

# Food Systems Transformation: Individual Imaginaries & Political Strategies

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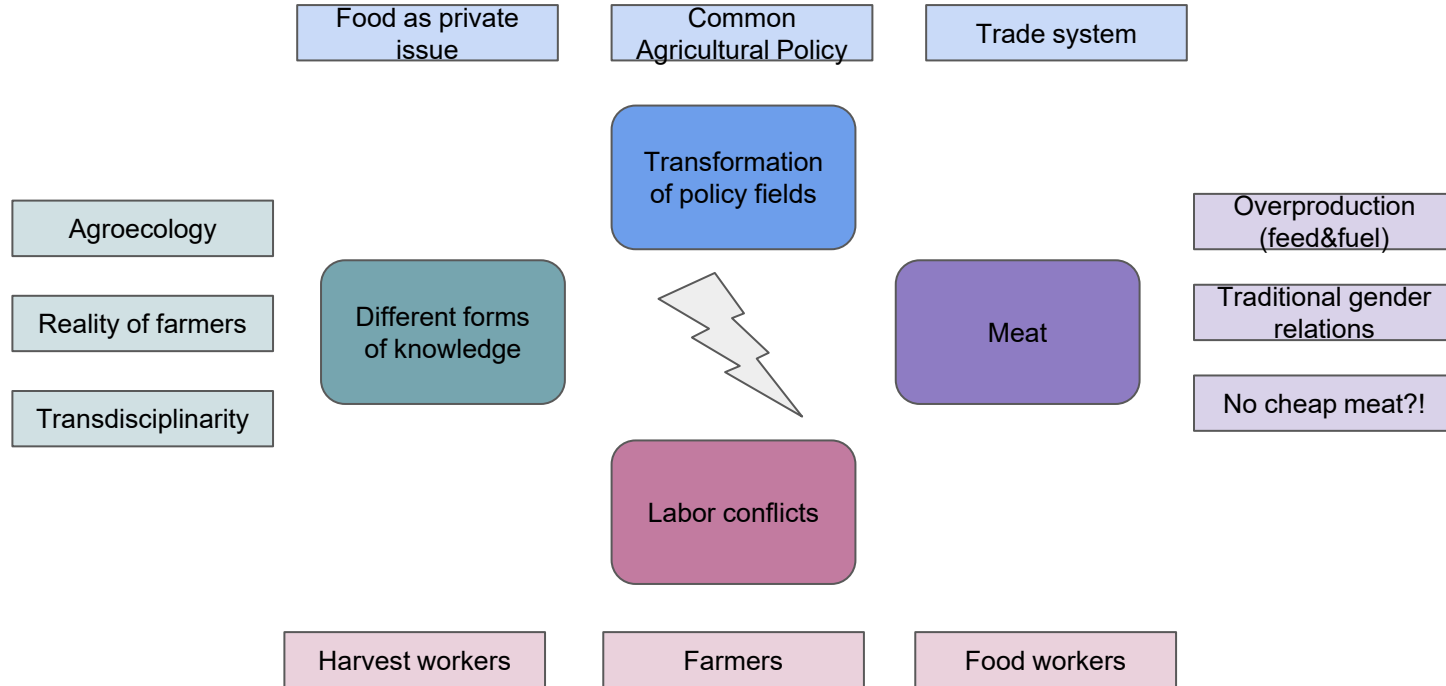


## Overview

- Conflicts in the food system
- Perspectives on transformation
- Values-based modes of production and consumption
- Agroecology in Argentina
- Up-scaling processes in central Europe

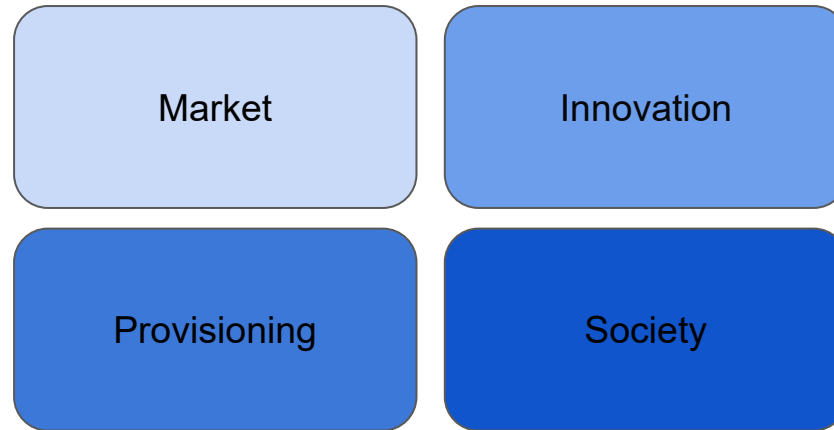


# Conflicts in the food system





# Transformation of the food system





# Values-based modes of production and consumption

1. National context
2. Local food systems
3. How to up-scale them?

**FoA**  
FOODALTERNATIVES.AT

**FWF**

Der Wissenschaftsfonds.





# Argentina

## Agroecology and Agrarian future visions

*Brunner, Anna-Maria (under review):  
When Agrarian Imaginaries Touch Uncertain Grounds:  
Moving Beyond Paradigms in Agroecological Farmers' Visions  
of a Desirable Future in the Valle Inferior del Río Negro, Argentina.  
Agriculture and Human Values*

