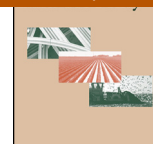




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## Taking context into account in urban agriculture governance: Case studies of Warsaw (Poland) and Ghent (Belgium)

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of local particularism in relation to the global interest in urban agriculture (UA). A growing movement is advocating UA, but future prospects are limited by variability, unclear expectations, vague responsibilities and leadership in the UA movement. We wonder whether the poor understanding of UA governance is associated with a public discourse and academic literature that too easily adopt the generic and universally claimed benefits. We argue here that uncritical enthusiasm results in an overly instrumental approach to governance of UA with a main focus on stimulating formal (e.g., policy making) and informal advocacy (e.g., civic engagement in UA). We do not deny the importance of formal and informal advocacy in UA development, but rather claim that the potential of UA needs a more nuanced analysis. Study of the interplay between UA advocacy and a city's contextual characteristics is a worthy pursuit, as it may provide significant and more profound explanations for the divergence observed in UA developments. Case studies performed in Warsaw (Poland) and Ghent (Belgium) serve to illustrate the importance of context. The results suggest that neither case is likely to benefit from a governance strategy that only stimulates greater advocacy and institutional support. The inclusion of city-specific needs, opportunities and pitfalls of UA in the governance strategy can help to move UA toward its full potential. We suggest a policy-making strategy for UA that expands beyond the realm of food production alone. Ultimately, the aim is to steer away from assessing (and critiquing) UA solely against the backdrop of these generic success factors.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of urban agriculture (UA) has caught the attention of city authorities, citizens, academics and the media across the globe (Dimitri et al., 2015; Mansfield and Mendes, 2012; Morgan, 2014). Although food production initiatives in and around urban areas are not new (e.g. wartime gardens), the recent interest in UA reflects a reinvention of the concept in which new purposes are assigned to UA (Wortman and Lovell, 2013). The attractiveness of UA lies in its potential response to a range of urban issues that are often linked to the overarching goal of sustainable cities (FAO, 2007; Lovell, 2010; Mendes et al., 2008; Mougeot, 2006, p.10). As

a consequence of its popularity, a narrative on UA has emerged in popular discourse that is both uncritically positive as well as decontextualized (Lawson, 2005; Classens, 2015; Mares and Alkon, 2011). This narrative has been eagerly adopted by the media and online platforms, with headlines such as “*Farming and the city: How local-grown agriculture can feed the world's urban areas*”<sup>1</sup> (website of Milan World Expo 2015), “*There will be billions more hungry people in 2050. Growing our food on vertical farms or under radical new lighting systems may be key to ensuring they have enough to eat*”<sup>2</sup> (BBC) or “*Urban Farming Is Growing a Green Future*”<sup>3</sup> (National Geographic).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.expo2015.org/magazine/en/sustainability/farming-and-the-city-how-local-grown-agriculture-can-feed-the-world-s-urban-areas.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20130603-city-farms-to-feed-a-hungry-world>.

<sup>3</sup> [http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/photos/urban-farming/#/earth-day-urban-farming-new-york-rooftop\\_51631\\_600x450.jpg](http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/photos/urban-farming/#/earth-day-urban-farming-new-york-rooftop_51631_600x450.jpg).

The assumption that UA is a valuable goal in itself often results in an instrumental approach to governance. UA advocates tend to consider the actual development of UA policies and projects to be of greater importance than the precise form, objectives and impacts of such initiatives (Cohen and Reynolds, 2014; DeLind, 2015; McClintock, 2014; Smit, 2016). Policy responses at various levels generally situate UA in the field of food and agriculture, with a strong focus on preservation of farmland and the supply of local food (Cohen, 2012). The European Commission launched a campaign entitled “*Europe’s Common Agricultural Policy: Taking care of our roots*” to promote the link between urban dwellers and agriculture (European Commission, 2014). Under the societal challenges priority in the Horizon 2020 program (2014–2020) “Food security, sustainable agriculture, marine, maritime and inland water research, and the bio-economy”, urban agriculture has become a Food, Agriculture and Biotechnologies (FAB) priority (Arnold, 2013). Furthermore, all measures within the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP, 2014–2020) will be applicable to farmers located within urban and peri-urban areas who fulfill the eligibility criteria (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2014). At the international level, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) assists national and city governments in optimizing policies and support for UA (FAO, 2015).

But the benefits of UA are not limited to food production alone: it also provides green, open spaces; mediates the urban heat island effect; helps to manage storm water; enhances food literacy; improves health through stimulating physical activity and consumption of fruits and vegetables; integrates traditionally excluded social and cultural groups; builds community; reconnects agricultural sectors with urban populations; and facilitates participation and democracy in the food system (e.g., Draper and Freedman, 2010; Feenstra et al., 1999; Hodgson et al., 2011; Howe et al., 2005; Lovell, 2010; Nugent, 2000; Smit and Bailkey, 2006; Van Veenhuizen, 2006). The above examples clearly show how an uncritical popular discourse on UA and a policy focus on food production endangers the diversity, multi-functionality and richness that characterizes the UA movement. The first step to taking this diversity into account is generating an in-depth understanding of the policy implications. Current research easily adopts the generic, positive narrative and the instrumental approach to governance (Classens, 2015; Lawson, 2005). In general, these studies (implicitly) start from the assumption that UA initiatives are inherently benevolent. They ask how bottom-up and top-down processes can stimulate the development of UA initiatives by examining how civic engagement (e.g., DeLind, 2002; Kaufman and Bailkey, 2000; Levkoe, 2006) and urban planning and policy-making foster growth in UA initiatives (e.g., Cohen, 2012; Certomà and Notteboom, 2015; Halloran and Magid, 2013; Hardman and Larkhman, 2014; Lovell, 2010; Pearson et al., 2010; Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; La Rosa et al., 2014). In accordance with this assumption, insight into UA governance, defined in terms of arrangements that effectively stimulate, facilitate and coordinate UA advocacy, becomes key to understanding how UA developments can be successfully advanced (Dubbeling et al., 2010; Huang and Drescher, 2015; Pearson et al., 2010).

