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Published online: 17 May 2024.

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Striving for just sustainabilities in urban foodscape planning: the case of Almere city in the Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

As cities increasingly adopt diverse ethnic, social, and cultural characteristics, there is an emerging logic for planning and policy to reflect this hyper-diversity (inclusion) while resolving the looming sustainability-related challenges. However, what is not adequately addressed in the current literature on urban planning – which could also solidify the justification for more citizen inclusion – is what happens when citizens are involved in planning from the perspective of sustainability. In response, this paper asks a key question: "What are the implications, in the case of urban foodscape, when citizens are involved in planning from the perspective of sustainability?" This question is investigated in this paper in the domain of urban foodscapes and through qualitative interviews, with the support of maps, in the Dutch city of Almere. A novel theoretical combination of just sustainabilities and social licence to operate (SLO) was utilised to frame citizen inclusion in foodscape planning. The findings showed that based on everyday practical experiences of food access in the city, citizens were more concerned about social interaction, the representation of food from cultural origins, and local food production. This theoretical combination, as a way of deepening inclusion, would help avoid the tendency of urban planning being used as an instrument for glossing over social injustice under the guise of citizen participation. This paper, therefore, argues that SLO can be a key pathway for actualising just sustainabilities in both urban planning research and policy.

Introduction

The hyper-diverse nature of rapidly urbanising cities suggests that planning and policy should take into consideration inclusive approaches within sustainability transitions (Franz et al. 2022). The research agenda in urban planning is becoming extremely conscious of social sustainability transitions in thematic areas such as housing (Campbell 1996), greening (Curran and Hamilton 2017), and more recently, food systems (Campbell 2004; Viljoen and Wiskerke 2012). The urban food system is even more important in sustainable transitions because it addresses concerns about feeding the increasing population in a manner that is socio-ecologically sustainable (Lever and Sonnino 2022). The need for socio-ecological sustainability in urban food system planning draws attention to the domain of justice and inclusion in the city. This means cities should be capable of enhancing food accessibility for all social groups – a strong pillar of food security.

However, in reality, equitable access to food for all in cities is still a challenge in rapidly urbanising and multicultural cities (Agyeman and Stewart 2023; Eckert and Shetty 2016; Saha 2022). These are apparently precipitated by the combination of diverse consumer preferences and the neglect of the role of urban planners in food access (Eckert and Shetty 2016). Although there is a growth of knowledge at the planning-food nexus, planning cities in a way that increases food access, not just for the wealthy but mostly for the poor, has received less attention (Bell and Standish 2009; Cabannes and Marocchino 2018; Misselhorn et al. 2012).

Furthermore, despite the fact that urban planning interventions affect the entire food chain, the distribution and consumption phase, which is very much an issue of access, have not been sufficiently addressed in the urban planning literature (American Planning Association 2007; Clancy 2004; Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). Within the global North, which is relatively advanced in urban planning and food integration, efforts towards healthier and more sustainable (HSF) food system transformation are not consumer-focused (Ilieva 2016). Such developments emphasise the production and transportation aspects of the food chain while neglecting distribution and consumption. Thus, several studies at the nexus of food and urban planning have focused on urban agriculture to promote locally produced food (Eckert and Shetty 2011; Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000). For example, in the city of Almere (Netherlands), food system planning studies (Jansma and Visser 2011; Jansma and Wertheim-Heck 2021) have been central to mainly the (peri)urban agriculture in the Oosterwold region of the city. This exemplifies the disproportionate attention given to the production and transportation aspects of the food chain in food system planning. Therefore, there is a need to move scholarship on food and urban planning from the current focus on producers to more consideration of consumer perspectives.

Lokers et al. (2018) argue that food systems and planning thinking should start with consumers and work backwards towards production. This is well justifiable on the grounds that the key to transitioning towards sustainable diets is predicated on keenly understanding consumers' demands and expectations (Torán-Pereg et al. 2023). Since the HSF system transformation is a complex proposition preconditioned by community support, equal access to food by all racial-ethnic groups, and understanding of intrinsic motivations and social preferences (Lokers et al. 2018; Torán-Pereg et al. 2023), the inclusion of consumer knowledge is extremely important even in the planning of food access in urban areas. A new set of questions is emerging around efforts to ensure that food habits become and remain acceptable to different segments of the population (Onwezen et al. 2019). The need to consider and prioritise the societal acceptability of the food system transition through food access planning as we switch to more sustainable food systems has not received sufficient attention in the literature. Therefore, the main objective of this paper will be to explore the potential of participatory urban foodscape planning to enhance community acceptance of food system transformation.

It must be emphasised that the focus of this paper is not to advance theoretical and empirical frontiers in sustainable food systems. Instead, it takes a departure from the knowledge gap and paucity of research on the inclusion of consumers' perspectives in the food systems to understand citizen participation in the planning process within a diverse and multicultural city. Hence, food is exclusively used as a medium to test the implications of pluralising the planning process (herein, food system planning) on the city and its link to sustainability.

By operationalising the food system-planning link, this paper postulates that food systems planning needs to be an accountant of daily food choices, which are tacit expressions of one's ethnic or social orientations. Besides this, building the HSF system with consumers unravels cultural orientations, which are motivations for consuming healthier and more sustainable food (Nemecek et al. 2016). In this light, governing food transformation requires the input of consumers, who are the embodied essence of these histories and cultures, which shape emergent social practices (including food consumption) (Terragni et al. 2014).

Considering the fact that society is a strong pillar of sustainability, the ideal of a healthier and more sustainable food future would hardly be realised without a meticulous understanding of the implications the input of consumers would have on urban (food) planning. It is useful to understand

these in order to build equitable cities that enhance the rights of urbanites to their cities. As argued by Agyeman (2019), access is a social issue that must be prioritised in the pre-planning phase of urban development. Thus, recognising food access in hindsight – after plans are made – would hardly reinforce equitable access to food. For this reason, understanding and prioritising citizens perspectives on (food) access before developing urban (food) plans is important if questions of social justice can be addressed in urban planning. It is against this backdrop that this study intends to meticulously understand the implications, in the case of urban foodscapes, when people are involved in planning from the perspective of sustainability. This paper foregrounds that including consumers' perspectives in urban foodscape planning could enhance consumer or community support for the planning process and make it more inclusive.

