Local food strategies as a stepping-stone in global sustainability: applying Hajer's sustainability perspectives to Ghent

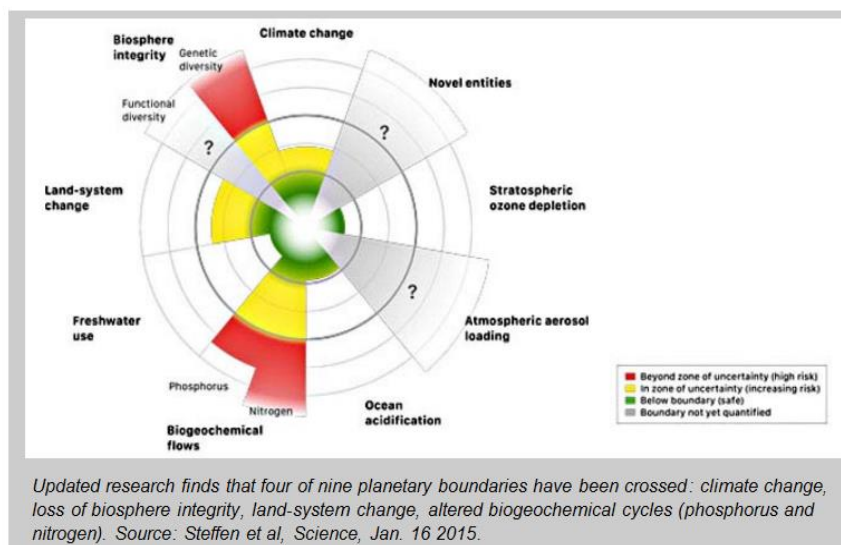**Maarten Crivits, Charlotte Prové, Thomas Block, Joost Dessein, Vera Dua**

1. Introduction

In this essay, we will explore how the city of Ghent can deploy a local food strategy, which is aligned with important objectives and rationales related to the agenda of sustainable development. In a recent contribution to the journal *Sustainability,* Hajer *et al* (2015) elaborate a nuanced critique on how to re-describe the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a set of globally binding targets and goals that will be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015. They warn for what they term 'cockpit-ism', i.e. the illusion that top-down steering by governments alone can address global problems. They argue that multiple perspectives on sustainable development are needed in order to engage civil society, business and local actors and respond to their needs, interests and capacities. They propose four connected perspectives that can strengthen the transformative potential of global sustainability: (1) planetary boundaries; (2) the safe and just operating space; (3) the energetic society and (4) green competition.

While the authors focus on a scale and dimension of global governance, we would like to strengthen the importance of the local level and bottom-up initiatives and also argue that similar challenges and opportunities play at this local level. We aim to show that in the context of local food strategies and urban agriculture (UA), 'cockpitism' is a similar danger. We show how the City of Ghent – as any other city in Belgium/ understandable due to its intrinsic complexity – is searching to find its position as mediator, facilitator and innovator in the deployment of a local food strategy. By adopting the proposed four perspectives to the case of local food strategies we hope to overcome overly abstract or technical approaches to sustainability and provide policy makers, stakeholders and citizens with a renewed focus on the potentialities of UA. In a discussion we reflect on each of the four perspectives in relation to the city's local food strategy and its governance of UA, by referring to the concept of food sovereignty as an overarching concept. In addition we point out the relevance and importance of acknowledging mutual influence of different local food strategies all over the globe, showing how the 'local' is anchored in global dimension of sustainable development. We conclude by offering a series of insights for local policy makers.

Planetary boundaries

The concept of planetary boundaries was put on the agenda by Rockström, et al. (2012), and delineates how human behavior impacts the Earth System (ES) in its continuation of a resilient and accommodating state. A science-based analysis foregrounded nine global priorities related to human-induced changes to the environment such as

Updated research finds that four of nine planetary boundaries have been crossed: climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, altered biogeochemical cycles (phosphorus and nitrogen). Source: Steffen et al, Science, Jan. 16 2015.

e.g. the use of freshwater, biochemical flows,... A recent update by Steffen et al. (2015),

published in *Nature*, specifies that five of the nine boundaries are currently being transgressed (see fig.1).

