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Gendered care, just food. Transforming urban food systems in Milan and Barcelona

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes gender differences and dynamics in urban food governance initiatives with the aim of understanding which governance spaces hold most potential for a gender-just transition of urban food systems. Indeed, the transformation of urban food systems is increasingly recognized as relevant to guarantee sustainable global food systems. Also, food systems are characterized by gender disparities in all their phases. Yet, initiatives tackling urban food issues rarely engage explicitly with gender differences. For example, urban food policies are often gender-blind, and gender-disaggregated data is not always available. This thesis provides an overview on literature about urban food systems and their governance, then connects it with literature on gender differences in food systems. It aims at understanding which governance spaces are most promising for the integration of a gender perspective in the transformation of urban food systems. This question is explored through the case studies of Milan and Barcelona, two pioneering cities in the field of food governance, that are differentiated by the fact that Barcelona's food policy includes a gender equality goal, while Milan's does not. The fieldwork consisted of 43 interviews with urban food governance practitioners, including institutional representatives of urban administrations, grassroots initiatives in the form of alternative food networks, and experts/researchers. Results reveal strong gender disparities, that intersect other axes such as origin and socioeconomic status. Most disparities regard representation, power, and the feminization of care practices, both collective and private. In terms of promising governance spaces, the relevance of inclusive participatory spaces emerged, as well as the importance of informal relations among actors, and the necessary presence of actors who include gender equality among their priorities. Lastly, results are contextualized in feminist urban theory. Specifically, they are interpreted through a feminist ethics of care lens to unpack gender and power dynamics, and from the point of view of the right to the city, to analyze the impact that participating in urban food governance can have on women's opportunities in and experience of the urban space.

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List of abbreviations

In alphabetical order:
AFN Alternative Food Network
AMB Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona
CARM Carta Alimentària Regió Metropolitana
EU European Union
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization
GAS Gruppo d'Acquisto Solidale
GHG Green House Gas
HIC High Income Country
HLPE High Level Panel of Experts (at FAO)
LMIC Low- and Middle-Income Country
MUFPP Milan Urban Food Policy Pact
OCAS Oficina Conjunta de l'Alimentació Sostenible
OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PEAC Pla Estratègic de l'Alimentació de Catalunya
PEMB Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
UFP Urban Food Policy

Notes

All links were last accessed on October 15th, 2025.
In the text, double quotation marks ("…") are used for concepts and words, while guillemets («…») are used for direct citations. The word "Municipality" is capitalized when referring to a specific one (e.g. Municipality of Milan) and not capitalized when used as a generic term.

Premise

In a historical period characterized by efforts to change our behaviors around food in a sustainable way, it is necessary to interrogate ourselves on who is going to be more affected by these changes. While valuable and necessary for the environment, we must make sure they trigger more social equity instead of exacerbating existing inequalities or bringing back inequalities that had been overcome. Historically and culturally, the labor, time and mental burden related to taking care of food procurement and preparation, as well as the responsibility of carrying out general tasks aimed at household nutrition, has weighted on women's shoulders disproportionately. In cities where female occupation has been growing, we must make sure that such positive increase in women's involvement in the labor market does not mean that they perform double work. In cities where access to food *seems* obvious and granted for people of all genders, we must make sure that the task to actually access it physically does not weight only on the shoulders of just one part of the population. In cities where the strive for more sustainable consumption and production patterns seems to be gaining momentum, we must make sure that the increased skills, time, and knowledge required by such new habits do not impact one or some groups more than others. At the same time, new power dynamics and relations that might emerge from the hoped-for more sustainable food system towards which current initiatives and movements are striving must take into explicit consideration differences in power and representation along all stages of the food system, from production to distribution, consumption and disposal, to make sure they are not repeated or exacerbated, but rather addressed and deconstructed. Alternative food networks and urban food policies are two relevant tools and spaces where such risks can be avoided, and through which the potentialities of the urban food transition can be enhanced and boosted. This is the topic of this thesis.

Chapter 1: Framing of the research question

Chapter abstract: The first chapter is aimed at contextualizing the research to frame the research question that will be presented in chapter 2. To do so, it introduces some fundamental concepts and expressions that will be used throughout the thesis, as well as relevant literature. More specifically, the concepts of urban food systems and urban food governance are introduced, and their relevance in broader discourses on global food systems sustainability is discussed. Then, a focus is presented on justice perspectives in urban food systems research, with specific attention to gender justice. Literature on gender differences in food systems is presented, and its links to urban food governance studies are explained. Later, a presentation is provided of the theoretical framework that will be used to interpret the results of this thesis. The framework is chosen with the aim of contributing to feminist urban theory, and indeed the research has an intersectional feminist perspective. The main theoretical concepts that will be applied are feminist ethics of care and the right to the city, as introduced at the end of the chapter.

1.1 The (un)sustainability of urban food systems, and why it is relevant to study gender differences within them

1.1.1 The need for a sustainability transition of food systems

Food systems globally are widely recognized by scholars as highly impactful on various ecological issues. For example, their phases from production to distribution and disposal are responsible for a third of anthropogenic GHG emissions, vast soil degradation and resource scarcity (Béné et al., 2019; Crippa et al., 2021; Marsden et al., 2018; Oñederra-Aramendi et al., 2023). At the same time, their impacts have a broader reach, influencing also human health, social and economic inequalities, and power distribution (or rather concentration) (Conti et al., 2025; Fanzo et al., 2022; Fanzo & Davis, 2021; Hinrichs, 2014; HLPE, 2023; Kropp et al., 2021; Sumner, 2011; Vivero-Pol, 2017; Westengen et al., 2025, Clapp et al. 2025). Already in 2013, Searchinger et al. (2013, p. 1) coined the expression «the great balancing act» to name the need to «adequately feed more than 9 billion people by 2050 in a manner that advances economic development and reduces pressure on the environment». For these reasons, scholars have long agreed on the need for a sustainability transition of food systems globally – by which I mean both of global food systems, but also of local food systems around the globe. In parallel to academic recognition, the need for a transition in food systems has also gained traction in

public sensibility, at first in the 1980s when it became clear that the developments of the Green Revolution (1960s and 1970s) had led to a consolidation of capitalism in the agri-food sector, causing it to be increasingly profit-seeking and concentrating power and influence in big corporations, rather than pursuing human and planetary wellbeing (Kropp et al., 2021; Sage, 2022). At this point, there is a need to define what is meant by "transition", by "sustainability", and also by "sustainable food systems."

Hinrichs (2014, pp. 144–145) defines "transition" starting from its Latin root, *transire*, «to go across», and states that humanities and social sciences have used the concept mostly referring to «a gradual, pervasive shift from one state or condition to something different» that is not always revolutionary in its occurrence, but can be in its effects. Brown et al. (2012) propose a distinction between the concepts of "transition" and "transformation" (referring to the political and economic context). They argue that transitions represent gradual shifts that respond to present needs and not necessarily entail a wholesale change in social norms, economic structures, and political institutions, while transformations are more rapid and revolutionary, representing a clear break from the previous system. Indeed scholars have also been speaking of "food systems transformation" (just a few examples among many are: Conti et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2024; Paganini et al., 2024; Rao et al., 2024), but arguably, outside the realm of transition scholarship, the two terms are often employed with a similar if not totally synonymous meaning rather than following Brown et al.'s conceptualization, nor others (Kropp et al., 2021). In addition, it is important to underline that both personal and research perspectives are relevant in studying and/or defining transition pathways, therefore its meaning must be negotiated and understood in context. For this reason, and because this thesis is not specifically about the transition (or transformation) of the food system itself, but rather the governance and gender dynamics informing it – and thus the choice of words both by actors on the field and scholars I refer to as references is not a choice made by transition scholars –, in this thesis the two terms will be implied to mean a general change towards a more sustainable food system, whose signification and vision can change based on who is imagining or working for it.

Indeed, the term "sustainability" itself must be negotiated. Eakin et al. (2017, p. 759) say that «there is agreement globally that sustainability, in its most general sense, incorporates the pursuit of social equity and justice, human welfare (…), and environmental integrity». Oñederra-Aramendi et al. (2023) underline that the "human welfare" element is often interpreted as an economic dimension. Such broad definitions are in line with international institutions' visions of sustainability, such as the arguably most famous one, the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations (2015),[1] that is a «plan for action for people, planet and prosperity», or the so-called Brundtland commission report from 1987 that introduced the concept of sustainable development along the three pillars of economic, environmental and social sustainability (WCED, 1987). In light of these conceptualizations of what sustainability means, scholars have tried to define what a "sustainable food system" should be like. In their review of food systems sustainability themes in research, Eakin et al. (2017, p. 759) start from a definition of sustainable food system as one that «achieves and maintains food security under uncertain and dynamic social-ecological conditions, through respecting and supporting the context-specific cultural values and decision-processes that give food social meaning, and the integrity of the social-ecological processes necessary for food provisioning today and for future generations», thus placing the focus on food security,[2] albeit also underlining the importance of granting such security while respecting environmental integrity and sociocultural values. They base their definition on a "functional integrity" perspective, arguing that the meaning of sustainability has to be negotiated and can be contested between different interest groups, and because literature rarely addresses sustainability of all the food system's stages comprehensively they had to choose a shared starting point, and they place it in the maintenance of «critical systems functions» (namely, food security) (Eakin et al., 2017, p. 759;

[1] The SDGs address both food issues (Goal 2), gender equality (Goal 5) and urban issues (Goal 11), and the specific targets that mostly relate to this research are: 2.1 especially in its part on food access for vulnerable groups, 2.2, especially in its call to address nutritional needs of girls, pregnant and lactating women, 2.3 in its interest on small-scale producers, in particular women, 2.4 which calls for sustainable food production systems, 5.4 in its call for recognition of unpaid care and domestic work, 5.5 on women's participation in decision-making, 5.c which calls for policies and legislation that promote gender equality, 11.6 on the reduction of cities' environmental impact especially through waste reduction, 11.7 on access to public spaces and 11.a on the strengthening of urban-peri urban-rural links (United Nations, 2015).

[2] According to FAO, food security encompasses matters of availability, access, utilization and stability of supply of nutritious food (2009).

Kaljonen et al., 2021). Later they provide a list of six main domains/perspectives scholars have been focusing on to define food systems sustainability: individual food security, community food security, human economic welfare, agroecological integrity, land change, global food democracy (Eakin et al., 2017, p. 761). Béné et al. (2019) also present a review of narratives around the sustainability of food systems. Here, too, the first and most agreed on outcome of a "sustainable food system" is said to be food security and nutrition, but the review also provides a list of the three main «communities of experts» (meaning in academia) that have addressed the concept of sustainable food systems by offering their perspectives, and these are: agriculture, nutrition, (social) ecology (2019, p. 126). Oñederra-Aramendi et al. (2023) base their definition of sustainable food system on the very comprehensive one given by the FAO's High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) (2014), «a system that integrally brings together the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the outputs of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes» (2023, p. 2). Indeed, Kropp et al. (2021, pp. 1, 3) had argued that securing diets with low environmental impacts that deliver nutrition security is only the «most basic level» of applying sustainability to food systems, and rather this concept «must […] be extended at the very least to embrace the broadest conception of human and planetary health and wellbeing, and the capacity to accommodate a new ethical frame of reference». They thus not only address the sustainability of practices (e.g., food production) and the accomplishment of functions (e.g., food security), but rather state that there is a need to re-conceptualize the ethics and visions within which food systems have been framed.

The scholarly debate on food systems sustainability is much broader than this, but for the purpose of this thesis, a summary of the main perspectives through the use of recent literature reviews is considered sufficient. Indeed, this thesis is about gender differences in governance processes of urban

food systems with a focus on two cities of the so-called Global Minority,[3] more precisely Southern Europe (see later paragraph about the research object) and the choice of perspective to adopt in terms of "sustainable food system" is very much tied to what elements of the food system, and at what scale, are being analyzed. Generally, it is perceived that food insecurity problems regard almost only rural areas and the Global Majority and indeed that is where the «noxious interplay of poverty, hunger and climate change» is more visible (Morgan, 2015, p. 1380). However, the rise of a "new food equation" in urban areas of the Global Minority after the 2007-08 financial crisis drove attention back to urban food systems of this geographical area (Morgan, 2015; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). Also, scholars are increasingly addressing the topic of justice within the food transition (Kaljonen et al., 2021; Kortetmäki, 2022; Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022). For this thesis, the geographical scale of attention to the food system is the urban one, and the main perspective to look at its sustainability is related to equality, more specifically gender equality, therefore the vision of a sustainable food system according to this thesis is that of a food system that not only accomplishes the function of granting food security, but does so while granting social and environmental justice along all the stages of the food chain. The interconnection of these elements is addressed in the next paragraphs.[4]

1.1.2 Just urban food systems

It is firstly necessary to define what is meant by "urban food systems" in this thesis. Although there is no single accepted way to define this concept, the HLPE (2024) considers that the firmest definition available is that by Tefft et al. (2020, p. 4), which draws on a previous report by FAO and the World Bank (2017):

[3] In this thesis, the terms Global Minority and Global Majority are preferred to the more common "Global North/South", due to a recognition of the colonial origin of the latter terms (Shahzad Uddin, 2025), as well as its imperfection from a purely geographical perspective. Yet, I also recognize that, while various disciplines have proposed other options – such as LMICs and HICs – none is yet considered ideal, especially because classifying countries worldwide within two groups necessarily hides very different contexts and situations, regardless of the chosen name.

[4] For a more detailed elaboration on the interconnection between gender equality, urban areas, and food, see Bergonzini (2024b).

> "Food systems include the range of activities in the production, processing, distribution, marketing, preparation, consumption and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, including the inputs needed and the outputs generated. Composed of traditional, modern and informal channels, food systems also involve the people and institutions that initiate or inhibit change in the systems as well as the sociopolitical, economic and technological environments in which these activities take place. This definition includes food security and the wider set of systems in which food operates. Urban food systems, specifically, hone in on activities that occur in and/or impact urban and peri-urban areas (FAO, 2017)." (Tefft et al., 2020, p. 4)

But why are they relevant? Attention to food issues both by institutions and scholars has long been subject to the so-called "rural bias", meaning a tendency to consider food only in relation to agriculture and rural areas (Crush & Riley, 2018; Halliday, 2022). Indeed, globalization and industrialization processes in countries of the Global Minority have contributed to the creation of a perceived disconnection between areas of food production and urban areas (Colleoni et al., 2017; Stierand, 2012; Wiskerke, 2009), although «the very existence of cities is predicated on food being available» (Riley & Dodson, 2020, p. 219). As a matter of fact, urban food systems are not self-sufficient, as they are not able to produce the amount of food that their populations require (Dansero et al., 2017) and for this reason they must refer to broader areas of production. Finally, this perceived disconnection has started to reverse since the 2007-08 financial crisis, which caused food to become more expensive, and at the same time the general public started to increasingly pay attention to the potential health and environmental impacts of food, creating what Morgan and Sonnino called the "new food equation" in urban areas (Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). Indeed, some issues related to potential food system's failures are critically relevant for urban areas. For example, the already mentioned question of food security, which as we saw in the previous paragraph is often looked at as the element that a functioning food system should always grant, is increasingly at risk in urban areas, also in the Global Minority, despite general perceptions of it being an issue localized in rural areas of LMICs (Morgan, 2015; Riley & Hovorka, 2015; Sonnino, 2016). In 2016, Sonnino elaborated the

concept of a "new geography of food insecurity". The first, evident element is that the world population is increasingly urbanizing, thus more and more people live in cities, but urban populations are also increasingly unequal (Halliday, 2022; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). At the same time, urban and peri-urban areas are increasingly vulnerable to shocks and crises that might impact the food supply chain, especially when they are too disembedded from, and therefore not served sufficiently or at all by, short and local supply chains (HLPE, 2024; Sonnino et al., 2019). The "new geography" coined by Sonnino (2016) also entails other elements: the global expansion of the Western diet, the rising political discourse around the topic of food sustainability, the extreme variation of the issue of food insecurity among socio-economic groups, and the ecological concerns related to all the stages of the food supply chain. As a matter of fact, urban populations are much more resource-consuming compared to the rural areas where the food they consume is produced, and consequently they also produce more waste (Fodor, 2022; Forno & Maurano, 2016; Marsden, 2016). An important shift happened not only in the re-found attention to urban areas as crucial for food security and food sustainability, but also in the perspective to apply when looking at these issues. In particular, the shift was to a rights-based approach emphasizing *access* to food, therefore focusing on the demand side of consumers, rather than a productivist approach focusing only on increasing supply. In this sense, food security and the sustainability of food are seen as a matter of quantity but also *quality* of food, and the capability to access it is underlined, not only physically in spatial terms but also economically, culturally, socially, educationally etc., thus shifting the perception of food security and access from that of a welfare or charity issue to an issue of food justice and/or "right to food" (Bedore, 2010; Bergonzini, 2024a, 2024b; Morgan, 2015; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010; Sen, 1981; Sonnino, 2016).

But what are food justice and the right to food? Again, we encounter concepts and expressions that must be defined. The right to food, which seems to mirror quite clearly the mentioned shift to a rights-based approach to food security, is indeed often understood in relation to food security itself. However, Mechlem (2004) underlines that the two concepts, while arguably aiming at similar outcomes, are not completely overlapping. In particular, she wonders whether we should interpret food security as a

policy tool to achieve the right to food, or vice versa we should see the right to food as the legal basis to justify and advocate for policies that grant food security. Indeed, the FAO defines the right to food as a universal human right, that States should guarantee and protect (FAO, 2024, p. 3). It is also worth noting that this concept is often discussed in relation to food sovereignty, which is «the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security» (Via Campesina, 1996, p. 1), thus the right is not only limited to *having* food, but rather also being in control of its production (Calvário & Desmarais, 2023; Patel, 2009; Patel, 2012).

As for food justice, its meaning is negotiated and interpreted in different ways by scholars and practitioners (Bergonzini, 2024a). As we approached the definition of food systems sustainability by starting from defining what is meant by sustainability, in this case too it is important to address the concept of justice. Some scholars have started from the conceptualization by Sandel (2011), who argues that the "justness" of any system – therefore possibly applicable to the food system – must be judged based on the main purpose of that system. This stance is shared by Kaljonen et al. (2021), who define the food system's main purpose to be food security, and therefore argue that food justice is reached when food security is granted. Bedore (2010) analyzed different ways scholars have used this expression, and she found that it is often used in the context of a rights-based approach, mirroring the mentioned shift in perspective that has led more and more scholars to address food security as a matter of food justice. Other examples of scholars speaking of food justice as a synonym to food security exist (e.g., Sachs & Patel-Campillo, 2014), however this perspective is arguably too limited (Bergonzini, 2024a). Instead, Hislop (2014) underlines that justice must exist at all the levels of the food supply chain, and therefore the perspective on food security is limited, as it focuses only on consumers, and it risks overlooking other areas of exploitation and oppression along the chain. Glennie and Alkon (2018) agree with this vision, as they feel that it is more apt for the aim of understanding how inequalities related to race, class, gender influence the food system and reproduce

within it. For the purpose of this thesis, this second approach to understanding food justice is employed. Such a complex and comprehensive vision of justice is applied in practice by Tribaldos and Kortetmäki (2022) to the concept of just food transition through the definition of six dimensions of justice that must be respected and performed for a food transition to truly be "just". These dimensions are: distributive justice, cosmopolitan justice, ecology and non-human beings, procedural justice, recognition justice, capacities (Tribaldos & Kortetmäki, 2022). For each dimension, they also propose criteria for control, and in two cases they mention gender: in "recognition justice", they include the need to control that «climate actions in different food professions and by both genders are equally recognized and esteemed»; in "capacities", the need to control that «people are not discriminated on ethnic-, gender-, age-related, or other grounds.» (Tribaldos and Kortetmäki, 2022, p. 248). However, arguably gender-based differences exist, and therefore should be controlled and addressed, throughout all the other dimensions, too.

This leads to the discussion of the last element this thesis wants to consider, in the context of urban food systems: gender.

1.1.3 Gender differences in food systems

It is necessary to explicitly address what is here meant by "gender". Throughout the thesis, when gender is raised as a concept or as an element that serves as basis for discrimination, it is meant in the broad sense of all genders, adopting what queer and gender studies scholars have long argued, that gender identity is not limited to a binary distinction between ciswomen and cismen (Schudson & Morgenroth, 2022; Wickham et al., 2023). However, it will become evident that especially in discussing data about gender differences in urban food systems, the main domains of gender-based inequalities in the food system, or practical examples of differences, as well as when discussing results from the field, gender will mostly be referred to as the distinction between people who are socialized as women and people who are socialized as men. This is caused by two main reasons. The first is that available data is mostly constructed and collected with this gender conceptualization in

mind, therefore most available gender-disaggregated data speaks of men and women – when it exists, as gender-disaggregated data in food systems is usually scarce (OECD, 2022). The same goes for studies regarding gender differences in food systems: most of them either address "gender issues" as a synonym to "women issues", or simply speak about women/men (Bergonzini, 2024b). For example, the book *Feminist Food Studies* (Sachs & Patel-Campillo, 2014) has separate chapters for issues related to women and issues for queer people and non-binary identities. This might be in part explained with the second reason that causes most studies and data to only focus on women vs men. That is, that gender differences along the food chain have developed and consolidated in culture, social norms, and daily practices throughout centuries along the binary lines of women vs men, with early studies about these gender dynamics dating back to the 1980s but addressing much earlier periods of time, as far back as the twentieth century (Hayden, 1981; Lupton, 1996; Van Esterik, 1999). Those early explorations focused mostly on gender dynamics in the household and on bodily matters like food-related disorders (Avakian & Haber, 2005). Thus, the period of time when such research was conducted and the specific matters it focused on partially explain why non-binary identities were not as integrated. Surely, a complete integration of such identities in the academic discourse around gender and food is desirable, and this thesis will try to include it as much as possible, within the limits that were previously discussed. At the same time, gender differences never go alone, they are «never pure» (Halliday et al., 2020, p. 6). Rather, they intersect with other axes of potential discrimination such as class, migration background, age, location, religion etc., as intersectional theory explains (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Halliday et al., 2020). While this thesis addresses specifically gender, and therefore only investigated gender explicitly, other intersecting elements emerged on some occasions, and they will be discussed when relevant. Lastly, it is important to specify what is meant by "gender differences" and "gender equality/inequality/discrimination". This thesis speaks mostly of "gender differences", because it aims at detecting *differences* based on gender in urban food systems and their governance. This means that these differences are not judged as discriminatory *a priori*, as they might even represent an advantage for women, or simply a difference that does not

entail better or worse consequences for any gender when in lack of evidence about the effects (or even when evidence exists but was not previously considered or known, for example in the case of suppositions by interviewees). However, when some differences are detected that are clearly (or almost certainly, based on previous studies or fieldwork) discriminatory towards one of the genders (most often women), it will be explicitly made clear by speaking of "gender inequality/ discrimination". Lastly, "gender equality" is used to express the final goal, the aim that not only this research, but the context it analyzes aims at.