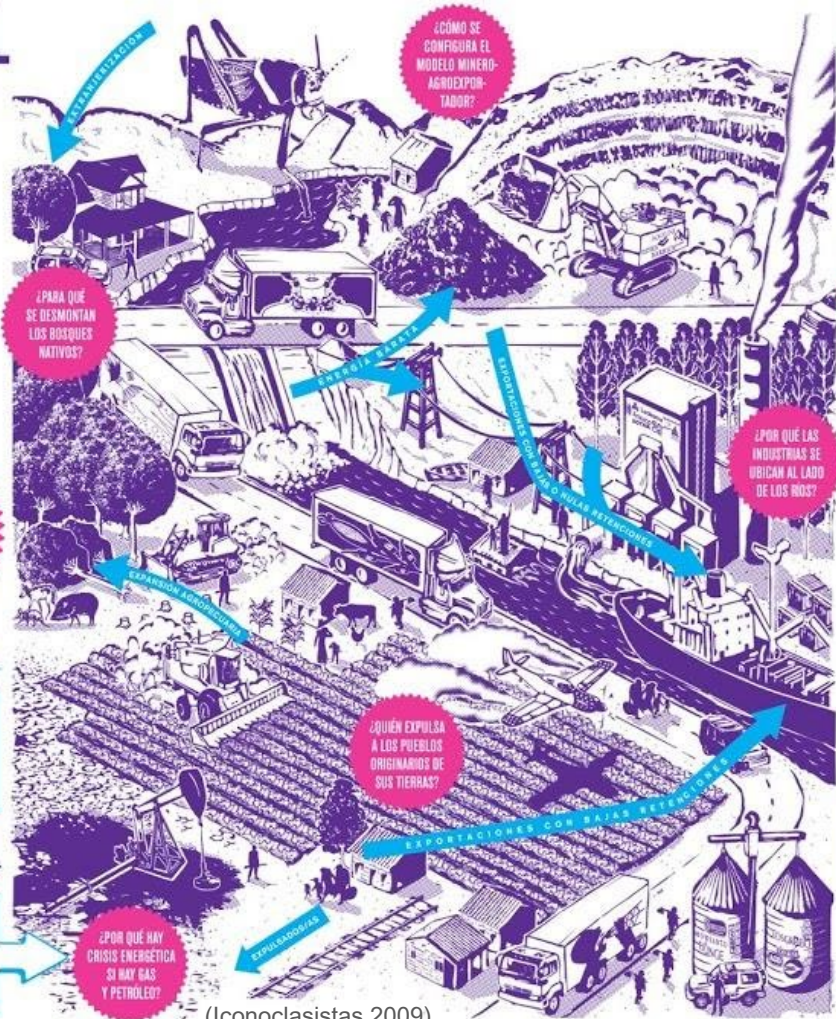






EL CAPITAL INTERNACIONAL ASOCIADO A LAS OLIGARQUÍAS LOCALES INVADE REGIONES RICAS EN BIENES NATURALES PARA IMPONER UN MODELO EXTRACTIVO Y EXPORTADOR.

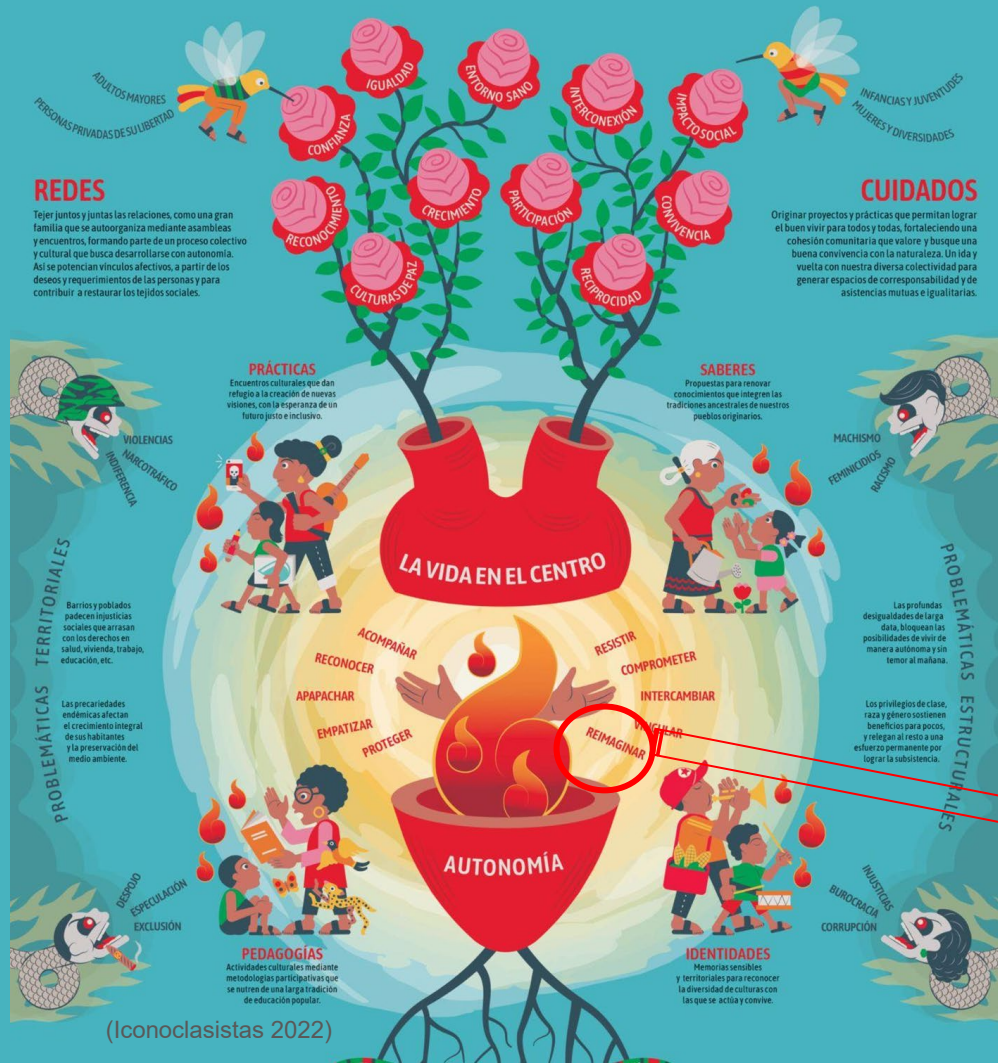
*(Teubal 2008, p.190)*

[illegible]

(Iconoclastas 2009)



# Counter-proposals



Reimagine  
the future



# Future Imaginaries

*"When the laws of nature stay the same, but society changes- Utopias are new views on the world [...], they make us move forwards. Where to? That depends on our imaginaries" (Viera 2023).*

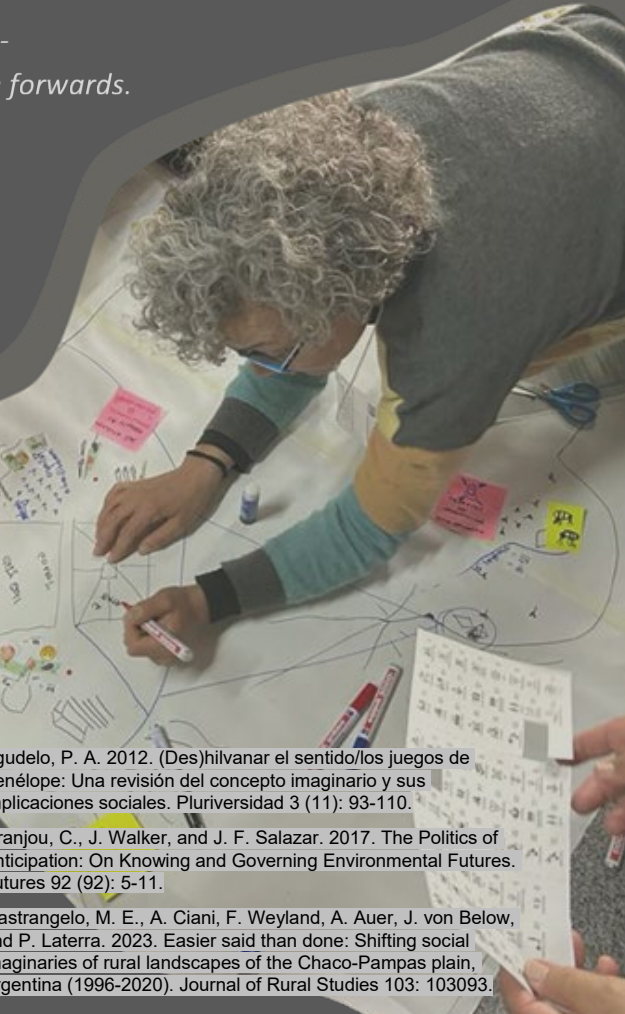
- guide society toward particular direction (Agudelo 2012)
- Materialize in discourses, politics and practices (Granjou et al. 2017)
- Are considered strong leverage points for socio-ecological transformation (Mastrangelo et al. 2023)



Agudelo, P. A. 2012. (Des)hilvanar el sentido/los juegos de Penélope: Una revisión del concepto imaginario y sus implicaciones sociales. *Pluriversidad* 3 (11): 93-110.