In order to address these concerns related to the Earth's carrying capacity, concreteness of targets and goals is essential. Hajer *et al.* (2015) for instance show how environmental concerns are often formulated in an excessively vague manner or without reference to concrete goals or time frames. To give one example, although scientific knowledge for addressing poor air quality in cities is ample, cities nonetheless often mitigate air quality through a series measures rather voluntary and of which overall outcomes are unclear.

Also at the local level, cities are prioritizing environmental concerns. The City of Ghent (is part of a network of cities that) has committed itself to become a 'climate neutral' city in 2050. In this legislature € 105 million has been budgeted to invest in the direct reduction of CO_2 emissions. Although this target can be applauded, caution is needed to solely determine sustainability (or the Climate Challenge) in terms of CO_2 reduction. Not only the 22 most polluting companies in the City of Ghent (e.g. Arcelor Mittal) are excluded in this strategy and calculation (due to the EU emissions trading system), but this rather reductionist approach emphasizes individualized and mostly technical solutions to sustainability such as the isolation of houses, refurbishment of infrastructure, energy subsidies, etc. As Shove (2009) convincingly shows, this type of environmental policy is based on an individualist account of 'autonomous choice', leaving less room for alternative conceptions of how social change can be attained such as connecting sustainable practices, creating a stimulating environment, understanding social norms, etc. Taking this insight into consideration, Ghent should be aware of the fact that (subsidies for) directs technical interventions to reduce CO_2 do not primarily invigorate social awareness nor action.

When we look at the deployment of a local food strategy in Ghent- which is part of the climate plan - we do see a more open approach. The '*Ghent en Garde'* program, establishes a first broad framework in realizing a more sustainable local food system. Under the topic of food, the Climate Plan of the city does emphasize that sustainability in the local food system cannot be reduced to CO_2 emissions since "*many consumer goods are not produced on our territory*" and therefore the city *"opt[s] in favor of developing a local food strategy, considering the substantial impact of food production and consumption on the emission of greenhouse gases.*" Table 1 lists the five overall objectives of the program.

GHENT EN GARDE PROGRAM

Objective 1: push for a shorter and more visible food chain

Consumers and local producers alike must re-establish their alliances as much as possible. This requires robust contacts and the elimination of as much intermediate chain links as possible. City-oriented agriculture means that farmers should gain easier access to the local market; on the consumer side we wish to place agriculture in the limelight. This way, consumers learn a great deal about the source of their food as well.

Objective 2: stimulate sustainable food production and consumption

The City of Ghent wishes to get farmers, residents, and users to participate in sustainable urban farming, and have users consume in a more sustainable manner; think local, seasonal, organic, vegetarian, or fair trade products. The City supports the growth of CSA initiatives, organic farming, and sustainable agriculture in and around the city. Because the scope for new urban farming projects in the city is limited, the available space must be utilized cleverly. That is why urban farming on roofs, terraces, in streets, and temporary public spaces are among the possibilities.

Objective 3: creating added social value regarding food initiatives

Sustainable food connects young and old, man and woman, poor and rich. Based on this social potential, the City of Ghent is pioneering a food system to create added social value. New food initiatives are to bring people together in communal gardens, enhance local employment regarding food, etc.

Objective 4: reducing food waste

Today one third of produced food goes to waste. Losses are tremendous, especially at the beginning and end of the food chain. Delicious vegetables that do not meet our aesthetic expectations never make it to the shelves. A more efficient food system merits our attention; one where food leftovers find new markets or better processing. Lastly, we wish to encourage Ghent residents to buy in a conscious manner, store food in an optimal manner, and process it better.