After the mentioned first wave of research on gender and food[5] that focused on the body and the household, scholars began adding new perspectives, and the general consensus came to recognize that almost all food practices are gendered (Avakian & Haber, 2005). Recently, the OECD (2022) defined three roles that women cover in food systems, and presented differences based on gender along all of them: namely, the roles of entrepreneurs, workers and consumers. However, this list misses a very important role, that is also one of the roles that present the most striking differences based on gender (at least in the context of urban areas in countries of the Global Minority, Lopez-García et al., 2018): that of carers, or providers of reproductive work related to food. Indeed, the fact that the OECD overlooks it is telling in itself. The reproductive work of buying groceries, cooking, washing the dishes, but even its less practical aspects such as planning meals and making sure they are nutritious, tasty, and balanced, is often invisibilized and not considered as work, as it is unpaid and unofficial (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Williams-Forson & Counihan, 2011). And most importantly, this care work is highly gendered (a few sources among many: Bryan et al., 2023; Conesa Carpintero, 2017; Njuki et al., 2022; Rocha, 2022; Tornaghi & Dehaene, 2020; Zaremba et al., 2021). The feminization of food-related care work entails a much heavier burden on women's shoulders in terms of time: it was also proven that the gradual consolidation of women's participation in the labor market did not correspond to the same level of women starting to disattend such tasks (for example by

[5] For a more detailed review about gender and food research, see: Allen & Sachs (2007); Bergonzini (2024b). When specific differences are raised throughout the thesis referring to the case-studies and results, relevant literature will be mentioned in the corresponding paragraph.

employing a professional), thus many women now perform both productive and reproductive work, nor did it correspond to a significant increase in men's participation in such tasks – for example ISTAT's (Italian Statistical Institute) latest data is from 2013 and shows that in heterosexual couples where both partners work (between 25 and 64 years of age, all levels of education, with and without children), men perform a mean of 1.70 hours of food-related care work a day, while women perform a mean of 6.70 hours a day, and these amounts change by very little when looking at different age groups (25-44, 45-64) but also at different educational levels of women (in couples where women have a university degree or higher educational level, men's share of work increases slightly to 2.0 hours/day, but a strong difference persists with women still dedicating more than double the time, at 5.80h/d), suggesting that over time and over generations, this has not changed much (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Avakian & Haber, 2005; ISTAT, 2014;[6] Riley & Dodson, 2020). At the same time, it also represents a heavier burden in terms of responsibility. Already in 1999, van Esterik noticed that families' nutritional problems such as obesity or food-related disorders tended to be blamed on women, as the underlying understanding was that they were responsible for the household's nutrition. Such tendency of placing this responsibility on mothers (therefore, women, instead of both parents), was recently also found in a review of urban food policies (Bergonzini, 2024a), a tool that more and more cities and local institutions are using to work on the sustainability of their food systems, and that will be better presented later. In these cases, it is more common to find examples of proposed actions that address what "mothers" can and should do for, among others, household nutritional security and children's health, rather than references to "parents," or "mothers and fathers". It is not the intention here to undervalue the role of mothers, and even more so in light of studies proving that an improvement in women's food security and food education grants better household nutrition (Broussard, 2019; Bryan et al., 2024). However, the very fact that women's food education has such

[6] The data was retrieved on the "I.stat" website (dati.istat.it) on April 2nd, 2025, through the following path: Vita quotidiana e opinione dei cittadini → uso del tempo → attività quotidiane in persone in coppia → Coppia con o senza figli, età e titolo di studio della donna, condizione lavorativa della coppia → lavoro domestico → cucinare lavare e riordinare le stoviglie. It was last checked for updates on October 10th, 2025. As of 15th January 2026, this was still the most up-to-date datum available.

a strong impact on households is tightly connected to the fact that they perform most of the food-related work for their households. It is quite logical that when household nutrition depends almost entirely on a woman, her education about nutritional values and balanced diets is more impactful than that of a male member of the same household. So, when such evidence is not observed critically, it risks reinforcing the idea that women must be held more accountable for households' food security and health, and a serious discussion about the need to share responsibilities is hindered. At the same time, only considering women's role in household's food-related issues in terms of what they can do as mothers erases women's experience throughout their lifetime, forgetting about all the phases when they are neither pregnant nor caring for children, even though studies have shown that they are impacted by many other issues that are not connected to motherhood or pregnancy. Just a few among many possible examples are that women tend to be more food insecure than men also in countries of the Global Minority, they are more subject to food-related disorders due to societal pressures about their appearance, and they are overrepresented in precarious jobs along the food chain (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Bergonzini, 2024a; Botreau & Cohen, 2020; Broussard, 2019; OECD, 2022).

1.1.4 Urban governance for the integration of gender equality and food systems sustainability

The previous paragraphs aimed at providing the necessary contextualization for the topic of this thesis by situating its main elements – namely food systems sustainability, urban areas (especially in the Global Minority), and gender differences – within relevant literature, but also defining some central concepts like food transition/transformation, sustainable food systems, food justice, and gender differences. While the specific object of this research, and the research questions it addresses, will be explained in detail in the next chapter, this paragraph summarizes the ways these three concepts interconnect and underlines the specific aspect of such interconnection that this thesis will focus on: governance. In a previously conducted review (Bergonzini, 2024b), the potential of the urban scale as promising to address food systems unsustainability and gender equality through

governance emerged (Beebeejaun, 2017; Brunori & Di Iacovo, 2014; Calori & Magarini, 2015a; Halliday, 2022; Peake & Rieker, 2013; Sonnino et al., 2019; Vaiou, 1992; Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006), but integration of the two themes seems to be mostly lacking from policy, practice, and also in research (Bergonzini, 2024b). For example, urban planning is seen as central to address the problem of fear of harassment in public spaces, which impacts women more than men, but also to provide support for specific daily life needs that mostly regard women due to the traditional gendered division of tasks, such as services related to child care (García-Ramón et al., 2004; Muzzonigro & Andreola, 2021; Peake, 2016; Valentine, 1989; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020). On the other hand, the urban scale is seen as promising to act on the sustainability of food systems for various reasons, for example the proven impact of local food environments on consumers' choices and the relevance of urban planning to grant equitable food access, but also the opportunity to leverage tools like public procurement to serve more sustainable and healthy meals in schools and public canteens (Bedore, 2010; Londoño-Cañola et al., 2022; Pitt et al., 2017). It is also important to define what is meant by "urban food governance" in this thesis. Indeed, the term "governance" is quite vast and many scholars even contribute to the field without specifying what they mean by it (Moragues-Faus et al., 2022, p. 10). Tefft et al. (2020, p. 4), referring to "food systems governance", provide the following definition:

> Governance, viewed broadly, refers to the process of interaction and decision-making among public, private sector and civil society actors involved in a collective problem that leads to the creation, reinforcement or reproduction of social norms, rules and institutions. It relates to: the structure, roles and performance of institutions; the formal and informal processes and mechanisms for mediating differences and protecting rights; and the intergovernmental and actor relationships and their ability to exercise power among them. Practically, governance plays an important role in determining whether cities are able to effectively address food systems problems and contribute to the larger structural challenges linked to improved [food systems] outcomes at national and global levels.

To be sure, and provide a briefer definition, this thesis will refer to Moragues-Faus et al.'s (2017, p. 3), «all modes of governing encompassing activities carried out by different actors to guide, steer,

control or manage the pursuance of food security – in addressing food system vulnerabilities, both conceptually and practically». Both are definitions referring to food governance, but because this thesis focuses on urban areas, these definitions will be applied to urban actors, or actors whose level of competence is broader (metropolitan, regional, national, international…) but that have a specific impact and/or plan to act on the considered urban areas. In the *Routledge Handbook of Urban Food Governance*, Moragues-Faus et al. (2022, pp. 11–16) provide a list of five principles that affect urban food governance: time, place, relations, diversity and power. Based on these definitions, it is clear that urban food governance is not only performed by official institutions through codified ways of actions such as planning and policies, but also (although not only) by other actors like bottom-up forms of organization. As a matter of fact, urban areas have proven particularly promising in terms of transformation potential also because they host a variety of grassroots initiatives that are increasingly innovative and pivotal in the context of food sustainability (Brunori & Di Iacovo, 2014; Edwards, 2023; Lopez-García et al., 2018; Maye et al., 2022). Such initiatives can be referred to, in a broader sense thus including the variety of existing types and forms, as "alternative food networks" (AFN). Venn et al. (2006) cite Murdoch et al. (2000) in saying that «AFNs and the producers, consumers and food that they include are understood to embody alternatives to industrial modes of food supply» (p. 249), although an agreed definition remains elusive. In a perhaps more straightforward definition, AFNs are described by Matacena (2016) as «a wide variety of rapidly diffusing initiatives and schemes of food provisioning that express a sense of differentiation from, and to some extent counteraction to, mainstream modes which dominate the conventional food system» (p. 50). Interestingly, they have been called «relational spaces» by Rossi and Brunori (2010, p. 1913). For this thesis, it is also relevant to mention that Riley and Hovorka (2015) quote Little et al.'s study on the UK (2009) as an example to say that «research in the Global North into gender consumption choices has shown that women's dominance in food purchasing and preparation has given them a prominent role in shaping alternative food networks» (p. 339).

Despite what elaborated so far, namely the recognized potential of urban governance to act on food sustainability and gender equality and the proven relevance of gender implications in urban food systems, there is little evidence of application on the ground of such integration, through policy or practice, nor is it much addressed in literature (Bergonzini, 2024b). However, some examples exist, despite being mostly context-specific case-studies coming principally from countries of the Global Majority, thus hardly generalizable (Di Masso et al., 2022; Hammelman, 2018; Hovorka, 2013; Qi, 2023; Riley & and Dodson, 2016; Riley & Caesar, 2018; Slater, 2001; Turkkan, 2019; Yasmeen, 1996b, 1996a; Yu, 2018). Some of the gender implications (positive and negative) caused by projects and policies related to food innovation in cities that these studies have detected are: i) increased burden on women's shoulders in terms of time and labor to dedicate to food-related matters when participating in alternative food networks (AFNs); ii) less power in the household caused by the spread of supermarkets; iii) cases of exclusion, elitism and negative judgement related to motherhood, children nutrition and AFNs participation; iv) increased emancipation thanks to stronger social networks built through participation in urban agriculture; v) lack of knowledge on the part of administrators on how to mainstream gender in a food-related policy.

Evidence from case-studies, then, further supports the relevance of gender implications in urban food systems and in the actions taken to govern their sustainability transition, as well as the need to study them. The chapter about the research object and questions will elaborate on how this thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge on this topic. Before moving to the description of the specific research object, though, it is necessary to present the theoretical framework within which such research was conducted.

1.2 Theoretical framework

1.2.1. Intersectional feminism

Firstly, it is necessary to explicitly state that this research has an intersectional feminist approach, stemming from intersectional feminist theories (such as: Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks,

2015; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1993). The need for food studies to be feminist, and for feminist food studies to be intersectional, has been explained very well by the volume *Feminist Food Studies* (Parker et al., 2019, p. 13): «An intersectional feminist food studies pursues an understanding of the ways that social injustices permeate and are perpetuated by the historical, social, cultural, economic, environmental, political, and transnational contexts surrounding food, from production to distribution to consumption and beyond».

The same volume also admits that intersectional analysis is, however, hard to do because often «one dimension or axis of intersectionality is foregrounded instead of looking closer at the intersections—and this leads to oppression» (Parker et al., 2019, pp. 35-36). At the same time, a way to escape such impasse in academic research is proposed: «Our challenge is to acknowledge and make visible the complexity, uncertainty, and messiness that intersectional analyses reveal. No single contribution can address the breadth and depth of power, oppression, and privilege. However, we believe that a single contribution does offer a starting place from which growth can occur as we work with complexity» (Parker et al., 2019, p. 21). This is the theoretical stance I position myself on when deciding to focus on women's experience in urban contexts, still with the aim of underlining other axes of discrimination, but aware that some axis of complexity, however relevant, might remain under-analyzed in favor of others. At the same time, as previously mentioned, by keeping an intersectional lens the focus on gender might be a helpful tool to detect other levels of complexity to be added to the analysis. In addition, it is necessary to reiterate that "gender" does not only refer to cisgender men and women. As previously elaborated, this binarism will be discussed and questioned when possible.

1.2.2 Right to the city and everyday life in a feminist view

As for the topic of cities and urban space, the main theoretical references will be the right to the city by Henri Lefebvre (1968), which has been used by feminist scholars to elaborate on the right to access the urban space and participate in its creation (Fenster, 2005), and the practice of everyday life by Michel de Certeau (1988), whose work on the importance of daily life practices has been used as a

basis by some feminist urban scholars to argue in favor of the importance of everyday life, as opposed to previous scholarship that tended to see it as "too private", often also as "too feminine" (Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006) to merit scholarly attention. The same argument could be used to support the need for a sociology of daily food practices, as well-described by Lupton: «food and eating habits are banal practices of everyday life; we all, as living beings, must eat to survive. This apparent banality, however, is deceptive. […] Food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our bodies, which itself is inextricably linked with subjectivity» (Lupton, 1996, p. 1).

Not less important are Collie's feminist remarks (2013) on de Certeau's conceptualization of the role of pedestrians (1988). De Certeau engages with discourses of power by differentiating the point of view of a «panoptic power» (de Certeau, 1988, pp. 91–110) – thus distant from everyday life matters and belonging to codified powers in the city such as urban planners – and the point of view of pedestrians, as well as differentiating between strategies (applied by such panoptic power) and tactics, that he defines as «the space of the other» (*ibid*, pp.35-37). Collie argues that his analysis, while engaging with questions of power between actors at different levels (power vs the "other"), does not consider differences of power among pedestrians/urban dwellers themselves, which are often based on identity (including gender). She differentiates between urban dwellers who can have the privilege of observing the city anonymously (thus being subjects), from those who become objectified when they enter the public space by constantly being observed, for example (but not only) women (Collie, 2013). The chapter dedicated to the interpretation of results will further elaborate on how this research contributes to these concepts.

1.2.3 Refusal of dichotomies

De Certeau's words of a "space of the other" invite us to engage with the concepts of "other" and "space", too, which must be addressed in any feminist urban scholarship. The concept of space that I plan to refer to is that theorized by Doreen Massey in her paper *Politics and Space/Time*, included in

the volume *Space, place, and gender* (1994). «We need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global.» (Massey, 1994, p. 264). Space, in her view, is not static but rather continuously constructed by the social interrelations happening within it (but also stretching outwards), sounding applicable to the way Brunori and Rossi (2010) called AFNs, "relational spaces".

The concept of "other" in regard to gender, and therefore as women being the "other" compared to men, has been widely challenged by feminist scholarship since Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sex* (1949). Massey is again the scholar who connected in a clear way the critique to this dichotomous view of genders to the argument of the importance of space (as opposed to time), and challenged dichotomous thinking: «this kind of dichotomous thinking, together with a whole range of the sets of dualisms which take this form […] are related to the construction of the radical distinction between genders in our society, to the characteristics assigned to each of them, and to the power relations maintained between them. […] Those whose understanding of society is ruled by such ideology find it very hard to conceive of the possibility of alternative forms of social order (third possibilities). Within such thinking, the only alternative to the one order is disorder» (Massey, 1994, pp. 256-259).

The last dichotomy that is relevant to mention here, directly related to gender binarism, is that between public and private space (Federici calls the private sphere «fictional», thereby re-politicizing family life and reproductive work, 2019, p. 55). As noted also by Massey later on in the previously mentioned volume (1994), but also by other scholars (such as: Fenster, 2005; Hayden, 1980; Kern, 2021; Peake, 2017; Vaiou, 1992), the man/woman dichotomy has often been associated to the public/private space dichotomy in claims that public space is a man's world – either explicit or implicit in the way a city is concretely more or less accessible to people whose gender is not male. It is clear how Collie's remarks on urban subjects vs objects (2013) apply to such vision of public space: it's a (middle-class, well-educated, white, heterosexual) man's space, and who is not man becomes

object of observation in the public space rather than simply a subject that carries out their everyday life practices in there.

1.2.4 Feminist ethics of care

In their chapter from the book *Routledge Handbook of Urban Food Governance*, Williams and Sharp (2023) discuss the potential of applying a feminist ethics of care perspective to the study of urban food governance practices. As a matter of fact, studies that recognize that working for the sustainability of urban food systems is an act of care are increasing (Beacham, 2018; Corubolo et al., 2024; Corubolo & Meroni, 2023; Krzywoszynska, 2019; Sharp, 2018; Toldo, 2017), but few explicitly frame the ethics of care they detect within a feminist vision. Williams and Sharp (2023) propose such a perspective in contrast to a neoliberal ethics of care (Muehlebach, 2012), in that it «centres the political importance of questioning who is responsible to and for care, who is taking on the burden of care, and, the ways in which such responsibility is unequally borne» (Williams & Sharp, 2023, p. 79). Midgley (2016, p. 615) explained that «a feminist ethics of care centres interconnection and relationality as its approach to responsibility and recognises the situated, interdependent and collective relational bases of our responsibilities both to the self and to others». Given the focus of this thesis, such a perspective on the practices, actions and attitudes that urban food governance actors apply to their work seems appropriate, as it aims at unveiling power dynamics that are not only based on gender, and that permeate urban food systems. Indeed, such an ethics recognizes the interdependencies that characterize food systems (between humans, non-humans, and the earth) and is also seen as transformative, as it has the potential to shape the understanding relevant actors have on such interdependencies and consequently their actions and attitudes (Midgley, 2016; Sharp, 2018; Sharp, 2020; Tronto, 2020; Tronto & Fisher, 1990; Williams & Sharp, 2023).

1.3 Summary of chapter 1

This chapter has presented relevant literature on urban food systems and gender differences in food systems, with the aim of providing a picture of the state of the art within which this research is framed. The importance of urban areas in the sustainable transformation of food systems was discussed, as well as how gender differences are to be found in all stages of the food system, and the fact that they are still mostly overlooked in urban food governance theory and practice. Also, some definitions were given of relevant concepts that will be raised throughout the text, such as "food justice", "urban food governance", "food transition" and also "gender". Later, theoretical concepts from urban studies (and especially feminist urban studies) were presented, namely feminist ethics of care, the right to the city and the practice of everyday life. These concepts create the theoretical framework that will be used to interpret fieldwork results in chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Definition of the research object and questions

Chapter abstract: The second chapter approaches the specific research object more directly and introduces the research questions and the case studies. Specifically, important tools and actors of urban food governance are introduced and defined, namely institutional forms of governance mostly expressed through urban food policies, and grassroots forms broadly defined as alternative food networks. Then, literature discussing the relevance of dialogues and relations between these levels of urban food governance is presented, and the expression of "interstitial space" is suggested to refer to the relational space that connects them. Later, literature on gender relations in these contexts is discussed, with a focus on the alleged potential of this "interstitial space" in granting attention to gender equality. Against this backdrop, the main research question is defined: what governance spaces hold most potential for a gender-just urban food transition? To find an answer, the case studies of Milan and Barcelona are selected, and the chapter ends with an explanation for this choice.

2.1 Studying the "interstitial space" between urban food policies and alternative food networks and its potential in shaping gender-just urban food systems

Given the literature background that was presented in the previous chapter, it was considered relevant to study the potential of urban governance to improve gender equality within urban food systems and guarantee that gender differences are considered when designing actions and performing initiatives that aim at transforming urban food systems towards greater sustainability.

As seen, "governance" can be interpreted in a broad way to include all types of initiatives by any actor who attempts to control and manage the pursuance of a goal (in this case, urban food systems sustainability) (Moragues-Faus et al., 2017), including institutional, private and civil society actors.

For the purpose of this thesis, the two main types of governance actors that were included in the research are institutions (at the urban level, or higher level that however has a direct impact on the urban area specifically and/or strong contacts with urban institutions) and civil society. There were, however, some cases of civil society initiatives that could also be considered as part of the private sector, and such exceptions will be addressed in the corresponding paragraphs. The reason to focus on institutional and civil society actors is based on the relevance and transformative potential that literature recognizes to their actions, which is discussed below.

2.1.1 Urban food policies

In terms of institutional governance of urban food systems, the main tool through which cities are performing it – and at the center of scholarly attention – is that of urban food policies (UFPs), which are sometimes also referred to as "urban food strategies" or, especially in Italy and Spain where the case studies of this thesis are located, "local" food strategies/policies. A variety of definitions of such governance tools can be detected in literature. Calori et al. (2017, p. 1) cite a definition that was developed in the context of the EU-funded project FOODLINKS, by Moragues-Faus et al. (2013), which aimed at compiling a review of examples of urban food strategies in Europe: «a process consisting of how a city envisions change in its food system, and how it strives towards this change». A report by IPES-Food (Hawkes & Halliday, 2017, p. 9) states that «an urban food policy is a concerted action on the part of city government to address food-related challenges. Urban food policies often emerge through significant involvement of civil society and other actors, […] however, grassroots, citizen-led actions that are independent of governments do not constitute urban food policies per se. […] Urban food policies run across a spectrum from integrated approaches to single-issue policies», thus raising the relevance of civil society in the development of UFPs, but also the variety of types of UFPs (a "spectrum"). Indeed, UFPs are generally conceived as integrated policies, meaning that they address in an integrated manner multiple issues related to the urban food system. However, such integration is not always comprehensive and is dependent on the context, as different cities have different food-related issues and different ways of integrating food in their administrative bodies (Barling et al., 2002; Candel, 2021; Edwards et al., 2024). As a matter of fact, the problem of food not belonging to traditional policy and planning areas (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 2000) nor administrative branches, but rather relating to many of them at the same time, results in a variety of institutional branches and professionals addressing single aspects of the food system separately (the so-called siloed approach), which is often mentioned in literature as one of the main challenges hindering the transformative power of institutional actions towards sustainable food systems (Donner et al., 2024; Lever & Sonnino, 2022). Over time, definitions have grown to recognize that UFPs also

include processes, such as in Zerbian et al.'s (2022, p. 2) definition, drawing on Moragues-Faus and Battersby's (2021), «specific policy documents or processes that aim to set out actions for the achievement of a commonly agreed goal within the local food system». In general, what all these definitions have in common is the idea that a UFP is a tool employed by urban-level institutions to address multiple issues of the urban food system in an integrated manner, but *which* issues are addressed, and *how*, remains highly context-dependent and therefore examples of international UFPs can have very different forms, contents and applications. Still, their relevance in highlighting the interconnectedness of the urban food system and the need to look at it in an integrated manner has been recognized by scholars worldwide, and indeed UFPs have already caused important advancements in urban food systems sustainability internationally (e.g., Candel, 2020; Cohen, 2022; Comune di Milano, 2023; Schneider et al., 2025; Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2023). Besides the siloed approach to food-related policy and planning, that UFPs try to tackle, another important element that negatively impacts the transformative potential of institutions over their food systems is political turnover and the related instability of administrative professionals as well as municipal visions (Giambartolomei et al., 2021; Halliday, 2022). Indeed, since food is not a traditional policy area or administrative branch in itself, the existence of a UFP, or at least of a vision about the urban food system, is not a given, and rather is still very dependent on the presence or absence of a political interest about developing it, and the shift from one administration to the next can cause such interest to strongly decline, if not completely disappear (as happened for example in Turin, Calori et al., 2017). In this case, too, the development not only of a UFP, but also and most importantly of actions to implement it and to foster engagement with other cities to discuss and present results and approaches, can lead to a level of institutionalization and affirmation of the topic of food in city administrations that contributes to its keeping on the agenda even upon political changes (Giordano, 2022; Minotti et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Alternative food networks