Without underestimating the merits of these academic approaches or seeking to contradict them, in this article and in agreement with notable exceptions (Certomà, 2015; McClintock, 2014; Tornaghi, 2014), we seek to critically discuss the assumption that UA developments are inherently desirable and are mainly shaped by UA stakeholders’ advocacy. In particular, we address the current lack of academic consideration of the city-specific material and socio-political contexts in which UA advocacy and developments are situated. We argue that when these city-specific contexts are taken into account, differences in UA developments in different

cities can be better understood, and arguably, a different approach to UA governance – including broader policy-making – is needed.

We empirically substantiate our argument by discussing UA dynamics in the cities of Warsaw (Poland) and Ghent (Belgium). Remarkably, similar types of stakeholders advocate UA in these cities, but UA developments take on different shapes and content in the two cities, largely due to different contextual dynamics. These findings indicate that the meaning of UA governance is not universal or generic – as the understanding of UA as inherently benevolent suggests – but is rather dependent on city-specific circumstances.

Below, we continue by explaining our conceptual and methodological framework. We then empirically explore UA developments in Warsaw and Ghent by making an inventory of UA initiatives in these cities, and by discussing how UA advocates and context-specific characteristics interactively constitute these initiatives. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of our findings in understanding the potential and the pitfalls of UA developments in different cities, and what UA governance entails by discussing socio-politically and spatially embedded public policies for UA that go beyond narrowing UA to food production.

## 2. The role of local particularism in the governance of UA

The complexity of the UA advocacy movement, involving different (state, market, civil society) actors operating at different governance levels and advancing different (sustainability) goals, makes novel demands on urban policy-making and planning processes. In light of this complexity and uncertainty, scholars have pointed out the need to identify governance arrangements and tools that can orchestrate the new creative multi-actor, multi-level, multi-purpose and multi-sector trajectories (Healey, 2004). As Hajer and Wagenaar (2003, p.3) explain, governments often face “open-ended, unusual, ad hoc arrangements” when seeking to further sustainability as a goal (e.g., Brodhag, 1999; Block et al., 2013). In many cases, city governments focus on single projects or experiments, when implementing UA policies, and support for UA is given shape through trial and error, instigating lengthy learning processes on how to support and implement UA initiatives. Strategic decisions on UA are mostly taken within a governance setting in which a convergence of circumstances determines the policy-making process (Kingdon, 1984), and decisions are only reached incrementally (Block et al., 2012; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Teisman, 2000). Explicit or clear-cut governance frameworks for UA currently remain absent, incoherent or unclear (Lovell, 2010). In many cases, policy making marginalizes UA as food production without the consideration of other relevant policy domains that embrace different aspects of UA.

We agree that an academic focus on UA governance is needed in areas such as urban planning and policy-making, participatory processes, civic engagement, and the institutionalization of UA decision-making processes (Pearson et al., 2010; Rosol, 2010). However, we assert that governance involves more than accounting for the diversity of needs, objectives and strategies of UA stakeholders (Pierre, 2000, p. 3–4), or identifying and adopting best practices and successful governance tools (Mendes et al., 2008). In accordance with the approach of Pollitt (2013), this paper makes a novel contribution to the governance of UA by considering context as a co-constitutive factor. The wealth of case studies on UA in a single country, city, neighborhood or site clearly indicates that variations in a given context sculpt the shape and content of UA developments. Nevertheless, academic literature on the governance of UA often either bypasses or merely describes the context in which UA developments unfold (Cohen, 2012; Garnett, 2000; Padgham et al., 2015) rather than considering it to be a constituting factor (for notable exceptions, see McClintock, 2015; Lovell, 2010). We suggest that

the interconnectedness of stakeholders and city-specific contexts creates complex dynamics that cannot be adequately explained by focusing on one or the other: they have to be considered simultaneously. Such an exploration requires insights into both stakeholder support for UA developments and the broader social, political and material context in which UA is being advocated.

This approach enables us to make sense of the vital relationship between the particularism and micro-politics at the city level and the homogenizing effect of globalization that informs the universalized, generically positive narrative on UA. In doing so, we suggest that the prospects for governance of UA cannot be assessed without taking the specificity of city contexts into account (Andrews, 2010). A governance structure that works in one context might not work in another.

By making conceptual space to explore the role of context in UA developments, we also aim to address a growing academic critique on the understanding of localized food production as sustainable or “good” in itself (Born and Purcell, 2006; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2004; Hinrichs, 2003; Reynolds, 2014; Winter, 2003). We argue that by uncritically adopting a generically positive UA narrative, actors may unwittingly help to perpetuate inequalities within city-level social and political structures. In accordance with Pierre and Peters (2000), we argue that a proper consideration of context brings more critical insights into UA governance, as it highlights how local inequalities, exclusionary mechanisms and injustices are overcome or (re-)produced (González and Healey, 2005).

Before identifying contextual factors that affect UA developments, the notion of context needs to be operationalized (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). To do so, we have made the following conceptual choices. First, while we acknowledge that different governance levels (e.g., international, national, community, and project-levels) affect UA developments, we have chosen to focus on governance dynamics that play out on the urban scale. In doing so, we aim to include specificities of urban contexts, which can be easily overlooked when uncritically adopting the positive narrative that is especially strong at the international and national levels. At the same time, we aim to steer clear of adding to the empirically strong, but often under-theorized discussions about single UA projects or experiments that aim to identify “best practice” on how to support and implement UA initiatives.