Objective 5: food waste becomes raw material

Some food will inevitably go to waste. The City of Ghent wishes to go one step further to optimize the collection and processing of waste. Because waste can also generate ecological added value. Our rubbish bags or containers hold a great deal of biodegradable waste

(Source: Ghent Climate Plan, 2015-2019)

Although this clearly sets out a decisive and inspirational vision based on social, ecological and economic sustainability the challenge remains yet to formulate concrete goals and targets. Just as in the general climate plan, the local food strategy could also be operationalized in concrete targets and budgets. For the time being, a series of different actions are being executed or planned (veggie day, festival on food waste, left over box, think group on providing land) but these are restricted to a communication based and more on ad hoc logic rather than specified along the lines of a concrete operationalization of targets. There are e.g. no specifications on more systemic and operational policy goals such as:

- How much land will be provided to organize multifunctional agriculture;
- What types of new food hubs will be developed in the city;
- What percentage of city infrastructure will be greened from an agro-ecological perspective;
- How many urban farming projects will be subsidized;
- How education of sustainable food consumption can be organized through the city net of schools;
- How much food waste will be reduced;
- How (much) school infrastructure could be re-organized to re-install local processing of food.
- How unstainable consumption will be changed or diminished?

With Hajer *et al* (2015) we contend that these more systemic policy goals clearly go beyond the concept of planetary boundaries as well as necessitate a logic of evaluation that goes beyond mere measuring of CO² reduction. To this aim, we shall turn to the other three perspectives, incorporating a social and political dimension.

Finally, we wish to add that specifically in relation to environmental policy, a local food strategy based on Urban Agriculture (UA) enables the potential for a 'positive' concept towards climate change. Where the reduction of CO_2 frames the climate problem in terms of 'reducing' human impact, UA proposes agro-ecological interventions that harbor potentialities to increase the Earth's carrying capacity. The integration of ecological corridors (Viljoen, 2005) and other types of 'green infrastructure' on the fringe between nature and agriculture allow for 'positive' actions towards changing the relationship of human-induced changes to the environment.

2. Safe and just operating space

The notion 'safe and just operating space' adds a dimension of social concerns to the 'safe space' inherent to planetary boundaries. This poses the question of how a city could enhance the just distribution of available resources and responsibilities. Although the evolution towards ever less democratic structures in the agro-food system has a distinctively national and international dimension related to, amongst other, the increasing role of speculative external forces seeking to exploit local conditions to produce high value goods for distinct markets (Sage, 2012), there do exist significant levers on the local level to increase distributive justice. Moreover, it should also be stressed that a safe and operating space implies different things for different stakeholders, i.e. justice in the food system for a farmer plays out in different areas of the food system that it does for a citizen, entrepreneur or policy maker.

Recently a Flemish documentary revealed how certain aspects in the agro-food chain are in need for reconsideration (Pluymers, 2014). Agricultural cooperatives can no longer guarantee prices that cover the expenses of farmers and a process of scale enlargement and increased anonymity have furnished unequal positions in the agricultural field. Diversification of channels of sale is also hampered by the increased imposition of exclusive supply duty. Because the management of cooperatives is equally put under pressure by retailer tactics that have exceedingly moved towards a buyer strategy, it is not straightforward to indicate the locus of accountability. Different political actors defend inserting an arbiter of the food chain, but this aspiration is stopped at that same political level (VILT, 2015). How this nexus of interconnected forces is to be redirected towards a more equitable organization is thus a contested and extra-local issue.

Nevertheless, a local food strategy and the evolution to urban agriculture do provide levers to recover distributive justice. The city can help install new vehicles of distribution by providing places where food producers and consumers are re-connected and where more sustainable forms of logistics are incorporated. The organizational model of the 'food hub' focuses on adding environmental and social criteria associated to sustainable food systems, to market management procedures. Food hubs can take several forms, both physical and virtual, both located within the city (food halls) as in the peri-urban region (multifunctional farm, food innovation center)

Examples of local food hubs in Gent are the various Food Teams organized throughout Ghent (18) and the recently introduced 'Fermet'. Both alternative food distribution systems have in common that through a virtual ordering of the food, the delivery or pick-up of the farmer products takes place at a specific location. Both initiatives have been specifically set up as a means to support local farmers in guaranteeing a fair price. The success and potential growth potential of these kind is clearly related to how demand for local, fresh and ecologically produced products exceeds current supply (Crivits and Paredis, 2013)