The other kind of governance actors that this thesis considers is grassroots initiatives trying to act upon the transformation of food systems from the bottom up. These bottom-up forms of governance, which mostly come from civil society, are usually referred to as alternative food networks (AFNs). Like UFPs, AFNs also take different forms and have different objectives and therefore have been defined in different ways in literature. Again like for UFPs, this variety of AFNs definitions does not provide a specific and delimited denotation but rather underlines the diversity of experiences that can fit under the label of AFNs. Indeed, this term can be dated back to the 1990s, when newly emerging practices by consumers and producers that offered an alternative to the dominant supply chain started spreading (Murdoch et al., 2000). As anticipated in the previous chapter, Matacena (2016) offered a definition of AFNs as «a wide variety of rapidly diffusing initiatives and schemes of food provisioning that express a sense of differentiation from, and to some extent counteraction to, mainstream modes which dominate the conventional food system» (p. 50). Manganelli et al. (2020, p. 301) define AFNs as «coalitions of actors pursuing alternative modalities to allocate resources to the food chain, make food production happen and govern the chain's processes». More recently, Zerbian and Lopez-García (2024, p. 02) have noted that the label "AFN" has been used in literature to indicate «a vast array of initiatives that differ from the conventional food system in one way or another.» They add some elements by referring to the "alternative" character of AFNs, stating that it «revolves around promoting values beyond profit maximization and industrial logic through market and non-market strategies incorporating some degree of ecological and ethical values within their motivations, local and sustainable food, and cooperation between food system actors» (*ibidem*). Through such definition, a variety of initiatives can be defined as AFN, including private sector's for-profit initiatives that include some level of critique to the dominant supply chain. However, already in the early 2000s, scholars were calling for a deeper investigation into the nature of the "alternative" character of AFNs, to assess whether they are more *oppositional* or *alternative*, to differentiate initiatives that aim at eroding the dominant political-economic structure of the current agri-food

system from those that aim at proposing a new, autonomous structural configuration (Allen et al., 2003; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). Similarly, Moragues-Faus (2017), drawing from Hinrichs (2000), highlights the need to differentiate between alternative (food) markets and alternatives *to* the (food) market. Contrarily to the attention on the "alternative" part of "alternative food networks", "network" is used «loosely» both as «metaphor» for complex and interconnected systems and as «analytical tool» to observe and study such systems (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019, p. 76). For this reason, the specific nature of the AFNs that were included in the analysis for this thesis will be addressed in the paragraph about fieldwork, as it is necessary to differentiate them and highlight the diversity of experiences. As explained by Mastronardi et al. (2019, p. 2), AFNs are diverse – and indeed they remind that in Italy, there is no national definition for them –, but they all respect three dimensions: «(1) to function as food markets that distribute the value through the network against the logic of mass production, (2) to contribute to the reconstruction of "trust" between food producers and consumers, and (3) to design new forms of social association and market governance». At the same time, Sonnino and Marsden (2006) also warned against the tendency to look at alternative food networks as parallel to conventional ones, and rather argued for the need to examine the interlinkages between the two, as there are no clear boundaries, instead they are blurred, and often AFNs are dependent on the conventional sector. The focus on relations, not only between alternative and conventional food networks but also within single AFNs, and between various AFNs, is supported by other scholars, with Rossi and Brunori defining AFNs as "relational spaces" (2010) and Jarosz noting that AFNs' aim is to «respatialize and resocialize food» (2008, p. 231). More recently, scholars have identified a "second generation" of AFNs, that «no longer operates entirely as protest», but rather «*perform[s]* opposition to the status quo, demonstrating that alternatives are not only practically feasible, they also deliver a host of other co-benefits, including ecological regeneration, community building and improved wellbeing» (Kropp et al., 2021, p. 2). As a matter of fact, the transformative power of AFNs has increased, and their role has gained more and more recognition as pivotal for urban food sustainability (Maye et al., 2022; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). In 2006, Sonnino and

Marsden commented that the fact that most AFNs were grounded in bourgeois urban context was of concern, as it limited their multiplier effect in rural areas and their reach to broader socio-economic groups (Jarosz, 2008; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006; Tregear, 2011). While concerns about the exclusionary elements of AFNs persist – related to the (time, power, …) privilege needed to be able to engage in them (DiVito Wilson, 2013; Moragues-Faus, 2017; Turkkan, 2019) – their mostly urban character has been observed by scholars also as positive more recently. For example, Oñederra-Aramendi et al. (2023) underline that integrating non-agricultural actors in the movement for food systems transformation allows for new forms of food governance that are intersectoral and inter-scalar. Such new forms of governance are defined by Kropp et al. (2021) as "coalitions" that represent the "second generation" of AFNs previously mentioned. At the same time, they also address the potential of AFNs to positively influence urban space, through their place-based and collaborative strategies, that contribute to the reappropriation of public space (Matacena, 2016), offering a space for civic experimentation (Rossi & Brunori, 2010) while also contributing to the re-connection between urban and rural areas, or urban centers and peripheries (Facchini et al., 2023; Manganelli et al., 2020). Scholars have also noticed that urban areas allow for different movements to converge and collaborate towards similar goals, such as neighborhood groups, movements for the rights of women, migrants and other groups, or agroecological coalitions, struggling for food security (Facchini et al., 2023; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). Others raised the point that sometimes the values and principles that are associated with the "alternative" character of AFNs are blind to broader social and equity issues (DiVito Wilson, 2013), or even that some AFNs risk reinforcing pre-existing inequalities rather than dismantling them (Goodman et al., 2012; Matacena, 2016), including gender inequality (Qi, 2023).

It is clear that AFNs cover a variety of experiences and attitudes, practices and objectives, that while grouping them under the same label serves as a means to show how numerous and varied such initiatives are, it remains necessary to situate and contextualize them when researching some specific AFNs. Despite this variety, though, their relevance for urban governance is agreed upon and is thus

one of the features they all share. In particular, the potential of AFNs to shape urban food governance and policy has been demonstrated, but also the importance of institutions in shaping the scope of action and actual potential of AFNs, through favorable or unfavorable attitudes and policies (Fiore et al., 2025; Manganelli et al., 2020; Mastronardi et al., 2019; Matacena, 2016; Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015; Oñederra-Aramendi et al., 2023; Tregear, 2011; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). This space of mutual influence and dialogue between bottom-up and top-down forms of urban food governance is addressed in the next paragraph.

2.1.3 The "interstitial space" between urban food policies and alternative food networks

The expression "interstitial space" has been used in literature from different disciplines to indicate spaces (both physical and conceptual) «containing actors from different domains engaged in developing outcomes that come to shape the activities of each domain, such interstitial spaces also tend to be highly political spaces as actors from each sphere seeks to represent and negotiate outcomes on the basis of their institutional and/or individual interests» (Wickson & Forsberg, 2015, p. 1176), as well as spaces that involve some level of informality, «in which cultural difference, historical meaning and social practices are inscribed and actively made through everyday human practices» (Steele & Keys, 2015, p. 114). To indicate the relational space between institutional and grassroots forms of urban food governance, the term was first used by Matacena (2016, p. 53) at the end of his paper about linking AFNs and UFPs to scale-up the transformative potential of the two, while advocating for the need «to create further institutional and interstitial space for the clustered agglomeration and crossover innovation in the convergent development of alternative food movements» (although he only uses this term once and does not make it central to his paper). In this thesis, this expression will be used to generally indicate the space of dialogue, relation and mutual influence – be it conflictual, collaborative, strong or weak, desired or avoided, etc. – that exists between bottom-up and top-down forms of urban food governance, especially in the forms of UFPs and AFNs, which, as elaborated in the previous paragraph, are two of the governance forms that

literature recognizes as more promising to drive the urban food transition. The choice to employ this expression is based on the fact that this relational space can take diverse forms – or at times even take no form at all – according to the specific AFN or institutional actor involved, thus speaking explicitly of "dialogue" or "relation" would risk implying that *some* level of relation always exists, even in the cases of total disconnection. This relational space will be analyzed more in detail in the chapter about results, and in such context, where data about the characteristics of this space is available, it will be characterized specifically.

Indeed, Moragues-Faus et al. (2024) include relationships[7] between actors among the five most impactful factors influencing urban food governance, and literature presents a vast diversity of cases of collaboration or lack thereof between bottom-up and top-down governance levels. For example, Camps-Calvet (2024, pp. 102–103), in her study of urban gardens in Barcelona, explains that sometimes activists «bridge the gap between protest and proposal» and build a relation with institutions to gain land rights and try to shape institutional actions, while others perceive institutions as allies to capitalism and therefore choose a more «anarchist» attitude due to their lack of trust in them. This example alone summarizes well the most common forms and aims of relation between AFNs and UFPs that are found in literature: i) AFNs receiving some type of concrete support from institutions, such as resources, space or permits, ii) AFNs participate and shape institutional actions, iii) AFNs refuse collaboration with institutions (or vice versa) due to contrasting political views (see examples from, among others, Mooney, 2022; Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2022; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). Among the many forms of collaboration between actors on food governance, food councils are one of the most common and institutionalized ones. Mooney (2022, p. 101) defines food policy councils as «a group of representatives and stakeholders from many sectors of the food system. Ideally, the councils include participants representing all five sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution and waste recycling) […] [and] often play

[7] The others are time, space, diversity and power.

an active role in educating policy makers and the public about the food system». Matacena (2016, p. 54) and Sonnino and Spayde (2014, p. 189) put more emphasis on the actual powers of food policy councils, by underlining that such groups should ideally have a mandate and the power and authority to effectively act on the food system. This form of governance first originated in North America – with Toronto's Food Policy Council, 1991, being one of the earliest and most prominent examples (Blay-Palmer, 2009) – and started spreading throughout Europe in the 2010s (Michel et al., 2022). While food policy councils are now quite spread worldwide (e.g., Arcuri et al., 2022; Fiore et al., 2025; Michel et al., 2022; Steyaert et al., 2025; Stierand, 2012), not all cities deciding to commit to urban food sustainability have one, but other types of governance that aim at integrating the perspective of various actors exist, such as the communities of practice organized by the city of Milan (Bergonzini et al., In press; Calori, 2015; Calori & Magarini, 2015b; Minotti et al., 2022).

This paragraph argued that the interstitial space between institutional and grassroots forms of urban food governance is relevant and studying the practices, processes and forms that influence and inform it is important to advance knowledge on urban food sustainability. The next paragraph clarifies more explicitly how and why a gender perspective is necessary in studying it.

2.1.4 Gender in UFPs and AFNs

Despite the various gender differences that can be detected along all the stages of food systems (urban and rural, local and global alike) which were discussed in the previous chapter, and the recognized potential of the urban scale to address gender differences and food issues, a gender perspective is widely lacking both from urban food policies and in alternative food networks' practice and literature (Bergonzini, 2024a; Di Masso et al., 2022; Facchini et al., 2023).

As for UFPs, although various international agreements (e.g., Beijing Conference, 1993) and legislations (such as at the EU level) are increasingly suggesting or demanding a gender mainstreaming approach in policies at all levels (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023; Treaty of Lisbon, 2007), a review of twenty of the most prominent UFPs – most of them considered as

pioneers in literature but also by international networks of actors working on urban food sustainability – revealed that attention to gender is mostly lacking, with only five of twenty UFPs even mentioning the word "gender", sometimes without further elaboration other than the word itself (Bergonzini, 2024a). What is more, is that such review not only revealed a lack of attention to gender, but also detected the risk for certain UFPs to reiterate gender stereotypes related to food, thus possibly reinforcing gender differences, for example by only referring to "mothers", rather than "parents", when speaking of the role of household nutrition in children's health (Bergonzini, 2024a; Farnworth et al., 2023; Van Esterik, 1999). This example shows concretely what gender mainstreaming aims at avoiding, namely the risk of unintentionally translating policymakers' unconscious gender biases into policies that can have negative impacts on gender equality (Verloo, 2016). Also, as noted by the OECD in its analysis of gender in food systems (2022), gender-disaggregated data in this context is still rare, so without an explicit intention to account for gender, the risk is to overlook its relevance and assume there is no gender difference to account for, since there is no data to make any difference visible (Paganini et al., 2024). However, two examples of UFPs considering gender as an overall goal of the policy were found, namely Zaragoza and Barcelona (Bergonzini, 2024a; Di Masso et al., 2022). In a follow-up study, the UFP of Valencia was also detected as a good example of gender integration (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). Other examples exist of UFPs that somehow consider the topic of gender, but mostly in the form of presenting very specific projects or actions that have women as beneficiaries, without actually extending a gender perspective to the whole UFP (see for example the cases of Belo Horizonte and Quito, Bergonzini, 2024a). In a study on *how* the UFPs of Barcelona, Zaragoza and Valencia integrate gender in their policy design (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025), the lack of official guidelines on gender integration in food-related policy was found to negatively impact the capacity of urban food governance actors (in this case, policy makers at the municipality level) to actually apply a gender perspective even when willing to. For this reason, the same study proposed a framework for gender integration and assessment in food policies, based on previous literature regarding the main axes of gender discrimination in food systems (Groverman & van der Wees, 2016;

Lopez-García et al., 2018), which identifies access to assets, to agricultural markets, to technology and knowledge, resilience and exposure to risks, access to decision making, and distribution of food-related care labor as the six main domains of gender differences in food systems that UFPs could address – and indeed the mentions to gender in the three considered UFPs can all be categorized under one of these asymmetries – (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). However, it was also found that many mentions to gender differences in these UFPs are simply statements about the existence of such differences, rather than concrete proposals for action. This study also reports on the governance processes that led each of the considered cities to apply a gender perspective to their UFP, and interestingly, in the case of Zaragoza the role of the interstitial space between bottom-up and top-down governance actors was crucial. Indeed, the idea to perform a gender mainstreaming process on the UFP came from a bottom-up suggestion from a feminist collective, that had the space and opportunity to raise the point during a public consultation that had been set up by the Municipality to collect the population's point of view (Di Masso et al., 2022). The relevance of these spaces seems thus confirmed, but clearly they are not a sufficient element to guarantee that the topic of gender will be raised, as many other cities have set up consultation spaces (such as the mentioned food councils), but attention to gender is still extremely rare in UFPs worldwide.

Recently, a paper published by *Nature Food* (Hawkes et al., 2024) addresses the importance of considering «the full picture of people's realities» when designing policy interventions on diets. They present four examples of daily life contingencies that get in the way of well-intentioned but failed policies. To grasp even more how relevant, but at the same time overlooked, gender is in people's daily lives in relation to food, it is striking to notice that in all these examples, people's gender is strongly relevant, often the most relevant element among many, even though the paper is not intended as a study about gender, but rather it broadly addresses daily life elements that influence people's relation to food and food policy. Example 1 is about policies on healthy food environments, and the authors state that «other realities also need to be brought into the picture when considering policy impact, notably the realities women face as caregivers typically responsible for household food

provision» (Hawkes et al., 2024, p. 895). Example 2 is about school food initiatives, and they underline that school meals «also benefit families (notably women) by reducing the burdens of time, labor and associated stress of food preparation» (*ibid*). Example 3 is about nutrition-sensitive agricultural programs, and the authors highlight that, in many of the contexts where such programs are implemented, women are more vulnerable, as they are often excluded from decision making and social networks, and their workload related to care tasks also hinders their capacity to engage in production. Lastly, example 4 is about interventions to reduce meat intake and it provides the example of the failed experiment of "meat-free" Mondays in the Norwegian armed forces due to the recipients' association of meat to masculinity, and consequent feeling that removing it was a threat to their identity (Adams, 2010; Bergonzini, 2024b; Hawkes et al., 2024; Timeo & Suitner, 2017). These examples not only show how entrenched gender is to people's relationship to food, but also how designing policy without keeping it explicitly into account (along other realities of people's lives) can lead to a reinforcement of gender differences and inequalities – and even to the failure of the policy.

As for AFNs, as anticipated in the previous chapters some examples exist that analyze gender implications for participation in AFNs, but most of them come from countries of the Global Majority, while case studies from the Global Minority of countries, where issues related to food and gender tend to be different, remain scarce. For example, Turkkan (2019) analyzes the interconnection between motherhood, socioeconomic status and participation in AFNs in Istanbul, and Qi (2023) explores how traditional gender roles are not challenged but rather reinforced in participating to AFNs if there is no explicit intention to incorporate social justice, based on a case study from the Yunnan province of China. However, studies also exist showing the empowering potential of AFNs, such as the paper by Slater (2001) that explores how South African women are empowered by participating in urban agriculture – not only through monetary gains, but also the establishment of social networks. A MUFPP report (2023, pp. 140–143) on good urban food governance practices lists three ways in which urban food governance projects can empower women: i) enhancing their access to resources, ii) protecting their health and nutrition, iii) including them into leadership roles; however, once again

all examples cited are from countries of the Global Majority, so it is considered relevant to investigate gender dynamics and differences within AFNs in countries whose socioeconomic context is different (and sometimes erroneously considered as already gender equal). Lastly, another raising perspective on AFNs – and arguably more broadly on food sustainability actions – that is strongly connected to gender (but not much analyzed as so, yet), is that of seeing actions to improve food system's sustainability as acts of care (Beacham, 2018; Corubolo et al., 2024; Corubolo & Meroni, 2023; Midgley, 2016; Toldo, 2017; Williams & Sharp, 2023) However, despite the strongly gendered character of care (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017; Thelen, 2015; Till, 2012; Tronto, 2020; Tronto & Fisher, 1990) – which is often central to discussions of actual gender equality (Farhall & Rickards, 2021) – not all these studies include a gender perspective in their analyses. For example, Corubolo and Meroni (2023) argue that food can be used as a trigger to establish relationships within a neighborhood and thus become a form of care, but never throughout their paper is gender mentioned. However, a care perspective, and more specifically a feminist ethics of care perspective, on urban food governance is appropriate to investigate power relations – along the lines of gender but not only – and the distribution of responsibilities for this care: who is, and who should be, taking care of urban food systems? (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*; Williams & Sharp, 2023) This question resonates with Moragues-Faus et al.'s (2024) inclusion of power and diversity among the five most influential factors over food governance, and also provides a relevant counterbalance to the feminist right to the city perspective. Indeed, according to Fenster (2005), the right to the city is made up by the right to appropriate and the right to participate in decision-making. In the case of urban food governance, the few studies that have addressed gender dynamics within it have found that women tend to be disproportionately more represented than men, for example in consultation processes for policies or in AFN participation (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b; Facchini et al., 2023). Facchini et al. (2023) argue that women's predominance reflects the disproportionate distribution of food-related care labor, that historically has been highly feminized. It is also important to underline that often, these types of participation – taking part to public consultations or participating in an AFN – are voluntary and

performed for free. Therefore, the fact that the context of urban food governance seems to guarantee women's right to participation cannot be observed as an absolute positive in itself, but rather it is crucial to observe why so many women participate, at what level of power, and whether such participation challenges traditionally discriminating gender and power dynamics or not (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*).

2.1.5 Object of the study and research questions

The previously presented background is the reason for choosing to focus this thesis on the potential of urban governance – especially of grassroots and institutional actions, as well as the interstitial space between them – to act towards a gender-just food transition. More specifically, the main research question is: *what governance space holds most potential for a gender-just urban food transition?*

The aim is to understand how urban governance, and especially *which actors* of urban governance and *through which processes and relations*, can ensure that the much-needed urban food transition also brings along increased gender equality in the food system.

To reach an answer to this main question it is also considered important to investigate a few more supporting questions that can provide a stronger contextualization of the topic, both theoretically and empirically:

1. How does the dialectic between AFNs and UFPs work? What happens in the interstitial space between these levels of governance?
2. What are the most relevant gender differences in the considered urban food systems? And is urban food governance influencing them (intentionally or not)?
3. Are urban food governance actors employing strategies to act on gender differences? If so, who is doing it and through which strategies? If not, why not?
4. Does the urban space (physical space, relational space, governance space…) influence gender differences in food systems?

These questions are important in supporting the main question for various reasons. The first one is useful because understanding how the dialectic works between diverse governance actors can help in detecting the most promising governance spaces for innovation in general and provide a starting point to further investigate whether that space can help spread a gender perspective, too, among other innovative perspectives. The second supporting question aims at contextualizing the topic of gender-just urban food systems in the case-study cities, as detecting which gender differences exist on the ground, and their relation to the local food system, allows to go beyond abstract discourses. The third supporting question aims at detecting single examples of strategies that actors are already applying (if any), again to overcome abstract discourses and start from what is happening on the ground to imagine possible futures (Gibson-Graham, 2011). Lastly, the final supporting question also aims at overcoming abstraction but with a focus on the role of the urban space.

Evidently, while the main question is more general, most of the supporting questions are context-specific and thus must be investigated in a situated manner. For this reason, structuring a double case-study was considered the most appropriate choice (Tarrow, 2010), as well as an opportunity to focus on Southern Europe, a region that is located in the Global Minority, which as mentioned is under-analyzed from the point of view of gender integration in urban food governance. The next paragraph introduces the case studies and elaborates on the reasons to choose them.

2.2 Choice of case studies

In the introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Global Urban Studies* (Le Galès & Robinson, 2023, p. 9), the volume's editors state that «comparison is practically embedded in new forms of international urban politics, especially with the rise of networks of cities as political actors accumulating resources to contribute to global policy debates and solve collective action problems at a planetary scale». The object of this research resonates with this statement, since – as elaborated in the previous chapter – urban food systems are strongly interconnected with global food systems and share similar issues, and also due to the increasing role of cities (and networks of cities, such as the

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact that will be mentioned later) as political actors to address such issues from their very own local/urban scale but also to higher scales by engaging with other levels of governance (Bergonzini, 2025b; Colomb & Kazepov, 2023). Tarrow (2010) also underlines the relevance of paired comparison in, among others, public policy related studies, as it allows to investigate deeply some relevant cases by «localizing theory» (p. 252), and at the same time offers a «balanced combination of descriptive depth and analytical challenge» (p. 246). In this case, the study is not precisely a structured comparison, yet it focuses on two comparable cases. This seemed appropriate, not only in relation to the available time – which influences research design in any case – but also because the research objective calls both for a fair level of exploration (due to the described general lack of previous studies about the topic) and of depth, which was possible to achieve by only focusing on two cases over the period of two years. At the same time, analyzing two cases was preferred to a single case study because, as seen, the vast amount of UFPs worldwide (and surrounding urban governance actions) do not consider gender differences, but few cases do. For this reason, studying one of these rare gender-attentive examples seemed crucial, but so was the need to investigate a case from the "vast majority", meaning from the large pool of cities whose urban food governance does not seem to consider gender differences (at least on paper in their UFPs). Even more so in the case of increasingly strong and active international networks of cities that regularly meet to exchange ideas, share practices and collaborate on the topic of urban food sustainability, that ideally provide a promising space for cities to influence each other on their best practices (Giordano, 2022). For all of these reasons, the choice was to investigate the cases of Barcelona and Milan. These two cities share various similarities in terms of urban food governance, but also present one main difference: Barcelona's UFP is one of the very few, worldwide, to consider gender equality throughout its policy, while Milan's UFP never mentions gender differences (Bergonzini, 2024a;[8] Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). Both cities were also considered appropriate as they are very active in urban food

[8] This review was performed as a preliminary analysis to detect possible case studies for this research.

governance, not only internally – with a variety of implementation initiatives of their UFPs and a vast pool of AFNs actively working on their territory – but also externally, as they regularly engage in national and international projects with other cities and institutions to boost the potential of their actions. In this context, Milan and Barcelona also collaborate often with each other – for example, they are currently involved, along the city of Utrecht, in the Cultivate EU project (Davies et al., 2025) – and are two of the most prominent examples of urban food governance in Europe. The following paragraphs provide deeper contextual data about urban food governance in Barcelona and Milan.

2.2.1 Milan

Milan launched its UFP in 2015 during its hosting of EXPO – which was titled "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life" – and in the same year, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact was announced. Although these are sometimes considered as EXPO's legacy for the city, experts who participated in the UFP project agree on the fact that interest around the topic of urban food systems had already been rising in the previous years, especially among citizens that were active in various bottom-up initiatives, mostly related to the Parco Agricolo Sud (Southern Agricultural Park), and among a few pioneering policy makers, researchers and administrative representatives that had started learning about international experiences of urban action on food sustainability (Bergonzini et al., In press; Calori, 2022; Calori & Magarini, 2015; Davies et al., 2025; Minotti et al., 2022; Salvador, 2024). However, the international attention that EXPO brought to the city was surely significant, as it was possible to leverage it to reinforce the legitimization of the topic of food – and thus the use of funds and resources towards it – in a period when, at least in Italy, UFPs were not yet spread or recognized as important governance tools (Bergonzini et al., In press). In this context, the research center ESTà[9] proposed to the Municipality of Milan and to Cariplo Foundation[10] to start working on a general urban food strategy, and the three signed a memorandum of understanding in 2014, that was followed by an in-

[9] www.assesta.it
[10] A local foundation that funds diverse projects related to sustainability, www.fondazionecariplo.it

depth analysis and mapping of Milan's food system by EStà (2018) and a citizens consultation phase to define priorities (Calori, 2022). Meanwhile, the Municipality also led talks with international cities that were already active in urban food governance with the aim of drafting the text of what then became the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. The MUFPP was defined by Magarini – director of Milan Food Policy at the time of writing – as «the first attempt at joint work between cities on these issues and [it] builds the largest global community of practice on food policies» (Magarini, 2022, p. 402, my translation from Italian). Indeed, the MUFPP is an international network of cities worldwide that are working, in various ways, on urban food sustainability. It promotes the sharing of practices and peer-learning, as well as funds some good practices through the Milan Pact Awards (MUFPP, 2023). At the moment of writing, in 2025, signatory cities are around 300.[11] The MUFPP also produced guidelines for cities willing to embark on urban food governance from scratch, as well as a monitoring framework, but all documents are suggestions, so implementing them is not mandatory for signatory cities, and indeed sometimes signing is only a symbolic gesture that is not necessarily followed by concrete actions (Candel, 2020; MUFPP, 2018; Polman & Bazzan, 2023). Surely, the presence of the MUFPP Secretariat in Milan contributed to the affirmation of Milan's reputation as a pioneering city and international example for urban food sustainability (Giordano, 2022).