Second, we face the challenge of identifying a series of stable contextual characteristics within the urban context that can be held as a constant for comparison purposes (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004), allowing us to identify “differences that make a difference” (Bakker and Bridge, 2006; Rucht, 1996). In the case of UA, creating space for urban food growing is a key aspect of governance processes (Roth et al., 2015; Taylor and Lovell, 2012) and the opportunities for creating such space depend to an important degree on the existing spatial layout of a city. These material or geographical characteristics, which are the result of specific socio-historical patterns of spatial development, are likely to differ strongly between cities. We categorize these characteristics under “urban layout”. Furthermore, we agree with McClintock (2015) that the interpretations of and attitudes toward the material city context, as well as the notion of growing food in the city, are themselves also grounded in a socio-historical and geographical context. These interpretations and attitudes are likely to result in different public stances regarding use of urban space for UA, which we categorize under the heading of “perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space”. These interpretations and attitudes are also likely to inform and, in turn, be affected by the existing broader political frameworks in which UA policies and strategies are embedded. We label these “political climate” (cf. Strategic Urban Planning (SUP)). In sum, we discern three analytically distinct categories of city-specific con-

**Table 1**  
Structural characteristics of Warsaw and Ghent.

	Warsaw	Ghent
Capital of	Country	Province
Population	1,726,581 <sup>a</sup>	251,133 <sup>e</sup>
Population density	3317 inh/km <sup>2a</sup>	1608 inh/km <sup>2e</sup>
Total surface (ha)	51,700	15,600
Agricultural land (ha)	12,243 <sup>b</sup>	3132 <sup>f</sup>
Allotment gardens (ha)	1770 <sup>c</sup>	6,4 <sup>f</sup>
Average monthly income	1,191.78 EUR (2014) <sup>d</sup>	2,224.67 EUR (2009) <sup>g</sup>
Unemployment rate (%)	4.5 (2014 <sup>d</sup> )	14.3 (2014 <sup>g</sup> )
People at risk of poverty (%)	22.9 (2012 <sup>h</sup> )	27.5 (2012 <sup>h</sup> )

<sup>a</sup> Central Office for Statistics, 2014.

<sup>b</sup> Statistical Office Warszawa, 2013.

<sup>c</sup> Office of Architecture and Spatial Planning of the Capital City of Warsaw City Hall, 2007.

<sup>d</sup> Statistical Office Warszawa, 2014.

<sup>e</sup> ADSEI, 2014.

<sup>f</sup> Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2007.

<sup>g</sup> VDAB (2014).

<sup>h</sup> Eurostat (2012).

<sup>i</sup> Sum Research, 2015.

textual factors: urban layout, political climate, and perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space.

Finally, we clarify our definition of UA and UA stakeholders. A multitude of UA conceptualizations exist, ranging from broad or ecosystemic definitions (Mougeot, 2000; McClintock, 2014), to narrow definitions that consider only commercial farming practices (Smit et al., 1996). In this paper, we align with Mougeot's definition and understand UA as growing edible plants and raising livestock within urban and peri-urban areas (FAO, 2015). In doing so, we include a broad range of possible meanings and perspectives on what UA may entail, and thus avoid an *a priori* restrictive focus on how city contexts affect the shape of UA advocacy and developments. We define a UA stakeholder as an individual who may act from within a group or organization, and who is involved in and may influence UA initiatives. This definition includes all agents who, in interaction with city-specific contextual factors, co-constitute the governance of UA trajectories. This includes public officers, local administrations, supporting institutions, volunteers, pioneers, activists, farmers, social workers, educators, students, NGOs, and academics.

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Case study research

The case study method is adopted because it best fits our aim of exploring contextual conditions relevant to the complex and relatively novel phenomenon under study, namely UA (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Horton et al., 2004; Yin, 2003). Case studies produce empirical evidence in context-dependent knowledge and provide reliable information for the broader topic of UA governance (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, they pose several limitations: (1) the data is difficult to structure and exhaust; (2) the findings cannot be generalized, and (3) such studies depend on the knowledge of the interviewees, but we have countered this by using various data sources that allow triangulation (Yin, 1993). To facilitate in-depth understanding into governance of UA, we used case study material from two European cities: Warsaw (Poland) and Ghent (Belgium). We selected these cities because of their distinct socio-historical backgrounds, which are respectively based in communist and social democratic pasts. In view of these different pasts, we anticipated that these cities would likely differ in terms of urban layout, political climate, and public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space. These differences are essential to meet our aim, namely to gain insight into how these contextual factors affect UA

**Table 2**

Categories of stakeholders and their presence in Warsaw and Ghent. (A qualitative evaluation of the degree of presence of different stakeholder groups within both contexts, with –, not represented; +/-, weakly represented; +, actively represented; ++, very actively represented according to interviewees).

Stakeholders	Examples	Warsaw	Ghent
Municipal government	Policy makers, public officers, council members	–	++
Social and cultural institutions	NGOs, social workers, health and education professionals	+/-	+
Pioneers	Students, volunteers	+	++
Entrepreneurial	Farmers, architects, restaurants, distributors	+/-	+
Academic	Research centers, universities	+/-	+

advocacy and developments. An additional motivation for selecting these two cities was the early stage of UA development in both places. This enabled us to identify and locate key stakeholders, initiatives and events at the foundation of an UA movement, and thus generate a good overview of the UA governance process in both cities.

To explore, describe and explain UA developments in Warsaw and Ghent, we mainly used semi-structured interviews and participant observation (Yin, 2003). Both cases were studied using the same empirical methods, namely similar criteria for stakeholder selection, comparable topic lists and similar field observation methods. Selection of interviewees in both cities began with participant observation and a web search to identify key UA stakeholders, followed by a snowball procedure. We questioned each interviewee about their perspectives on, and involvement in, UA developments in their cities; their perspectives on the constitution of the network of UA stakeholders in their cities; their understanding of contextual factors that enable and constrain UA developments in their cities; and their views on the future of UA developments in their city.

We collected our data during three periods: two in Ghent (spring 2013, 20 interviews and spring 2014, 12 interviews) and one in Warsaw (spring 2014, 18 interviews). All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. During the same periods, we also made field notes during informal meetings and field visits, and collected relevant documents (including policy documents, newspaper articles and website texts) to complement our interview data and to enable data triangulation (Yin, 1993). In Ghent, we also collected data during focus group meetings for a project launched in 2014 by the department of urban planning called “Vision for agriculture in Ghent, 2050”. Conventional farmers and their representatives, pioneers, entrepreneurs, academics, representatives of social and cultural institutions and public officers were consulted for feedback regarding opportunities and bottlenecks for the agriculture and food system in Ghent. The goal was to explore the potential for a local agriculture and food system supported by a common vision. We maintained contact with key stakeholders from both cities after the data collection periods through email or personal contact, in order to stay updated on important events and developments relating to UA. In both cities, our data analysis focused on the following: determining the presence of UA initiatives; the network of stakeholders involved in governing UA developments; and the impact of the urban layout, political climate, and public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space on UA advocacy and developments.