Literature review: food and urban planning nexus

From accounts on the history of cities, food has been the main driving force of city and community planning (Steel 2020). Over time, this relationship has been overshadowed by market forces. From that point on, the food system has had a long history of relying on market forces in decisions regarding its trajectory with less planning practice (Eckert and Shetty 2011). Watson (2020:, 20) argues that this commenced "due to changes in food production practices in the late nineteenth century that made them incompatible with key planning objectives." After the long absence of planning in the food trajectory, professional planners are increasingly aware of the fact that planning practice is undoubtedly affected by many facets of the food system (Watson 2020). In this light, the production, processing, distribution, consumption, recovery, and complementarity of the local food system and rural agriculture are closely linked to planning (see Cabannes and Marocchino 2018). This increased research attention portends the realisation of the opportunities within urban planning for HSF system transformation. For this reason, food system planning has emerged as a line of research to bring to light the longstanding oversight of food in planning practice, research, and education (Morgan 2009; Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000).

In planning research, attempts to integrate urban planning and the food system are scanty – a concern that prompted the revolutionary work by Cabannes and Marocchino (2018). In emphasising a recourse to planning in food system transformation, Watson argued that land use designations, facility design, and administration of services – vital functional units of the food system – can be supported by planning. In doing so, food system planning is capable of helping to attain synergized broader societal goals such as public health and social justice (Watson 2020). These broader societal benefits of the planning-food nexus show that the two are inseparable entities and must therefore be interactively pursued if cities can be prepared to address inequitable access to the food retail environment. It must be accentuated that realising equitable food access is preconditioned by how well planning plays a role in land use designations, facility design, and the administration of services. Since food access is a social issue (manifests differently among race, ethnicity, and culture) that manifests spatially, the decision of where food can be accessed in the cityscape is only meaningful if the diverse consumers to whom the decision bothers are at centre stage.

Food provisioning practices, the circumstances that shape them, and the effects of these practices are not only of a socio-cultural dimension but also manifest spatially. As stated before, while HSF transformation is a complex proposition, the spatial component, in terms of food access and availability, makes it even more complex (Wiskerke and Verhoeven 2018). For this reason, recognising the spatial dimension is crucial in the decision-making process towards healthier and more sustainable urban food futures.

The emphasis on the spatial dimension of foodscapes is not a new development. Using spatial analysis and statistics (spatial approach) to understand the diversity of food access was the first approach to emerge in foodscapes research (Vonthron, Perrin, and Soulard 2020). Following this, new approaches have emerged in foodscape literature. According to Vonthron, Perrin, and Soulard (2020), current literature on foodscapes is steered along the lines of spatial, socio-cultural,

behavioural, and systemic approaches. The socio-cultural approach depicts that foodscapes are socially shaped and highlights structural inequalities by understanding food procurement practices. This has been done through quantitative and qualitative methods. The behavioural approach emphasises how consumer perceptions of foodscapes explain and determine food behaviours and food education at the microscale. In contrast, the systemic approach mainly challenges the globalised food system and argues for more local, ethically sensitive, and sustainable food systems (Vonthron, Perrin, and Soulard 2020).

Despite the fact that foodscapes are socially shaped, the planning literature fails to explore the diversity of food access from the perspective of the people who constitute the socio-cultural elements of the city, which in turn shapes the foodscape. Hence, the sustained scholarship produced in line with the need for diversity-oriented sustainable transitions has to permeate the field of urban food planning. Considering this gap, it is important to integrate the spatial and socio-cultural approaches of the foodscape in order to foster the integration of consumer perspectives in urban food planning. More so, since the focus of the study is only to utilise food (wherein access is within multicultural cities) as a medium for understanding the dynamics of urban planning, the spatial and socio-cultural approaches are enough to guide the study.

Therefore, this study is built on the knowledge gap that there is a paucity of research dedicated to the diversity of food access from the perspective of consumers. The consultative nature of urban foodscape planning, as will be presented in this paper, provides a potential platform for increasing accountability, enhancing empowerment (Kinchy and Perry 2011), and building trust (Gulsrud, Hertzog, and Shears 2018; Trimble and Berkes 2013) from a consumer perspective. Rocha Menocal and Sharma (2008, 33) outline that increasing citizens voices will make public institutions more responsive to citizens' needs and demands and therefore more accountable for their actions. This combination of voice and accountability will in turn contribute directly to: (a) changes in terms of broader development outcomes, including meta-goals such as poverty reduction, human development, and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more generally; and (b) changes at a more intermediate level involving changes in policy, practice, behaviours, and power relations (Rocha Menocal and Sharma 2008, 33). In order to understand the pathways that can potentially lead to more consumer acceptance of urban foodscape planning, this paper will seek theoretical guidance from the concepts of just sustainabilities and the social licence to operate.

Theoretical framing – just sustainabilities and social licence to operate in urban planning

This study draws from the just sustainabilities perspective (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2002) and applies the concepts of social recognition to justify the need for inclusion in urban foodscape mapping from a sustainability. In order to attain socially just and equitable transformations, necessary structural and systemic changes will require enabling and emancipatory change as well (Scoones et al. 2020). Scoones et al. (2020) describe such enabling approaches as those which emphasise on creating capacities that empower individuals and communities to take action on their own behalf. Specifically, agency through capacity building in enabling approaches focuses on the most excluded interests in a community. Such enabling approaches take different forms in different settings, and are usually characterised by citizen engagement and other participatory approaches (Abrol and Ramani 2014). This enabling approach is analogous to the just sustainabilities perspective.

The term "just sustainabilities' was coined to add more emphasis to social element of sustainability. Just sustainabilities raises questions about; what is to be sustained, by whom, for whom, and what is the most desirable means of achieving this goal (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2002). The concept of just sustainability emphasises integration of the aspects of sustainability by maintaining that sustainability cannot exist without justice, and explicitly links environmental justice and sustainability (Agyeman and Evans 2004).

As the concept of sustainability broadens to include social aspects, sustainability through just sustainabilities, organisations and development projects must embrace strategies that allow them to more effectively address place-based sustainable transformation issues. Just sustainabilities acknowledges the relative place and culturally bound nature of the concept. It acknowledges that social sustainability is not one prescription, one template or model for sustainability that can be universalised. This means that every context has its own unique pattern in which it can actualise sustainability solutions or address wicked problems. It deals with the fairness of decision-making processes in which people affected or concerned such as urban consumers in an urban foodscape have the opportunity regardless of race, ethnicity, income, nationality or educational level to participate or be adequately represented in decision-making processes (Boillat et al. 2018) about where they can access their food. In this frame, just sustainabilities answers about how decisions are made and who is included or excluded from decision-making about urban foodscape planning.

Since its inception, just sustainabilities has been used in a variety of contexts in which issues around sustainability have been addressed. These include amongst others: green-gated communities and exclusion in South Africa (Mistry and Spocter 2022), climate change adaptation in the United States (Fiack et al. 2021), exclusion in University Education in the United States (Coleman and Gould 2019), and wind power transition in Kenya (Simberg-Koulumies 2024). Nevertheless, research has shown that integrating elements of the just sustainabilities approach to sustainability remains a major challenge. For example, research concerning the prioritisation of sustainability objectives has found that addressing social vulnerabilities receives less prioritisation relative to ecological (Boström 2012; Opp and Saunders 2013; Woodruff 2000) and economic (Anguelovski 2016) objectives. This highlights the need for more emphasis and more studies in just sustainabilities to reverse the interest in prioritisation of sustainability objectives which still largely favour the economic and ecological objectives.