Over its first ten years, the Milan Food Policy grew in size and became more institutionalized, as it moved from being a part of the International Relations Office, to being a self-standing office, that now refers to the Education department (Bergonzini et al., In press; Calori, 2022; Marino & Mazzocchi, 2022; Minotti et al., 2022). The city of Milan, through its Food Policy, has participated and is still participating in many European projects (Magarini & Mazziotti, 2022), that have granted consistent funding – together with the continuous support of Cariplo Foundation – to a municipal office that, internationally and historically, has struggled with funds (and general legitimization):

[11] See https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/our-cities/ for the updated list.

indeed many cases exist worldwide of UFPs that had to downsize their objectives, or even failed, due to lack of resources (Hawkes & Halliday, 2017).

The five priorities of the Milan UFP are: i) ensure healthy food and water for all citizens; ii) promote the sustainability of the food system; iii) promote food education; iv) fight against food waste; v) support scientific research in agri-food sector (Comune di Milano, 2015). The main lines of work that the Municipality has developed since 2015 regard mostly the following domains: i) food waste, through the internationally acclaimed tool of local food waste hubs that received the Earthshot Prize in 2021,[12] ii) food education, through a variety of initiatives related to school canteens that regard food waste and public procurement, as well as food education in schools, and, more recently, iii) food production – thanks to the fact that the competences for agriculture were also moved to the Food Policy Office –, through the promotion of farmers' markets and the managing of public agricultural land (Bergonzini et al., In press). It is also important to mention that, since 2014 when the UFP project started taking shape, Milan has been administered by the same party – the leftist Partito Democratico. In 2014 and 2015 the mayor was Giuliano Pisapia, and in 2016 Giuseppe Sala, from the same party, was elected and kept many of the previous administration's members – formerly, he was the commissioner for EXPO. He was also re-elected in 2021. This is strongly relevant, as literature has often recognized political turnover as a hindering factor for urban food governance, as it is not yet a "traditional" urban governance matter, and therefore its presence in urban governments' agendas is still very much connected to the personal visions and commitment of parties and politicians (Sonnino et al., 2019, Bergonzini, 2025b). A further demonstration of the Municipality's commitment to the UFP is that the political responsibility along its first ten years has belonged to the vice-mayor, Anna Scavuzzo, instead of specific directories, as is often the case in other cities.

Meanwhile, the «fertile ground» of citizen initiatives that Calori (2022, p. 24) identified as an enabling factor for the UFP development in 2014-2015 kept working, and to this day the city of Milan

[12] https://earthshotprize.org/winners-finalists/city-of-milan/

is characterized by the presence of diverse AFNs acting on various food-related issues (Davies et al., 2025), such as GAS (Gruppi d'Acquisto Solidale, solidarity purchasing groups) (Rossi & Brunori, 2010), food waste collection and redistribution initiatives, and more. However, the city of Milan has never implemented a food council along its UFP's first ten years, contrarily to what most cities do when approaching the theme of urban food sustainability. Indeed, while at first some studies for the implementation of a food council were performed (Calori, 2015; Calori & Magarini, 2015b), at the moment participation happens mostly upon invitation, through moments of co-planning (*coprogettazione*) or through the tool of the communities of practice (*comunità di pratica*) (Bergonzini et al., In press; Minotti et al., 2022). As anticipated, this research also investigates the spaces for and dynamics of dialogue between institutional and grassroots forms of urban food governance, therefore further details about this topic will be discussed in the chapter about results.

To summarize, then, Milan is definitely the pioneering city in Italy, and arguably one of the most relevant in Europe and worldwide, for urban food governance. Its role of example is not only related to the success of some of the actions it has implemented since the launch of the UFP, but also thanks to the existence of the MUFPP, that allows for continuous exchanges with international cities. Also, its UFP has existed for ten years, surpassing the first deadline of 2020 that was included in the very first title "Guidelines for Milan Food Policy 2015-2020" (Comune di Milano, 2015). For these reasons, the Milan UFP was studied and analyzed in various occasions, and monitoring data and studies about its results are available. However, as for the topic of this research, attention to gender differences throughout this decade of activity is scarce, if not absent – as will be addressed in the results chapter –, even though the MUFPP guidelines include some references to the need of accounting for gender differences (MUFPP, 2018).[13] Indeed, some critique has arisen about the fact that the UFP focuses mostly on numerical results, such as kilograms of CO2 that were saved by recovering food waste, and not enough on the social impact of its actions (Bergonzini et al., In press).

[13] E.g., suggested indicator 28 is "Proportion of total agricultural population – within the municipal boundaries – with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land for food production, by gender", while for suggested indicator 13 ("Prevalence of overweight or obesity among adults, youth and children") they state the need for disaggregation by gender.

Considering its prominent role internationally and the potential this city holds to influence other cities' actions and policies, it was considered particularly interesting to investigate this case.

2.2.2. Barcelona

Barcelona's UFP is titled Estratègia de Alimentació Saludable i Sostenible Barcelona 2030 and it is, compared to Milan's, much more recent, as it was officially launched in 2022 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b).[14] However, Barcelona was already quite active, locally and internationally, to position itself as a city that acts on urban food systems, and the launch of the UFP was one of the results of this process. Already back in 2015, when the MUFPP was announced, Barcelona signed it and presented its application to host one of the future MUFPP Global Forums, and indeed in 2021 the city hosted the 7th edition, during which the Barcelona Challenge for Good Food and Climate was launched to other MUFPP signatory cities (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 13), thus tying Barcelona's name to an internationally known initiative related to urban food governance. In the same year, a first analysis and mapping of Barcelona's food system was published (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2021), and Barcelona was named World Capital of Sustainable Food. This event allowed the city to draw more attention to the topic of sustainable urban food systems, and consequently direct more resources to it, as well as contribute to its political legitimization and spread among public opinion, for example through cultural events (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, pp. 7, 9; Bergonzini, 2025b). Somehow, this event could be compared to what EXPO was for Milan, as both events helped with the legitimization of food as an urban policy issue and helped raise awareness among citizens, however it is interesting that while for Milan, EXPO and the UFP launch represented the start of the process that led the city to becoming a renowned example of urban food governance, for Barcelona the 2021 events and the 2022 launch of the UFP seem more like a final result of a process that started in 2015 with the signature of the MUFPP (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 13) and from which, onwards, a new phase started.

[14] See page 13 of this document for a graphical representation of the main steps that led to the launch of the UFP.

What's more, is that Barcelona's UFP document is much longer than Milan's, and it contains detailed explanations as to why and how the city decided to embark on the project of a UFP. More specifically, before listing the nine objectives of the UFP (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 21), the document provides a summary of the main challenges of Barcelona's food system, and one of them is gender inequality. It says:

> «La inseguretat alimentària afecta majoritàriament les dones. Les desigualtats entre homes i dones es reflecteixen tant en els treballs productius del sistema agroalimentari (cotitzacions, registre en el cens agrari, bretxa salarial, reconeixement i visibilitat, etcètera) com en els treballs reproductius vinculats a l'alimentació. Els cànons culturals de bellesa dominants exerceixen més pressió normativa sobre els cossos de les dones» (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 11).
>
> «Women are more impacted by food insecurity. Differences between men and women are reflected both in productive labor of the agrifood system (contributions, registration in the agricultural census, wage gap, recognition and visibility, etc.) and in reproductive labor related to nutrition. Dominant cultural canons of beauty exert more regulatory pressure on women's bodies» (my translation from Catalan).

Also, the document provides data about the public consultation process, and states that 76.9% of participants were women, out of a total of 1.053 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 16).

As for the nine objectives, they are: i) increase the production, sale and consumption of seasonal, local, organic, animal welfare-friendly foods and sustainably caught fish, as well as guarantee distribution in shorter, fairer and balanced chains; ii) protect, recover and promote urban and peri-urban agricultural spaces; iii) promote healthy and sustainable nutrition for all people; iv) increase the resilience of the food system and guarantee the right to healthy and sustainable food; v) prevent food loss and waste; vi) fight the climate emergency and the extinction crisis; vii) promote a cultural and educational change towards sustainable food; viii) promote just relationships within the food chain; ix) coordinate and mobilize food system actors to carry out specific and evaluable actions, linked to existing strategies (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022, p. 21, my translation from Catalan). All these objectives are broken down into 54 guidelines and 265 actions. In those related to the eighth

objective (just relationships in the food chain), gender differences emerge once again, when mentioning the precarization of jobs related to food, which is especially impacting women and racialized people, and when advocating for a balanced gender representation in decision-making spaces (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, pp. 68–70).[15]

Purely in terms of governance, the ninth objective is also very relevant, as it addresses the need to coordinate with other actors in relation to existing strategies. The lack of official spaces for collaboration and dialogue was also included in the list of challenges of Barcelona's food system. In this context, this does not only refer to dialogue with AFNs and actors that are not institutional, but rather also with other institutions acting on the city of Barcelona at different scales. As a matter of fact, urban action on food systems has sometimes been underestimated and/or concretely hindered by the limited competences that municipalities tend to hold over the food system – as the Ajuntament de Barcelona explicitly admits in its UFP (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 12) – but multi-level governance, albeit being called for and encouraged by experts, is often unorganized and fragmented, with divided mandates and limited dialogue among actors who hold these mandates (HLPE, 2024). The geographical area that includes the city of Barcelona, for example, was included in other food strategies. One is by the Generalitat de Catalunya (regional government) and is called Pla Estratègic de l'Alimentació de Catalunya 2021-2026 (PEAC) (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021), which was updated in 2024 into the Estratègia Alimentària de Catalunya 2024-2028 (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2024). Another one is by the PEMB (Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona, a non-profit association, sponsored and created by the Ajuntament de Barcelona and Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona [AMB] together with other local institutions, with the aim of developing various sustainability strategies for the metropolitan area of Barcelona),[16] and it is called Carta Alimentària de la Regió Metropolitana (CARM), that was developed since 2017 (PEMB, 2020). The CARM was one of the working lines of the Compromís Metropolità 2030, a broader metropolitan strategy to rethink the model of

[15] Barcelona's UFP also has a larger document version (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022a). For more details about gender integration in this version of the document, see Bergonzini & Donati, 2025.
[16] https://pemb.cat/en/us

development of Barcelona's metropolitan area in the context of climate change.[17] Also, the Diputació de Barcelona (a governance scale that corresponds to a province) launched in 2022 the report "Alimentem Barcelona" ("Let's feed Barcelona"), an over 400-pages-long practical guide to «push local food strategies» (Diputació de Barcelona, 2022). Lastly, the AMB also launched, in 2020, the Plà per a l'alimentació sostenible 2020-2023 (Action plan for sustainable food), which was later updated in 2025 (Área Metropolitana de Barcelona, 2020, 2025). The presence of all these strategies and plans regarding food at the urban, metropolitan and regional level shows a strong political commitment to the topic of food by the most relevant institutions acting on the territory of the city of Barcelona. However, according to my interview with a member of one of these institutions,[18] at first all these plans were not intertwined, nor had the responsible institutions spoken with each other to (try to) agree on aims and visions while drafting their plans. This has since changed. As explained on page 29 of Barcelona's UFP, one of the flagship projects to operationalize objective 9 was to create a collaborative office to institutionalize and give an official structure and space to the dialogue between the Ajuntament and the Generalitat about urban food sustainability plans. This office was launched in January 2023 as part of the PEMB – thus including also the AMB, which is a member of the PEMB – and is called Oficina Conjunta de l'Alimentació Sostenible (OCAS).[19] The OCAS is a very innovative governance tool that aims at organizing a dialogue that is often fragmented, and at times even inexistent, but also at boosting the transformative potential of each institution and strategy, for example by sharing practices and making the use of resources more efficient (Bergonzini, 2025b).

Two more flagship projects are presented, along the OCAS, in the pages about objective 9 (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b, p. 29): the Acord de Ciutat (sometimes called Acord Ciutadà) and Agròpolis. These are two participation spaces organized and led by the Municipality to discuss and collaborate on the sustainability of urban food systems, respectively open to institutions and

[17] https://pemb.cat/es/compromiso-metropolitano-2030
[18] Details on the interviews, interviewees and dates will be provided in the chapter about results of the fieldwork. This refers to interview B02_I of Table 1 in chapter 3.
[19] https://pemb.cat/es/proyectos/oficina-conjunta-de-la-alimentacion-sostenible

organizations (thus boosting public-private cooperation) and to citizens and various stakeholders, including AFNs. While Barcelona does not have a proper food council *per-se*, Agròpolis serves the function of granting an opportunity to share their opinions to all actors willing to do so. However, it does not hold actual power to act and legislate over it, which is what a food council should ideally be able to do according to scholars (Matacena, 2016; Sonnino & Spayde, 2014).

Barcelona has indeed a long tradition of citizens self-organization in relation to food (Davies et al., 2025), for example through consumption groups, urban gardens, and farmers' markets (Camps-Calvet et al., 2022; Espelt, 2013; Espelt et al., 2015; Williams & Sharp, 2023; Yacamán Ochoa et al., 2019). Also, the city regularly promotes and funds grassroots initiatives for social and solidary economy (*economia social i solidària*), that are often related to the food system, and indeed the UFP suggests actions to further strengthen the agency of such initiatives (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b; Espelt et al., 2015, 2017). In general, it is important to contextualize such integration of citizen participation in Spanish recent history.[20] After the 2008 crisis – which, as seen, was crucial also in developing a critical opinion towards dominant agrifood systems worldwide – the growth of the so-called 15M movement nationally, especially up to 2011, brought about a drastic increase in social participation, and since then, bottom-up initiatives have become pillars of local policies (Lopez-García et al., 2018; Moragues-Faus et al., 2017). Another contextual element is particularly relevant in studying Barcelona's urban food governance, and that is the administration that boosted most of these processes. From 2015 to 2023, thus covering most of the main steps from the MUFPP signature to the launch of the OCAS, Barcelona was administered by the leftist, social movement-born party Barcelona en comú, with Ada Colau as mayor. This party was self-declaredly feminist and strongly invested in participatory governance processes (Blanco et al., 2020; Charnock, 2018; Eizaguirre Anglada et al., 2018; Roberts, 2023). Also, the mayor herself became committed to the topic of urban food sustainability – she personally signed the prologue to the UFP (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b,

[20] For a longer historical recount spanning almost 800 years of Barcelona's food system, see Herrero & Moragues-Faus (2025).

pp. 6–7) – and pushed not only for more political commitment in the form of official plans and policies, but also for increased collaboration with higher governance scales that could complement the mandates and legislative powers of the Municipality, up to the point of creating an official governance space for this dialogue (Bergonzini, 2025b). Once again, the relevance of committed individuals in roles of power proved crucial for the legitimization and prospering of food as a policy issue in Barcelona. Since 2023, instead, the role of mayor moved to Jaume Collboni of the Socialist Party, who used to be Colau's vice-mayor. The choice to focus on Barcelona as a second case-study, then, was based on all these reasons: its recent change in administration – that provides one more contextual difference from Milan –, its integration of gender in the UFP – which sets it apart from most gender-blind UFPs worldwide –, and its strong commitment to urban food governance both on the part of institutions and of AFNs, that has granted international recognition to the city, thus making it on par with Milan as a relevant case-study.

2.3 Summary of chapter 2

This chapter has firstly discussed the object of this research, namely the role of the potential of the "interstitial space" between grassroots and institutional forms of urban food governance in pursuing a gender-just food transition. To do so, it has defined UFPs and AFNs, explained why they represent relevant forms of urban food governance, and why the "interstitial space" between them is considered potentially transformative, as well as the state of the art of gender integration in these processes and spaces. Then, the chapter has presented the main research question – what governance space holds most potential for a gender-just urban food transition? – along with supporting questions about gender differences in urban food systems. Lastly, the two case-studies of Milan and Barcelona have been introduced, with a brief description of both cities' urban food governance context.

Chapter 3: Results from fieldwork in Milan and Barcelona

Chapter abstract: The third chapter presents the results from fieldwork in Milan and Barcelona. It first introduces the research methods, comments on the positionality of the research, and provides a list and maps of conducted interviews. Then, it discusses the main results, which are divided into three main topics that mirror the interview questions, namely gender differences, governance relations, and potentialities of urban food governance. A paragraph is dedicated to each topic and the subthemes that constitute them. The most striking results regard the feminization of urban food governance, that is however not causing the presence of strategies to guarantee gender equality in this context, the importance of informal relations among practitioners to overcome practical limitations such as bureaucracy and time constraints, and the necessity of an intersectional perspective. The chapter ends with an overview on the connections between the results from the three topics of analysis (gender, governance relations, potentialities).

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews

The research object presented in the previous chapter focuses on processes and relations in a context that so far has not been much investigated in literature, and therefore it was considered that using qualitative methods would be the most appropriate approach. Indeed, qualitative research is «particularly suited when theory is underdeveloped, providing a useful tool to discover and understand a phenomenon […] and should be adopted when the focus is on the process» (Belina, 2023, p. 334).

More specifically, it was decided to use semi-structured interviews, to allow for a fair level of standardization – to make sure all interviews touched upon the main themes of the research, namely gender differences and dynamics in the interviewee's organizations' actions, and governance and relational dynamics between institutions and AFNs – but, at the same time, to leave a large amount of freedom to interviewees to raise topics and issues related to the main research theme, thus combining flexibility and structure (Belina, 2023; Bichi, 2011; Ritchie et al., 2013; Roulston & Choi, 2018; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). As presented in previous chapters, the theme of gender-attentive urban food governance has been under-investigated so far, and therefore interviews aimed at exploring the field and creating a broader picture of the state of the art of this topic – who is doing

what? Through which strategies and practices? Is anyone doing anything at all? – rather than starting from a (so far inexistent) confirmed and validated set of strategies and practices and controlling those specifically. This approach allows to investigate what urban food governance actors are doing in the here and now about gender differences in food systems, and to learn from practices that are already happening on the ground, rather than judge and dictate what should and could be done, since, as was elaborated, specific guidelines or successful examples to use as baseline are still lacking (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2010; Williams, 2017). Interviews have also been recognized as a good feminist research method, if they are used in a project that aims at advancing gender equality, if they are employed in way that is attentive to the interviewee's needs and to the relationship (of power, needs and reciprocity) between researcher and interviewees (this point will be further discussed in the sub-paragraph about positionality), and if they use a language that is attentive to women's realities (DeVault, 1990; Roulston & Choi, 2018).

For the same necessities of exploration, the intention was to interview urban food governance actors in Milan and Barcelona representing diverse institutions and AFNs, rather than focusing on one specific actor (or few). This also responds to the need of mapping what is happening on the ground regarding gender-attentive urban food systems transformation, and indeed the exercise of mapping helps in «representing a community of practitioners» and has the effect of «get[ting] a sense of the mass, spread and power» of alternative economies and networks (Gibson-Graham, 2011, p. 14).

To proceed with the mapping, a document analysis was performed on official documents from the two municipalities' UFPs,[21] as well as a continuous following of dedicated social media platforms,[22] to detect projects and actors involved. Also, expert sampling was used, based on previous knowledge related to my working experience in the field of urban food sustainability in Milan, and through

[21] They were retrieved by the institutional websites dedicated to the food policies of Milan and Barcelona.
For Milan: https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/food_policy.
For Barcelona: https://www.alimentaciosostenible.barcelona/es.
[22] For Milan, the Instagram account @foodpolicymi, for Barcelona, the Instagram account @alimentaciososteniblebcn.

conversations with experts of the field[23] (Patton, 2018), but also by participating in relevant conferences and events (see Table 3 in the next paragraph). From this first selection of actors (institutions and AFNs, but also specific people representing them), a snowball sampling strategy was employed, since interviewees would often mention other relevant actors that I should interview, and even provide me with their contacts and/or intercede for me in contacting them (Crouse & Lowe, 2018; Oñederra-Aramendi et al., 2023; Patton, 2018; Zerbian & López-García, 2024). Lastly, during my fieldwork I collected pamphlets and other informative material that interviewees gave me, and I kept notes about collateral information that was not specifically related to the interviews, such as my perceptions, conversations I had with interviewees out of the context of the interview, descriptions (or photos) of the spaces and activities, and challenges that I encountered. Also, on a few occasions I had the chance to observe AFNs in action, specifically when the interviewees invited me to have the interview during their activities (this happened for interviews B07_A, B09_A, B12_A, B21_A, M07_A; see Table 1 in next paragraph). On the one hand, this sometimes represented a challenge, as the interviewees had to engage in other activities and conversate with other people while answering my questions (Roulston & Choi, 2018), but on the other hand, these opportunities were useful to take more notes and understand their actions *in situ*, thus providing more benefits than challenges, and a few times some extra participants voluntarily engaged with me and told me their opinion about my questions. In any case, it is important to underline that observation was not intended to be part of the methods of this research and was not performed intentionally nor systematically.

3.1.2 List of interviews and attended events

Fieldwork to collect data for this research happened in the year 2024, after a period of preparation (corresponding to most of the year 2023) that included reviewing the literature, choosing the cities

[23] For Milan, it was based on contacts with former colleagues during my previous work at the research center ESTà, as well as my life experience of over 5 years in the city that allowed me to be familiar with many AFNs, and for Barcelona on conversations with the professor supervising my visiting period at Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya.

for case studies and analyzing information that was already available about their context (which was presented in the previous chapters). Interviews were conducted in Barcelona between March and July 2024 during a visiting period at the Universitat de Vic – Universitat Central de Catalunya, and in Milan between September and December 2024 (except for two interviews that were conducted in March 2024 before moving to Barcelona). I later went back to Barcelona between February and July 2025 for a visiting period at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, during which I did not perform any more interviews but I engaged with experts in feminist methodologies (especially the Gender and Geography group at the UAB's Department of Geography) to discuss my results and their analysis, and I had the chance to participate in more events related to my research.

Table 1 lists all the interviews I conducted, characterizing them by city (Milan or Barcelona) and type of actor, to distinguish between institutional representatives, AFNs representatives, and experts/researchers. Many times, during interviews some information would come up revealing that the interviewee actually covers multiple roles in urban food governance, for example is both active in AFNs and as researcher. The table shows which role they were contacted for and interviewed about, and between brackets it shows what other role they also cover. The final column gives more information about the institution or AFN that each interviewee represents, since, as seen in the previous chapters, the label of AFN is actually a spectrum that includes extremely different initiatives, and the types of institutions that get involved in urban food governance are also diverse and can change based on the studied city. Also, this column specifies the area of expertise of interviewed experts. A code is assigned to each interview, that will be used to refer to it throughout the thesis. Codes are anonymous but refer to the city (B or M for Barcelona or Milan) and type of interview (A for AFN, E for Expert, I for institution) for easier reading. Table 2, instead, depicts gender representation among interviewees in the two cities, divided by each type of interviewee (institutions, AFNs, experts).

Table 1: List of interviews.
Interviews conducted in Barcelona (pink) and Milan (green), with relative code, and brief description where applicable (AFNs and experts). The total is 43 (21 in Barcelona and 22 in Milan). Institutions include AMB, Ajuntament, OCAS, PEMB, Diputació for Barcelona and the Municipality's Food Policy Office and the MUFPP Secretariat for Milan. Source: author's elaboration.