### 3.2. Introduction of the cases

To introduce the cases, we outline a number of structural differences between Warsaw and Ghent (See Table 1). The capital city of Warsaw comprises 18 districts. It is the main Polish center for politics, business, innovation, trade and tourism (Clark and Moonen, 2015; Foreign Affairs, 2014; Metaxas and Tsavdaridou, 2013). The modern appearance of the city is largely the result of post-war reconstruction. After introducing the market economy in the 1990s and joining the EU in 2004, Poland’s economy has been booming. Warsaw’s economic situation has long been advantageous in rela-

tion to the rest of the country (Euromonitor International, 2016; Niemczyk, 1998). Immigration numbers in Warsaw mainly represent Eastern Europeans and rural-urban migration. Net migration in Poland as a whole has been negative for many years, however.

Ghent comprises nine townships and has a reputation for being one of the most progressive and vibrant cities in Flanders, i.e. the largely urbanized northern part of Belgium. Ghent is home to a relatively large population of young, leftist and highly educated people (Certomà and Notteboom, 2015). The population is becoming increasingly diverse, with significant numbers of residents with roots in Bulgaria, Turkey, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Poland and Morocco (Environmental Department Ghent, 2012).

In both Warsaw and Ghent, the general food purchasing and consumption patterns follow global trends: the supermarket is the main food supplier and the consumption of fast food and snacks is increasing.

In 2012, the number of people at risk of poverty in Poland (before changes in social support) was lower than in Belgium (Eurostat, 2012). These numbers reflect Warsaw’s recent economic boom (Foreign Affairs, 2014) as well as the economic banking crisis in 2008, which led to increased risk of poverty in Ghent residents (Environmental Department Ghent, 2012). In Ghent, people eligible for social assistance increased from 19/1000 in 2008 to 24/1000 in 2010.

## 4. Results

In the following section, we describe the UA initiatives in both cities and discuss the configuration of stakeholder networks that advocate UA in Warsaw and Ghent. Subsequently, we analyze how the contextual characteristics of “urban layout”, “political climate”, and “public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space” affect the configurations of stakeholder networks and the development of UA initiatives in both cities.

### 4.1. UA initiatives in Warsaw and Ghent

Under the umbrella of UA, many diverse initiatives have recently been developed in both cities, marking an upcoming trend toward urban food production. In both cases, UA projects are primarily initiated by non-governmental agents and involve practices such as guerilla gardening, rooftop gardening, community gardening, CSA, apiculture, vertical farming, educational farming, institutional/social gardens, artistic and experimental projects. Moreover, in both contexts, existing UA initiatives get extensive coverage in newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, posters and other visual displays, which gives the impression of a growing UA movement. However, interviewees complained about the many difficulties in realizing novel UA initiatives. Partly because of these difficulties, the majority of UA projects are traditional vegetable gardening projects. Innovations commonly associated with UA, such as aquaponics,<sup>4</sup> hydroponics, LED-farming initiatives, or agroparks

<sup>4</sup> Defined here as a symbiotic system combining fish production and cultivation of plants in water. Apart from fish fodder, it is a closed-loop system.



**Table 3**  
Key contextual characteristics based on in-depth interviews with stakeholders in Warsaw and Ghent.

Warsaw			Ghent		
Urban layout	Political climate	Public perceptions & attitudes toward use of urban space.	Urban layout	Political climate	Public perceptions & attitudes toward use of urban space.
Warsaw is characterized by broad streets, green and/or open space and compact high-rise housing	Focus on economic and infrastructural development	“Agriculture” and “rurality” are associated with the past, unfavorable conditions and economic hardship	Lack of green and open space, densely populated city; strongly urbanized; well-developed suburban housing with private gardens	Socio-ecological problems are high on the policy agenda	Broad public support for urban food production initiatives
High number of allotment gardens	Poor understanding of UA	Community gardens as appropriate location for urban food production Safety concerns relating to urban food production	Resurgence of allotment gardens, but few gardens	Substantial attention given to UA and UA-related initiatives	Shared perception of lack of space as a major barrier to UA development Low to moderate safety concerns
Strict division of land-use functions; poor use of public land	Poor support in administration, planning and policies for UA, and agriculture in general	“Local” is generally understood as “Polish”	Less strict division of land-use functions; multifunctional land use and public land use are common	UA understood as a strategy in the plan for a climate neutral city by 2050	
Urban and <i>peri</i> -urban land increasingly transformed for economic development	UA referred to as an activity for professional farmers or citizens in community gardens; focus on inclusion is lacking	Weak associational life	Agricultural land increasingly transformed into land used for keeping horses, urbanization and nature preservation.	Lack of explicit focus on the process to include historically under-represented social and ethnic groups in the public sphere	Local is understood as “food produced in or around the Ghent region”.
Clear identification of rural areas surrounding Warsaw, namely in close proximity to the city.		The topics of food and agriculture are increasingly popular, but with a select audience Mainly young, white, educated, middle-class citizens enthusiastic about UA	Urban-rural distinctions are difficult to sustain in the immediate areas around Ghent		Strong associational life  Increasing attention on topics of food and agriculture  Mainly white, educated, middle-class citizens enthusiastic about UA

are either scarce or non-existent in both cities. It should also be noted that the number of novel UA initiatives in Ghent is relatively higher than in Warsaw.<sup>5</sup>

In Warsaw, in addition to the wealth of community gardens (See Table 1) – which, in the case of Poland, can be best described as individual plots of green open space on public land assigned to citizens or groups – we predominantly find artistic and experimental projects, examples of which are rather scarce and whose goals are often not made explicit. Examples are seasonal projects in a museum or other cultural institutions and dropping of seed bombs in neighborhoods. Apart from these, few UA initiatives were observed. In Ghent, community gardens are the most common form of UA. Due to space constraints, gardening projects in Ghent are often initiated or incorporated by larger non-profit socio-economic institutions that have relatively large amounts of land or space available. Accordingly, Ghent UA initiatives adopt similar socio-economic objectives. Examples are incorporating food production activities within social employment or job skills training programs and horticultural training in educational institutions. In 2013, for-profit UA initiatives emerged for the first time in Ghent.