Within the domain of just sustainabilities, three dominant analytical frames can be identified. These include: distributional justice, procedural justice and recognition justice. While the frame of distributional justice is important because it argues for a fair access to resources for all, the other frames of procedural and recognition are much closer to the objective of this paper. Procedural justice focuses on the right to participate in deliberations (Newell and Mulvaney 2013) concerning the urban foodscape as will be applied in this paper. Social recognition is a form of recognition justice (an analytical frame in just sustainabilities) which addresses the status, respect, and valuation assigned or denied to individuals and communities (Boillat et al. 2018; Fraser 2001; Honneth 2001).

Social recognition through participatory mapping in foodscape planning can be seen as an enabling process in a sustainable process which focuses on including voices which go beyond those of the planners. Therefore, it is about being reflexive about whose culture or viewpoint is privileged and respected (Walker 2012). In this regard, and in the context of this paper, top-down urban food planning efforts not sensitive enough to cultural differences may subordinate and misrepresent particular groups (Fraser 2001; Martin et al. 2016; Martin, McGuire, and Sullivan 2013). Accordingly, recognition embraces respect for local knowledge, cultures, and alternative ways of relating to nature (Martin et al. 2016) and access to food. Equitable influence over decision-making and intercultural dialogue may facilitate a more genuine integration of access to food and urban planning. One way to actualise just sustainabilities in a real-life context will be through a social licence to operate (SLO).

This paper suggests SLO as a pathway to actualising just sustainabilities. SLO is relatively new and has been used to consider the levels of approval accorded to the works of different project developers in the communities they serve (Boutilier and Thomson 2011; Prno and Scott Slocombe 2012). Developed in the late 1990s in the mining sector (Boutilier 2014; Dare, Schirmer, and Vanclay 2014; Prno and Scott Slocombe 2012), the SLO has only recently been extended to other sectors. The SLO can be a perfect tool for identifying how project developers (including urban planners) can improve support for their work in the communities they serve. The SLO is rooted in the beliefs, perceptions, and opinions held by the local population and other stakeholders about a

project (Boutilier 2014; Boutilier and Thomson 2011). They created a cumulative hierarchy model with four levels and three boundaries. In their model, the first level of SLO, acceptance, is achieved with legitimacy. Without legitimacy, the SLO faces rejection or withdrawal. Then, approval is achieved with credibility. Finally, "psychological identification" is achieved with trust. This highest level of SLO describes a very stable environment and is only rarely achieved (Boutilier, Black, and Thomson 2012). The absence of legitimacy can lead to rejection of a project; the presence of legitimacy and credibility leads to acceptance of a project; and a high level of credibility and the presence of trust are the basis for approval (Boutilier and Thomson 2011). Gaining a stronger SLO (positive approval or shared ownership) requires that the project gain credibility and ultimately the trust of local people (Vanclay 2017).

In this model, the SLO must be understood as a dynamic and project – or site-specific concept. It can fluctuate over time, and it depends solely on the characteristics of the project and the community. Also, this community must be considered as a network of stakeholders. Indeed, the community is often a heterogeneous entity. It is, then, the duty of the company to invest in social capital to build a uniform entity through community-building strategies (Boutilier and Thomson 2011). Furthermore, ideally, project developers should start with "the assumption that they do not currently hold a social licence and that they must engage in ongoing, dialogic negotiation of community and societal expectations and perceptions' (Parsons and Moffat 2014, 357). Thus, an inclusive participatory process as advanced in this paper is a prerequisite for this process of obtaining social legitimacy, credibility, and trust from consumers in urban foodscape planning.

It is worth stating that the adoption of SLO to realise just sustainability dwells on the argument that there is a need for synergy and coherence in resolving problems that connect questions of both social and ecological origins (Savini, Ferreira, and von Schönfeld 2022), including food system planning, because it supports wider societal goals: public health, ecological integrity, and social justice in the entire food supply chain (Morgan 2013). In this case, "just sustainabilities" is introduced to bring questions around social and technical sustainability, such as social justice and ecological integrity to the fore. The SLO is an approach that deepens citizen inclusion in projects so as to avoid circumstances where social injustice could be swept under the carpet under the guise of citizen participation. The SLO is particularly important because the imperatives of urban plans are subjugated to the critical social reflection of the citizens from whom the plan intends to benefit. This paper therefore argues that the two will help synergize and build strong coherence in solving the issue of access within the socio-ecological nature of food. Aside from this justification, this theoretical combination could help provide a response to the constant search by cities and urban planning for pathways where just sustainabilities can be actualised and institutionalised in urban (food) planning.

To apply the theoretical framework to the knowledge gap, this research asked a single question: what are the implications, in the case of urban foodscapes, when people are involved in planning from the perspective of sustainability?

Materials and methods

The study area: city of Almere

Geographically, Almere, within the Flevo-Polder, an area initially created for agriculture, makes sustainable food provisioning a priority in policymaking in the city (see Figure 1). Although the initial design of the city was to accommodate urban agriculture (Zalm and Oosterhoff 2010), this was not fully materialised except for the Oosterwold area due to the increasing housing needs in the Amsterdam metropolitan region (Jansma and Visser 2011). Despite these challenges, Almere envisions transforming its food system into a healthier and more sustainable one.