Granjou, C., J. Walker, and J. F. Salazar. 2017. The Politics of Anticipation: On Knowing and Governing Environmental Futures. *Futures* 92 (92): 5-11.

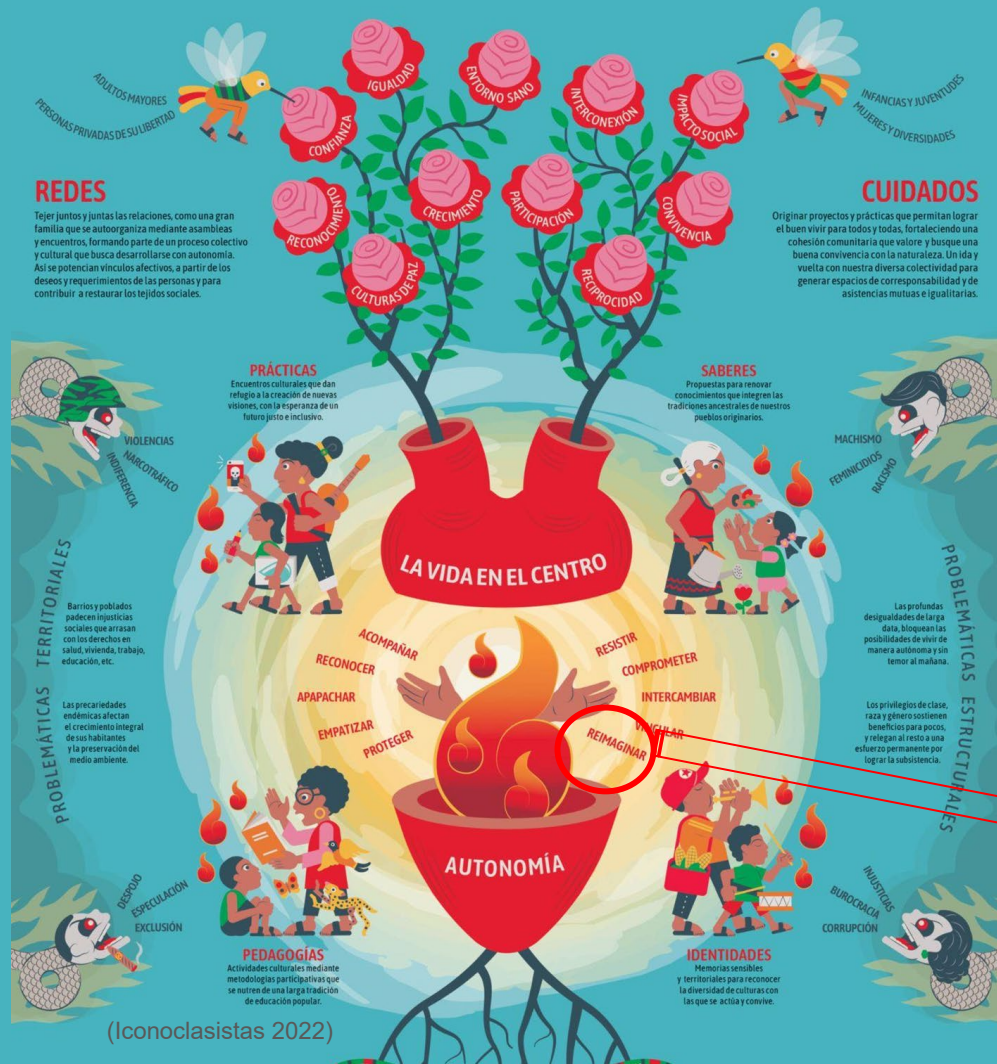
Mastrangelo, M. E., A. Ciani, F. Weyland, A. Auer, J. von Below, and P. Laterra. 2023. Easier said than done: Shifting social imaginaries of rural landscapes of the Chaco-Pampas plain, Argentina (1996-2020). *Journal of Rural Studies* 103: 103093.





# Counter-proposals

Dirección Nacional de Agroecología.  
2023. Marco conceptual de la  
Agroecología. Accessed 25 November  
2024. chrome-  
extension://efaidnbmnnpbpcjglcflm  
dmkaj/https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites  
/default/files/dnae\_sagyp\_marco\_conce  
ptual\_de\_la\_agroecologia\_pdf.



*“La **agroecología** es un paradigma que promueve el diseño y gestión de sistemas de producción agropecuaria, recolección, pesca, elaboración, comercialización, consumo y comensalidad, económicamente viables, socialmente justos y ambientalmente sostenibles, caracterizados por una mayor resiliencia socio-ecológica y orientados a fortalecer el buen vivir de toda la sociedad.” (DNA 2022)*

**‘Reimaginar’**  
**Reimagine**  
**the future**

(Iconoclasistas 2022)



# Agroecological Networks

*‘many nodes act in multiple spaces, forming a political macrostructure aimed at disputing hegemony.’*  
(Giraldo 2024)

## Transnational

La Via Campesina

Movimiento Agroecológico Latinoamericano  
(MAELA)

Sociedad Científica Latinoamericana de  
Agroecología (SOCLA)

## National

SAAE - Sociedad Argentina de Agroecología

National Agroecological Directorate (until 2023)

REDAE (INTA)