Even though these alternative food networks operate (successfully) outside the sphere of the local government, the apparent interest and demand for such initiatives should be an incentive for local governments to support these types of initiatives (e.g. by providing space to organize food deliveries) and - going one step further- initiate more structurally integrated and physically visible food hubs. These places can become more than mere consumption junctions (Spaargaren), but initiate socio-cultural processes related to sustainable food consumption and UA. Cities such as Drumshanbo (Ireland) and Parma (Italy) actively integrate new food hubs in the city's infrastructure, allowing local economic actors to attain

secure and profitable channels of sale.[1] We do however acknowledge that this is not an easy undertaking since this implies (1) actively recruiting new potential producers (2) investing in city infrastructure (3) consistent engagement of citizens (4) the difficult balance between a fair price for the consumer and an affordable price for the people in the city.

Another approach to the dimension of social sustainability is taken in the field of urban development and is related to what Hajer *et al* (2015) call the construction of a 'social foundation' needed to stimulate equity-based action. In 2003-2004 a large urban renewal project (Bridges to Rabot) was set up the area of Rabot, one of the poorest areas in Flanders. Initially the neighborhood was supposed to be upgraded by attracting 'potential' from abroad. There were a whole range of socio-cultural organizations, however, that wanted to stimulate participation of the current residents. Key in the whole process is the disappearance of the Alcatel site, a one acre piece of industrial ground, which is left behind contaminated and opened for renovation. *Rocsa*, a local socio-artistic organization wants to write the 'story of the residents' to "*claim the space from the existing needs and requirements within the district, not from the potential new residents, who are likely to be middle class groups*" (Forum Urban Agriculture, 2015). Interestingly, when asked what residents are missing, an overwhelming majority indicated the lack of having a garden or green area to be enjoyed. It was this concern that prompted the implementation of 150 container gardens (4m² each). This process started in 2007 and is increasingly popular today. One specific type of benefit was that groups previously unknown (white middle class, Turkish community, newcomers and many other groups) met each other and created a shared ownership of the space. New social networks created awareness of spatial development and alleviated poverty through increased inter-group solidarity (Debruyne, 2015).

By contrast, in a neighboring district a similar development process towards community gardens, was initiated. Here, however, the decision-making and designing processes were largely represented by local government and key stakeholders of the district (in this case white middle class men). One of the requirements that the city put forward – perhaps in parallel to the Rabot case - was that the project needed to be a 'demographic and cultural mirror of the district'. Yet, project stakeholders have a hard time establishing the mirror: migrant populations remained absent or refused to participate. What possibly explains the difference between the seemingly similar projects is the vital approach towards participatory processes that are to be designed in the initial phase. In the former case, the city handed the project over to a mediator, which had the capacity and resources to involve the different migrant populations. While in the latter case, the project was already in the hands or 'owned' by a few that already shaped and gave content beforehand.

The point we are here making is not necessarily that the local government should step back from any involvement. Rather, we claim that its precise role is to be aware of how participation is stimulated and especially, when. Apparent trivial decisions in initial phases have shown here to impact on the overall dynamic and societal relevance of the two projects.

We thus argue that setting up such participatory projects, costs time, money and courage and cannot be merely standardized nor duplicated. From the perspective of a local food strategy, One of the implications here is that UA is not to be considered as a primarily economic activity in the market (although some produce is sold) nor as a mere hobbyist practice, but rather as an 'instrument' to create a social transition. In such a perspective, the way participation is organized becomes immediately a pressing issue.

This is an important insight for the further deployment of the Ghent local food strategy and its

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[1] Right now there are plans for an Albert Heijn at the Korenmarkt, the historical heart of the city. Citizens are uninformed and have no say in how this public space can be filled in. Food sovereignty would imply that citizens do have a say in the type of food hubs that permeate public space.

overall sustainability strategy. In order to integrate a 'just operating space' in the development of the projects and policies of the city, adequate support will be needed to initiate and compensate the hard work behind the co-design implementation and maintenance of a participatory and locally anchored path of development.