Regarding socio-demographics, Almere is a typical Dutch city with an average disposable income of 35,000 euros per year, 1000 euros more than the Dutch average (Gemeente Almere 2013).
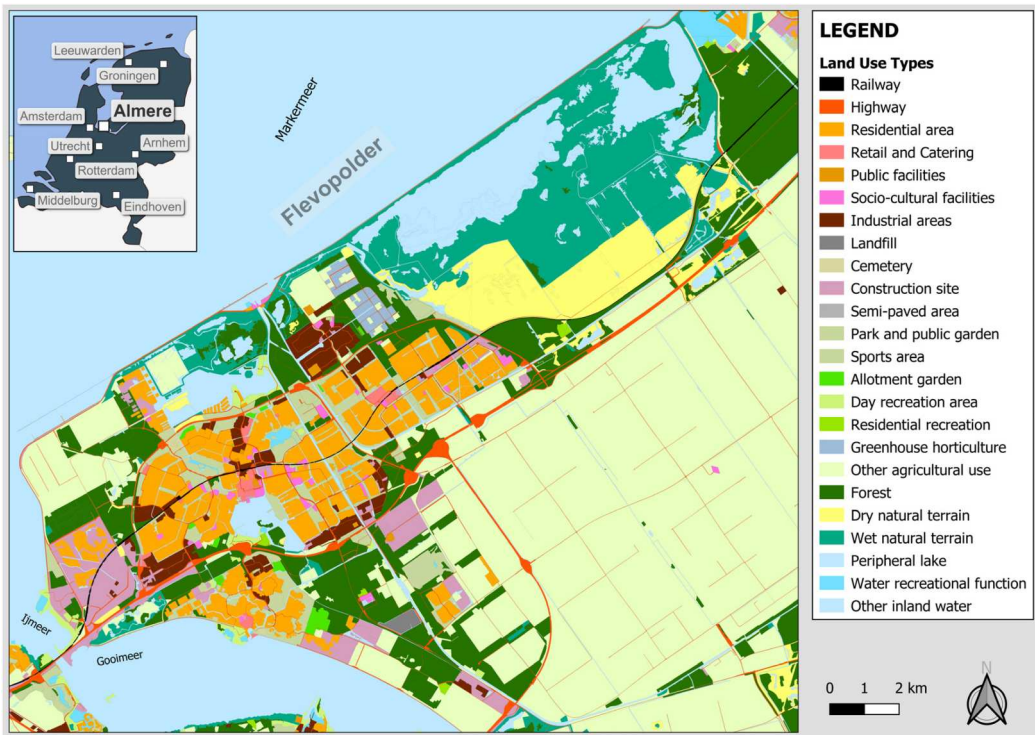
Figure 1. Almere in the context of Flevo-polder and the Netherlands.
Source: Authors' construct based on data from the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, CBS.

Almere's educational background differs from the rest of the Netherlands in that 23% are attributed to lower education, 45% are secondary and vocational, and 31% have attained higher education (Gemeente Almere 2013). Contrarily, the diverse culture and nationalities make Almere an atypical Dutch city. According to CBS StatLine (2022), 41.6% of Almere residents have a migration background, with at least a parent born in another country, placing it among the most multicultural cities in the country.

However, concerning other aspects such as planning, establishment, and growth, Almere is unique compared to other Dutch cities. For instance, as the youngest city in the Netherlands, Almere has grown over 40 years to become the seventh largest city. Being the fastest-growing city in the Netherlands, with an expected population growth of up to 350,000 by 2030 (Awuh 2022), Almere has not been spared by urbanisation and its associated challenge of feeding the city. Unlike mediaeval cities, where the formalisation of urban planning only came after the phenomenon of urbanisation to restore order, the formalisation of urban planning and urbanisation predates the city of Almere (Constandse 1989). Neighbourhoods were planned completely from scratch before people started settling. More so, food is also important in Almere because the city is located on the Flevo-Polder. Flevo-Polder is one of the most productive food regions (Schaap et al. 2011). On the Flevo-Polder, yields are close to the potential production of the soils, thanks to excellent natural conditions combined with the management skills of the farmers (Schaap et al. 2011). The large agricultural land use in the eastern-south-eastern part of Figure 1 substantiates the massive food production character. Hence, being one of the most productive food regions in the world and planning from scratch makes Almere a very ideal combination for this study, which focuses on planning through the lens of food.

Study design

This research employed an exploratory case study approach to understand the perspectives of consumers on their everyday food choices. A case study is an idiographic examination of a single individual, family, group, organisation, community, or society (Rubin and Babbie 2013). Given the contextual variations of consumption habits and motivations, the case study approach is the best approach to unravelling the underlying factors that yield consumption patterns in the city of Almere.

Furthermore, a case study approach was preferred because it enables a better explanation of peculiarities within a study's context. The case study approach is one of the research approaches used in the social sciences that enables the elaborate examination of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2003). Through this approach, this research will be able to acquire context-dependent knowledge, which is useful in the understanding of human experiences and motivations for behaviour, as this study seeks to examine. The approach allows the researcher to identify which conditions lead to causal reactions.

Although case study approaches have received criticism in academia for their limited potential for generalizability (see Bartlett and Vavrus 2018), other scholars have highlighted the strengths of the approach. For instance, Flyvbjerg (2006) supports the case study approach by arguing that there are several ways in which one can accumulate knowledge, and case studies as one such way are ideal for the processes of falsification. According to this falsification philosophy, theory can be contradicted by evidence, and case studies can provide the evidence needed to test the validity of theory (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Sampling and data collection

As a qualitative research study, convenience and purposive sampling were employed to recruit thirty-two (32) participants who reside in Almere. Thirteen participants were conveniently selected from the bubble of people loosely connected to the network of a research institution in Almere which hosted the correspondence of this paper. Since there was a higher chance that this group may be predominantly homogenous (interests, ideas, and ethnic background), the other nineteen (19) participants were purposively sampled from streets within the city centre (hotspots of food access). This helped to enhance the inclusivity of consumer perspectives. Hence, participants' profiles were diverse, with at least one from each of the dominant ethnic groups in the city of Almere (see Tables 1 and 2 for the age and ethnic background of participants). Despite the promise of anonymity, most participants objected to sharing their income and occupation due to past experiences. Hence, data on occupation and income are not presented here.

The main data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which consisted of four main questions: (i) where people currently access their daily food ingredients; (ii) where

Table 1. Background of participants by nationality.

Country of Origin	Number of Participants
Dutch	10
Ghanaian	4
Dutch-Ghanaian	4
Canadian	3
Venezuela	2
Turkey	2
Syria	2
Suriname	2
Guatemala	1
Thailand	1
Dutch-Cameroonian	1
Total	32

Table 2. Demographic background of participants for the participatory mapping process.

Age	Male	Female	Total
16–30	–	6	6
31–40	3	9	12
41–50	3	4	7
51–60	2	3	5
61–70	–	2	2
Total	8	24	32

they would like to get them in the future; (iii) additionally, they were asked to plot any food they needed but were currently not in Almere at their preferred location; and (iv) the reasons for their future preference or ideal locations for food they can't find in the city. To elicit the lived experiences of food access of consumers on the "where" questions, the semi-structured interview guide was supported with printed base maps of Almere because, across citizen engagement studies, it is noted for obtaining critical socio-spatial data relevant to planning and management (Levine and Feinholz 2015). Printed base maps were preferred over digital maps to make participation easier for participants who did not find the digital mapping approach convenient. The study circumvented the use of complex digital tools because it may have triggered a high non-response rate, thereby compromising the inclusiveness of the research. Furthermore, with social justice as a central proposition in our theoretical framework (the connection between just sustainabilities and SLO), a participatory research approach was required in order to arrive at findings that are worthy of social justice arguments. Thus, the maps, whose function in the data collection was a semblance of participatory mapping, were required in order to participate in policymaking (planning) that affects their wellbeing (Jacobson and Rugeley 2007).