RENAMA

CALISAS

UTT

Movimiento Nacional Campesino Indígena

## Regional & Local

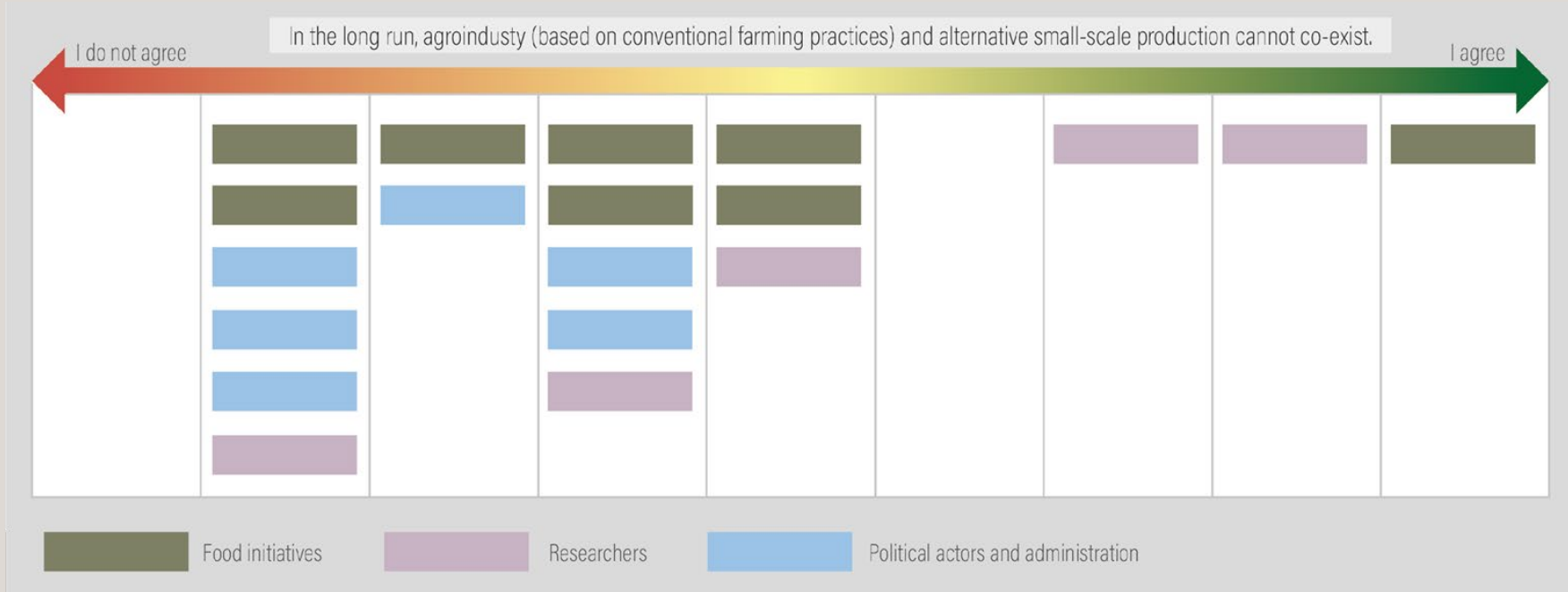
Nodos Agroecológicos  
Territoriales

Colonias Agroecológicas

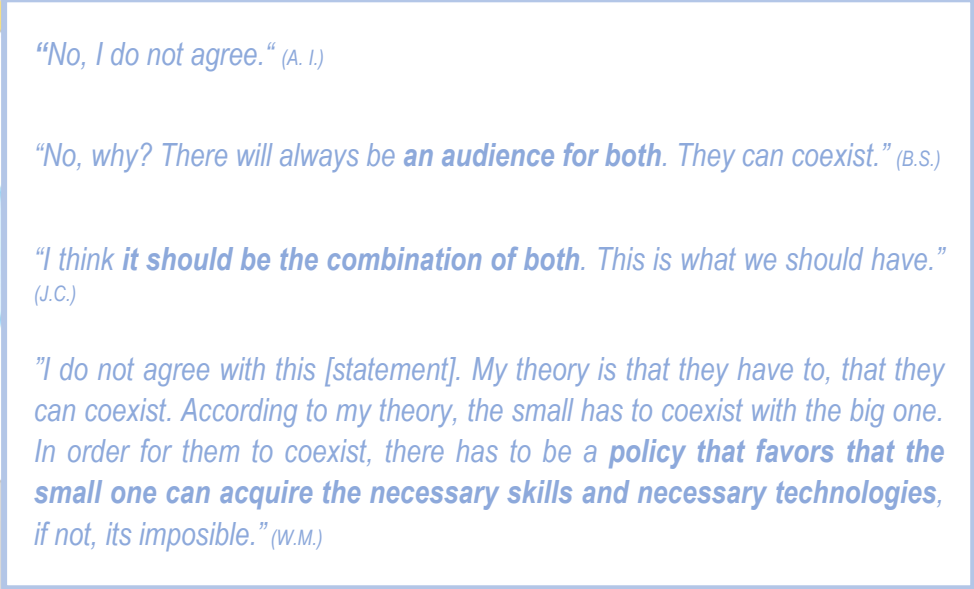
Colectivo Agroecológico del  
Valle Inferior

PROTAAL











# Recurring discourses

## *I Agroecology's unproductiveness*

AE small-scale production unproductive & undercapitalized

-> in the need of technology

-> Governmental support or erase/ vanish

## *II A divided market*

Internal supply (AE, small-scale) and exports (convent.)

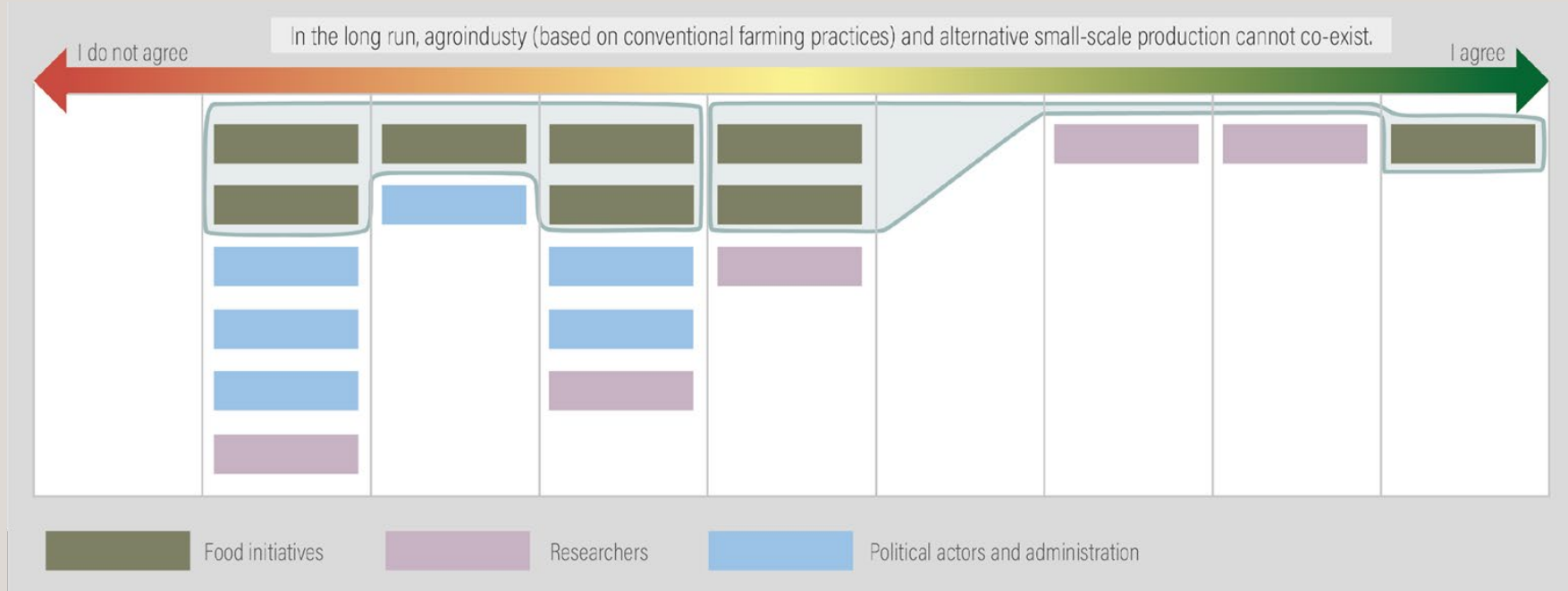
### **Governmental actors and institutions:**

