CULTIVATE
POLICY BRIEF

URBAN AND PERI-URBAN FOOD SHARING GOVERNANCE

DISCOVER THE POTENTIAL OF URBAN FOOD SHARING TO FOSTER SUSTAINABLE CITY TRANSFORMATIONS

Food sharing is increasingly making its way in cities, offering new opportunities to tackle inequalities and shape more sustainable and resilient urban and peri-urban food systems. However, food sharing initiatives face multiple policy barriers that hinder its potential. Drawing on an international review of existing studies of Food Sharing Initiatives (FSI) governance, this first policy brief of the CULTIVATE Project summarizes key governance barriers that currently limit the sustainability potential of FSIs and also distils a suite of high-level policy recommendations to rectify this.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Food-sharing initiatives are part of food systems and play a role in their transition towards more sustainable forms. Therefore, FSIs need to be considered when reshaping governance dynamics, and particularly in the development of international, national, regional or local food-related policies and programs. Below, we identify key multilevel policy recommendations to advance sustainable food sharing across the EU.

1. **Acknowledge food sharing initiatives' sustainability potential** as enablers of healthy and sustainable food environments in official documents such the Framework for a Sustainable Food System (FSFS).

2. **Integrate regulatory policies and voluntary agreements** to allow the development of wider sustainable food sharing strategies.

3. **Promote food sharing collaborations** and agreements between a wide range of stakeholders including national and local governments, businesses, charities, NGOs and communities, farmers, food entrepreneurs and activists.

4. **Create synergies between different levels** of food sharing governance.

5. **Empower vulnerable citizen groups** (e.g., the elderly, poorer households, long-term unemployed, migrants) to participate in food sharing initiatives through job creation as well as cultural inclusion measures.

6. **Grant financial independence** and budget for collaborative governance on food sharing.

7. **Consider food sharing as one of the strategic responses to health, socio-economic or climate crises** and allocate resilience funds to increase their capacity to act in case of disruptive events.

Cities play a crucial role in the transformation of the food system. They are hubs for the consumption and distribution of food as well as drivers of innovation for cultural and social change. Food sharing initiatives can provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits to local communities, and can support vulnerable groups while positively impacting social movements, local business, public institutions and the city as a whole. Given the wide-ranging potential impacts that food sharing initiatives can have, food sharing provides opportunities to accomplish key social, economic and/or environmental performance indicators of different city departments in order to reach sustainability goals (see Figure 1). These include sustainability indicators identified in specific food strategies, national programmes, European and international protocols such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, the Farm to Fork strategy or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

HOW CAN WE FOSTER FOOD SHARING BENEFITS?

Changing policy and governance of food sharing. FSIs are rapidly changing the urban foodscape and offer new opportunities to shape more sustainable urban food systems despite facing complex governance challenges. Governance architectures must play a key role in expanding and strengthening sustainable food sharing, through the appropriate governance of FSIs and other food system actors, such as national and local governments, businesses, charities, NGOs and communities, farmers, food entrepreneurs or activists.

WHAT ARE THE GOVERNANCE BARRIERS TO ADVANCING FOOD SHARING?

Food sharing initiatives operate within a complex, fragmented and multilevel policy landscape. They are affected by norms and regulations from a wide range of sectors such as food safety, urban and regional planning, social services or culture. By and large, this policy landscape considers food as a commodity side-lining other non-market-based conceptualizations, meanings and relations that we establish around food, such as those at the heart of many FSIs such as food as a human right or commons. Consequently, food sharing faces multiple policy barriers that hinder its potential to create more sustainable food systems. A participative

exercise in the context of the SHARECITY project identified the following policy barriers across the three main areas of FSIs activities – growing, cooking and eating, and redistributing food.

• Narrow conceptualization of food as a commodity

• Lack of a systems perspective in policy development perpetuating siloes across sectors and scales

• Lack of recognition of sustainability impact of food sharing initiatives

• Strict food safety regulations designed for commercial activities

• Limitations on the use of spaces and access to resources (including funding)

• Limited influence, participation and inclusivity of policy-making processes

Additionally, each of the key areas of food sharing experiences specific policy barriers across different levels of governance. These are:

Growing: The main policy barrier for the development of urban gardens revolve around regulatory gaps in land use planning and the expansion of neoliberal development policies favouring commercial developments. In many cities there is a lack of support, protection, implementation and promotion of urban gardens and their multiple benefits through land use planning strategies.

Cooking and eating: FSIs focused on cooking and eating are immersed in complex policy landscapes mostly shaped by the economic interests within the food sector. These types of initiatives face burdensome bureaucratic and administrative demands. Often, policy focuses on furthering the economic impact of these initiatives while side-lining their social impacts such as improved wellbeing, inclusion, or the protection of human rights. At the same time, this reductionist focus results in negative impacts mostly for marginalized communities and a reinforcement of race, class and gender food inequalities.