It is a profound misunderstanding that participation can be merely achieved in 'after-hours work', or on the margins of a project. Instead, it should be considered as a distinct governmental task. As we have illustrated for the case of agriculture and of spatial development, a local government can actively support the creation of a 'safe and just operating space, stimulating involvement and co-creation in its construction. A government is however - luckily - not alone.

3. Energetic Society

The fact that citizens' initiatives, social movements, knowledge institutes and companies are increasingly taking the lead within urban initiatives, constitutes an ever-growing challenge for politics and its administration. Bulkeley and Castan-Broto (2013) argue that urban sustainability experiments are able to create new forms of urban political spaces within the city, as public and private authority seem to blur increasingly (Devolder and Block, 2015). In his search for a new way in which public administration can shape its relationship with citizens, Hajer (2011) proposes the concept of "the energetic society". The perspective of "energetic society" underlines the potential of the multiple initiatives for sustainable development taken by various agents of change all over the world.

The city of Ghent is overflown by energy from a very diverse group of local actors such as autonomous citizens, civil society initiatives, self-organized farmers, innovative companies, network based groups and Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs).[2] How these new relationships between citizens, businesses, and public authorities will look in the future, and how the different concerns to emerge will be dealt with in a careful and proper manner (cf. the transition from the welfare state to the participation society) is unclear (Devolder and Block, 2015). It surely cannot be the intention that public authorities, under pressure of expenditure cuts, shift numerous (generally social) responsibilities onto citizens (Uitermark, 2010). That 'Big Society' serves to aggravate inequality.

Ostrom (2010) believes firmly in 'polycentric governance', with governance being undertaken not from a specific center but rather from multiple centers that are not linked in any hierarchical sense but rather in a structure of mediation. This encourages the actors involved to experiment with different cooperation strategies and to learn collectively. These actors can be families, individuals and other small groups of people as well as businesses, local, regional and national authorities.

In other words, although we understand that local governments are increasingly driven towards the 'sanitation of expenses' the maxim 'do it yourself' cannot be equaled to the maxim 'do it alone'. An energetic society requires support in the creation, organization and continuation of local sustainability initiatives by providing time, material resources and regulatory flexibility to all participating groups. The city needs to dare to go beyond the minimal communication strategy it is currently upholding (i.e. communicating about bottom-up initiatives).

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[2] Devolder and Block (2015) tried to map the diversity of sustainable urban projects in the city of Ghent, in particular to gain an interesting view of a broader range of emerging "sustainability" niches. On the website (www.gentintransitie.com) almost 100 sustainable urban initiatives are listed and described, and 20 projects are situated in the food system.

For instance, the City of Ghent has engaged itself in supporting the growth of CSA initiatives, organic farming and multifunctional agriculture in and around the city. This goal requires more than the communicative and moral support the city is currently giving. Two concrete developments hint at how a more supportive role could be established.

One instance is related to a citizen initiative related to a spatial area allocated as one of the four green development areas of Ghent, the 'Vinderhoutse bossen'. In this area the city has acquired a piece of land of 4 acres, located in a zone where agricultural land, nature and a petting zoo owned by the city are located. A citizen initiative has evolved towards vision development of a multifunctional agro-ecological space where (city owned or public-private) CSA initiatives combine agro-tourism and ecological food production, with a potential spin-off to the integration of urban farming techniques in the educative setting of the petting zoo. The linchpin is an old farm put up for sale. The citizen group organizing this initiative is searching for means to acquire this estate as a public or public-private good. A local food strategy could prioritize such unique possibilities for a multifunctional urban farming area and look for handles to organize and envision the development of such a space. Unfortunately current planning agencies, both on the local and regional level have not yet developed institutional routines to combine local visioning with alternative modes of spatial planning. The process is still ongoing and the city's role could be decisive in the creation of a first agro-ecological and multifunctional (recreation, agriculture, nature, education) zone in Flanders.