Chronologically, participants were first given two weeks to plot their current and ideal food futures to ascertain responses that are deeply embedded in their daily food practices (see Appendix 1 for an example response from a participant). Following that, the interviews (the aforementioned questions) were administered based on participant responses on the map. The average interview time was fifteen minutes. Giving participants the freedom of choice in time and space of engagement offers better participation opportunities, in which responses are a true reflection of the everyday lives of participants since they are deeply involved in the study (Awuh 2022).

Data analysis

Interviews were automatically transcribed with MS Word online, after which authors manually corrected inconsistencies with the automatically generated transcripts. The data were analysed inductively based on emerging themes such as social interaction, culture, affordability, and healthy food, while the plots on the base maps were organised in "Umap", an online GIS environment for spatial visualisation of visions together with key interview responses (see Appendix 2). The first author entered consumer mapped responses because respondents were familiar with the GIS environment.

Validity and reliability issues

To minimise reliability issues, uniform questions were asked to all participants, but with much space and time to allow for consistency without influencing their thought processes. More so, the validity of the study was enhanced by consciously selecting participants from most of the dominant ethnic groups in the city of Almere. Furthermore, blending interviews with the maps elicited responses that are embedded in the everyday practices of citizens. This also averted guesses, which in turn strengthened the validity of the responses received.

Findings

Citizens prioritised social elements in foodscape planning – social interactions

The fact that food, through collective production, consumption, and/or access, acts as a means for conviviality is conclusive within the sustained number of studies of urban food (Follmann and Viehoff 2015; Rizzato et al. 2016; Rut and Dolejšová 2018). The food access visions of participants were deeply informed by the degree to which the food access point stimulated social interaction. More emphasis is laid on social interactions when people are given the opportunity to participate in the planning of the city. Socialisation is one of the key factors that single-handedly dictated a large part of people's food future, to such an extent that some people clamoured for more open market days because it makes the city active and more liveable. A place that was in the spotlight in connection with social interaction is the open market. The open market gives them the space to socialise, which is at the core of most cultures, oceans apart and within Europe, represented in Almere (see Figure 2 for the setting of the open market). For the sake of social interaction, a majority of the interviewees expressed a desire for more open market sites and opening days:

> "Since I strongly prefer fresh vegetables, I sometimes buy them from the open market in the Stad [city centre]. It would be great if that option were available for more than just two days in the case of the open market. I like this informal setting of shopping where I see people and interact with them". (Participant 25, female, Surinamese, 37 years old)

> "I want to have more toko shops. There, I interact with the shop attendant about personal issues. I went there just yesterday and said, Hey, amigo, tomorrow is my daughter's birthday. Because of this personal relationship and bonding, I have become loyal to them. I always buy from them regardless of other factors." (Participant 23, female, Guatemala, 51 years old)
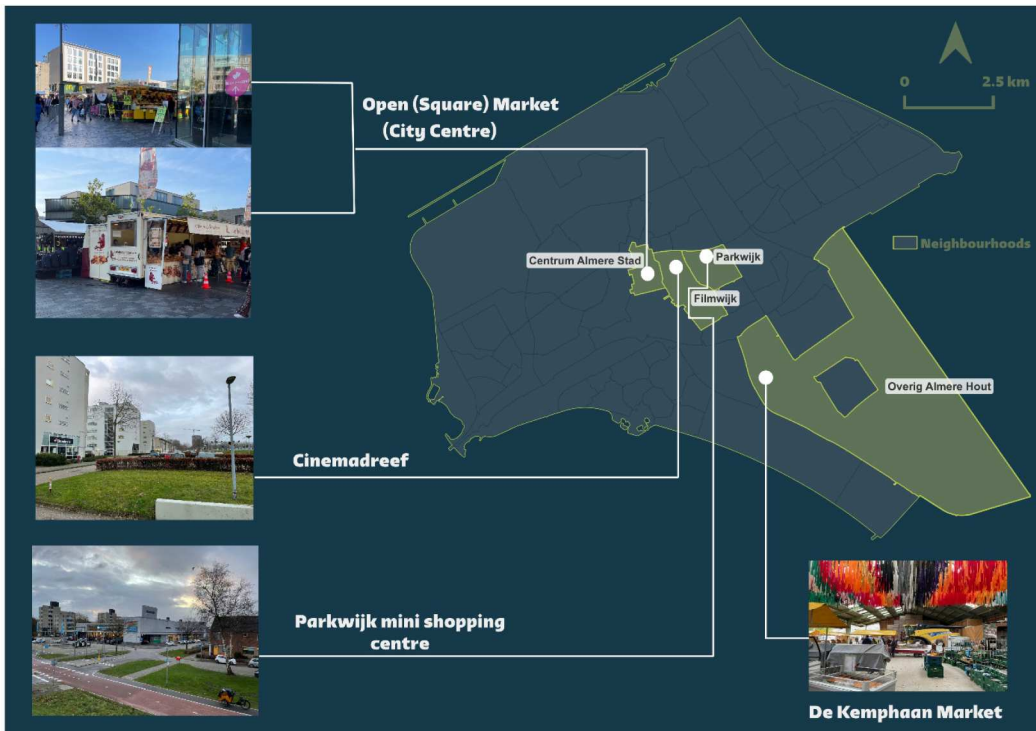

Figure 2. An infographic illustrating hotspots for change (future preferences) in the foodscape by participants.
Source: Fieldwork (2022).

"I would like to buy my vegetables from the Stad in the open square [open market] … I like shopping in areas where there are many people around. It is nice to be outside and meet a lot of people. Not just food but also social bonding." (Participant 21, female, Dutch, 64 years old)

Furthering the inability of the current foodscape to foster social interaction, it appeared that citizens are not merely better at registering their displeasure with urban plans. The data also show that citizens can make a practical contribution to the development of their foodscape by making reference to specific areas that can ignite a change in their foodscape to foster socialisation.

"For me, I would like to have a café on the wide avenue of Cinemadreef [a street] and around the station Parkwijk. There is already a shop layout or commercial centre in these areas. These kinds of cafés make it very important to know people in your community. Without that, I feel there is no bonding in the community." (Participant 22, female, Dutch, 45 years old)

She further remarked that the current foodscape does not reflect the Dutch culture, where there is an abundance of cafés that promote social interaction. In the quote below, she references her former neighbourhood in Amsterdam, where the foodscape relatively enhanced social interaction.