- Social and ecological conflicts left aside
- Conviviality under the premise of governm. support
- Continuation/ adaptation of the status-quo



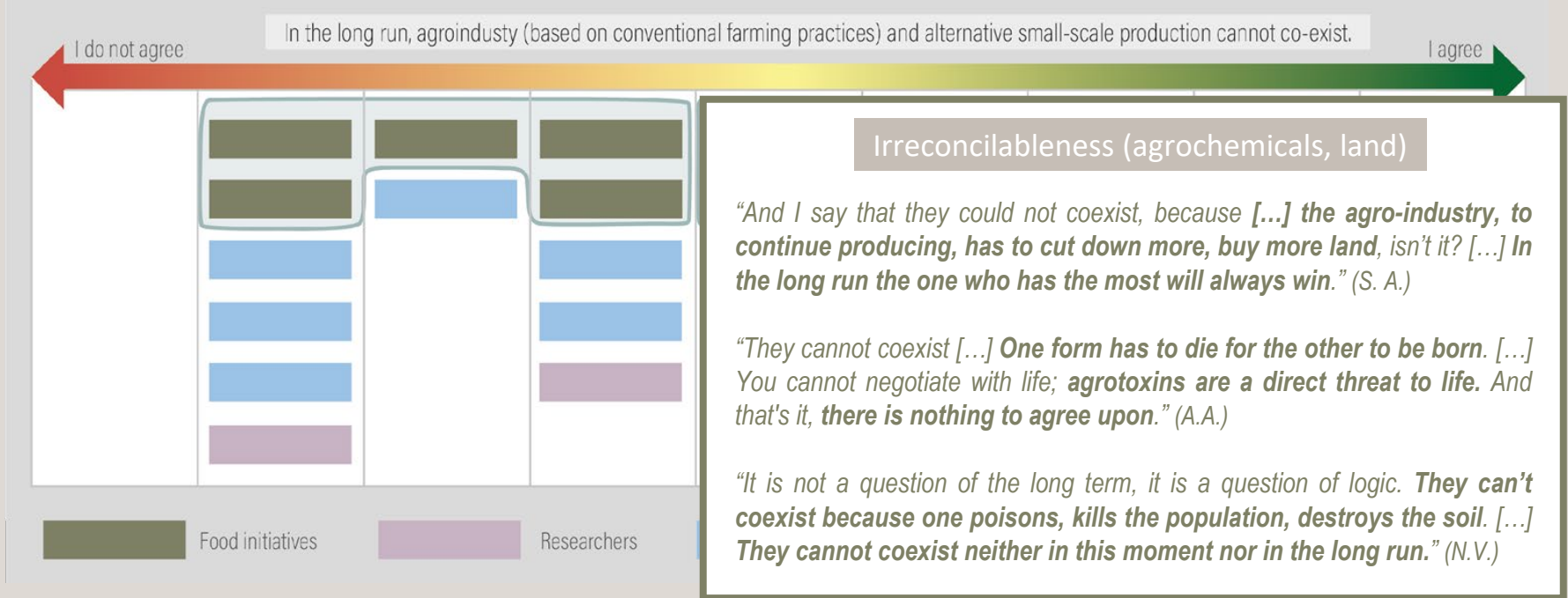


# Food Initiatives





# Food Initiatives





# Food Initiatives

In the long run, agroindustry (based on conventional farming practices) and alternative small-scale production cannot co-exist.

I do not agree

I agree

Defensive, pragmatic, subordinating stance

*“Yes they can. I don’t agree with this.” (H.S.)*

*“Yes they can coexist. Yes, they have to coexist. Because **agribusiness is not going to stop producing and we have to try to get into the production system.** [...] we can make a small contribution, [...] like a grain of sand; to go climbing up the ladder.” (E.S.)*

*“People [...] are gradually implementing **small-scale production out of necessity**, taste, because they want to do things with nature. Not in the countryside [...] but **in the cities** I think there is also a little bit **of new coexistence.**” (E.F.)*

Irreconcilableness (agrochemicals, land)

*“And I say that they could not coexist, because [...] **the agro-industry, to continue producing, has to cut down more, buy more land**, isn’t it? [...] **In the long run the one who has the most will always win.**” (S. A.)*

*“They cannot coexist [...] **One form has to die for the other to be born.** [...] You cannot negotiate with life; **agrotoxins are a direct threat to life.** And that’s it, **there is nothing to agree upon.**” (A.A.)*

*“It is not a question of the long term, it is a question of logic. **They can’t coexist because one poisons, kills the population, destroys the soil.** [...] **They cannot coexist neither in this moment nor in the long run.**” (N.V.)*

Realistic << >> Idealistic

*“Here there is a key word which is ‘**can’t**’ or ‘**shouldn’t**’.” (N.V.)*





**Agribusiness  
as part of  
(agroecological)  
future imaginaries**

**Complex Causal Networks  
Interests, Politics & Relations of Power**

**Material, discursive and power-related barriers to future imaginaries**



# Structural Interdependencies

Material and political barriers

*„We use the plastic of the surrounding onion producers for mulching, otherwise we wouldn't be able to afford it”*

*„The land was formerly cultivated by onion farmers, now it is depleted but affordable”*

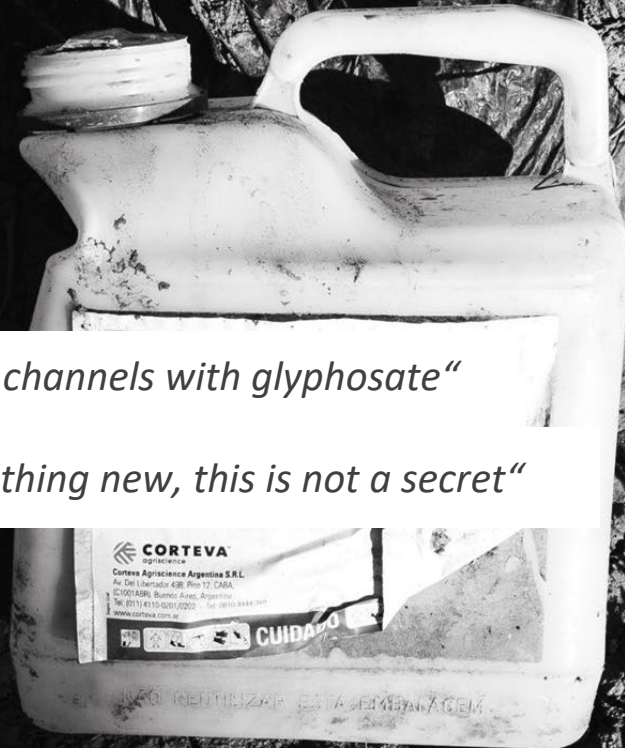


# Normalization of Dystopia

Discursive barriers

*„They clean the irrigation channels with glyphosate“*

*„Yes, but this is nothing new, this is not a secret“*







# The Echo of Colonization

Discursive and Epistemic Barriers

*„Our worldviews have been colonized,  
with the result that we can only imagine dystopia.“*