Another example is related to the ongoing search of (until now mostly) new farmers to acquire land in self-organizing new local food systems such as CSA initiatives as well as to farmers potentially re-orientating their production to the city. In Flanders a lot of new entrants in farming are searching for land to buy or lease in order to set up a new farming business. While the city of Ghent was at first unsure as to whether they could allocate land for any type of UA projects, a VILT article revealed that the Ghent Public Centre for Social Welfare (OCMW) sold 250 acres of the 2900 acres it owned at the beginning of this legislature. The article specified that "*the past two years seven farms and 53 acres of farmland, 20 residential houses, three acres of building land and 17 acres of forest and woodland have been sold, good for an income of 14.5 million euros.*" Contrasting this observation with the scheduled budget for the deployment of a Local food strategy (300.000 over 6 years) raises questions about how seriously one takes the deployment of such a strategy to increase local and sustainable food systems.

We cannot, however, merely hold the government accountable for the success of the energetic society. The success of reconnecting top-down with bottom-up can be seen in a larger political challenge of re-thinking the relationship between state and civil society. Ghent has the potential to develop a social perspective on democracy. However, this also requires a shifting perspective on behalf of citizens. Right now, individual citizens are still accustomed to individually approaching policy makers, discussing personal projects and aiming to gain specific support. Interviews revealed how these dynamics of nepotism are still prevailing, in spite of calls for participatory governance. Also, when governments are organizing participatory moments, citizens often use these instances as a means to protect personal interests or complain about policy dynamics.

In short, an attitude shift in how the institutionalized political sphere (local government) and the 'free and wild' public sphere relate will need to go both ways. On the one hand, political agents will need to go beyond electoral concerns and consensus based politics. On the other hand, however, citizens will need to adopt a stance which exceeds public scrutiny through complaint or a relationship of accountability based on voting for political personalities.
In order to achieve such a needed democratic shift, the Ghent food council can be an potentially effective vehicle to initiate a bridge between government and citizens. Here, we wish to refer the USA case of the Food Policy Advisory Council in Philadelphia (FPAC), serving as a 'best case' to understand how this process could come about.

The FPAC is represented by Mayoral appointed members but is strongly driven by the participation of individual citizens. The subcommittees and focus of the FPAC have been defined through debate and the focus of the subcommittees shifts depending on the needs and dynamics at the time. The meetings are alternately held outside office hours and in public spaces, in order to stimulate the inclusion of stakeholders outside the policy realm. While the employees within the FPAC are striving to have an impact on the different policies within Philadelphia, all kinds of local actors are strongly encouraged and stimulated to take action and participate in the local food strategy. While we are not saying that *Ghent en Garde* is not open to individuals outside the policy, institutional and organizational realm, we merely point out here that an openness toward individuals to import concerns and needs into the debate within the FPAC is a valuable starting point to create an energetic society. In addition, it contributes to the establishment of a just and fair operating space.

4. Green competition.

Corporate social Responsibility (CSR) and business strategies orientated towards sustainable development become increasingly important. As the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) states in its new agenda for business: "*Rather than follow change, business must lead this transformation by doing what business does best: cost-effectively creating solutions that people need and want. The difference is that the new solutions will be based on a global and local market place with "true values and costs", the "truth" being established by the limits of the planet and what it takes to live well within them.*" This clearly aligns with the previous perspective of sustainability, but adds a business dimension. Processes of innovation have always found their way to the market and also challenges of sustainability can be substantially answered by developing business models. We distance ourselves from an anti-market approach yet wish to approach the concept of green economy in a critical yet constructive manner. Maintaining a link with the other dimensions of sustainability is a serious challenge and cannot be attained by merely shifting rhetoric and corporate communication.

First, radically new ways of delivering goods, services and wellbeing require experimentation between business, policy makers and consumers, creating an enabling environment to concretize new business strategies. Hajer *et al* (2015) rightly indicate that governments have a clear role in (1) stimulating new business practices that actively implement sustainability as a core strategy and (2) dis-incentivizing unsustainable systems and practices.

Secondly, of particular importance in creating economic sustainability is the concept and operationalization of 'fair competition'. In order to allow the creation of a level playing field towards innovations for sustainability, it becomes important that all types of businesses gain access to resources and potential market share.