"For me, I would like to have a café in my neighbourhood. You can't say there is no place to sit (outside) and have a coffee. Everywhere I lived in Amsterdam, we had a neighbourhood café and always sat there to have a drink. Here I don't have that kind of place available. Most importantly, enjoy that neighbourhood feel and get to know people. These kinds of cafés are very important to know people in your community. With a lack of that, I feel there is no bonding in the community." (Participant 22, female, Dutch, 45 years old)

The findings of this study emphasise the fact that citizens regard social elements as more important than technocratic visions when they participate. While the embeddedness of intangible or tangible aspects of life (effortlessly expressed) in place may be missed by planners, the advantage of consumer participation in foodscape planning, as the results show, is that it prioritises them throughout the planning process.

Strong representation of cultural identity

Food not only nourishes our bodies but also holds a deeper significance in connecting us to our roots and where we come from. As such, they are important features of diverse ethnic groups' cultural identities. Abubakar, Ololade, and Olawepo (2022) pointed out that it is a symbol of heritage, trademark, and cultural identity. Therefore, while some participants are concerned with social interaction in envisioning the future of their foodscape, others are motivated by the degree of cultural diversity of the foodscape. This is part of the social element of sustainability. In advocating for a more culturally sensitive foodscape, some participants felt that their foodscape did not resonate with their culture. People of migrant backgrounds express a sort of emotional connection to foods from their home countries when they are given the chance to plan their foodscape. These nostalgic connections to cultural background were well represented in the foodscape in people's food visions. A core insight that could be drawn from the strong representation of cultural identity is that the feeling of belonging and connecting to their past could be ingrained in the fabric of hyperdiverse cities through consumer-oriented urban food planning. It is therefore worth arguing that the planning of the foodscape, incontrovertibly, is not just about food but deeply a vehicle for people to reestablish connections with where they came from. And that is perfect for a diverse city like Almere, with over 40% of its residents having strong familial connections outside of the Netherlands (CBS Statline 2022; Tzaninis 2020). A number of the interviewees remarked that:

"In Venezuela, I get fresh tropical papaya in the open market … Having them in the open market will help me to relive my experience and preserve my food identity." (Participant 26, female, Venezuela, 66 years old)

"In Guatemala, where I lived with my wife, the tortilla is street food. I like to go down the street and buy that. The friendly environment of the street adds to the pleasure of eating it. But I don't get it here. I miss the street food, and it will be very nice to have one here in the open market." (Participant 24, male, Dutch, 55 years old)

Furthermore, it was also observed that people of migrant backgrounds prefer to shop in these ethnic shops where they have access to tropical products that align with their place of origin. By emphasising the importance of the social element of sustainability, a participant from Guatemala mentioned that she would prefer the *toko – an Indonesian ethnic grocery store where varieties of tropical products are sold –* to the supermarkets in that they offer varieties of products that suit the pockets of everyone (whether poor or rich).

> "I prefer going to this toko because it is closer, but most importantly, they have a variety of products to choose from. Their products also suit all pockets". (Participant 23, female, Guatemala, 51 years old)

Although affordability and distance were mentioned as reasons to go to tokos, the main reason behind the emphasis on Tokos in people's food visions is unequivocally the variety of products that suit one's cultural or ethnic background. Literature on migrant adaptation in the destination, especially on food, shows that during the early periods after migration, people struggle with food acculturation (Terragni et al. 2014). This is the reason Terragni et al. (2014) recommend that early initiatives aim at enhancing confidence in food in order to become familiar with the new food culture. Despite their influential recommendation (strictly food acculturation), the question of how the new food environment could be representative of their place of origin is still unanswered. Following this dearth of knowledge, our findings – that future foodscapes reflect cultural backgrounds when people are given the opportunity to plan their foodscape – have shown that food acculturation is not the only solution to migrant integration. Rather, a long-term solution for migrant integration in their new environment might rest in citizen involvement in the planning of their foodscape.

Particularly revealing is how participants were critical of their neighbourhood foodscape because it is not culturally stimulating. Of concern to residents is the occupation of Sushi Deluxe and Dominos on Cinemadreef in the neighbourhood [Filmwijk], which hardly foster healthy eating (see Figure 2). Further, their delivery business orientation hints at the fact that the majority of those served may not live in Filmwijk. Commenting on this issue, one of the interviewees proposed that:

> "In the future, I propose a bakery and café around the Cinemadreef [a street], because then I can get fresh bread near my house because in a bakery, you always want to eat the bread the moment you buy it. You don't want to pre-buy it. So, it's easy if it's close to your house. I want it as close as possible to my home; they can kick out either that Dominos or the Sushi Deluxe, which needs to be evicted. It can be replaced with a café; they are not healthy; I never go there." (Participant 22, female, Dutch, 45 years old)

She envisioned that these could be replaced with better, culturally satisfying alternatives, as a Dutch. In doing so, it did not seem challenging for the consumer, who cares more about health, to suggest a place to find culturally preferred food outlets.

Valorisation of locally produced food

By engaging stakeholders, including consumers, with interests in food security, the literature shows that their views and perspectives are crucial in shaping access to healthy and sustainable diets (Sidiq et al. 2022). In line with consumers contribution to the healthy and sustainable food system is the proposition of consuming locally produced foods (Brown 2003), a lifestyle that gained wide acceptability during COVID-19 (Sgroi and Modica 2022). A common view amongst participants was the desire for farmers markets in their current foodscape, mainly because shopping there is a way to support the agricultural activities in the region (producing local), which indirectly creates social interaction through the open market setting. There, consumers get to know the farmer, and this creates a strong attachment and even willingness to promote "eating your local". However, the farther location of the current farmers market, De Kemphaan – does not encourage people to visit daily (see Figure 2). This means accessing preferred fresh food directly from the farmers, plus the convivial benefits are hampered to some extent. The comments below illustrate how wishful consumers are to have more but close stores for locally produced food:

"If I can really be wishful thinking about the future, I would like a shop where I can buy local products. If there could be one shop, a bit like that farmer market, maybe in De Kemphaan, that is a little bit far for us. So, we end up not really going there. We want something like that closer to home. Never go that far to buy fresh things. So, you cycle for half an hour to get to the market to buy food, and then you have to go all the way back with all this perishable food. I don't know; it just feels far away. I think it would be someplace nearby. A smaller store, not necessarily a supermarket, with a shorter food chain." (Participant 22, female, Dutch, 45 years old)

"If I were to look into the future, I was thinking … I would like to be more aware of products that come from here. One time I was walking through the shop, and I said, Oh, it would be nice if all the vegetables that are from close by were in a special place. It would be nice if there were special stores fashioned according to De Kemphaan. I would go there to buy my vegetables." (Participant 24, male, Dutch, 54 years old)

In relation to the burning question posed by Cappelli and Cini (2020, 566): Will *COVID-19 make us reconsider the relevance of short food supply chains and local productions?*", our findings, alternatively, show that citizens involvement in foodscape planning can stimulate a reconsideration towards local productions. However, whether the valorisation of local food production, specifically in Almere, is causally related to the pandemic, although established elsewhere (Philippe, Issanchou, and Monnery-Patris 2022; Sgroi and Modica 2022), could be a concern for further investigation. While it is worth mentioning that distance was a concern to consumers, this issue was not particularly prominent in the interview data. Hence, they were not discussed as standalone themes.