UA is an emerging topic in both Warsaw and Ghent. A range of different stakeholders are involved in the UA initiatives mentioned above. For reasons of analytical clarity, we have grouped

these different stakeholders into five categories (See Table 2). Based on an appraisal of interviewees concerning the presence of different UA stakeholders in their cities, we have given the involvement of the stakeholder groups in UA advocacy a relative score from – to ++, to give an indication of the strength of the presence and visibility of UA stakeholders in relation to the other context (Table 3).

What immediately emerges from Table 2 is that similar categories of stakeholders advocate for UA in both cities. Strikingly, however, (1) municipal government stakeholders are absent in the case of Warsaw, and (2) the other categories (social and cultural institutions, pioneers, entrepreneurs and academics) are more strongly represented in Ghent than in Warsaw. Evans (1996) suggests that connections between state and society can forge synergistic relationships that in turn foster action—in this case, UA initiatives. The paragraphs below show how the presence of municipal government stakeholders and the strong focus on networking can create a strong platform for UA in Ghent. Indeed, Ghent benefits from a large number of organizations and initiatives supporting UA. Multiple events have taken place over recent years ranging from debates and lectures to practical courses and seminars where UA receives special attention. An “Urban Agriculture Working Group”, formed in 2011, wrote a charter to provide the city of Ghent with a vision for UA development. More than 15 local and regional organizations have signed the charter and the municipal government has revised and adopted it. Accordingly, UA was officially mentioned for the first time in the municipal policy agreement of 2013–2018.

<sup>5</sup> Can be defined as spatial clusters of value chains in an industrial setup in proximity to urban areas.

Having become aware of its influential role in the network, the municipal government actively promotes UA initiatives and integrates the different initiatives into a general strategy for a more local food system. This local food strategy was formally launched in October 2013 under the name *Gent en garde*. A public officer describes the work done for *Gent en garde* as:

I try to get an overview from all these UA initiatives, make connections between them, create synergies and move things forward. Some projects are led from within the department, but many others are not in our hands.<sup>6</sup>

Interdepartmental cooperation has also recently started in Ghent. The Department of Urban Development and Spatial Planning, the Department of Work and Economy, and the Department of Environment have jointly launched a study entitled “Vision for agriculture in Ghent, 2050” in January 2014. The aim of this study is to develop an urban planning vision that will safeguard the availability of land for agricultural purposes in Ghent. The following quote illustrates that the municipal government is actively seeking opportunities to promote UA by stimulating stakeholder interaction:

But we can also bring them together, let everyone cooperate in the search for opportunities. Who knows what kinds of cooperation mechanisms will emerge? Maybe some farmers will lease a hectare to initiatives and then maybe they will no longer experience UA as a competitor. Or do you give them a percentage of the yield? I mean, there are many possibilities. (Public officer, Ghent).

Strikingly, similar support for UA on a city scale, either located within the government or in civil society, was completely absent in Warsaw. Cultural institutions – such as the Warsaw Center for Contemporary Art – had hosted individual UA projects, but only when cultural aptitude was demonstrated. However, these institutions hardly contribute to creating a more substantial UA movement:

I think that cultural institutions should play a strong educational role. If they also do not feel that this [UA] is something very important. . . I thought this was the most important place to start something like that [UA]. (Pioneer formerly working in a cultural institution, Warsaw).

Interviewees in Warsaw also experience the network of UA stakeholders as small and inexperienced in promoting UA. At the same time, we found that stakeholders in Warsaw have either no or very imprecise expectations of the municipal government in terms of how it could support UA development. This can be largely attributed to the poor understanding of UA within the municipal government and the large socio-economic and cultural institutions. Interviewees stated that they were operating in isolation from other relevant networks. Some added that only an exclusive group of pioneers is involved. They stated having problems with engaging the broader public, connecting with other stakeholders such as governmental agents, and ensuring that their efforts are taken seriously. A pioneer (Warsaw) expresses his discontent as follows:

I think the city does not see these UA initiatives as the start of something bigger, I think they see us as those kids, these weirdos, doing their thing. Accordingly, they support us only sporadically. Nothing big can grow out of this. As long as these remain interventions, the city will see them as a sort of entertainment. The city would use it strategically as an advertisement [for cultural purposes], but not connect these ideas to larger scale urban planning (Warsaw-pioneer).

In contrast, interviewees from Ghent indicated that a wide range of different stakeholders are connected in an extensive and mutually supportive UA network. This might be related to the net-

working efforts and support of the city government, as described above. However, linking of different groups of stakeholders always involves some degree of friction. Even though the majority of the respondents believe that the UA movement is socially inclusive, some added that in practice, primarily highly educated and white middle-class families are the most active in UA governance. Ghent is home to a relatively large number of migrants with different backgrounds and although some of them participate in UA initiatives such as gardening projects, they tend to be absent in discussions that shape the form and content of UA initiatives in Ghent. As such, UA developments in Ghent reconfirm, rather than overcome, existing socio-cultural inequalities (McClintock, 2014). Interviewees repeatedly mentioned that existing socio-cultural tensions are reflected in the UA movement in Ghent.

Comparing the UA situation in Warsaw and Ghent with the sole focus on stakeholder involvement would lead us to conclude that support by the city government and a strong network of UA advocates that covers a wide variety of stakeholders are indeed crucial aspects for creating an environment that fosters UA development (Huang and Drescher, 2006). However, if we consider local particularism in an analysis of UA governance, do we then reach different conclusions or increase our explanatory power for its potential in Warsaw and Ghent?