Code	City	Type	Description
B01_E	Barcelona	Expert	Expert on feminism, gender and urban space
B02_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B03_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B04_A	Barcelona	AFN	Consumers cooperative
B05_A	Barcelona	AFN	Consumers cooperative
B06_A	Barcelona	AFN	Feminist urban garden
B07_A	Barcelona	AFN	Organic market
B08_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B09_A	Barcelona	AFN	Consumers cooperative and food waste collection and redistribution
B10_I	Barcelona	Institution (formerly, expert)	Institution
B11_E	Barcelona	Expert	Researcher on local food system
B12_A	Barcelona	AFN	Community kitchen
B13_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B14_A	Barcelona	AFN (formerly, expert)	Cooperative for agroecology and food sovereignty
B15_A	Barcelona	AFN	Farmers' markets
B16_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B17_A	Barcelona	AFN (also expert)	Food waste prevention foundation
B18_I	Barcelona	Institution	Institution
B19_I	Barcelona	Institution (formerly, AFN)	Institution
B20_E	Barcelona	Expert	Expert in feminism and rural issues
B21_A	Barcelona	AFN	Agroecological cooperative
M01_A	Milan	AFN	Community center (distribution of food aid boxes)
M02_A	Milan	AFN	Food waste collection and re-use in cooking workshops
M03_A	Milan	AFN	Food waste collection association
M04_A	Milan	AFN	Community center (warm meals distribution to homeless people)
M05_A	Milan	AFN	Network for food distribution to people in need
M06_A	Milan	AFN	Community center (cooking recollected food for meal distribution)
M07_A	Milan	AFN	Peri-urban vegetable garden group
M08_A	Milan	AFN	Foundation leading one of Milan's food hubs
M09_A	Milan	AFN	Ethical food delivery cooperative
M10_A	Milan	AFN	GAS
M11_A	Milan	AFN	GAS
M12_E	Milan	Expert	Expert on food systems sustainability
M13_A	Milan	AFN	Cooperative restaurant employing vulnerable people
M14_I	Milan	Institution	Institution
M15_A	Milan	AFN	Private farmers' market
M16_A	Milan	AFN (also expert)	Food aid boxes distribution project
M17_E	Milan	Expert	Expert on food systems sustainability
M18_A	Milan	AFN (also expert)	Partner association of one of Milan's food hubs
M19_I	Milan	Institution	Institution
M20_A	Milan	AFN	Organic agriculture cooperative
M21_I	Milan	Institution	Institution
M22_I	Milan	Institution	Institution

Table 2: Gender representation in interviews.
Gender representation in interviews, with details about each interviewee type divided by cities. *Milan has 22 interviews for a total of 23 people because for one AFN, two people participated in the interview (throughout the text, this interview is counted as 1). Source: author's elaboration.

City	Type of interviewee	F	M
Barcelona (21 interviews)	Institutions	6	2
	AFNs	8	2
	Experts	2	1
	Total Barcelona	**16**	**5**
Milan (22 interviews)*	Institutions	1	3
	AFNs	7	10
	Experts	1	1
	Total Milan	**9**	**14**
Total		**25**	**19**

Table 2 requires clarification about the fact that interviewees were *not* selected based on their gender, but rather on their relevance in the local urban food governance. This was aimed at avoiding a possible bias on gender attentiveness by selecting, for example, only women or only men. Indeed, most times I did not have previous knowledge of the gender of the person I was contacting, because I mostly relied on official contacts of institutions and AFNs, such as emails or social media accounts, that are simply named after that institutions or AFN. Also, in the case of interviewees that were suggested to me by other interviewees through the mentioned snowball strategy, I had no influence on who each interviewee suggested, as it was a spontaneous decision on their part. As a matter of fact, the objective was to understand what is happening in the cities of Milan and Barcelona in terms of urban food governance generally, and how gender differences belong in such context. Therefore, selecting specifically and *a priori* actors that might be more attentive to this topic[24] would have created the risk of picturing an apparently gender-sensitive context, by not including other relevant actors that show no engagement with the matter. Also, this allowed to portray gender representation in the contexts of Milan's and Barcelona's urban food governance. However, when contacting possible interviewees, they were provided with a brief presentation of the research project and its aims, and therefore they

[24] Although it is superficial to believe that women are more interested and active in gender equality themes *because* they are women, it is also true that, intentionally or not, they tend to be more actively impacted by gender discrimination, and thus to have a more developed awareness about it – indeed literature has shown that a person's gender influences their opinion on gender equality struggles (Simon & Abdel-Moneim, 2010).

knew in advance that it included the topic of gender, so this might have influenced interviewee's acceptance or refusal to participate in case of strong views (especially negative views) of the topic, although no one stated this explicitly as a reason for refusal. Clearly, I do not claim to have interviewed all – nor the majority of – people who are active in the sustainable transformation of urban food systems in these two cities. This would be impossible both because among the actors I mapped, a share never got to the interview – for reasons such as lack of reply, lack of time, or a change in their role so that they did not feel like they represented the context any longer – but also more simply because the active people are many, especially in AFNs that often rely on large groups of volunteers. However, the mapping had the objective of detecting the most relevant actors, thus arguably the ones that have a broader reach on the context and also a larger knowledge of other smaller initiatives. Also, most times by interviewing a representative for an AFN or an institution, they could provide me with data (either official or based on their perception) on gender representation within their specific organization, such as gender representation among volunteers.

In general, based on Table 2, it is visible that urban food governance in Barcelona is highly feminized, with only 5 men out of 21 interviews (around 24%). This mirrors the data presented in the UFP document about participation in the consultation process, that saw almost 80% female participation out of 1.053 participants, a much larger total number (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2022b). In Milan, such difference is not present, with 9 women and 14 men (thus men are about 64% of the interviewees). For Milan, gender disaggregated data about the citizens consultation process that led to the choice of the five UFP priorities is not available. Milan, the city where the UFP office is more institutionalized, and many AFNs are actually led by big foundations – and therefore employ people to lead them instead of relying only on voluntary work – is the one where men are more represented. While I cannot claim that this is the cause for a similar gender representation (as I have not studied this specific point), it strikes as interesting that the city with a larger presence of paid positions, even within AFNs, is also the city where urban food governance is more masculinized. This will be further discussed in the next paragraph and chapters, with support from the interview results.

Differences are also present in the share of AFNs and institutions that were interviewed. In this case, too, I did not plan any ideal number or share of interviewees for each category but rather contacted all actors that resulted from my mapping and conducted interviews with those that accepted. The fact that in both cities I conducted a similar number of interviews is in itself a casual result of this process. In Barcelona, I interviewed 8 institutional representatives from four different institutions (Ajuntament, Diputació, PEMB, AMB), and 9 AFN representatives. In Milan, I interviewed 4 institutional representatives, all from the Municipality (either from the Food Policy Office or the MUFPP Secretariat, which are both part of the Comune) and 16 AFN representatives. A seemingly fair explanation for this difference can be found in the fact that more institutions are involved in food governance in Barcelona (as previously explained) than in Milan, where higher governance levels such as the Città Metropolitana or Regione are not so active. However, there were also practical reasons related to the availability to being interviewed. Indeed, Milan's Food Policy Office is much larger than Barcelona's and employs many more people. At the time of my interviews in 2024, Barcelona's UFP team was made up of 4 people (B16_I), while Milan's of over 30 (M14_I). I contacted more than 4 people in Milan, not only via email but also by speaking to some UFP office members during events I attended (such as Event02M, Event03M), but it was difficult to receive a reply, or to find a time that suited their needs. However, in the interviews that I did conduct the interviewees were helpful in providing me with a broader vision of the whole office rather than only the projects they follow, and so were the webinars I watched (Event04M, Event05M – Table 3), during which, however, the topic of gender never came up.

Table 3 shows all the events I attended that are somehow related to my research, including academic conferences. It provides information about the event's title, the location and the date. These events were not systematically analyzed through the perspective of gender integration in urban food governance, but rather my attendance was aimed at taking notes in case relevant information about this topic was raised and at engaging with actors and experts on the field.

Table 3: List of attended events and conferences.
List of attended events and conferences during the phase of thesis writing (until September 2025). The events 5 related to Barcelona are in pink, the 5 related to Milan are in green, the 6 generic scientific conferences are in yellow. Total is 16 events/conferences. Source: author's elaboration.

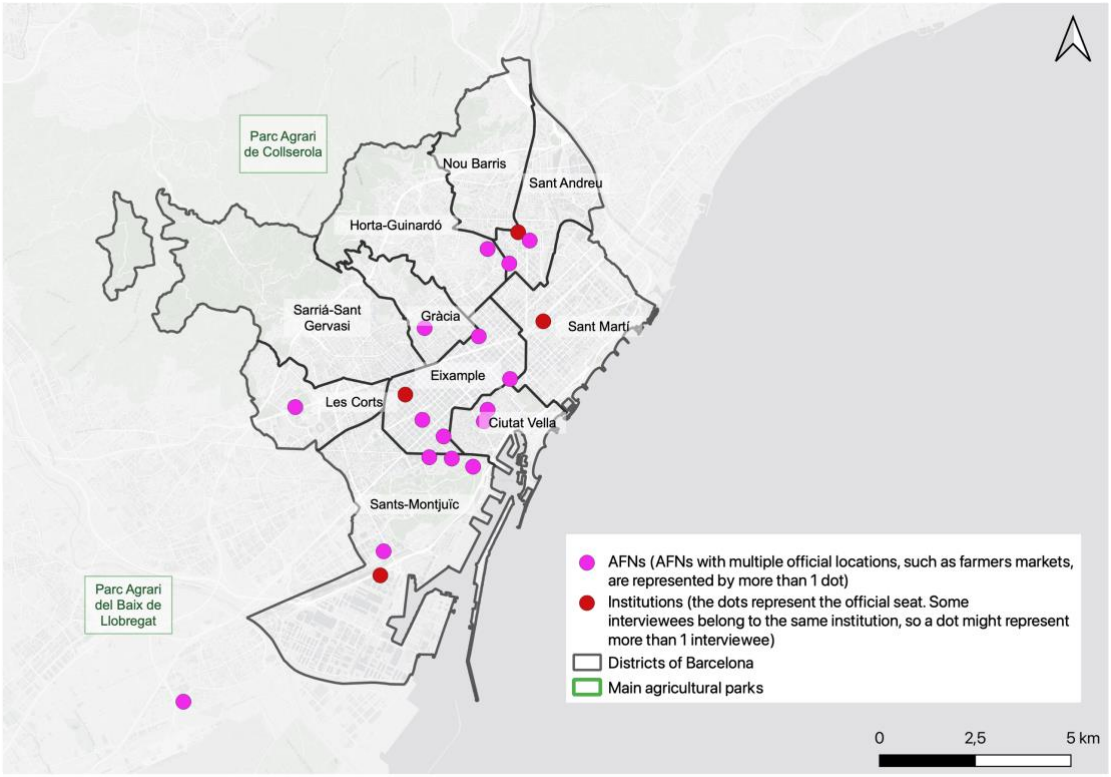
Code	Date	Where	Name of event	Organizer
Event01B	3/05/2024	Barcelona	Debate "Ecologisme i clase"	Expert – IDRA (Barcelona Institute for Urban Research)
Event02B	19/11/2024	Attended online	"Jornada de polítiques alimentàries municipals: Alimentem Barcelona"	Institution – Diputació de Barcelona and PEMB
Event03B	29/05/2025	Granollers (Barcelona Metropolitan Area)	European Symposium "Fomentar la biodiversitat cultivada a través de polítiques alimentàries locals"	Experts/AFN – Red de Municipios por la Agroecología, Municipality of Granollers, LiveSeeding project
Event04B	16/05/2024	Barcelona	Seminar on innovative feminist methodologies	Expert – UAB Gender and Geography group
Event05B	26/06/2025	Barcelona	Food Cultures and Practices Workshop	Expert – RMIT Europe
Event01M	9/10/2024	Milan	ONFOODS Convivial laboratory @ Farout Festival	Expert – OnFoods project research group of University of Milan-Bicocca
Event02M	16/10/2024	Milan	Inauguration of Cascina Cuccagna Food Waste Hub	Institution – Municipality of Milan
Event03M	23-24/10/2024	Milan	URBACT EU City Lab on Land Strategies to Feed the City	Institution – URBACT, Municipality of Milan, MUFPP
Event04M	9-17/12/2025	Attended online	Series of 5 webinars "From Waste to Worth: Rethinking Food in Cities. Milan's Best Practice of Local Food Waste Hubs"	Institution – MUFPP
Event05M	26/02/2025	Attended online	Webinar "MUFPP approach to food action on climate"	Institution – MUFPP
Conf01	19-22/06/2024	Brussels & Ghent	AESOP Sustainable Food Planning Conference[25]	Expert/Institution – AESOP, Universiteit Gent, HafenCity University of Hamburg, ILVO, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Conf02	4-6/09/2024	Turin	Association of Italian Regional Studies (AISRE) Conference, panel on local food policies[26]	Expert – University of Turin
Conf03	30-31/01/2025	Turin	National meeting of Rete Italiana Politiche Locali del Cibo	Expert/Institution – Rete Politiche Locali del Cibo, University of Turin
Conf04	11-13/06/2025	Montpellier	AESOP Workshop "Emerging voices for the changemaking of food systems"[27]	Expert – AESOP Sustainable Food Planning group
Conf05	7-11/07/2025	Istanbul	AESOP Congress, panel on food planning	Expert – AESOP, Yildiz Technical University of Istanbul

[25] Proceedings for this conference were published. I presented preliminary results for my research, and the proceedings of my intervention can be found at https://zenodo.org/doi/10.5281/zenodo.12938366 pp.102-109 (Bergonzini, 2024c).
[26] Proceedings from my intervention at this conference, where I presented my research project advancement as of September 2024, were published and can be found at: Bergonzini, 2025a.
[27] Proceedings for my intervention in this workshop were published at: https://dx.doi.org/10.17180/q8a8-pk77 pp. 19-23 (Bergonzini, 2025c).

Conf06	4-6/09/2025	Naples	Italian Society of Political Science (SISP) Conference, session on "Local food systems and their sustainable transformation: governance, participation, and grassrootss initiatives"	Expert – Naples University Federico II

Lastly, two maps (Figure 1, Figure 2) were created through QGIS-LTR (3.22 version for Mac) to represent the location of the activities of AFN and institutional interviewees[28] in Milan and Barcelona.

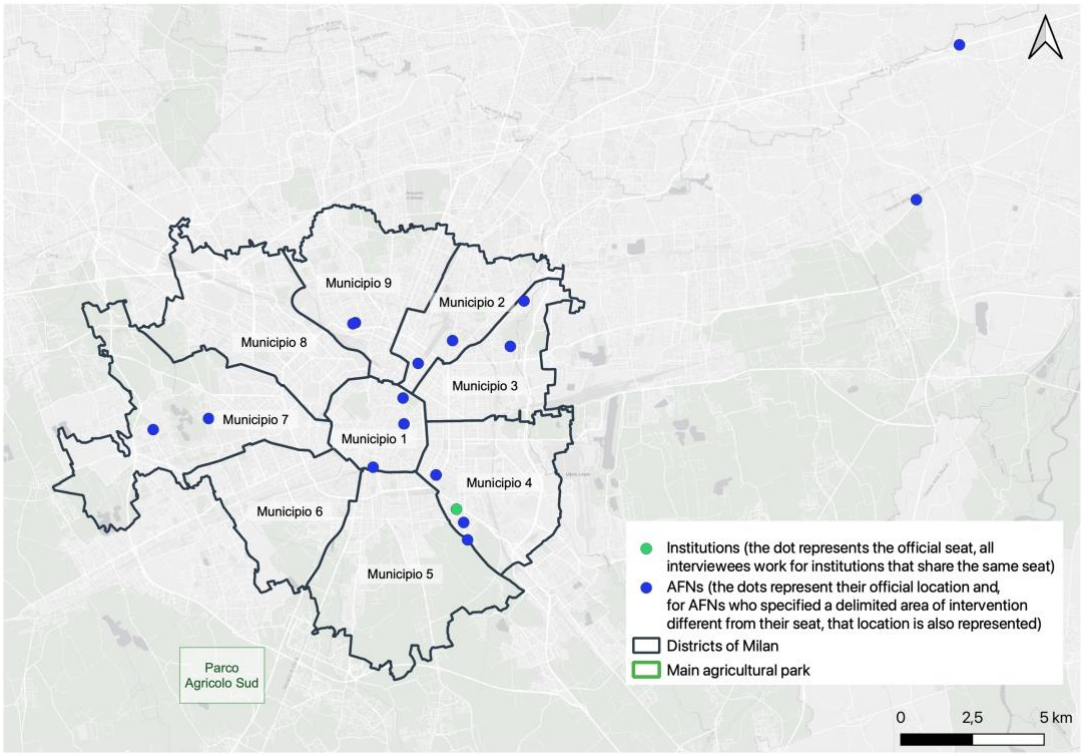
Figure 1: Location of AFN and institutional interviewees' activities in Barcelona.[29]



Source: author's elaboration based on open access data and data from interviews (district borders: Ajuntament de Barcelona, base map: ESRI gray light)

[28] Experts were not represented because their location is not considered particularly relevant as they are not practicing urban food governance actions, but rather studying and analyzing them.
[29] Thank you to Meritxell Gisbert Traveria from UAB's Geography Department for the support on this map.

Figure 2: Location of AFN and institutional interviewees's activities in Milan.



Source: author's elaboration based on open access data and data from interviews (district borders: Comune di Milano, base map: ESRI gray light)

The maps are not intended as objects of analysis, but rather as a graphic support to better grasp the main physical and spatial characteristics of both cities, how the interviewees and their activities are distributed on their territory – for interviewees who have an official seat but declared other specific areas for their actions, both were represented, thus one interviewee might be represented by more than one dot – and other relevant elements such as location of the main agricultural parks of both cities, that as mentioned are relevant in urban food governance discourses.

3.1.3 Interview contents

The semi-structured interviews focused on the two main topics of the research. All AFNs and institutional interviewees were at first asked about gender differences and dynamics within the actions of their organization (e.g., gender differences in internal representation and in external recipients, specific strategies to account for gender differences, etc.) and then about dialogue dynamics and relations between other levels of governance – for AFNs, regarding their relationship with institutions,

and vice-versa. Interviews with experts also covered both topics, but focused more specifically on the topic they are expert about (for example B01_E is expert on gender equality in cities but not food systems, so while we mentioned the topic of food, the interview focused mostly on gender equality and gender-just urban space). At the end, interviewees were asked whether they wanted to add anything that they thought was relevant but had not come up during the conversation. While this was the structured part of the interviews, which remained the same for all interviewees, follow-up questions were asked based on their answers. This allowed to explore various topics that are connected to the main research question and that each interviewee felt that were relevant. The reason to ask separately about gender differences and governance dynamics is that often interviewees would immediately state, at the beginning of the interview, that they did not have much to say about gender differences because their organization does not work on it. By keeping the two topics separate, I found that people who felt like they could not contribute on the question about gender still participated proactively in answering to the question about governance dynamics and dialogue. This was particularly useful because, although my main research question wonders *what governance space holds most potential for a gender-just urban food transition*, understanding the general dynamics of urban food governance is in itself crucial – even when not connected to gender equality –, as such dynamics can hinder or boost participation, including the possibility for gender-attentive actors (if present in the city) to raise the theme and invite others to collaborate. Finally, interviewees were asked about what they feel is the potential of urban food governance in transforming food systems.

3.1.4 Positionality

It is necessary to address some aspects related to my positionality doing research on gender differences as a female researcher with an intersectional feminist perspective, with the aim of situating the knowledge produced in this thesis (Haraway, 1988). As a matter of fact, the topic of gender equality is not yet largely shared and agreed on by society as a whole (Bardho et al., 2024; Flood et al., 2021). Although the aim of reaching actual gender equality might seem collectively shared – at

least superficially –, views about what this means and how it should be pursued vary greatly, and such views are also dependent on people's gender itself (Simon & Abdel-Moneim, 2010). Also, the meaning of the very concept of "gender" is debated and still controversial throughout society, as is the concept of "feminism". Although feminism advocates for equal rights, the (erroneous) perception that feminism actually undermines men's rights and argues in favor of women's superiority is still spread and leads various people to refusing it (Bardho et al., 2024; Christopher & Sharp, 2020; Flood et al., 2021; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023), even though in Spain this word and movement are arguably more legitimized than in Italy thanks to the implementation of the so-called "State feminism" and the use of the word in official institutional offices and administrations (Alonso et al., 2023). Lastly, the very existence of differences based on gender in a certain context is sometimes questioned, although scientific literature from all disciplines proves that actual gender equality has not been reached anywhere in the world, as demonstrated by the collection of articles organized on their website by *Nature* in 2025, to detect progress and setbacks in the 30 years anniversary of the Beijing Declaration.[30] In my personal experience during this research, at more than one presentation or conference was I asked to justify whether it is really necessary to apply a gender perspective to the context of urban food systems in countries of the Global Minority.

As previously elaborated, this thesis has an intersectional feminist perspective, since it recognizes that gender is non-binary and that other axes of potential discrimination intersect gender – such as origin, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, education, age… – to create a variety of individual situations of discrimination that go beyond "pure" gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991; Halliday, 2022). In addition, this thesis stems from the assumption that gender mainstreaming is needed, in all policies and actions aimed at transforming society, because when such approach is lacking, unconscious gender bias by policy makers risks appearing in the policy itself, and gender-blind policies tend to reinforce existing differences, including urban food policies more specifically

[30] https://www.nature.com/collections/ebfbjajfgi

(Bergonzini, 2024a; Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). However, the aim of the research was neither to convince interviewees about the need to consider gender differences in their actions, nor to push a feminist agenda. Rather, the aim is to investigate what gender differences are more relevant in the urban food systems of Milan and Barcelona, who is acting to reduce them – if anyone –, and through which strategies, to understand which governance spaces (and actors) hold most potential to act towards a gender-just urban food system in the here and now.

Since the beginning, the research considered the possibility that interviewees might state that they are doing nothing about gender differences, or that they disagree about the fact that their city's urban food system is unequal from the point of view of gender. Also, it was considered that the vision of each interviewee about the meaning of the word "gender" might differ from mine, and from that of other interviewees, based on personal views but also on access and exposure to education about these themes. For all these reasons, including avoiding discomfort in interviewees or creating a conflictual environment, the choice for words during interviews was crucial. Firstly, the question about gender differences was only asked with this wording – "gender differences", in the language of interviews "differenze di genere" (Italian), "diferencias de género" (Spanish) – so that interviewees were free to interpret the word "gender" by themselves and reply accordingly. This allowed interviewees who have a non-binary understanding of gender to bring up differences and topics that are not necessarily related to the distinction between men and women, as the question was not specifically referring to "women", but also avoided explicitly referring to gender as non-binary, and interviewees who replied by referring only to women and men were never corrected, nor asked to elaborate on whether they also consider other genders, unless they introduced the topic themselves. Generally, understanding what interviewees mean by the word "gender" was never part of the research objectives, and such wording of the question simply aimed at being clear and avoiding misunderstandings or conflicts during the interviews. It must also be underlined that the main gender differences in food systems, which were elaborated in the previous chapters, have developed historically mostly along the binary lines of women and men, so even interviewees who explicitly recognized that they believe gender is

non-binary were often only able to reply to my question with differences based on a binary vision, for example because none of the participants in their initiatives identifies (openly) in a different gender other than cisman or ciswoman. The same type of attention was dedicated to the word "feminism", that was never raised by me, unless interviewees used it themselves to refer to their actions and attitudes, in which case I used it in follow-up questions. Also, I only asked whether or not they had noticed any difference based on gender in their activities, so as not to imply that there *must* be some difference, by leaving open the option to reply negatively and putting the focus on their perception.

On another hand, it is important to be aware that this research topic might be subject to the so-called social desirability bias (Belina, 2023), leading interviewees to give replies that are not fully true if they feel like they must appear attentive to gender differences, even more so during an interview with a female researcher. However, during fieldwork I also encountered interviewees who said they were glad I was asking these questions, because they had never thought about gender implications in their actions, and they were willing to start paying more attention in the future, even by asking about examples of strategies or suggestions of things to consider to be more gender-attentive. This is in itself one more strength of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews, as such conversations were allowed specifically by the flexible form of the chosen data collection method.