In order to illustrate both points, we wish to refer to the city's efforts to use its public procurement policies to increase the market for locally owned and green businesses. Although a lot of effort has been put in the integration of ecological and social sustainability criteria in the city contract for school meals, the challenge yet remains in finding a solution to include more business practices. Right now, for instance, all school meals are provided by one of the largest national companies, specialized in delivering pre-prepared meals all over the country Two specific measures could significantly enhance the transformative potential of novel sustainable business practices. First, dividing the contract into smaller 'lots' (*lotting*) is a well-established procurement practice which opens up opportunities for smaller providers. This measure is legal under the EU procurement regulations. One can understand that providing 450 school meals a day (= approximately 1 lot) offers a more realistic market segment for a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) specialized in sustainable school

meals, than 4500/meals a day does (= current contract). Larger companies do still have the possibility to bid for one or even all bids, but an element of fair competition has been added, offering a level playing field to support innovation. This shows how a city has a lever to enhance fair competition and the support of green niches.

Discussion

In this section we want to discuss two aspects we think of as having particular relevance in the context of integrating multiple perspectives of sustainable development in the deployment of a local food strategy. First, we propose the term 'food sovereignty' as an overarching concept to connect the four perspectives. Secondly, we relate the 'local' to the global interconnectedness of sustainable development.

    1.

Practices embedded in local food systems and UA have the potential to recast food security. As Sage (2012) puts it food security "*once considered as responsibility of nation states on behalf of its citizens, is replaced by acceptance that this is now a service performed by transnational agri-food corporations on behalf of consumers*"(p7) The concept of 'food sovereignty' restores this democratic notion in the food system by advocating that all citizens should have a say in how food is produced. Enacting food sovereignty would allow some form of public discussion to determine what citizens want out of their food system. However, lowering thresholds to participate after alternative food practices have been developed is but part of the challenge. As Hanagan (2014) aptly puts it for one particular case:

"*The reason why most alternative food institutions appeal primarily to middle class whites is not simply that other groups lack the means to participate in farmers markets and CSA but also that working class people and people of color have little input in to the goals and practices of these institutions.*"

This insight can however be transposed to all societal groups and fields in the agro-food system. Whether we are considering citizens participating in the local food strategy, farmers co-deciding the evolution of prices, smaller enterprises getting access to the market or less affluent groups gaining ownership of the neighborhood, in each case some form of food sovereignty is outside the reach.

    2.

With regard to the case for global interconnectedness, an important question and concern that thus far remained unanswered is how a shift toward the proliferation and grounding of local food strategies is or can be a driver for global sustainable development. While a local food strategy is concerned with the question of the production and consumption of local resources, aiming to move away from the global agriculture and food market, we here make a case for global interconnectedness of sustainable development. By focusing on the operationalization of a local food strategy, the global market perspective does not disappear, yet proceeds from a more 'social and just operating space'. In other words, in addition to the question 'what will be produced and consumed locally,' a local food strategy has to ask 'what should not be consumed globally?' in order to promote the sustainability of local food systems around the globe. For example, the unsustainable import of flowers, palm oil and other controversial products and the unsustainable export of for example pig meat to countries like China have an equal impact on the true sustainability of a local food strategy. As such, the interconnectedness and awareness of local food strategies around the globe is crucial. The acting on the local scale should thus not entail a shift from thinking globally to thinking locally.

Conclusions: Towards a social climate policy

In this paper we have adopted four connected perspective on sustainability in the context of developing of a local food strategy in the city of Ghent. We have given several illustrations as to how a local government can become a facilitator, mediator and innovator in setting up and supporting governance towards sustainability. In this final section we conclude by offering some insights in how to develop a policy based on the four perspectives of sustainability.

The city of Ghent explicitly advocates her choice for a 'social' climate policy in which not only environmental goals are to be achieved, but the wellbeing and participation of all citizens is addressed. We have contended that, in contrast to the general climate plan in which the rationale of CO_2 reduction through technical measures dominates, the local food strategy opens possibilities to create a process of social innovation for sustainability.