## 4.2. Contextual characteristics that co-shape UA developments

### 4.2.1. The urban layout of Warsaw

After the Second World War (WWII), more than 80% of Warsaw was reconstructed according to the principles of the Communist regime: broad streets, many open, green spaces and compact high-rise housing. Allotment gardens represent a major land-use category. Table 1 illustrates that the amount of farmland is fairly comparable between Warsaw and Ghent, but the amount of land dedicated to allotment gardens in urban areas shows a stark difference. Allotment gardens have been very popular in Warsaw because they served as a major source of food under the Communist regime (Bellows, 2004). Furthermore, due to the expansion of the city, many previously isolated community gardens are now located in the city center and form a very visible aspect of the urban landscape. Even though the amount of food produced in Warsaw's allotment gardens has diminished significantly, they still remain functional urban green spaces. Broad public support for safeguarding these spaces creates strong resistance to their potential removal for economic development purposes. Another characteristic of Warsaw's post-WWII reconstruction was that land-use functions became strictly divided. Respondents mentioned the clearly distinguishable rural areas that immediately surround the city. Despite the large amount of green space available, UA pioneers indicated difficulties in finding new space as discussed below.

### 4.2.2. The political climate in Warsaw

Interviewees stated that Poland has always lagged behind Western Europe in socio-economic terms, despite the recent and successful economic development efforts. Currently, the municipal government of Warsaw is mainly investing in the economic development of urban space. Projects such as high-rise office buildings and suburban housing developments are popping up all over the (peri)urban landscape. UA initiatives by the municipal government are thus currently located within the logic of economic and entrepreneurial city development, in which these initiatives – which have a low economic value – are confined to places where experimentation is temporary and socially appropriate, such as cultural institutions and public squares. The municipal government and large socio-economic institutions do not see very much societal value in novel UA initiatives. During interviews, representatives of the municipal government equated UA with the remaining pro-

<sup>6</sup> Quotes from interviews held in Ghent are translated from Dutch into English. Interviews in Poland were all held in English, or in one case, translated from Polish to English.

professional farmers in the peri-urban areas, while UA initiatives that were initiated by other stakeholders were not recognized at all. When asked about initiatives that involve growing food in the city, the municipal government referred to the existing allotment gardens, even though these serve currently primarily as recreational gardens. Overall, the agricultural sector receives little attention or support. Agricultural land as well as green spaces such as allotment gardens and parks are under threat from investors, who are supported by the municipal government because they foster the economic growth of the city. This trend has been formalized in an amendment to the “Protection of Agricultural Land and Forest Land Act” in 2008, which states that formal consent is no longer required to convert agricultural into non-agricultural land use in all Polish cities. Combined with the non-obligatory nature of “Local Development Plans” which specify land-use functions in Poland, zones that are unspecified in the planning system succumb quickly to urban sprawl. These are illustrations of a general political-institutional orientation in which UA initiatives are poorly recognized, where opportunities to link farmers, UA pioneers, institutions and government departments are left unaddressed due to an opposing focus in urban planning. The following quote from a public officer illustrates that interdepartmental cooperation on cross-sectoral topics such as UA is absent:

It is strange. . . For the first time I have to talk about something I know absolutely nothing about. . . Agriculture. . . Nobody in our department knows. We are only responsible for the green areas such as parks or forests (Stakeholder in Department of Environmental Protection, Warsaw).

#### 4.2.3. Public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space in Warsaw

UA initiatives in Warsaw are only weakly supported by the broader public due to several persistent perceptions and values regarding food and agriculture. First, urban dwellers associate agriculture and rural life with a difficult past. Migration from rural to urban areas is an ongoing phenomenon in Poland and regarded as a strategic socio-economic choice. A pioneer explains:

Class perception is very strong in Poland. Many people who live in Warsaw originally come from the countryside. If your family has spent their whole life digging in the dirt, you do not come to the city to grow potatoes. You want cars, shopping malls and movie theaters.

Second, interviewees strongly emphasized that many Warsaw citizens consider growing food in the city unacceptable. There is a strong belief that food should be produced in rural areas for food safety reasons. A pioneer and member of the local council further elaborates this point:

People still think that the city center is not for growing food, because the soil and air are too polluted. When people heard that apiaries were placed on top of a building, discussion arose about growing food in the cities at all. But the people did not think about the next step: how to prevent that air pollution.

Third, interviewees stated that until today much confusion remains about public and private ownership titles (Niemczyk, 1998) which leads to public spaces being traditionally avoided for urban (re)development purposes or community initiatives. The weak associational and community activity among Warsaw citizens (which is, according to respondents, a result of decades of oppression of such activities under the communist regime) further contributes to the persistent underutilization of public space. Respondents stated that people in the city are not used to undertaking initiatives in their neighborhoods nor is it common to cooperate in formulating or achieving community objectives (see also Czapiński and Panek, 2011 as cited in Jakubowska and Kaniasty, 2014). This naturally also applies to formulating and achieving UA-

related objectives. A pioneer aims to address the above dynamics with her guerilla gardening project:

We do more than just gardening. We try to connect neighborhoods, make the city safer and show that public space can be used instead of just going from work to the shopping mall or movie theater.

Finally, within Warsaw, “local food” is generally equated with food that has been produced within Poland. Thus citizens are not motivated to promote the production of food in (the immediate surroundings of) Warsaw to establish a truly local food system.

#### 4.2.4. The urban layout of Ghent

Table 1 shows that Ghent currently provides little official physical space for UA initiatives such as gardens or new farms. Similar to Warsaw, allotment gardens thrived during and after WWII, but their relevance waned earlier than in Warsaw, as the citizens' economic status quickly rose and suburban housing provided private gardens. During the same period, the number of professional farms and acreage of farmland has decreased significantly, leading to an increased overall farm-to-city distance. Agricultural land is currently actively being transformed into land used for keeping horses, urbanization and nature preservation. In short, urban land and space is a very contentious issue in the Ghent context. Space is needed for nature, parks, social housing, industry and business, all of which are difficult sectors for UA to compete with. There is also an increasing perception in Flanders that urban-rural distinctions are difficult, if not impossible, to sustain in this Belgian region as it is almost entirely (semi-)urbanized:

In all honesty, I think that there are only a few really uninhabited areas left in Flanders. In that sense, almost every farmer here is an urban farmer. (Entrepreneur).