Redistribution: Key policy barriers hindering food surplus redistribution are mostly related to the

BENEFITS	**SOCIAL**	Accessibility of food	Increasing appreciation of different cultures	SDG 11
			Improving communications skills	SDG 11
			Fostering a wider food and sharing culture	SDG 9, 11 and 17
		Community integration and sharing	Increased access to and consumption of fresh food	SDG 2, 3 10
		Health and Wellbeing	Connecting and creating new support networks	SDG 3, 11
			Boosting levels of meal sharing	SDG 2, 3 11
			Increasing well-being	SDG 3, 11
			Improving self-confidence and resilience	SDG 1, 3, 10, 11
			Increasing movement and exercise	SDG 3
			Increasing access to health and well-being services	SDG 3
		Education and food choices	Thinking about issues beyond price when buying food	SDG 12
			Increasing engagement in growing food	SDG 11
			Increased confidence and participation in cooking	SDG 3
			Discovery of new fresh foods	SDG 3, 10
	ENVIRONMENTAL	Agricultural practices	Diverting organic waste from landfill	SDG 11, 12, 13, 15
			Water recovery	SDG 11, 12, 13, 15
			Maintaining and improving soil quality	SDG 11, 12, 13, 15
			Maintaining and improving biodiversity	SDG 11, 12, 13, 15
		Food waste	Food waste reduction	SDG 11, 12, 13
		Carbon footprint	Reduction of the carbon footprint	SDG 12, 13
		Education and food choices	Increase preferences for vegetarian meals	SDG 3, 12, 13
			Reducing food packeging	SDG 11, 12, 13, 15
	ECONOMIC	Jobs	Training and jobs	SDG 4, 8, 9, 10
			Fairly paid work	SDG 8, 9, 10
		Urban food production	Contribution to food production	SDG 8, 9, 11, 12
		Affordability	Reducing pressure on food budgets	SDG 1, 2, 10
		Education and food choices	Sharing specific skills and knowledge about the food system	SDG 3, 11, 12

Figure 1: Food sharing initiatives and sustainability. Source: Adapted from Mackenzie, S. G., & Davies, A. R. (2019). SHARE IT: Co-designing a sustainability impact assessment framework for urban food sharing initiatives. *Environmental impact assessment review*, 79, 106300.

conception and implementation of food safety and food waste regulatory frameworks, and the ambiguous interpretation of liability rules. Existing legal frameworks are designed for large-scale commercial operators and consider all organisations as business while ignoring significant differences in scale, structure, and modes of operation. This 'one fits all' system puts individuals facing potentially disproportionate legal risks in relation to the actual safety risks posited by food they share.

In addition, labelling regulations, such as best before dates, directly and significantly affect surplus food redistribution options. There are also prejudices related to eating surplus food and a lack of public awareness on the impacts of food waste. Moreover, there is a general lack of policies addressing food poverty, regulating food environments to reduce junk food (and junk surplus food) or giving incentives to redistribute surplus food.

SOME EXAMPLES OF FOOD-SHARING INITIATIVES

Milan Food Waste Hubs is a municipal-led initiative which aims to halve waste by 2030 by creating hubs to recover food mainly from supermarkets and corporate canteens and donate it to NGOs, which would redistribute it to vulnerable citizens. Today the city has five Food Waste Hubs, each recovering about 70 tons of food per year.

UpFarming is a Portuguese social enterprise that builds healthy, sustainable, resilient cities through participatory vertical farming. It combines the productive power of vertical farming with the therapeutic benefits of community gardens to make financially self-sustaining, community-governed farms in city centers.

Zusamen leben E.V is a German NGO that organises open civil society spaces for encounters to break down prejudices, get to know and understand each other, learn about sustainability in a trusting environment and build a foundation for peaceful coexistence by eating and gardening together.

Fundació Espigoladors is a Spanish NGO that uses gleaning and surplus food product development to divert agricultural produce from landfill, thus preventing food waste and food loss. Most recovered food is distributed to social entities and food banks. This NGO has also developed an innovation lab for food transformation that produces vegetable preserves with their own brand while generating job opportunities for people at risk of social exclusion.

KEY READINGS

1. Sharing Futures Workshop: The future of food sharing governance. Facilitator's summary. 2019. Available in: https://sharecity.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/SHARING-FUTURES_Facilitators-Summary.pdf

2. Davies, A. R., Cretella, A., & Franck, V. (2019). Food sharing initiatives and food democracy: Practice and policy in three European cities. *Politics and Governance*, 7(4), 8-20.

3. Davies, A. R., Edwards, F., Marovelli, B., Morrow, O., Rut, M., & Weymes, M. (2017). Making visible: Interrogating the performance of food sharing across 100 urban areas. *Geoforum*, 86, 136-149.

4. Zurek, K. (2016). Food sharing in Europe: Between regulating risks and the risks of regulating. *European Journal of Risk Regulation*, 7(4), 675-687.

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