*We have to fight,  
to be again able to imagine a different future.“*



# Imposed & Incarnated Epistemic Injustice



*„I don't want to think of the future,  
I am already busy enough with the presence.“*

*„I shall rather not participate... to not make mistakes,  
others know better anyways.“*



# Up-scaling Processes in Czechia





# The role of the state in building food alternatives in the current food regime in Czechia

Christina  
Plank

Michaela  
Pixová





# Food regime theory and critical state theory

*What role do “food alternatives” play in the current food regime in Czechia and how are these connected to the state?*

- **“food alternatives”** as alternatives in production, networks and economic practices (Rosol 2020)
- **“food from somewhere”** & **“food from nowhere”** (McMichael 2009); **“food from here”** (Schermer 2015)
- **state** as a **contested terrain** (Poulantzas 2014), picked up by Tilzey's work (2019)
- drawing on work of Buckel et al. (2014) and Brand et al. (2022): operationalization through **political projects**: context, actors, process

Rosol, M. (2020). On the significance of alternative economic practices: Reconceptualizing alterity in alternative food networks. *Economic Geography* 96, 52-76. doi: 10.1080/00130095.2019.1701430

Schermer, M. (2015): From “Food from Nowhere” to “Food from Here:” changing producer–consumer relations in Austria. *Agriculture and Human Values* 32(1), 121–132. DOI: 10.1007/s10460-014-9529-Z.

Poulantzas, N. (2014): *State, power, socialism*. London: Verso.

Pritchard, B., Dixon, J., Hull, E., Choithani, C. (2016): ‘Stepping back and moving in’: the role of the state in the contemporary food regime. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 43(3), 693–710. doi: 10.1080/03066150.2015.1136621.

Tilzey, Mark (2019): Food Regimes, Capital, State, and Class: Friedmann and McMichael Revisited. *Sociologica Ruralis* 59(2), 230–254. doi: 10.1111/soru.12237.

Brand, U., Krams, M., Lenikus, V., Schneider, E. (2021): Contours of historical-materialist policy analysis. *Critical Policy Studies*, 16(3), 279–296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2021.1947864>

Staatsprojekt Europa (Eds.) (2014): *Kämpfe Um Migrationspolitik: Theorie, Methode Und Analysen Kritischer Europaforschung.*: Transcript Verlag. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1fxgk5>.





# Current food regime in Czechia

- **dual farm structure**: very few rather large farms for EU-average; high share of rented land
- result of **collectivization processes** during socialism; loss of resources and knowledge for small-scale farming
- **low added value production** of “flex crops” (Borras et al. 2015) together with poor soil management
- **subsidies**: high during socialism, declined after that and are now provided for and shaped by large-scale agricultural enterprises
- dominance of **transnational retail chains** becoming prominent in the 1990ies



# Political projects

## The liberal project - “liberal globalist” - FOOD FROM NOWHERE

ODS, post-soc. capitalist transition, international market competition and Czechia's semi-peripheral position in the world capitalist economy (low wages, large rates of income outflow abroad), dependence on **foreign food sector, private farmers**, paradox - small enterprises vs. corporations, absence of cooperatives due to anti-communism

**The nationalist project - FOOD FROM HERE - oligarchy** - also involved in international exports + foreign investment + took over power and access to public resources extraction through populism (anti-corruption), agrarian oligarchy - privatization of cooperative farms, lobby organisations (Agr. Chamber, Agri.Assoc.), **CAP subsidies**

**The alternative project - FOOD FROM SOMEWHERE** - strong political alternative is missing, the “**parallel world**” of food alternatives (permaculture, AFN, CSA, FSP, organic agriculture etc. )





# Conflicts

**Subsidies** - CAP, EU Green Deal, advantage for **large enterprises**, subsidies' abuse, Agrofertisation, **promotion of family farms by the liberal project**, strong lobby by AK & ZS - subsidies to support food production, not enviro.measures

**family farms** - represented by ASZ, complicated access to land, alliance with food alternatives but different perspectives on subsidies, aversion to forming cooperatives

the state and agro-food lobby **insufficiently support organics** → the role of **FOA**

**threats** - insufficient state protection of arable land, lack of visions and plans in the agri-food sector, low public awareness - possibility of land grabbing

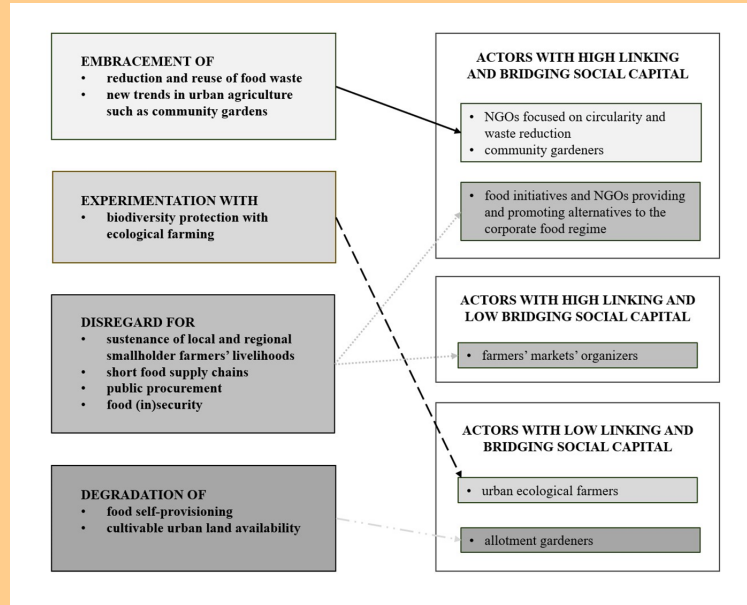
**Transnational retail chains** - international competition, powerful, high concentration due to laissez faire, convenience + low prices, harassment of CZ farmers and food producers, loss of domestic revenue, criticism of CZ agro-food sector, preference of food and SERVICES from abroad, marketing inspired by FOA, overpriced org. food

**controversies** - dual quality of food, price inflation, mandatory share of Czech food,





# Urban food governance without local food: missing links between Czech post-socialist cities and urban food alternatives



Paper: Pixová, M., Plank, C. (2024): Urban food governance without local food: missing links between Czech post-socialist cities and urban food alternatives. Agriculture and Human Values, doi.org/10.1007/s10460-024-10567-2



# Context

- polycrisis + damage caused by globalized industrial agri-food systems and the corporate food regime (McMichael 2009)
- cities in the Global North increasingly face issues related to food accessibility and affordability by adopting progressive food policies
- food system transformation is advocated for by urban food movements
- hybrid food governance – cooperation between urban governments and food movements
- civic actors' bridging and linking social capital + municipal approach to food policy are crucial for food system transformation and for shaping urban food governance
- urban food governance and movements in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) remain relatively unexplored, despite the region's unique socioeconomic and political context, which includes remnants of pre-capitalist food systems and strong neoliberal influences





# Research questions

- What are the characteristics of urban food governance in Prague and Brno, and what is its potential to lead to a successful transformation of the local food system?
- (i) What policies, based on what kind of values, support urban food agendas in Prague and Brno?
- (ii) How is the two cities' urban food governance constituted based on the municipal actors' and institutions' relations to different aspects of the local food system transformation and the social capital of different actors involved in urban food alternatives?
- (iii) what gaps in the local food system transformation can be identified by comparing these relations to the role of different aspects in the corporate food regime and the capitalist urban economy?