Discussion

This study set out to find the implications of including consumer perspectives in urban food planning. As a main outcome, it revealed that when consumers are included in the planning of their foodscape, there are high tendencies towards valuing social elements of sustainability. In specific terms, citizens were more concerned about social interaction, the representation of food from cultural origins, and local food production. For instance, some Dutch participants felt their current foodscape was not representative of their culture. Furthermore, participants who were of migrant backgrounds shared similar views. Since the culturally sensitive character of the foodscape is not satisfying enough, consumers wished for improvements in the future to foster the expression of socio-cultural values. This finding is unsurprising considering that arguments for their desired foodscape rest on everyday practices of accessing food, which reflect their social and cultural identities. The findings of this study suggest the need for a revision in the food retail environment, according to SLO, in order to account for the diverse cultural representation in Almere. Similarly, a previous study concluded that including citizens in the planning process "is an efficient way of avoiding social exclusion (Hassan, Hefnawi, and Refaie 2011, 203). Thus, our findings re-emphasise the importance of eschewing top-down planning approaches in urban food planning since they are less sensitive to cultural differences and prone to misrepresenting particular groups as compared to bottom-up approaches (Fraser 2001; Martin et al. 2016). This position is also supported by Kati and Jari (2016), who emphasised that top-down planning approaches are technocratic and less practice-driven since they are produced by "experts". Since technocratic solutions hardly consider context-specific issues, planning interventions tend to exacerbate social problems, which ultimately result in exclusion and less regard for the diversity and cultural context of a place (Agyeman and Stewart 2023). Conversely, bottom-up approaches, which resonate with the SLO approach put forward in this study, are widely known for their success and recognition of social context (socio-cultural values of citizens), which enhances the perpetuity and continuous improvement of plans to meet changing societal needs (Hassan, Hefnawi, and Refaie 2011; Kati and Jari 2016). In the field of urban food planning, our results are consistent with – and also offer practical steps to amend – the less representations of social and cultural identities of urbanites in food accessibility in the urban fabric, as called by Agyeman and Stewart (2023). In so doing, the findings corroborate Watson (2020), who argues that through urban food planning, broader societal goals such as social justice can be attained.

While our findings broach the need for revision in the foodscape of Almere according to SLO, we do not assume that Dutch planning obscures the valorisation of citizen perspectives. Rather, the results seek to deepen access to food as a central theme in urban planning. The SLO approach could be seen as a reinforcement for existing participatory planning approaches so that projects or land use plans are not caught off guard amidst the everyday making of the city due to the constant imbued in the processes of SLO.

The SLO framework was developed through the implementation of development projects and, therefore, has been widely used with the aim of giving people a voice to participate in development projects that affect them. This paper is the first to incorporate the SLO framework in the domain of urban planning. Theoretically speaking, the SLO is comprised of two levels. The first is to give people the voice to participate in urban planning. This level was empirically explored in this paper using the case of Almere, giving people the voice to plan their city in terms of the urban foodscape. The second part of the theory argues that when people are given the power to contribute to projects (in this case, urban planning), it will lead to more trust for the planning process and credibility of the planners vis-à-vis the people, and it is also going to lead to more legitimacy because it's been backed up by people's ideas. Within the frame of this paper, the SLO was employed to empirically explore the kind of food access visions that are dominant when people are given a voice. However, the findings from this study cannot postulate that trust, credibility, and legitimacy of SLO actually increase when people are given the social licence to operate in the planning of their foodscape. A comprehensive assessment of these three tenets can be done only after consumer vision is implemented by planning (Boutilier and Thomson 2011). Since the intention of this paper was to experiment with the SLO as a theoretical and empirical advancement of just sustainabilities in planning research and practice, further studies need to be conducted on the post-implementation phase of a food planning project that affords citizens the social license to operate.

The rationale behind recognising the diverse food visions from the findings of the present study is to foster just sustainabilities. As posited in the beginning, just sustainabilities was coined to place more emphasis on the social element of sustainability, that is, what is to be sustained, by whom and for whom, and what is the most desirable means of achieving it. This study builds on the general observation that cities are increasingly becoming hyper-diverse; hence, decision-making regarding healthy and sustainable food access (what is to be sustained) must be diversified in order to appropriately address the questions of "by whom" and "for whom". For this reason, the study sought to include the voices of diverse groups in the city of Almere in such decision-making. Furthermore, the study has demonstrated that SLO could be a means to achieve a just sustainability transition in urban (food) planning. This is because experimenting with the SLO (giving the people a voice to take decisions regarding plans) better rendered the social element of sustainability, wherein people see urban food planning as a medium to enhance the conviviality of their society and express their culture.

This paper therefore argues that just sustainabilities, which is increasingly gaining traction in urban planning, can be attained in rapidly urbanising and multicultural cities through the adoption of the SLO framework. This framework could also be useful for professional planners in that the SLO can help in approving plans for implementation (legitimising) and sustaining them through the never-ending validation they bring to ongoing projects (credibility). Through that, ongoing projects could align with everyday experiences from which societal needs emanate. This creates a healthy rapport (perpetual trust) amongst citizens, planners, and policymakers. In so doing, the theoretical compatibility of just sustainability and SLO would help avoid tendencies of urban planning being used as instruments for glossing over social injustice under the guise of uncritical adoption of public participation since it would offer a critical social reflection on the planning process and constantly question the relevance of an object of planning to the social relations of people they intend to serve.

Limitations of the study

Concerning limitations, in the supporting role of the maps, participants were given more space and time to yield a realistic response (a true reflection of daily experiences). While this worked for photo voice research methods in Awuh's (2022) research in Almere, the author could not outright circumvent problems despite adopting paper-based maps instead of digital map platforms – a reason for five wrongly filled maps. Hence, arguing for more space and time for participation by Awuh (2022) might be counterproductive in participatory mapping research if the researcher fails to facilitate the mapping process. Facilitating mapping exercises must be done cautiously so that the responses of participants are not influenced by the researcher. The best case is to experiment with methods and check what works best for each participant.