Furthermore, it is important to be aware of power relations and take them into account. In this case, they not only regard the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees (Belina, 2023), but also those among interviewees themselves. Indeed, in the case of researcher-interviewee relationships, the way of choosing interviewees and their role and relevance was explained in the previous paragraph, as well as the way they were contacted and the possibility they had to choose to adapt the interview modalities to their needs, such as the mentioned cases of interviewees who responded while carrying out other activities. Also, my first messages to them already gave information about the research aims and the topics I was willing to discuss. However, what is arguably most relevant in this case is that interviewees represent different levels of governance and therefore power, such as

volunteers in self-managed AFNs versus policy makers in municipalities. Other than the difference between the power of each interviewee, it must be considered that often, these interviewees must work together, with different power dynamics between them. Indeed, Moragues-Faus et al. (2024) include power and relationships among the five most impactful factors influencing urban food governance. For example, AFNs might need to ask for funds from institutions, or request permits to operate, while institutions might want to engage AFNs in participatory projects. In the context of interviews, such interconnection could result in a watering-down of criticism towards other actors, and such possibility was considered during the analysis. For the same reason, all interviewees are anonymized, and some pieces of information were removed from the considered data, when asked by the interviewees.

3.2 Interview results

3.2.1 Themes emerged from interviews: overview

As said, 43 interviews were conducted – 21 in Barcelona and 22 in Milan. For Milan, in one AFN interview two people responded, so this case is counted as 1 interview throughout the text, but when commenting gender and type of interviewee representation, they are counted as two individuals. Thus, in total and as represented in Table 2, interviewees were 19 men (5 in Barcelona and 14 in Milan) and 25 women (16 in Barcelona and 9 in Milan), and of them, 5 were experts (3 in Barcelona and 2 in Milan), 27 were AFN representatives (10 in Barcelona and 17 in Milan) and 12 were institutional representatives (8 in Barcelona and 4 in Milan).

Findings from interviews were coded on NVivo (version 14.24.3 for Mac) through the method of thematic analysis to identify and interpret «patterns of meaning» (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). Codes were divided into three topics, mirroring the main interview questions. The first two are related to the main research topics – gender differences and governance relations –, plus a third topic addresses specifically the potential of urban food governance in transforming urban food systems

(both from the point of view of gender and more generally). Codes were assigned inductively (Adu, 2019), because an officially recognized framework of analysis about gender-attentive urban food systems does not exist (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025), and because of the semi-structured nature of interviews, that allowed interviewees to raise a variety of themes even when it was not previously planned. The result was 66 codes for the topic of gender differences, with a total of 620 references throughout the 43 interviews, 113 codes for that of governance dynamics, with a total of 1.621 references throughout the 43 interviews, and 54 codes for the potential of urban food governance, with a total of 707 references throughout the 43 interviews (see Annex 1 for the list of codes and related number of references).[31] Already from this first overview, it is clear that interviewees had more to say about governance relations and potentialities (respectively 1.621 and 707 references) rather than on gender differences (620 references), in accordance with the presented preliminary studies and literature showing that the topic of gender differences is often overlooked in this context. For example, 6 interviewees admitted to having never thought of this topic before (Annex 1, row 14) and 6 interviewees commented that although gender differences emerged in some type of data, no further attention was paid to them (Annex 1, row 59).

Later, the codes were grouped into thematic clusters based on the most recurring themes, to allow for a more organized analysis, as well as some overall considerations (Adu, 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2017). The resulting themes are extensively shown in Annex 1, which is also colored based on more and less mentioned codes (conditional coloring of columns E and F), and includes information about whether each code was mostly mentioned by male or female interviewees, by interviewees in Barcelona or Milan, and by interviewees from AFNs, institutions or experts. It must be remembered that this Annex only aims at showing the collected data and highlighting differences between results based on interviewees' attributes (gender, type of organization, city), but in no way claims that a certain

[31] Annex 1 is in text form, but an online spreadsheet is also available to facilitate dynamic consultation. It includes the full Annex but also sheets dedicated to each topic (Q1, Q2, Q3) in extended and summarized form: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BXGEWj0ymfRP99r9nBMX1w4j5-heEs-u/edit?gid=474259865#gid=474259865 The online version will remain available for a year since the thesis defense, that is happening in February 2026.

attribute directly causes interviewees to have a certain opinion. Indeed, due to previously explained reasons, attributes representation among interviewees was not completely equal (e.g., there were more female interviewees, more AFN interviewees…), and such causal relation was never investigated specifically. However, it was considered interesting to show this data, to support further and deeper reasonings and possibly detect special cases, thus favoring the exploratory character of the research. At the end of Annex 1, there are three extra codes that do not belong to any of the main research topics but were coded and included because many interviewees mentioned them, namely the importance of municipal markets in Barcelona, the relevance of the Covid-19 pandemic in influencing urban food governance, and the fact that food is often used as an instrument for other goals rather than as an aim in itself.

Annex 1 is too long to include in the text, because the total of codes is 234 and it shows, for each code, further information about number of references and sources, and attributes of interviewees. For this reason, Table 4 shows a summary and description of the main themes that were addressed for each of the main interview questions, that were presented in detail in a previous paragraph and are here referred to, for brevity, as "gender differences (Q1)", "governance relations (Q2)" and "potentialities (Q3)". The following paragraphs about each topic (Q1, Q2, Q3) will include specific summary tables as well.

Table 4: Main themes derived from clustering the codes of interview results.
Main themes derived from clustering the codes of interview results (see Annex 1 for all codes belonging to each theme), divided by the three main interview questions (Q1 gender differences, Q2 governance relations, Q3 potential of urban food governance). Information about number of sources (how many interviewees mentioned each theme) and references (how many times each theme was mentioned, including repetitions by same interviewee) is included in column 2; information about negative, positive and neutral connotation is mentioned in column 3 when applicable, and a description for each theme is provided in column 4. Source: author's elaboration.

MAIN THEMES RELATED TO EACH TOPIC	NUMBER OF SOURCES / REFERENCES	CONNOTATION (when applicable)	DESCRIPTION
Q1 gender differences	43 / 620		
Theme 1: CONTEXT	39 / 223		Contextual elements that are relevant to gender differences
Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	26 / 59		Actual gender differences in the city's urban food system
Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	34 / 151		Gender representation in urban food governance
Theme 4: STRATEGIES	28 / 106		Strategies for gender equality in urban food systems (implemented or imagined)

Theme 5: SETBACKS	24 / 81		Hindering factors of a gender-just urban food governance
Q2 governance relations	43 / 1621		
Theme 1: VISION	40 / 238		Elements related to actors' visions and ideas
	33 / 101	NEGATIVE	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with negative impact
	16 / 65	NEUTRAL	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with neutral impact or that could be negative or positive based on context
	24 / 72	POSITIVE	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with positive impact
Theme 2: PROCEDURES	41 / 346		Procedural elements that impact governance relationship
	34 / 204	NEGATIVE	Procedural elements that impact governance relationship negatively
	38 / 115	NEUTRAL	Procedural elements that could impact governance relationship both negatively and positively (or have no real impact)
	15 / 27	POSITIVE	Procedural elements that impact governance relationship positively
Theme 3: RELATION DYNAMICS	42 / 661		Relevant elements for actors' relations, and dynamics of relations
	32 / 111	NEGATIVE	Negative aspects of governance actors' relations
	40 / 236	NEUTRAL	Neutral aspects of governance actors' relations (or aspects that can be both positive or negative based on context)
	39 / 314	POSITIVE	Positive aspects of governance actors' relations
Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS	42 / 376		Governance elements that impact relations
	22 / 49	NEGATIVE	Governance elements that impact relations negatively
	41 / 290	NEUTRAL	Governance elements that impact relations neither positively nor negatively (or one of the two, based on context)
	18 / 37	POSITIVE	Governance elements that impact relations positively
Q3 potentialities	43 / 707		
Theme 1: IMPACT	40 / 318		Actual or imagined impacts: what is the potential or urban food governance? What has it already done and what could it do?
Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	31 / 129		Factors that support the potential impacts of the previous theme
Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	35 / 127		Factors that slow down impact potential
Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	35 / 133		Other factors that might be positive or negative based on context

From Table 4, it is immediately clear that interview results about Q2 are more specific, complex and varied, as was suggested also by the larger number of references that was previously mentioned. This is probably due to the fact that this question regards more straightforwardly each interviewee's lived experience in their initiatives to transform the food system of their city. About this topic, interviewees mostly addressed the relevance of each actor's vision and ideas (Theme 1), the impact of procedures

such as bureaucratical processes and practicalities (Theme 2), general relational dynamics between actors (Theme 3), and other elements related to governance that impact such dynamics, like the existence or absence of a policy, international networks, and the role of other actors such as the academy and private companies (Theme 4). All these themes have been referred to either with a positive or a negative connotation, or sometimes neutral, and such difference is represented in Table 4. To explain the rationale for such distinction, the example of Theme 1 for Q2 can be useful. Regarding this theme related to actors' vision and ideas, 15 interviewees expressed that a difference in political views influenced negatively the chance to engage in dialogue and collaboration with other governance actors (code "political conflict" in Annex 1), while 12 expressed that sharing a vision with other actors is an important element for a successful collaboration or dialogue (code "importance of sharing a vision" in Annex 1). Also, 14 interviewees simply spoke of the relevance of AFNs' political stance, which could be of agreement or disagreement towards institutions, and therefore such code ("AFN political stance" in Annex 1) was considered neutral as it could influence dialogue positively or negatively depending on the context. It is also important to underline that the same interviewee might have addressed the same theme both positively, negatively and neutrally. Indeed, they do not necessarily exclude each other, because the interviews were not about the interviewee's relation to a specific actor on a specific project, but rather in general to other urban governance actors over time, and therefore a single interviewee might have had different experiences while relating to different actors or situations.

Next, a paragraph is dedicated to each main topic of the interview: gender differences, governance dynamics, and potentialities of urban food governance. Despite the richness of codes and references about Q2 and Q3, for the sake of this thesis only Q1 will be presented in its entirety, while Q2 and Q3 themes and codes will be presented and analyzed by focusing on those that are relevant to gender differences and the gender-just transformation of urban food systems. The main points raised by interviewees, even when not referring to gender differences, will still be presented briefly, nevertheless the focus will remain on codes (and specific interview contents) that are more strongly

connected to the research topic, either explicitly by interviewees, or that were not connected to gender differences by interviewees but could be read from a gender perspective. The full information on interview results, including codes that will not be extensively presented due to their little connection to gender differences, remains available in Annex 1. Lastly, these paragraphs aim at presenting the results and highlighting some relevant excerpts and points, while their interpretation in light of the theoretical framework will be conducted in the following chapter.

3.2.2 Themes emerged from interviews: gender differences

The topic of gender differences received 620 references, covering 66 different codes. Table 5 lists all the codes, and clusters them into 5 main themes. The themes regard contextual elements that are somehow related to gender differences in food systems (Theme 1: context), actual differences detected by interviewees in their urban food system (Theme 2: actual differences), gender representation in urban food systems and in the interviewees' experience of them (Theme 3: representation), strategies that interviewees either already apply, or imagine could be applied, to make urban food systems more gender equal (Theme 3: strategies), and lastly setbacks, meaning hindering factors that make it harder for urban food governance actors to either consider gender equality at all, or successfully implement it even when it is considered (Theme 5: setbacks). When reading Table 5 (and future tables for Q2 and Q3, too), it is important to consider that when a theme consists of fewer codes, it does not necessarily mean that it was mentioned less. For example, from Annex 1 and Table 4 it is visible that, in Q1 (gender differences), Theme 1 (context) had 223 references, while Theme 5 (setbacks) had 81, although the latter is made up of more codes. This is because some codes belonging to Theme 1 were mentioned many times, such as "care work / motherhood" that received 40 references, "intersectionality" that received 42 and "family roles and ties" that received 36, all belonging to Theme 1. In Theme 5, instead, the most mentioned code is "lack of awareness about this [gender differences]", with only 10 references (see Annex 1 for details).

Table 5: Thematic clusters for codes belonging to Q1 (gender differences).
Thematic clusters for topic Q1 (gender differences), with complete list of codes belonging to each theme. See Annex 1 for further details. Source: author's elaboration.

1 CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS (that are relevant to gender differences)	4 ACTUAL DIFFERENCES (in the considered urban food systems)	3 GENDER REPRESENTATION (in urban food governance activities)	4 STRATEGIES (implemented or imagined)	5 SETBACKS (of urban governance's potential for gender-just urban food systems)
• Care work/motherhood • family roles and ties • cultural understanding of gender • Men seen as bosses • food as a more feminine topic • gender as a transversal theme • intersectionality • gendered knowledge • patriarchal relations and attitudes • rural world is very masculine • self-admittedly no attention to gender • sexist environment • Spanish state situation on gender • women belong to the home **TOTAL: 14 codes**	• food labor • differences in access to land • feminization of poverty • few women in distribution sector • access to sustainable food • internal gender related conflict • new life attitude by participating in AFN • restaurant sector • women representation in food production **TOTAL: 9 codes**	• more women involved • gender differences in recipients • internal gender roles • lack of planning of gender roles • self-perception as gender equal • AFN founded by women • gender representation in institutions • internal gender representation **TOTAL: 8 codes**	• existing but insufficient attention to gender • attempted but left mid-way a more structured gender perspective on UFP • feminism as organization principle • funding request asks for gender data • gender equality indicator for activities • gender goal but no real reflection • importance of data to visibilize differences • imposition of creating gender attentive indicators • indicator for gender representation in their activity • internal body for care work • only open to women • responsibility must be shared • strategy to let women be involved • use of inclusive-feminine language • visibilization of gender differences in food systems through events and blogs • willing to work more on gender • women in charge of directive roles on purpose • first feminist, then food system transformative **TOTAL: 18 codes**	• gender differences as one more checklist point to address • aware of different access but no connection to gender • gender differences emerge in data but no attention paid to it • gender equality is an invisibilized topic in food systems • if not necessary, no attention to it because of workload • lack of awareness about this • need to overcome the simple data on number of men and women • no actor specifically involved on gender equality in UFP • no concrete impact of gender equality goal • not right space to talk about gender • practices are feminist but no awareness of it • problem of binarism of gender data • risk of gender equality claims remaining abstract • risk related to normalization of feminism • self-define as feminist but lacking explicitly feminist approach • spontaneous and not intentional attention to gender • time and effort cost does not allow to spread the topic internally **TOTAL: 17 codes**

3.2.2.1 Contextual elements: feminized care, masculinized rurality, lack of awareness

The theme that received most mentions was Theme 1, about contextual elements which cause, or are caused by, gender differences in food systems. Among its codes, two of the most mentioned are related to traditional gender roles within the household, namely "care work / motherhood" with 40 references and "family roles and ties" with 36 references. This data seems to confirm what literature already suggested about the relevance of the household micro-scale in investigating gender differences in urban food systems (Fodor, 2022; Lopez-García et al., 2018). What's interesting is that care is mentioned in diverse ways, as a burden, a responsibility, a positive attitude and more (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*). For example, the strong feminization of care labor is mentioned as a burden on women, which sometimes makes it difficult for them to actively participate in urban food governance initiatives (B04_A, B17_A, M02_A), but at the same time this burden is visible in many food distribution initiatives whose beneficiaries are mostly women (B02_I, M01_A, M05_A, M18_A), due to the fact that they are often responsible for their household's nutrition. M13_A said that, during food aid distribution in the period of Covid-19, «you could really feel the difference between women "beneficiaries" of actions and men "decision makers" of those actions», as most food aid recipients were women, who did have some power to choose their preferred food box contents, but «then, what could they do with that food box? Go home, be in the kitchen, and work more [to cook that food]», while on the other hand most decision makers in institutions managing the initiative were men. B08_I even said that, sometimes, projects that aim at engaging families are intentionally targeted primarily at women, because they tend to be the entry point to get in touch with households. This latter consideration was sometimes related to broader considerations on the cultural understanding of gender especially in areas and neighborhoods with large migrant communities, such as the Fondo neighborhood in Santa Coloma, a municipality in the Barcelona metropolitan area (B02_I), and the Calvairate neighborhood in Milan (M18_A). However, interviewees also warned against believing that such care labor division has been overcome among native citizens and only regards the cultures of migrant communities, because this is not the case. For example, B15_A

considers that, in Spain, the act of cooking is still mostly done by women, although male shoppers at farmers' markets are increasing, while B14_A says that responsibility over care labor in households still follows a gendered division.

These statements clearly intersect with the code about intersectionality. Indeed, M18_A mentioned that her AFN interviewed the people who went to collect their food boxes (mostly women, mostly with a migration background) to understand whether they liked the products that were inside the boxes. Answers revealed that sometimes they did not know how to cook them, for example some women said they did not have a *moka* machine – typical tool in Italian households – so they could not use the type of coffee provided that was specific for *moka*, or they did not know some vegetables because they are not common in their traditional cuisine, like artichokes that are not common in Chinese cuisine (M05_A). Moreover, the topic of care is also raised as a probable explanation to justify the larger presence of women among many of the interviewed organizations, or in general in urban food governance spaces. B09_A, B10_I, B17_A, B21_A, M03_A, M21_I all state that there is a strong connection between food and care, and indeed a larger presence of women in their respective contexts is probably due to the fact that acting on the sustainability of urban food systems «is ultimately an act of care» (B10_I). Partially connected to this code is the code "food as a more feminine topic". Indeed, not all interviewees explicitly connected their perception of food as more feminine to its undertext of care, but they associated urban food governance actions to social (B17_A, B08_I) and environmental (M03_A) aims, that in their opinion tend to engage women more than men. Therefore, we both find a vision of care as forcibly feminized, meaning that care labor is a burden on women's shoulders, and a vision of care as a positive attitude that mostly belongs to women. Indeed, care was also mentioned as a positive characteristic of urban food sustainability initiatives, for example local markets can become a space of care for the neighborhood (B01_E), and sustainable peri-urban agriculture initiatives are a way of caring for the Earth and soil (M11_A). Such diverse connotations of the topic of care show that, while performing care is positive (caring for others, for the environment, etc.), the responsibility for it must be shared, otherwise it is performed out of

necessity, rather than attitude/desire, and consequently becomes a burden rather than an opportunity (Williams & Sharp, 2023; Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*). As a matter of fact, the need to share responsibility is one of the most mentioned codes in Theme 3 about strategies to overcome gender inequality.

Despite the strong feminization of food-related care that was discussed so far, interviewees also mentioned quite often the code "rural world is very masculine". Indeed, the strongly feminized phases of the food chain are the last ones, related to the nutrition of individuals and households, and ultimately to the unpaid and unrecognized labor needed for people to feed and be fed. On the contrary, the productive phases related to the agrifood industry are more masculinized (OECD, 2022). A majority of men was indeed detected in markets (M19_I, B15_A), in agricultural cooperatives (M20_A), and among producers who work directly with GAS (M10_A). M03_A also mentioned that, when her AFN collects surplus food at the wholesale market of Milan, the environment is often sexist – most volunteers are women while most workers at the market are men. However, no other interviewee raised the topic of sexist environments as a reason for a lower female representation in these contexts, but rather they mostly connect such underrepresentation to a cultural understanding of gender. For example, M20_A said that when social services send people to work at his cooperative (which employs people facing social exclusion), very often they do not even consider sending women. It is interesting that such male prevalence is not to be found in the case of B17_A's AFN, whose activity resembles normal agricultural activities, but is actually aimed at harvesting products that do not comply with selling standards (for example due to unconventional shape) and would otherwise be left on the field to rot. She says that, while the task in itself is harvesting, and could seem more masculine, the majority of volunteers are actually women. She connects this to the fact that such harvesting is done with an idea of care and for free, rather than productively, but also with slower rhythms (due to them being volunteers and not aimed at profit) and secondary aims such as spending time outside.

One more interesting code from the contextual theme is “Spanish State situation on gender”. Obviously, it was raised only by interviewees in Barcelona, who often said that in Spain it has become natural and spontaneous to at least mention gender differences when planning a project or policy (B02_I, B03_I, B06_A, B08_I, B10_I, B16_I, B17_A, B19_I, B20_E). However, such spontaneity is not always intended positively. While B02_I says that Spain in general, but even more so Catalunya and Barcelona, are quite serious about applying this perspective, others believe that considering gender differences is sometimes more a claim or a checklist item that must be included but does not necessarily translate into concrete and operational actions to implement it (B06_A, B11_E, B14_A, B20_E). B14_A says that sometimes, including gender perspectives is a matter of «aesthetics», but not always «ethics and aesthetics go together». In general, though, awareness at least about the fact that gender differences exist, and that public policies should consider them, seems fairly spread. At the same time, both in Barcelona and in Milan, some interviewees admitted that they had not previously thought of the gender implications of their activities (B04_A, B10_I, B11_E, M10_A, M12_E, M14_I, M17_E), and others believe their consideration of gender is insufficient (B08_I, B10_I). This shows that the existence of theoretically favorable political contexts, such as the Spanish one, do not necessarily always lead to a broad awareness and implementation of gender integration (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025), again confirming the need to investigate the specific governance spaces, actors and practices that hold most potential to transform urban food systems in a gender-just way.

3.2.2.2 Main gender differences in Milan and Barcelona’s food systems: food chain labor, gender-based conflict and feminization of poverty

Theme 2 is about the specific gender differences that interviewees detect in their own food initiatives. It is fundamental to remember that many interviewees said they had not thought of this topic before the interview and thus started thinking about it in that very moment. Consequently, not all answers are based on officially collected data, but rather on their first-hand experience and perceptions. For this reason, this paragraph does not aim at describing in detail and comprehensively all the gender

differences of Milan and Barcelona's food systems, but rather to explore the ones that are more visibly present and immediately impacting the activities of the interviewees.

Overall, most codes belonging to this theme are related to work and labor in the food chain. The most mentioned are "women representation in food production" and "food labor", which are both strongly connected to the code "rural world is very masculine" from Theme 1.[32] This shows that the previously discussed cultural understanding of gender roles in the food chain is confirmed empirically by a larger presence of men working in food production. However, M14_I says that women working in agriculture-related fields (such as agronomy) are increasing, and M19_I says that, among the people who rent Milan's public land to run agriculture businesses, there are many «wives and mothers»: they do not have an official statistic on gender, and very few businesses start from women entrepreneurs, but women's relation to the family makes it so that they somehow participate, and over time many become very active. Other areas related to working in the food chain that interviewees find to be unequal from the point of view of gender are the restaurant sector, where women are more present in positions of waiting (B17_A, M01_A), and the distribution sector, such as logistics (B10_I, M09_A) and farmers' markets (M19_I), where women are very few compared to men. Apart from differences in food chain labor, interviewees raised other types of differences that highlight the still discriminatory environment of urban food systems, even in countries of the Global Minority, which, as said, are sometimes erroneously considered to have overcome this type of discrimination. For example, women still tend to feel discriminated against in group dynamics, like assemblies in AFNs (B05_A, B06_A, B20_E), and in one case it was necessary to install a care commission to avoid violent attitudes (B05_A). Also, the feminization of poverty is visible in many initiatives that deal with vulnerable people (B17_A, B21_A, M05_A), for example M05_A says that volunteering in a

[32] Co-occurrence of codes is represented in Annex 2, which is only available as an online shared spreadsheet as it is too large to be transferred onto a text document. It includes co-occurrence among all codes of the research represented through conditional coloring, and specific sheets for each topic (Q1, Q2, Q3). It was simply used as a support for the analysis, to detect strong relations between codes, but was not analyzed in itself. It is available here until February 2027: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VCqQH41xK3CnDOYF23k7-RjByvTJzJ70/edit?usp=drive_web&ouid=111534997961685524607&rtpof=true

food bank made her realize that the profile of vulnerable people attending the food distribution is almost always feminine, «it's very rare to see a man». M02_A, who represents a startup that collects wasted food and uses it to organize cuisine workshops led by migrant cooks who are facing unemployment,[33] said that they do not intentionally select only women cooks, but among migrant communities it is more probable to come across unemployed women who are in need of a paid collaboration, and thus most of their cooks are women. This in turn relates to differences in access to sustainable food (B01_E, B02_I, B17_A, M08_A, M10_A). Lastly, interviewees underlined that joining an AFN translated into a different life attitude and practical organization (B04_A, B05_A, B14_A, M10_A, M11_A), for example purchasing food through consumers' cooperatives (B04_A, B05_A) or GAS (M10_A, M11_A) entails acquiring more fresh produce and therefore having to cook it, but also having time to organize the collective orders, and going weekly to collect them. If the household division of labor is not equally distributed, such tasks risk weighing more on women's shoulders (B14_A). Another type of difference is gender representation. It was mentioned extensively and with such varying perspectives that it was chosen to consider it as a separate theme.