# Urban food alternatives = urban food movements + non- activist food alternatives to the corporate food regime

- urban food movements = form of urban activism driven by a collective desire for food system transformation towards more local, sustainable, equitable, democratic, and empowering modes of food production and consumption
- non-activist food alternatives = food self-provisioning, informal food practices, small farms and other alternatives within the corporate food regime
- interdisciplinary theoretical framework of **values-based modes of production and consumption** concentrating on actors and institutions, values, and their multiscalar interplay (Brunner 2022; Pixová and Plank 2022)

Brunner, Anna-Maria. 2022. The missing piece to food system's socio-ecological transformation? Community-supported agriculture in Argentina. Master's Thesis, Institute for Geography and Space Research. Graz, University of Graz.

Pixová, Michaela, and Christina Plank. 2022. Relocalizing food production in times of crisis: Urban governance in Prague and Brno. *AESOP—sustainable food planning conference proceedings*. Almere, Netherlands, 19–22 October.





# Urban food governance and territoriality of urban food alternatives

- common values informing progressive urban food strategies in cities of the Global North (Mendes and Sonnino 2019; Sonnino 2019): **(1) systemic approach (2) relocalization (3) translocalism (4) participatory governance**
- **contestation within multistakeholder urban governance** – the lens of **critical geography and political ecology** (Coulson and Sonnino 2019) and the **hybrid food governance approach** (Manganelli 2020, 2022; Manganelli et al. 2020)
- + corporate interests as a key barrier to food alternatives - land commodification and financialization threaten food sovereignty and food democracy in both urban and rural areas
- mismatches and contradictions between environmental governance & resilience processes and the current neoliberal form of crisis-contingent capitalism → financialized environmental governance - incoherent and counterproductive policy results in terms of supporting sustainability and increasing food security (green gentrification, sustainability fixes, impermaculture etc.)



Coulson, Helen, and Roberta Sonnino. 2019. Re-scaling the politics of food: place-based urban food governance in the UK. *Geoforum* 98: 170–179.

Manganelli, Alessandra. 2020. Realising local food policies: a comparison between Toronto and the Brussels-Capital Region's stories through the lenses of reflexivity and co-learning. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 22(3): 366–380.

Manganelli, Alessandra. 2022. *The hybrid governance of urban food movements. Learning from Toronto and Brussels*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer (Urban Agriculture).

Manganelli, Alessandra, Pieter van den Broeck, and Frank Moulaert. 2020. Socio-political dynamics of alternative food networks: a hybrid governance approach. *Territory Politics Governance* 8(3): 299–318.

Mendes, Wendy, and Roberta Sonnino. 2019. Urban food governance in the Global North. In *The SAGE handbook of nature*, ed. Terry Marsden. 543–560. London: Sage.



A photograph showing hands holding fresh vegetables, including beets and carrots, at what appears to be a market stall. The background is slightly blurred, showing more produce and market activity.

## Social capital in urban food system transformation

- bonding social capital (within a group), bridging social capital (across differences), linking social capital (links to institutions)
- crucial role in the viability of partnerships within local food systems and movements – can improve community food security and contribute to the transformational potential of local alternatives
- possible tensions due to different levels or forms of social capital within a group or community – possible hindrance of cooperation across difference, limited access to resources or political influence, limited possibility of sustainable transformation)





## Methods

- document analysis of urban food policies in Prague and Brno
- focus on policies from 2016 to 2022, examining their alignment with progressive food policy values (systemic approach, relocalization, translocalism, and participatory governance)
- 32 qualitative interviews with 39 individuals – food policy authors and municipal officials, representatives of urban food alternatives, experts
- exploring social capital in local food system transformation