#### 4.2.5. The political climate in Ghent

The social democratic party has been part of the municipal government coalition since the late 1980s, with an accordingly strong influence on the political climate in Ghent (Boone and Deneckere, 2010). Since the Green party joined the coalition in 2012, socio-ecological problems have been high on the policy agenda. The current focus of attention is the stated goal to make Ghent climate-neutral by 2050. As part of its “Climate Neutral Plan”, the municipal government manages a participatory trajectory in which citizens are encouraged to join. One of the main functions of this plan is that it provides environmental initiatives in Ghent with an overarching goal. The local food strategy, *Gent en garde*, has also been placed within the framework of establishing a climate neutral Ghent by 2050. UA is adopted as one strategy that contributes to diminishing Ghent's ecological footprint. Consequently, UA is placed within the logic of stimulating change in the food system to ultimately achieve climate neutrality. This strategy includes all stakeholders seeking connections from around the city with urban dwellers and so-called “urbanites” who seek to establish “rurality” in the city by setting up food production initiatives. Projects explicitly focusing on this environmental goal are strongly embraced by the municipal government.

However, such positive political discourses on UA do not necessarily reflect the local needs as expressed by advocates of UA initiatives. Interviewees referred to cases in which the municipal government, experts (e.g., academics), and representatives of well-established organizations (e.g., *Boerenbond*, the largest Flemish farmers' association) regularly meet in a private setting, without (much) involvement of the stakeholders representing all sections of the broader public. Various interviewees stipulated that little has been actively done to include historically underrepresented social categories in public debates on UA developments – such as migrants, elderly, or economically disadvantaged citizens – that

are part of the participatory trajectory which the municipal government has initiated in the frame of *Gent en garde*.

#### 4.2.6. Public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space in Ghent

According to the majority of the interviewees, space for UA initiatives is a roadblock to further UA development in Ghent. Because the municipal government offers only limited financial support, volunteers are left to find and legitimize space for UA initiatives in creative ways. This takes the form of reallocating land (e.g., the regional government has been budgeting new community gardens in Flanders), temporary gardening projects on vacant land (e.g., the city grants permission to use public land for a fixed number of years), multifunctional land use (e.g., the inclusion of a rooftop garden on a newly constructed building; community farming on recreational land), and innovations in the use of land that is already being utilized for urban food production (e.g., the incorporation of educational programs or social initiatives within existing community gardens).

All interviewees argued that topics relating to food and agriculture are being re-evaluated and re-appraised in Ghent. The idea of local food—generally interpreted by stakeholders and formal documents as food that is produced in, or in the vicinity of, Ghent—has become increasingly popular. Urban food production initiatives, such as gardening projects in public spaces, receive broad support. Only low to moderate food safety concerns were observed in relation to eating food produced in urban areas. A representative of a social institution argued that Ghent:

is one of the few places in Flanders where the idea of UA could develop. . . There is public support and enthusiasm. . . When I think of how many volunteers and organizations support my project [a gardening project for children from underprivileged neighborhoods]. . . You cannot but conclude that it [support for UA development] is [part of] the mainstream mentality.

This enthusiasm is captured in a dynamic network, partly because associational life is strong in Ghent and because local food is currently of major public interest. Multiple UA initiatives connect stakeholders, forge collaborations and stimulate the formation of an overarching network:

In Ghent, you have a young population. There is automatically a desire to do things together; associational life is important. I think UA stimulates this. (Pioneer)

I notice that a good network is very helpful. Immediately, it opens so many doors. The network keeps on growing and this is crucial in developing a successful UA project. (Representative of a social institution)

Notably, this enthusiasm for UA is not always shared by professional farmers who are located in (close proximity to) the city of Ghent. Several professional farmers who were already operating prior to the discussion on UA in Ghent indicated that they feel threatened by the growing enthusiasm for UA. Professional farmers see UA in opposition to their own farming practices and currently tend to distance themselves from UA initiatives.

## 5. Discussion

Despite a remarkable number of analogies in UA advocacy in Warsaw and Ghent, strong differences in the underlying dynamic of UA development were identified. The UA movement in Warsaw is characterized by isolated, short-term projects, whereas in Ghent it mainly represents well-established socio-ecological projects and a resurgence of community gardens. There is a growing public discourse on UA in Ghent, while UA initiatives in Warsaw receive little support and are generally poorly recognized by the public and the municipal government.

To explain these differences, this article went beyond an analysis of advocacy and included context-specific characteristics—grouped in categories of “urban layout”, “political climate”, and “public perceptions and attitudes toward use of urban space”.

The results have clearly shown that the norms and values in Warsaw steering social change do not reflect a positive attitude toward urban food production. Citizens and government actors prioritize economic development of the city. Current ideas to integrate agricultural activities into urban areas have been pushed aside. In this situation, enthusiasm for UA and UA initiatives becomes rather subversive and often lacks legitimacy. Accommodating space for UA becomes a difficult task. This partly explains why advocacy for UA primarily finds a purpose in cultural expressions and experimenting despite having plenty of green space in Warsaw. The lack of attention to UA can also be explained by the historically important allotment gardens. In Warsaw, they have been manifest, intensively used urban spaces for decades and reflect deeper cultural attachments (McClintock, 2015). The ongoing association of community gardens with food production – even though they are increasingly used as recreational spaces – results in public perceptions of green, open space as an abundant resource in Warsaw. These perceptions also obstruct the recognition of UA initiatives as exemplary cases in the search for creative opportunities to deal with unused or underdeveloped public land.

In contrast, the comparable advocacy for UA plays out very differently in Ghent and can also be explained by particular contextual characteristics. The development of a local food system is included in the broader political agenda on sustainability. This, together with the receptive attitude of citizens toward innovations in the urban food system, makes UA an increasingly popular topic. UA in Ghent benefits from a strong associational life that generates public debate, new initiatives and cohesion between a wide variety of stakeholders. The fact that space is a very contested and controversial issue is an additional trigger for stakeholders to meet and discuss this common barrier. Finding space for UA initiatives becomes a shared goal of municipal government, pioneers, institutions and entrepreneurs. This is by no means an easy process. UA initiatives that do develop mostly resort to temporary spaces or become incorporated into existing, more established (cultural or socio-economic) organizations, where UA initiatives can be set up relatively easily with limited investment. In the urge to match enthusiasm with the realization of UA projects, financial dependency and a lack of representation of all social groups become significant barriers.