3.2.2.3 Gender representation: more women as actors and recipients, less in power positions, little awareness or planning of representation

The most mentioned code of Theme 3 (representation) is "more women involved". It was mentioned by 21 interviewees and strongly relates to previous considerations about attitudes of care and cultural understandings of gender and familiar relations. It is interesting to distinguish between types of involvement, especially between unpaid roles – like volunteer roles or unpaid roles of participation, such as in workshops, trainings, or public consultations –, and paid roles. Female prevalence in unpaid positions is generally confirmed, both in AFNs (such as GAS and consumers groups, B04_A, M10_A, M11_A, workshops and community kitchens, B12_A, B21_A, and general volunteering in various AFN activities, M05_A, M16_A, M08_A, M03_A, M21_I), and in participatory processes in policy

[33] In the fall of 2024, the startup closed.

consultations (B10_I). This is often explained by more proneness towards (unpaid) social and community-based initiatives, but also by life practicalities, such as the case of M08_A, one of Milan's food waste hubs that is based on volunteer work and sees mostly elderly women volunteers. According to M08_A, this is due to its location in a very central area which is historically wealthy and mostly inhabited by older, catholic (heterosexual) households, in which the wife is typically unemployed and engages in voluntary work. At the same time, M08_A also says that even paid positions within their organization are mostly covered by women (although the responsible person for the whole project is a man). Female prevalence, generally, is not as spread in paid positions as it is in unpaid ones. Some cases indeed see a female prevalence, like mentioned by M08_A, or M09_A, whose cooperative had for a long time only women partners – but fewer women employees in the core business (cyclo-logistic and delivery). Also, some interviewees stated that they intentionally aimed for a balanced gender representation, like B07_A or B13_I, who says the UFP team of Barcelona was always either gender balanced or more feminized, and so is the OCAS, in both cases due to intentionality (but also because in Barcelona there are more female professionals in this field, B13_I). However, the topic of hierarchical representation was also raised. For example, M14_I mentions that, «except for the Director [of the UFP]», there are many women working for the UFP office, although not as many as in other European cities that Milan engages with. M05_A, who supervises a city-wide network of AFNs, says that while volunteers are more varied, governance and management positions are mostly covered by men. M17_E also reminds that, at the early stages of Milan's UFP, many professionals working at the Municipality and pushing for its creation were young women, who sometimes had to struggle against prejudices to be taken seriously. Clearly, the fact that women «occupy much space» (B10_I) in urban food governance is dependent on the level of power (and payment) that each role entails. Generally, Barcelona's urban food governance seems more equal (or even skewed towards female majority), since also institutional positions intentionally employ many women, while Milan confirms that caring for urban food systems through voluntary unpaid labor is a feminized attitude, but hierarchically higher roles are still retained mostly by men. This

might also be related to the type of AFNs that are present in the two cities. Although it was not specifically investigated, and, as said, this thesis does not cover all AFNs of the two cities, it was still possible to detect some differences between Milan and Barcelona. In Barcelona, strongly bottom-up, small-sized and self-managed initiatives are very active (Davies et al., 2025), not only in terms of presence in the city and neighborhoods, but also in terms of engagement with broader institutional projects. For example, in the mentioned EU project Cultivate, the city of Milan is represented by the Municipality, while the city of Barcelona is represented also by an AFN. The city has a long history of social and solidary economy and citizen self-organization around food (Espelt et al., 2015; Miró, 2018). Indeed, many interviewees belong to AFNs in which all members are volunteers, and others to AFNs that they founded themselves, firstly without gaining any money from it, and over time and with struggle managing to make a job out of it, for themselves or at maximum few other people (B04_A, B05_A, B09_A, B17_A). In Milan, history of citizens self-organization (especially around the Parco Agricolo Sud) coexists with a tradition of catholic social solidarity (Calori, 2022; Muehlebach, 2012) related to big third sector organizations that organize AFN-like activities, that ultimately are not completely bottom-up, since they do involve bottom-up voluntary participation but are managed in a top-down way. A good example is M08_A, who works for a foundation that is involved in the management of one of Milan's food hubs. While it both employs some people and relies on volunteers, and the activity in itself is indeed an AFN, its organization and origin are much less spontaneous and informal, and arguably more similar to the work of institutions. In general, Milan's institutional urban food governance works more closely with big NGOs and foundations (Davies et al., 2025), like the mentioned Cariplo foundation, which has been playing an important role in the UFP since the beginning. Indeed, the topic of struggling to make a living out of such initiatives was never raised by interviewees in Milan. On the one hand, the least institutional interviewees represented community centers that organize food-related initiatives that only occupy a few hours weekly for participants and volunteers (M01_A, M04_A, M06_A), or GAS members who aim at buying groceries out of the mainstream chains, and not at making a living out of their GAS

activity (M10_A, M11_A). These actors rarely, if ever, engage formally with institutional actions of urban food governance, but also have no wish to transform their activities in a job. On the other hand, other interviewees were employees of bigger organizations (such as foundations but also other types of third sector actors) whose job was, among other tasks for their organization, to manage a certain AFN project (e.g., M08_A, M05_A, M18_A). Therefore, while most of them also mentioned the gender representation within the group of volunteers working for their respective projects, the topic of paid/unpaid roles did not come up because it was very formally (and hierarchically) organized, rather than a topic that was commonly discussed within the AFN. Again, this argument was not specifically investigated, and such consideration was born from the data analysis on interview results that did not ask a specific question about this. Still, these results give a hint of some possible cultural and historical elements that contribute to the different gender representation (and power distribution) in urban food governance roles in the two cities based on the most common types of actors performing food-related initiatives, that would be valuable to follow up on in the future.

Another quite often mentioned code (10 interviewees) is "gender differences in recipients", this time with very different contents based on the type of activity. For example, two interviewees said they work mostly with men: M03_A, whose AFN collects surplus food in markets – thus confirming the majority of men working in food production and distribution (but more women volunteers going to collect this food); M04_A, whose AFN distributes warm meals to homeless people, stated that most homeless people are men, and the few women they meet are usually with a partner. The other eight interviewees who mentioned gender differences in their recipients stated they meet more women than men. They represent varied activities, including distribution of food aid boxes (M05_A, M08_A, M16_A, M18_A), but also trainings about sustainable food (B17_A, M21_I) – M21_I organizes trainings in schools for teachers and family representatives and says that these roles are still very feminized – and actual engagement of recipients in the activity itself, such as the mentioned startup that organizes cooking workshops employing migrants (M02_A), or engagement of partner associations that are specifically targeting migrant women (M12_E). One very interesting example is

B12_A, who oversees the activities of a community kitchen for the residents (mostly elderly) of the neighborhood. The interview took place in the minutes before the activity started, so a few participants arrived during it. When asked about gender representation among participants, the interviewee said there are many more women, and asked to a male participant that had just arrived why he thought there were fewer men. He said that it is probably «because all women know how to cook, not all men can cook» (especially his age).

These two codes alone paint a very interesting picture. They demonstrate that urban food governance initiatives in Milan and Barcelona are mostly performed by women, but also mostly targeted (intentionally or not) to women. What is more, it is interesting that 62% of mentions of the code "more women involved" are from Milan (Annex 1), but this is not reflected in the interviewees' composition (in Milan there were more men interviewees, see Table 2), and neither in the distribution of power (institutional or financial), as seen previously in the distinction between paid and unpaid roles or hierarchically higher positions. Such gender representation intertwines with the topics of right to the city and feminist ethics of care, as they raise questions on who takes the responsibility to care for the collectivity and with which return (in terms of power, but also payment), as will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Another interesting code is "internal gender roles", that is to be differentiated from gender representation because it regards what roles and tasks people perform based on their gender, regardless of whether women are more, less or equally represented than men and vice versa. While many interviewees perceived their organizations as gender equal or at least without a specific gender-based division of tasks, others underline that tasks that have a more social connotation tend to be more feminized, such as GAS organizing weekly meetings for member households that receive more female participation, but «husbands go to social dinners and social trips» (M10_A), and help with tasks that require more physical strength such as moving and storing the collective orders (M11_A). Also, gender dynamics related to discussions in assemblies are sometimes still discriminatory against women (M01_A, B20_E), and in the previously mentioned case of creation of a care commission, all

members were women (and for some time, a non-binary member) (B05_A), not on purpose but because probably «we [women] have the interest in creating it».

Lastly, it is relevant to mention the code "lack of planning of gender roles". As mentioned, in the case of the UFP team in Barcelona, and later of the OCAS, gender balance was intentionally considered and applied (B13_I), B06_A is intentionally (and politically) only open to women and people whose gender is not cismen, and B07_A says her AFN appoints only women to the board on purpose. However, such awareness in the planning of gender representation lacks from most interviewees. In some cases, especially in the most informal and horizontal organizations, such representation is «casual», due to other strong variables like (free) time that people have to dedicate to these initiatives (M01_A) – although it relates to the previously discussed topic of care attitude, and the fact that women tend to be more willing to give their free time to these activities. In others, gender representation is not controlled beforehand but rather *ex-post* for reasons of data reporting (B21_A). As discussed in this same paragraph, female representation is overall granted, but becomes less present in more powerful positions, where planning and data collection could also be performed more easily (contrarily to informal, self-organized AFNs that rely strongly on volunteers and therefore accept anyone without focusing on engaging people of a certain gender). No mention was made to representation of other genders except for B05_A, as said. In general, while female representation in this context is quite spread, awareness seems to be lacking about both the prevalence of women in unpaid positions (B10_I, B09_A), and of the gender representation in higher hierarchical roles, including the prevalence of women in Barcelona and the prevalence of men in Milan, which respectively means a lack of collective awareness on the part of women of all the «space they occupy» (B10_I) (and power they have), and less societal awareness of the importance of planning gender representation to avoid situations in which most unpaid or hierarchically lower positions are covered by women and the whole context is considered feminized, but the most powerful roles belong to men.

3.2.2.4 Strategies: co-responsibility, gender-disaggregated data and the need to go beyond abstract goals

Theme 4 is about strategies that interviewees either already implement, or simply imagine that could help in improving gender equality in urban food systems in general, and more specifically in their activities. While this theme has 18 codes (the highest number of codes for a theme in Q1), it was actually mentioned much less than Theme 1 (context) and Theme 3 (representation), meaning that many codes were mentioned by few interviewees. This translates into quite a large number of (real or imagined) strategies that are, however, not commonly agreed on or shared.

The most mentioned code is "existing but insufficient attention to gender differences", with interviewees saying that their organizations somehow consider gender differences but not in a sufficiently satisfactory way. This is particularly true for project writing (B14_A, B19_I, M21_I) and policy design, where attention to gender is often added on paper because it has become normal to do it, or because of pressure, but then it is not actually implemented extensively (B10_I, B11_E, B13_I, B17_A, B20_E, M22_I). M13_A thinks that all people working in his AFN have a strong, «utopic» understanding of gender equality, but he also believes this is not sufficiently implemented in their actions, for example because board members are all men. In this case, this is also due to the fact that all women who were asked to be board members refused, as they are already *de facto* involved in decision making and prefer not to take up official roles of responsibility, but he still believes official recognition of their decision-making role would be important. Indeed, M13_A, together with B17_A and M22_I, are the interviewees who mentioned the code "willing to work more on gender".

The second most mentioned code is "responsibility must be shared". This is intended at various scales. The first scale is the household, where responsibility over food-related tasks should be shared but often is not, and women are still performing this type of task much more than men (B14_A, B15_A, M10_A, M22_I). The second scale is the AFN, especially the self-organized ones that work only on a voluntary basis, where all members should share the responsibility to carry out the tasks to keep the AFN running (M11_A, M16_A). The last scale is the macro scale of the food system, in which actors

with more power (such as private companies or investee companies over food waste issues, B17_A, M09_A), should take more responsibility than individuals. M22_I mentions the relevance of food environments over unhealthy diets and bad consumption habits, which are often blamed on the individual or on the family – most often the mother/wife – rather than the system. However, none of these interviewees could suggest a concrete strategy to ensure that such sharing of responsibility is implemented, other than a generic «spreading of the feminist discourse» (B14_A).

In terms of actual strategies, we can detect two main lines of work: one dedicated to visibilizing women's role in food systems and gender differences, and another dedicated to overcoming and/or protecting women from existing differences and discriminations. For example, many interviewees mentioned the importance of gender-disaggregated data collection, either because of a personal choice that aims at making differences visible (B14_A, B15_A, M09_A, M12_E, M14_I), or because some funding opportunities require such data in the applications and/or advancement reports (M03_A, M14_I, M21_I). Other than data collection, constructing specific indicators about gender equality in activities and representation in the organization are considered important (B07_A, B08_I, B16_I, B17_A, M05_A). B16_I said that at the moment of the interview she was working, in the context of the MUFPP, on a series of new indicators for MUFPP signatory cities to monitor their advancement in the Barcelona Good Food Challenge, and the working group had the intention of also including gender indicators. Some other proposals regard more creative ways to increase the visibility among citizens of gender differences in food systems and women's role in them, such as the use of inclusive language (B18_I)[34] and the organization of events and writing of blog posts about this topic (B10_I, B15_A, B17_A). One interesting example in this sense is the project "Dames_Bcn". B17_A explains that, during the UFP drafting, the lack of a gender perspective was noticed by someone in the team, who decided to contact some women active in the field of food governance to discuss the topic.

[34] Italian, Spanish and Catalan – the official languages of the studied cities – all have gender-based inflections in words and use the overextended masculine when referring to a group made of both women and men. The use of both masculine and feminine with the aim of explicitly including women too is increasing (e.g., "hello everyone" becoming "ciao a tutti e tutte" in Italian, rather than just "ciao a tutti"), and in Spain it is not uncommon to also hear the use of the overextended feminine to refer to groups including both men and women, although not in official settings (for example, B14_A uses it).

Contacts were quite informal and done based on personal relationships, engaging with women they already knew, «it was very natural» to involve each other in the project. The first outcome was the creation of the Instagram account @dames_bcn with the aim of showing the role of women in the local food system through pictures. They also planned on organizing an exhibition, but it did not happen, in part because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This case anticipates a relevant topic that will be discussed in the paragraph on governance relations, which is the importance of personal ties and informal networks of friendships and acquaintances in starting innovative projects. Another case that underlines the relevance of informal relations was told by M13_A. He explains that the neighborhood where his AFN is located has a Whatsapp chat consisting of about 80 local women, who are «the real territorial power» of the neighborhood, because «almost every social and cultural initiative that happens in the neighborhood either starts from or passes through» the group. Although this is an informal chat based on community ties, he says that during the Covid-19 crisis these women had a crucial role in the neighborhood, when the whole city created a network of AFNs to work on food distribution (managed by M05_A with local referents). M13_A believes this is a good example of «female protagonism» in social and community endeavors, related also to food.

As for strategies that try to address existing differences and discriminations, two AFNs created an internal care commission (B05_A, B17_A) to control and prevent acts of violence, and one (B07_A) says they assign directive positions to women on purpose. Other strategies to make women's participation easier include scheduling meetings and trainings at times that are usually not dedicated to care labor and even providing childcare when possible (B17_A),[35] designing projects specifically targeting women and mothers (M05_A), allowing women workers to receive paid menstruation leave (M13_A).

[35] It could be argued that providing childcare services should be favorable both for women and men's participation, since it is not necessarily women's duty to take care of children. Yet, in the here and now responsibility for this task is still disproportionately placed on women, and as long as real co-responsibility is not accomplished, similar initiatives impact women's participation capacity more than men's.

Lastly, one more interesting code, albeit mentioned only once (B06_A), stands out: “first feminist, then food system transformative”. This AFN is an urban garden located on the rooftop of a public building used by a feminist collective for their activities. While the urban garden activities aim at learning about food systems sustainability topics, such as food sovereignty and seeds care, the interviewee explained that they never intended it as a way to transform Barcelona’s food system. Rather, in the context of their collective, they thought that learning about caring for the soil and the Earth, as well as learning about nature cycles and the time and care needed to grow food, was feminist in itself. The garden does not have a «productive philosophy» and works «outside the main economy», for example they try not to buy seeds, but rather to exchange them with other urban gardens. Their activities are only open to women or other genders except for cismen, and the feminist discourse has spread among participants, including ecofeminist discourse of interdependence with nature, although not all members have the same level of awareness. The garden also represents a space to unwind from «heavy» intellectual discussions that are usually held within the collective, and to «care more for each other» (B06_A). In this case, the interconnection between gender equality, feminist values and urban food systems sustainability seems perfectly represented and understood. However, this activity was not organized specifically to act on the sustainability of Barcelona’s food system and continues not to engage explicitly in urban food governance (they do have some sporadic contacts with institutions, but no links to the UFP or other actors dedicated to urban food systems, B06_A). For this reason, it surely serves as a good example but has little potential (nor wishes to have it) in spreading a gender and feminist perspective to urban food governance actors more broadly.

In general, these results show that there are many possible strategies, sometimes that do not even entail a big financial burden (such as the use of inclusive language or scheduling meetings at specific times), but none of them is collectively recognized and implemented, nor enforced by policies. Also, practical strategies that address daily needs, like menstruation health, are fundamental, but it is also clear that a broader, systemic change must happen in the cultural understanding of gender (and power) roles along the food chain at all scales, from household to global, and interviewees have no concrete

proposals to address this, except for a generic call to «spread the feminist discourse» (B14_A), which could only happen through large-scale education and awareness campaigns, that AFNs could hardly imagine to implement alone.

3.2.2.5 Setbacks: lack of awareness, lack of time, lack of professionals, lack of coordination

The final theme for Q1 is about setbacks, meaning the reasons that make it harder for urban food governance actors to integrate a gender perspective, including reasons for their lack of willingness to do so, and reasons that hinder the chance to do so even for those that would like to.

The most relevant setback is a lack of awareness, which can take different forms, from a general lack of awareness about the importance of considering gender (18 references), to a lack of intentionality in applying a gender perspective beyond the simple inclusion of a gender goal on paper (13 references), including a lack of attention to the gender differences that emerged in data (10 references). These points emerged also in previous paragraphs, especially when considering strategies such as integrating a gender goal in policies or projects without a proper implementation plan (M21_I, B10_I, B08_I). Regarding data, some interviewees had mentioned that gender-disaggregated data collection did happen, but sometimes it was done *ex-post* only for reporting (B21_A), and other times the differences found in data did not lead to a broader discussion, for example regarding the almost 80% of women participants in the UFP consultation in Barcelona, that was detected but not further explored (B10_I, B13_I). However, B14_A and B15_A also underlined that data collection should go beyond the simple numerical distinction of how many women and men are involved in a project or field, because actual equality is not only about numerical balance (and this type of data also reinforces a binary vision of gender, B01_E). These attitudes indeed lead to a risk of normalization of feminism (and co-optation of its discourse, B06_A, Hobart & Kneese, 2020), and in general a risk of equality claims remaining abstract (B11_E, B14_A).

Nonetheless, some interviewees defined themselves, or the actions of their organizations, as feminist, not much due to their attention to gender equality, but rather to the attitude of mutualism and care for

others and for the Earth (B05_A, B21_A). This in turn means that, while a feminist attitude is sometimes present, it not always translates into explicit strategies to include a gender perspective throughout all the initiatives of a certain actor. For example, B21_A explains that their cooperative is explicitly and openly feminist, but such attitude is not shared by and agreed upon with all the people who participate in their activities. Indeed, they operate in a newly residential area located west of Barcelona, where opportunities and spaces for social gathering are scarce. For this reason, B21_A believes that some participants decide to engage with the AFN's activities even though they do not share completely the political vision that the AFN supports. This is especially true for cooking workshops, that happen in the morning and therefore have mostly elderly participants, who enjoy the socialization opportunity while not always sharing the political views, for example the AFN's critical stance towards meat consumption (B21_A).

While the lack of awareness is indeed the most relevant type of setback, interviewees also mentioned other, more practical reasons that can hinder such an approach. One is the time, effort and workload that mainstreaming any theme, including gender, can take, both inside a self-managed AFN (M03_A, B17_A) or in institutional actions and practices (B18_I), which make actors reluctant to doing it unless it is mandatory. This is in part connected to the fact that, often, there are no professionals dedicated only to this topic in AFNs or in institutional teams – as seen, some institutions do have departments dedicated to gender equality, but internal coordination is not always granted – (B08_I, B10_I, B13_I, M09_A, M14_I, M21_I). These shortcomings of urban food governance clearly hinder the possibility for actors to better integrate a gender perspective in their actions, but they are impactful on governance relations and dynamics in general, also beyond the topic of gender, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

3.2.3 Themes emerged from interviews: governance relations

Governance relations among urban food governance actors were the second main topic of the interviews. It is important to once again underline that, during interviews, this topic was often

discussed as separate from gender differences, therefore not all its codes have a direct and explicit connection to gender. For this reason, this paragraph does not extensively present all the results from this question, as was done instead for the question on gender differences. Rather, it focuses on the results that are more relevant to gender differences and dynamics, either as explicitly said by interviewees, or through the interpretation of some results that were not raised as relevant to gender by interviewees, but appear so based on literature or on their intersection with other results.

This topic received 1.621 mentions throughout the 43 interviews, covering a total of 113 codes. These codes were clustered into four themes. Theme 1 is called "vision" and collects codes that are related to actors' visions and ideas, it received 238 mentions. Theme 2 received 346 mentions, it is called "procedures" and includes codes about practical things that influence governance actions and relations regardless of actors' visions, such as bureaucracy, coordination between departments and time constraints. Theme 3 is called "relational dynamics" and consists of those codes that are more explicitly about the dynamics among actors, the relations that exist between them and how these work. This was the most mentioned theme, with 661 mentions – probably because it mostly explicitly connects with the question. Lastly, Theme 4 is called "governance elements" and clusters codes about other governance elements that are not related to actors' visions or procedures but still somehow impact governance relations between grassroots and institutional actors, like the presence of policies and international agreements, the context, or the presence of other actors such as private companies. It received 376 mentions. Notably, most of the codes of this topic had either a positive or negative connotation. For this reason, it was chosen to divide the codes of each theme also based on the connotation, thus distinguishing for each theme which codes are positively impacting relations, which negatively, and which are either neutral, or could be both positive and negative based on the context. Table 6 lists all codes for each theme (in the rows) and also separates them through columns based on positive, negative and neutral codes.

Table 6: Thematic clusters and connotation for codes belonging to Q2 (governance relations).
Codes belonging to Q2 (governance relations). They are clustered into four themes, represented in the rows, and for each theme, the codes are also divided through columns based on their connotation (positive, negative, neutral/both). See Annex 1 for more details. Source: author's elaboration.