#brno2050



# Urban food policies in Prague and Brno

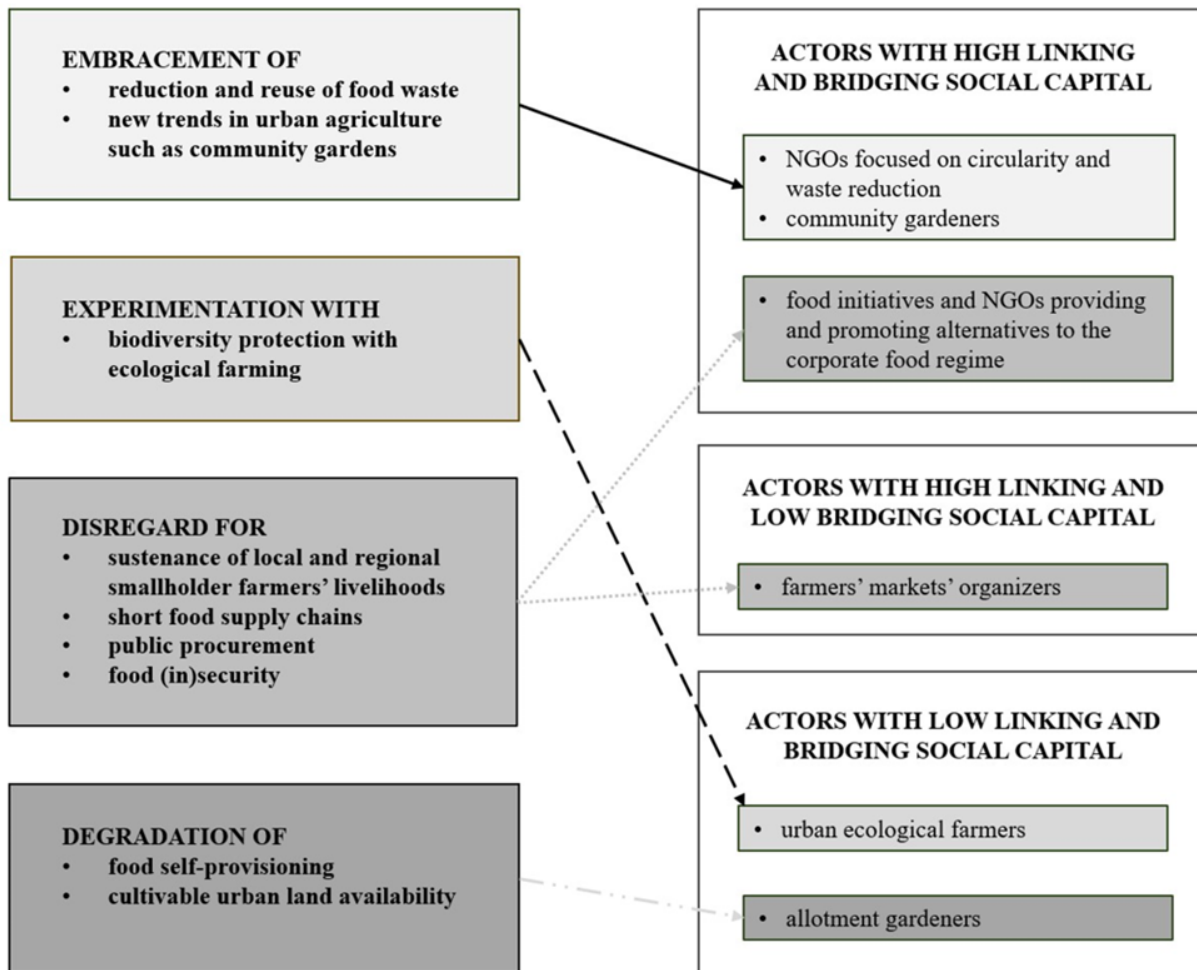


- strategic plans, climate plans, climate adaptation strategies, related conceptions
- main focus on Circular Prague 2030 and Strategy #brno2050
- **systemic approach not fully employed, unequal attention to different aspects, stages, and scales of food systems**, large emphasis on the circular economy, urban agriculture as a tool for climate adaptation and ecosystem support, large focus on community gardens, mentions of employment and integration of socially disadvantaged groups via urban agriculture, charitable donations of cooked meals as a measure supporting food waste reduction, food insecurity is not mentioned
- **relocalization** is embraced but overt focus on urban agriculture, vague mention of regional and peri-urban agriculture, support for local organic food by public procurement, storage spaces for farmers, establishing a city farm, online platform for connecting farmers with consumers, alternative food networks (farmers' markets, CSAs, food cooperatives) mentioned without outlining their support, mentioned need to include new trends in urban agriculture (such as roof, aquaponic etc.) into the general plan of allotment gardens
- **translocalism** is missing, the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy, Brussel's Good Food Strategy, and the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact are mentioned for inspiration but without the ambition to join translocal networks
- **participatory food governance** is defined without specific connection to food and agriculture or concrete measures, Circular Prague 2030 suggests establishing a coordinator for community gardens and circular economy



# Four types of municipal relations to different aspects of local food system transformation

- focus on aspects of local food system transformation which are:
  - (1) included in urban food policies
  - (2) mentioned in interviews





# Discussion: how urban food governance is constituted in relation to the local food system transformation in Prague and Brno

- **prioritization of aspects aligned with the corporate food regime and capitalist urban economy** – such as circularity and community gardens
- **disregard for socioeconomic aspects of food system transformation and food security** – no tailored support for urban ecological farmers in competing within the global industrial food system and for improving citizens' access to healthy and nutritious local food via alternative food networks
- **post-socialist municipalities particularly effective in implementing neoliberalism** to rid themselves of their socialist past - reliance on market forces, supply and demand, and corporate food charity, instead of providing public services and adopting social policies
- **a lack of understanding of the contradictions within the corporate food regime and the capitalist urban economy**, due to which non-commercial food initiatives and small-scale organic farmers cannot compete with more powerful economic actors





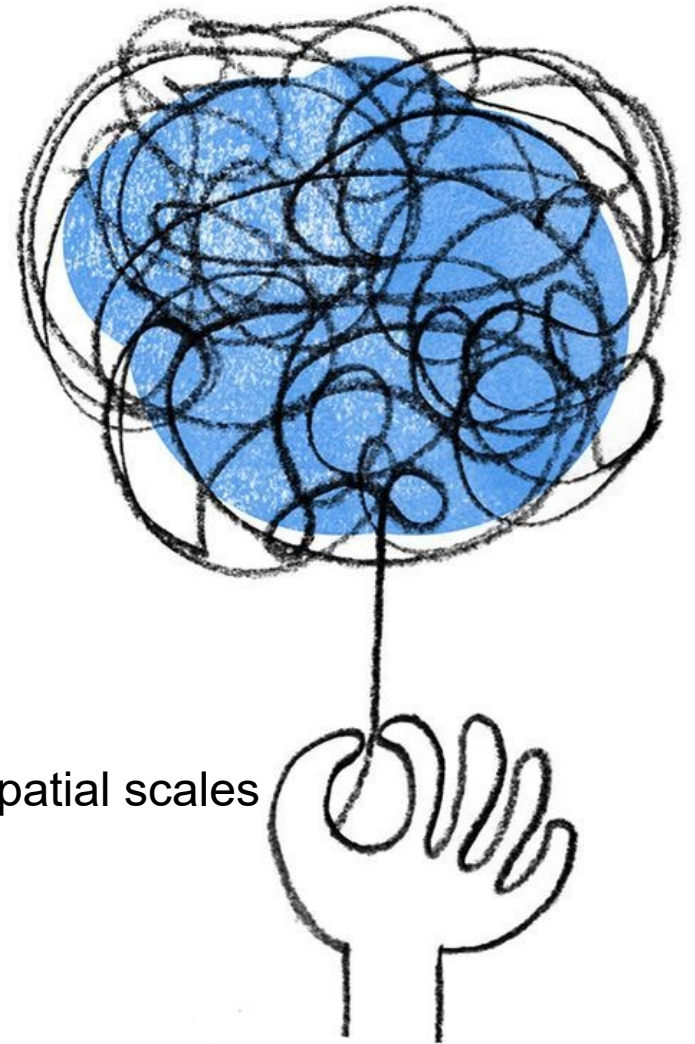
# Conclusions

- urban food policies contain relocalization and participatory governance, but systemic approach and translocalism are missing
- **four types of relations:** embracement, experimentation, disregard, and degradation
- linking social capital plays an important role only for initiatives aligned with the corporate food regime, such as waste reduction and community gardening, and is less important for initiatives representing radical alternatives
- radical alternatives face challenges due to neoliberal restructuring and municipalities' efforts to distance from socialist past, impacting initiatives like public procurement and non-commercial land-use
- allotment gardens, despite their self-provisioning and environmental potential, are degraded due to associations with the socialist past and development pressures
- more systemic approach to local food system transformation towards larger sustainability and resilience could be achieved by strengthening bridging social capital and fostering coalition work among urban food alternatives which would
  - (1) empower marginalized actors
  - (2) pressure urban governments to address the polycrisis context by adopting and promoting progressive food policies and inclusive food governance



## Summarizing

- Conflicts within the food system
- Context matters
- Altered future imaginaries
- Interplay and support of higher political spatial scales is necessary for transformation





**Thank you  
for your attention!**

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