Another limitation was the timing of the data collection. Initially, the response rate was lower than anticipated due to the peak of the summer holidays and respondent fatigue in that there are several living labs and co-creation citizens of Almere who are involved. For instance, out of a total of 40 people approached with the interview guide and maps, only 23 returned. To beef up data quality and participation rate (non-response and bad data), the research instrument and sampling strategy were reinforced and adapted with a facilitative mapping process, which yielded nine additional responses. This helped to obtain more responses (an addition of 8 valid responses) but also increased the quality of responses given that a lack of rigorous data collection strategies impacted sample representativeness. Hence, instead of only sharing base maps with ample time to fill, the researcher may need to facilitate the mapping process for some participants.

Conclusion

As cities increasingly adopt diverse ethnic, social, and cultural identities, the decision-making processes for resolving sustainability challenges need to be more inclusive. In advocating for an inclusive approach to sustainability transitions, this paper asked the key question, "What are the implications, in the case of urban foodscape, when people are involved in planning from the perspective of sustainability?". With urban planning making waves with the need to prioritise just sustainability transitions, this paper demonstrates, to some extent, that just sustainabilities can be achieved when SLO is adopted both in planning research and practice. Hence, this study has teased out the compatibility between theories of just sustainabilities and SLO in urban planning to advance efforts towards just sustainable futures.

Based on the findings, it is clear that when people are given the opportunity to plan their cities, their drive and motives go beyond technocratic reasons to a more social, environmental, and cultural perspective. This depicts how citizens are particularly protective of their social and cultural identity and, for that matter, planning as levers to foster these linkages, which are important aspects of urban life and social sustainability. In particular, residents of Almere envisioned a foodscape that fosters social interaction and bonding, connects them to their cultural background, and values locally produced food. These intangible social elements that are prioritised by consumers are often overlooked since planners are unable to single-handedly identify these daily experiences of citizens. Therefore, giving people the SLO helps break the hegemony of technocratic perspectives, which fails to resolve the socio-technical nature of sustainability-related challenges in a socially just manner because it is not premised on diverse social perspectives. From the perspective of urban food planning, making access an afterthought of already-made technocratic-driven plans would perpetuate injustice in sustainability transitions, denying diverse and multicultural groups access, thereby hampering food security. It is therefore encouraged for urban planning to continually give citizens the SLO prior to urban developments and throughout the process to gain legitimacy for urban projects, maintain the credibility of the project, and establish trust between planners and citizens. The theoretical combination of just

sustainability and SLO would expunge the risks of glossing over social injustice in cities under the guise of mere citizen participation. This is because SLO allows citizens to critically reflect on and question the imperatives that a plan seeks to achieve with the metric of socio-cultural relevance. This fusion can be a key pathway for urban planning to achieve just sustainabilities in hyper-diverse cities.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Declaration of interest

All authors were fully responsible throughout the processes that led to this paper; study conception and design, materials preparation, data collection and analysis, and writing.

The datasets obtained during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the main author on reasonable request.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants in this study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and what the data will be used for. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of Participant–generated maps indicating their [1] current food access and [2, 3] vision for the foodscape of Almere
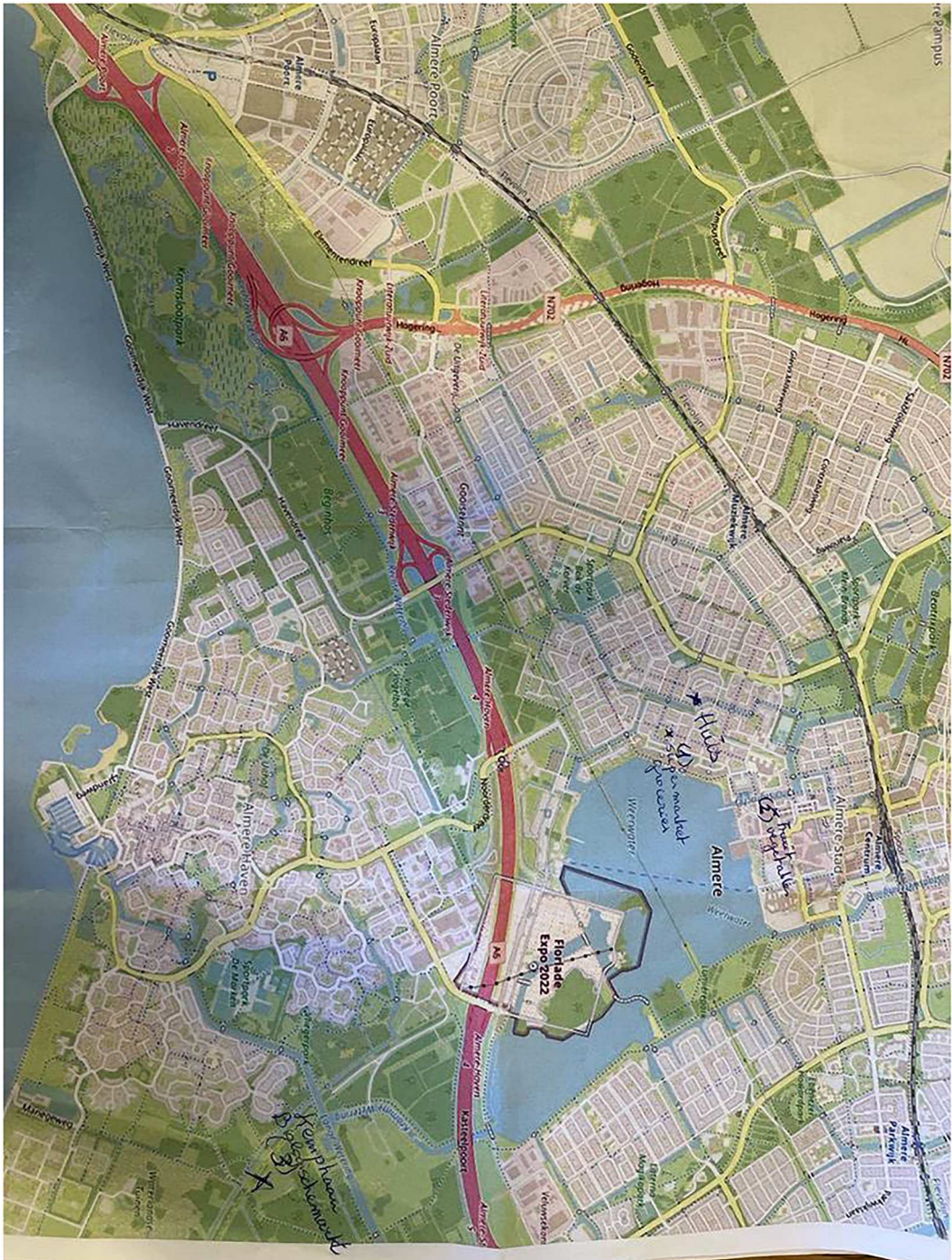
Appendix 2: Interface of uMAP – an online platform where consumer preferences were stored