bestuursmechanismes openen een perspectief voor een meer democratische en participatieve manier samenwerken.

Ten tweede, om goed te begrijpen hoe deze gemeenschappen kunnen bestaan en groeien is het concept van 'place' onmisbaar. Dit concept omvat zowel materiele en non-materiele bronnen, netwerken, en kennis, voor duurzame voedselsysteem veranderingen.

Ten slotte, voedsel urgerinitiatieven geven een belangrijke verandering aan in het debat rond duurzaamheid waarin de kracht van collectieve actie voor een meer duurzame wereld wordt erkent.

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About the author

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Ciska was born in Austin, Texas, in the United States, to Dutch mother and a father of Turkish descent. After finishing her bachelors in Anthropology and Psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, she found herself embarking on several adventures: living in collective houses, working in gardens and community organizations, and biking down the Pacific coast of the United States. After living in Iowa for a year, working with the Meskwaki tribe to revitalize their local and traditional food system, she decided it was time to connect to her own (Dutch) roots. In 2015 Ciska moved to the Netherlands to pursue the Regional Studies Research Master at the University of Groningen. Throughout her master's degree, she continued to unpack how communities and food systems are intertwined and how community initiatives can support sustainable food system development – research that would eventually land her a PhD in the same faculty. Ciska's main research interests revolve around (food system) sustainability, community initiatives, and (more generally) the role of citizen action for sustainable societies. Her main theoretical interests include community and diverse economies, social innovation, and social practice theory. She especially likes to explore the above through ethnographic, participatory, and creative methods. Today, she lives in Amsterdam with her kitten, Patatje.

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If a PhD isn't lonely enough, the scholarship PhD left me feeling detached from a larger project. Luckily that changed when four new PhDs entered our Planning department and the *Marie Skłodowska-Curie* training network, RECOMS commenced. The fifteen fellows, scattered throughout Europe welcomed me with open arms to three of their trainings, where I felt at home within a community of researchers. Discussions and activities at these trainings and fellows in Groningen were inspiring and indispensable for this thesis as well as my own development as a researcher. Thank you all 15 of you <3

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