As the goals of the *Ghent en Garde* program illustrate and as we have shown for various ongoing cases in Ghent, projects related to food and (urban) agriculture are a stepping-stone towards enhancing sustainability in its various forms and perspectives. Hajer *et al* (2015)) specify that one way of operationalizing a sustainability strategy on the regional level, is by linking social wellbeing to sustainable management of resources (Cf. a safe and just operating space). From that perspective a local food strategy should not only be a strategy on its own, but equally an impetus for other policies and programs. The reduction of poverty, health policy, education, social welfare, economic development, policies and spatial development policies could be potentially addressed by engaging in the specific practices of local food production and consumption and the development of more green or agro-ecological infrastructure. Although these goals can be partly financed through connecting existing policy budgets to the social, economic and environmental benefits of local food systems and UA, a local food strategy requires a substantive budget and priority. Unfortunately, the food strategy is only granted a budget of € 300.000 which is insufficient and in stark contrast with the total Climate budget of € 105 million. As we have discussed in this paper, more weight should be given to financial (concrete budgets), material (providing land, space for food hubs) and immaterial (communication, time) support for the development of a local food strategy.

However, as we have argued, in order to stimulate the local food governance, a mere top-down approach cannot suffice. This is also reflected in the support needed to create a setting that enables all relevant actors to design, participate in and practice local food projects, policies and enterprises that enhance sustainability. Merely providing a policy program with budgets, goals and targets will not furnish a sufficient condition if the 'energetic society" is not mobilized to specify these goals and integrate them in their views and lifeworld.

To this end we propose a governance program based on what we call a ***cycle of increasing ownership*, i.e.** the creation of a process in which increased participation leads to a gradual shift in ownership and anchored sustainability. Figure 2 illustrates this process.
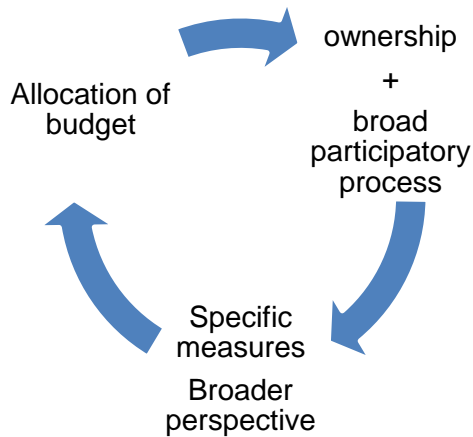
Figure 2: Cycle of increasing ownership

In a first step a local government can provide means to organize a process of participation, structurally creating a 'just and operating space'. We have shown that this is possible in several instances such the creation and support of food hubs, inclusive projects of urban development or social transition and public procurement practices. Also the food council could play a role in creating a platform for more public and bottom-up involvement. In this context, policy makers can play a decisive role at the beginning of each project. We argue that because each urban project or (bottom-up) initiative is unique, a customized approach is required. The history, the physical context, the policy situation and the complexity of the urban food context are so specific in nature that it is difficult to assess easily on the basis of certain fixed "*passe partout*" or "uniform" criteria how an urban project can contribute to a sustainability transition (Block and Devolder, 2015).

Arising out of these more structurally anchored participatory processes more concrete and wide goals would be formulated spanning different policy departments, organizations, social groups, etc. The program of the local food strategy would become an impetus for various actors – internal and external to the city services, both in civil society and in the market – to specify and concretize its underlying goals of sustainability. Inevitably, this will create a shift in priority and importance: when more people participate and a local strategy gets more local significance, more budgets are likely to be allocated to it. This is likely to set a scene for a more integrative convergence of policy goals and targets across city administrations.

Cities all over the world are just only starting to develop local food strategies. Ghent can become a pioneer in developing its local food strategy as a means to find a social foundation for its sustainability policy. It is this social strategy that can provide a sound starting point to set up a process of exchange with other cities, both neighboring and in the global context. In is in this sense that the deployment of a local food strategy

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