The above shows that context-specific characteristics and advocacy are intrinsically interwoven. They synergistically pave the way for particular development pathways for UA, signaling a high degree of complexity in which UA comes to serve different purposes in different cities. In the remainder of this section, we wish to focus on what this implies for governance of UA. Although we agree that community advocacy, municipal support and cooperation between different stakeholders are crucial (Franklin and Marsden, 2015; Huang and Drescher, 2015), we have also demonstrated that an analysis of contextual dynamics has several implications for UA governance strategies.

In the case of Warsaw, the persistent focus on economic development by public and government actors leads us to conclude that a larger network of advocates or UA policies would offer few additional opportunities for UA in the near future. A pioneer in UA stated that people in Warsaw do see what the urban development problems are, but they do not consider UA as a potential solution:

There is no need for it [UA]. . . you cannot propose a solution when there is no problem. There are other problems here right now. (Pioneer, Warsaw).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no use for UA development at all. The allotment gardens do represent an extraor-



dinary opportunity for a significant number of food production initiatives—on healthy soil. Efforts to purposely connect UA advocates to this resource might begin to result in a more substantial UA movement. Currently, UA advocates are largely disconnected from the existing gardens. As long as these advocates are not linked to these resources, we argue that these pioneering efforts will continue to be considered as temporary and subversive acts. At the same time, the existing community gardens might evolve further into recreational gardens that lose their food production function.

In Ghent, the strong enthusiasm for UA in Ghent is at risk of ultimately remaining for the large part a movement that is fixed in the sphere of public discussion and debate, rather than in the materialization of UA projects or businesses. When advocates of UA and government actors respond to this risk by quickly substantiating the UA movement with tangible and visible initiatives and projects, their attention is taken away from important questions that should be addressed first: Who is (and is not) participating in shaping the UA movement? How will adequate material and non-material support be provided to match the current enthusiasm for UA? What kind of UA do we want? If these questions are not addressed, merely establishing stronger municipal support and UA advocacy does not guarantee a more socio-politically and spatially embedded UA movement that will not disappear when public attention shifts away from UA to other topics.

Finally, while there is nothing wrong with an UA movement that resides in the sphere of cultural and socio-economic institutions (Ghent) or socio-cultural experimentation (Warsaw), we argue that if these governance recommendations are not taken into account, the result will be an *a priori* narrowing down of what UA could be in a city. Each case has specific opportunities and barriers (i.e., abundant land opportunities in Warsaw but opposing public perceptions, versus supportive public and policy discourses in Ghent but a lack of adequate support and spatial opportunities) that require more strategically formulated and grounded strategies than those inspired by the generic, universalized narrative on UA.

## 6. Conclusion

Cities are facing complex pressures, both from higher policy levels as well as from citizens, to engage in a sustainable development agenda (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Evans et al., 2005; McCormick et al., 2013). The potential of UA in such an agenda has been welcomed in the search for concrete and action-inducing strategies. However, in practice, celebrating UA's potential in sustainable urban development often prematurely results in instructive, generic plans to advance UA—generally within policy fields relating to agriculture and food production. Such an approach hinders reflection on the broader impact that UA could have on current social, political, economic and cultural structures.

Some authors argue that the mediocre results of current sustainable development initiatives are rooted in the forms of governance, and we therefore have to evolve to more cooperative and interactive approaches (Crivits et al., 2016; Franklin and Marsden, 2015). We advance this argument by stating that a strategy of merely stimulating advocacy and cooperation between government, private and civic actors will be insufficient to sustain an UA movement over time. Opportunities or barriers to UA are not only created or overcome by direct action; they are mediated by context-specific factors. For instance, in Warsaw UA advocacy currently remains marginalized because it functions in isolation from the existing food production activities (i.e., agriculture and community gardens). In contrast, UA advocacy in Ghent should not be overstated. The lack of space, investment and critical reflection could easily dampen enthusiasm for UA as time goes on. To realize UA's full potential, it is important to understand the relationship between governance

of UA and the context in which UA emerges. This approach offers a more comprehensive and nuanced image of the opportunities and pitfalls in the governance of UA, because it takes us beyond generic positions on what UA can and should be. Instead, it explores what it can be *within a given context*.

The implications for public policy making are obviously case-dependent. In a governance approach that includes context, in any case we would be informed by broader policy-making that is responsive to the city's specific needs, barriers and opportunities. Besides food production, UA can contribute in manifold ways to sustainable urban development. Openness in policy making would not *a priori* situate UA in the policy field of agriculture where particular opportunities are defined in a top-down manner. Perhaps UA will find more significance in other policy domains or, through innovative cooperation, among several policy sectors. By taking contextual factors into account, government stakeholders in Warsaw would possibly no longer deny the value of UA, or strategic matchmaking between stakeholders and resources could result in a more diverse UA movement.

While it is widely accepted that UA should not be understood as a single conceptualization (Mougeot, 2006), little research explicitly demonstrates that an empirical assessment of context-specific characteristics furthers the interpretations of the role that UA can play in sustainable urban development. We have demonstrated that focusing on the particularisms of place in public policy-making addresses critiques by a growing number of scholars that warn of the potential adverse social, economic and environmental effects of UA (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2004; Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003). Additionally, it would prevent us from falling into the 'local trap' that Born and Purcell (2006) have warned us about. Taking context into account in governance approaches allows UA to be more complex than only merely contributing to the local food system. This article offers a much-needed reflection on which governance tools could orchestrate "*the new creative multi-actor, multi-level, multi-purpose and multi-sector trajectories*" (Healey, 2004). It seems useful to build further on the findings of this article, because it is important for citizens, policy makers, as well as scholars, not only to learn how to cooperate, but also to understand how to make the most of the existing opportunities for UA and how to maximize societal value under specific, local circumstances

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