	Positive	Negative	Neutral / both
1 VISION **Total: 14 codes**	• AFN gives sort of free public service • AFN shares the institution vision • importance of dialogue recognized • importance of sharing a vision	• contrasting views • different working cultures hinder dialogue • lack of political interest • political action vs political claim • political conflict • priorities are different • same view but no will to collab	• AFN political stance • AFN can be more radical than institutions various reasons to participate in AFN
2 PROCEDURES **Total: 25 codes**	• collaboration born due to emergency • easier organization effort for stable entities • importance of sharing a plan and methodology • shared but different responsibility	• complications due to bureaucracy • (perceived) lack of organization btw institutional levels • difficult to carry on with AFNs activities • difficulty of translating visions into concrete actions • feminist dept not participated in UFP project • institutions have a sectorial approach • institutions make more theoretical projects than concrete • lack of connection btw same municipality's branches • lack of coordination • lack of relation btw levels of governance • limit to AFN growth • limits to public funding • loss of content in the transfer from one level to the other • many institutional projects before a real coordination • participation modalities not ideal for AFN • urban planners not attentive to food vague definition of limits to AFN action when collab with institution	• AFN internal governance • impact of admin change • relevance of resource allocation • sharing a space with other actors
3 RELATIONAL DYNAMICS **Total: 51 codes**	• AFN favors institution's dialogue with other smaller AFNs • AFN took part in UFP participation process • collaboration btw institution and producers • collaboration plan – strategy • coordination attempt • coordination btw levels of governance • higher gov level tries to include smaller scales • informal but strong network btw actors • institution recognizes AFN's role • institution takes AFN as reference • institution's role in favoring dialogue • intention of collaboration • lower level of governance contacts higher level • municipality funds the AFN • no competition btw AFNs • personal relationships • positive but hard dialogue btw institutions • positive multilevel dialogue • positive relation with municipality • reciprocity btw AFNs and institutions • relation to institution as convenience • role of support of smaller institutions • same professionals moving from AFNs to institutions etc. • same-level governance coordination	• AFNs attempt for participation dismissed • AFN does not know the UFP • AFNs not willing to collab with institutions • ambivalent position of institution towards AFN • closed group of actors not open to others • co-optation risk • difficult to involve AFNs • intention of dialogue to the street and not institutions • lack of awareness of own's role • lack of institutional recognition to some AFN • lack of interest in collaborating with smaller or newer actors • lack of strategic vision of AFN-institution collab • lack of success in wanted collaboration • need to convince politicians • protest against institutions • relationship made of compromise	• different powers of actors • AFN dependent on institution • AFN must contact UFP, not contrary • alternative vs oppositive • fluidity in relations btw institutions and AFNs • municipal funds to AFN not because of UFP but bottom-up request • relation AFN-Municipality • relation btw different AFNs • relevance of trust in relations

	• spaces for dialogue set up and managed by institution • symbiosis tight relation		
4 GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS **Total: 22 codes**	• importance of networks of institutions sharing the same territory • institutions + academy relations • relevance of AFN as alternative spaces for transformation	• relevance of individual people within bodies	• BCN - Milan relation on UFP • Role of higher gov levels (EU...) • importance of studying international experiences • more local level – "municipi" / neighborhoods • multilevel institutional governance • north and south • role of private companies • pros and cons of international networks • relations to NGOs etc • relevance of AFN location • relevance of bigger cities • relevance of city's governance • relevance of flagship initiatives for institution • relevance of MUFPP • relevance of public space • relevance of smaller cities around the big one • relevance of UFP role of private sector in AFN participation

3.2.3.2 Governance actors' vision: importance of dialogue recognized, but political conflict and lack of a shared vision may hinder it

In the theme regarding urban food governance actors' visions and ideas, the most mentioned code is "AFN political stance", with 54 references, which is considered a neutral code as it can both represent a political stance of agreement and disagreement towards institutions or other AFNs, and in general about values that AFNs identify with. Indeed, in general interviewees agree that a certain political stance can lead to collaboration between actors who agree on the vision and weaker between actors who disagree, although with exceptions, as discussed at the end of the paragraph.

As a matter of fact, "importance of sharing a vision" and "political conflict" are the second and third most mentioned codes of this theme. Sharing a vision is considered important both between institutions at different scales (B13_I, B18_I) and between AFNs partnering up for projects (M18_A). On the contrary, political conflict can hinder collaboration even when visions about the food system are similar, for example in the case of institutions that share a similar vision about food systems transformation but are administered by different political parties (B02_I), or of AFNs who perform food-related initiatives that institutions agree on, but have a general political stance that is conflictual

to the political party of institutions. For example, M01_A, M04_A and M06_A belong to the same community center (it manages three different food-related initiatives), that used to be squatted and was later evicted under the same administration that often supported their food-related activities. M04_A interestingly says «ours is not volunteering, it's political action. And this political action happens both in a cooperative and conflictual way towards institutions». Relevantly for the topic of this thesis, also B06_A, the feminist urban garden who identified first as a feminist action and only secondly as a food sustainability action, said their feminist vision has always caused an «ambivalent» relation to institutions, and while they do sometimes dialogue and feel supported (for example through funds and the space they are granted), they prefer not to build an official and continuous tie for fear of co-optation, as their view is necessarily more radical than that of institutions – even feminist ones. For this reason, they did not join the participatory process for the UFP. This seems quite relevant as B06_A is the most aware interviewee of the connections between gender equality and food systems sustainability, but their political conflict – albeit not radically critical – towards institutions was a reason for such vision not to be represented in the consultation process for the UFP. Differing views are not only related to purely political conflicts, but also more generally to contrasting views about objectives or approaches to reach them. For example, B09_A mentioned a monetary prize the AFN received, but which they struggled to use because «when money arrives, everything gets contaminated». M13_A explains that his cooperative restaurant took part in the city-wide network of associations to coordinate actions against food insecurity during Covid-19, and in that context he realized that most association representatives were women, which granted a sort of «feminine perspective», but it must be remembered that feminine perspectives are diverse, and depending on the type of association (such as religious groups, social cooperatives…), different approaches co-existed. This also warns against falling into essentialist traps that see women as a whole, non-diverse group that acts solely on the base of their gender.

Generally, though, many interviewees recognize the importance of dialogue (33 references), not only because it helps coordination (B13_I), but also because it helps bring new ideas to the table (M11_A,

M14_I). This suggests an open attitude of urban food governance actors in Milan and Barcelona, and a promising context for AFNs that are already paying attention to gender differences in their actions to raise the issue – as happened for example in Zaragoza (Di Masso et al., 2022, Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). At the same time, though, the presence of actors willing to raise the issue is not granted, and we saw that the most aware interviewee about gender implications in food systems, B06_A, did not participate in the consultation process for Barcelona's UFP specifically because of their perception of institutions as not radical enough on the topic of feminism – while in Milan no such actor was found.

Finally, there are cases of actors who share a vision but do not collaborate anyway. For example, M20_A thinks that the «tiredness of daily life» caused the failure of some attempts at collaboration of his AFN with other AFNs, despite both sides' initial willingness. Moreover, M02_A lamented that their attempt at building a tie to the Food Policy Office were cut short although they work on one of the UFP's priorities. He felt that it was due to their being very new and small actors, and that the «circle» of participants to the UFP's participation spaces was not welcoming. While M02_A was not specifically working on gender differences, such exclusionary attitude towards actors that are perceived as new and unexperienced raises questions on the chances for future actors to suggest a gender perspective – if ever anyone will be willing to – unless it comes directly from already well-connected and legitimized actors.

3.2.3.3 Governance procedures: daily life practicalities, bureaucracy and lack of coordination

Theme 2 regards governance procedures and includes codes about practicalities of governance actions. Interestingly, out of 25 codes and 346 references, the most mentioned ones are all either negatively or neutrally connotated (negative: "complications due to bureaucracy", "difficulty to carry on AFN activities", "limit to AFN growth"; neutral: "impact of administration change", "relevance of resource allocation"), while the 4 positive codes are mentioned much less (only 27 mentions altogether, see Annex 1). This suggests that procedures are generally more of a setback to governance relations, both

meaning their most bureaucratic and structured part and the practicalities of daily life intertwining people's engagement with governance actions.

The most mentioned code of all is "difficulty to carry on with AFN activities", with 54 references. This includes both the collective struggle of carrying on with an AFN, especially the non-profit and self-managed ones, and the individual struggle of participating in time-consuming activities, which most often are unpaid and voluntary. AFNs struggle with a variety of issues, such as paying rent and utilities (B04_A), paying for ecological certifications (B07_A), and other general managing costs (M08_A), having few human resources since they cannot afford to employ many (or any) people (B09_A, M03_A, M16_A), keeping the political claim as alive and central as the practical act of food distribution (M04_A). For example, M04_A says «sometimes we try to update and enlarge the project […] but the association-related activities become dominant over the political activities, I think because the [the former one] is an activity you can do on auto-pilot while managing a political campaign is difficult […] and activities that can be organized on a routine basis are easier and end up taking up much more time than you wish for, because the required cognitive effort is lower».

All these struggles, and probably more, limit AFNs' growth potential, although the growth of each AFN is not always their goal, with some stating they aim more at model repetition (B09_A, B17_A, M20_A). Individual struggles within AFNs, instead, are mostly connected to the need to dedicate free time to these activities, and this dedication varies over time depending on life contingencies (B12_A, M02_A, M03_A, M04_A, M10_A, M11_A). This also means that most participants are not professionals (M16_A), or that they do not have much extra time to dedicate to thinking about the AFN itself and taking up new projects, because internal needs already occupy most of their time (M04_A, M20_A).

The struggle of participating in AFNs for free relates to the previously discussed distinction between paid and unpaid labor in urban food governance, and in turn connects with the topic of responsibility over urban food systems transformation in a feminist ethics of care perspective (see chapter 4). Indeed, interviewees also mentioned that these daily life practicalities tend to mostly disfavor female

participation (B04_A, B05_A, B17_A). Also, paid and unpaid positions have a much different power and potential of impact, although AFNs – even volunteer-based ones – can be more radical than institutions in their political claims. B14_A explains that, while the AFN is «listened to and valued» by institutions they work with, the AFN is «much more radical and openly anticapitalist», which creates an «interesting» relation to institutions. However, such radical claims are more difficult to spread and sustain over time, as people's involvement cannot be guaranteed as steadily as in paid positions. Indeed, one of the positive codes of this theme is "shared but different responsibility", with interviewees mentioning various scales of responsibility that must coexist, like the need to consider global justice (for example among countries, B17_A), assign different tasks to AFN participants based on each person's needs and skills (such as retired participants versus participants with office jobs, M10_A, M11_A, M16_A), and power-based responsibility to shift the perspective towards food environments and away from individual choices over bad food habits (M22_I). M11_A interestingly puts it as «no one is essential, everyone is useful» (in his GAS). About responsibilization for bad food choices, literature has already shown that the responsibility over household food habits is often placed on women due to traditional gender roles tying them to the task of feeding households, that cause them to take the blame for nutritional issues of other family members (Hawkes et al., 2024; Van Esterik, 1999). Shifting the focus to food environments and other systemic issues as suggested by M22_I could contribute to putting this stereotype into perspective.

However, even in the ideal case of a perfectly executed "shared but different responsibility" approach, some issues remain to be addressed that are related to AFNs' mostly volunteer-based and/or understaffed models, and that is the fact that such models make participation in governance dynamics more difficult for AFNs than institutions (or private actors, too). Surely, the importance of having a dialogue between urban food governance actors is recognized, but especially in the case of institution-led consultation processes, the fact that most AFN representatives are volunteers makes their participation very inconvenient. They already give their free time to the AFN's own activities, and participating in other processes would be even more time-consuming, sometimes during working

hours, which means that people who have another job or care-related tasks cannot join (B10_I, B16_I, B21_A, M14_I). On the other hand, institutional representatives are aware of these time constraints, and for this reason consultation sessions are often kept as short as possible, and therefore strongly focused on the issue that the institution wishes to discuss (B10_I, M13_A). This, however, translates into fewer chances for participants to raise completely new themes or drastically challenge the starting premises (M13_A, B10_I), and consequently in a feeling on their part that their participation is not so transformative anyway, so the time effort is not always justified (B10_I). Lastly, other elements impact actual participation, like the need to feel a sense of belonging to the context, which is often hindered by educational level, age, and origin (B16_I, M12_E), once again showing the need for an intersectional perspective. For all these reasons, stable entities have it much easier in terms of organization effort to participate in these processes, although they sometimes lack the strong motivational and spontaneous character of volunteer-based initiatives (B19_I). This in turn connects with the "relevance of resource allocation" code (44 mentions). Interviewees agree that, when institutions are committed to urban food sustainability, they allocate funds not only internally to employ more professionals (B19_I, B17_A, B13_I, M14_I), but also externally to AFNs (M12_E, M13_A, M17_E, M18_A, B21_A), or grant a space for free or for a low rent (M08_A, B06_A, B09_A). In these cases, resource allocation can lighten the burden of work that AFN members carry out and in turn favor their participation to dialogue spaces.

On the other hand, lack of political interest translates into lower resource allocation, and indeed administration changes are impactful as they can mean losing funding opportunities (for AFNs) but also having fewer professionals dedicated to food issues inside institutions. Indeed, interviewees in Barcelona agree that in the change from Ada Colau's administration for Barcelona en comú – who launched the UFP and had a strong feminist stance – to Jaume Collboni's Socialist party in 2023, much of the initial political commitment was lost (B02_I, B03_I, B04_A, B05_A, B06_A, B07_A, B08_I, B09_A, B10_I, B11_E, B12_A, B13_I, B15_A). B8_I says that «political commitment has very much diluted». Still, B19_I believes Barcelona's Municipality has a long tradition of dialogue

with associations and social entities, and although political interest to different topics can vary from one administration to the other, generally a tie with grassroots initiatives always exists, as well as funding opportunities.

Other than life contingencies and practicalities, bureaucracy also stands out as strongly impactful. Food-related initiatives struggle with bureaucracy in contexts such as applying to receive funds or certifications (B07_A, B17_A, M02_A), sanitary regulations when offering or donating food (B09_A, M16_A), and permits to operate (B17_A). At the same time, some AFNs try to serve exactly the people who struggle with bureaucracy, such as food insecure people who do not want to, or cannot, contact social services or public food banks (B21_A, M05_A). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, interviewees mostly agree that the majority of people receiving food aid through these initiatives are women (especially with a migration background), due to the feminization of poverty and the gendered division of reproductive labor.

As a matter of fact, some of the most innovative ideas presented by interviewees are the result of informal ties and personal relations which escape the slow and complicated processes of bureaucracy, such as the mentioned cases of the Dames_Bcn project or the Whatsapp chat of women from M13_A's neighborhood. Indeed, the relevance of personal relationships was raised multiple times and will be discussed further in the paragraph about Theme 3 (relational dynamics). However, informality once again traces back to the distinction between paid and unpaid initiatives and reliance on voluntary work and individual determination, and indeed the Dames_Bcn project was not completed. As said by B19_I, there is a «double possible reading of spontaneity [of bottom-up initiatives], on one side it is positive, on another side it represents a difficulty due to intrinsic reasons of basing a project that needs people who show up on volunteering».

Lastly for the theme of procedures, interviewees lament a general lack of coordination among institutions (B02_I), and departments within institutions, like literature has explained extensively (Donner et al., 2024; Lever & Sonnino, 2022). In this specific case, the lack of habit in intersectoral collaboration (M08_A, M14_I, B21_A) stands out in particular due to the feminist department of

Barcelona's Municipality not participating in the UFP (B10_I, B08_I), the lack of involvement of urban planners in food issues (B03_I), and Milan's Municipality sectorial approach that has so far meant that the welfare department has not collaborated with the Food Policy Office (M08_A). Interestingly, interviewees in Milan explain that many of these issues, including the lack of coordination and the long bureaucracy, were partially overcome during the Covid-19 pandemic, showing a strong effort and willingness to collaborate in a time of crisis (M03_A, M04_A, M05_A, M08_A, M09_A, M11_A, M13_A, M17_E).

3.2.3.4 Relational dynamics: shared but ambivalent intention of collaboration, convenience, compromise, and relevance of informality

Theme 3 is the one that more specifically mirrors the interview question about relational dynamics between urban food governance actors. A wide spectrum of cases was raised, from successful relations between actors to total disconnection, from strongly structured relations to informal ones based on personal ties.

In general, positive codes have received more mentions (314, against the 111 mentions of negative codes), but the overall picture still shows ambivalent attitudes. For example, many interviewees feel like institutions recognize the role of AFNs in urban food governance (B07_A, B09_A, B11_E, B14_A, B15_A, B17_A, B18_I, B19_I, B21_A, M03_A, M08_A, M11_A, M12_E, M13_A, M14_I, M16_A, M21_I). Indeed, 20 interviewees explicitly said they have an intention of collaboration with other actors, and 9 AFN-interviewees said their AFN participated in their city's UFP participatory processes (B07_A, B13_I, B17_A, B19_I, B21_A, M03_A, M09_A, M13_A, M17_E). These collaborations include receiving funding (B06_A, B07_A, B09_A, B21_A, B14_A, B16_I, B16_I, B19_I, M03_A, M05_A, M06_A, M08_A, M09_A, M13_A, M14_I, M16_A, M18_A, M20_A, M21_I), institutions setting up official spaces for dialogue like the mentioned Agròpolis space in Barcelona and the co-planning sessions in Milan (B16_I, B17_A, B18_I, B19_I, M14_I), and concrete plans for collaboration on specific projects. Relations with their Municipality are defined as

generally positive by 12 interviewees, including some that have raised concerns over political conflicts like B06_A and B09_A. Indeed, while they feel the Municipality recognizes their impact over their communities of reference, and funds their activities, they also share a fear of co-optation, or of losing their «nature» (B09_A) if they were to structure an official, long-term collaboration. Such fear of co-optation was shared by other interviewees (B05_A, B19_I, M13_A), and indeed was the main reason for the feminist collective represented by B06_A not to participate in the consultation process for Barcelona's UFP. Other interviewees say that it is "convenient" to collaborate with the Municipality (M04_A, M08_A).

On the other hand, despite such spread "intention of collaboration" from both sides, some interviewees also lamented ambivalent positions of institutions towards their AFNs, and the presence of pre-conditions to be admitted to the group of actors who institutions actually want to collaborate with, especially in Milan. As anticipated, M02_A felt that his AFN was «treated as strangers» during their attempts at participating in consultation sessions. M17_E laments a similar attitude of institutional representatives that causes bottom-up proposals to have little to no impact, although in other cases «top-down processes allow bottom-up processes to emerge». B15_A thinks support to his AFN's activity by the Municipality is always existing in words, but concretely only granted when not in contrast with other interests (e.g. large-scale retailers), thus relating once again to the topic of power relations in food systems.

As a matter of fact, relationships are often made of compromise, due to issues such as different levels of bureaucratization, the co-existence of contrasting views, different political stances and priorities, as well as practical limits to participation.

Lastly, another often mentioned topic that was anticipated in the previous paragraph is the importance of informal collaborations and personal relations. In Barcelona, B18_I and B17_A explain that most professionals working on urban food sustainability know each other – especially technicians, academics and practitioners, rather than political representatives – and surely this means that, among them, dialogue is continuous even outside of official contexts. Indeed, the group that started the

Damen_Bcn project (B17_A) was built «naturally» through interpersonal contacts among women who knew each other, and so was B09_A's project of food waste collection and redistribution, «through a chat», just like the mentioned Whatsapp chat in M13_A's neighborhood. M13_A also explains that many collaborations around his AFN were not much «looked for, but rather welcomed», as the members' previous involvement in various social initiatives allowed them to have a «great system of relations». Interestingly, the relevance of informal networks of actors was recognized even by the final conclusions of the EU Horizon project Food Trails (M14_I). Generally, informal networks of actors are recognized by many interviewees as crucial to keep a continuous dialogue open and come up with ideas that may or may not later become official projects (B17_A, B18_I, B21_A, M06_A, M09_A, M10_A, M13_A, M14_I, M20_A). Such relevance of personal relations is strongly tied to the importance that individual people covering urban food governance positions have, as will be discussed in the next paragraph.

3.2.3.5 Other governance elements: the impact of policies and international networks, multilevel governance, private actors and researchers

Theme 4 is dedicated to codes about other governance elements that influence relations between urban food governance actors and that were not part of the previous themes. In this case, the most mentioned code is "relevance of individual people within organizations", which was negatively connotated. Interviewees overall agree that individual people covering each urban food governance role, with their visions and attitudes, strongly influence the way such roles are carried out and consequently shape urban food governance all around. Although some interviewees mentioned positive experiences related to individual people's strong commitment and leadership – as seen with the creation of the OCAS in Barcelona (B13_I) –, this code is considered negative as it ties very strongly the success of urban food governance initiatives to individual people's skills and visions, which are unstable, often unpredictable and not easy to plan or replicate. M02_A says «organizations are made of people, and people can make a difference, for better or for worse. Much of what we did,

we did because there were some people who were committed to making things happen […] and the same goes for people in charge of organizations you interact with». Other than visions, individual people's expertise is also highly impactful (B18_I, M17_E). The same is valid for AFNs, where individual ideas, attitudes, and possibilities to participate are different and change over time, influencing their capacity to carry on with their activities. Indeed, reasons to participate in AFNs vary, and different attitudes co-exist within a single AFNs, such as the mentioned difference in political views among members of B21_A's agroecological cooperative over meat consumption and their ecofeminist approach, which is presented as the AFN's official stance but not actively shared by all members – and indeed it is not part of the claims the AFN brings to institutions.

The strong dependence on individual people, especially in institutions, can be reduced through governance actions that consolidate the relevance of food as a policy issue, such as the existence of a UFP (B10_I), the participation to international projects or networks such as the MUFPP (B13_I, B18_I, M22_I), or flagship initiatives that create a positive and well-known legacy that future institutional representatives would have a harder time dismantling, such as the Milan food waste hubs (M13_A, M14_I).[36] These institutionalization instruments are also relevant in the relations between AFNs and institutions, as they often provide funding opportunities (M03_A, M08_A, M09_A) and spaces for dialogue. These spaces seem particularly apt for knowledge-sharing and peer-learning, so it would be interesting to see the impact of integrating a gender perspective in these spaces in terms of how pervasive this perspective would (or would not) become. However, so far this has not happened, despite the MUFPP guidelines' references to gender. Interestingly, some interviewees speak specifically of the ties between Milan and Barcelona when mentioning the importance of international networks (B11_E, M08_A), confirming the two cities' international recognition.

Additionally, other actors of urban food governance influence the relations between AFNs and urban institutions, once again raising the question of power relations beyond gender relations. Interviewees

[36] It must be said that, in the first ten years of its Food Policy, Milan has been administered by the same party and mayor, so the actual strength of the institutionalization of its UFP and flagship initiatives in times of administrative change remains to be assessed.

mention private actors and research institutions as influencing urban food governance dynamics. For example, agrifood industries have a strong power over the visions – and consequent policies – that institutions apply to urban food systems (B02_I, B04_A, B07_A, B08_I, B11_E, B15_A). In Barcelona, this is mentioned mostly in relation to the strong lobbies of agrifood industries who impact the Generalitat's approach (B02_I, B15_A), but also of large-scale retailers impacting the management of municipal markets (e.g., many renovations of such markets are funded by large-scale retailers in exchange for the possibility to open retail points inside them, see photos included at the end of the thesis). This in turn impacts the possibility for farmers' markets to receive permits to operate, based on proximity to municipal markets (B15_A – he says this resonates with a broader vision of Barcelona that he defines as «Barcelona on sale»). In Milan, instead, most mentions to private actors are positive, as many large-scale retailers have agreements with food waste collection and redistribution initiatives (especially the city's food hubs) (M01_A, M03_A, M06_A, M16_A). As for the role of academia, urban food governance actors often have exchanges with researchers, through structured collaborations (like that of Politecnico di Milano with Milan's Food Policy Office) but also through personal relations, and indeed professionals sometimes cover both roles of research and of urban food governance practitioners in institutions or AFNs, like Table 1 already showed.

Other relevant actors are higher governance levels, especially in relation to municipalities' general lack of legislative competences over food systems (B08_I) and the need for multilevel governance (B02_I, B08_I, B10_I, B11_E, B13_I, B16_I, B18_I, M14_I, M17_E). Lower governance levels, instead, are often involved due to their stronger connection to local communities. For example, M01_A explains that his AFN has a stronger relation to *municipi* (Milan's districts) rather than the Municipality, firstly because the «relation is more accessible», and secondly because they «see us on the ground doing things» so their recognition of the value of their actions is stronger. M04_A confirms this and adds that the *municipi* have «much more practical interests» than the Municipality, while representatives of the Municipality are always somehow considering political positioning too.

Relations to this lower institutional scale are also strongly connected to another relevant element: the location of AFNs.

The location of AFNs plays an important role for various reasons.[37] One AFN located in the Gràcia neighborhood of Barcelona explained that their location has an impact on the people who participate both in terms of social background – Gràcia's population mostly has a medium-high socio economic level – and in terms of physical accessibility, since some of their members stopped participating when they moved to a different neighborhood. This is connected to the gentrification that is happening in Gràcia (but also other areas of Barcelona), which not only risks pushing inhabitants to other neighborhoods, but also led to a price increase in the AFN's rent, and they were only able to stay after negotiating with the landlord. Another AFN from Barcelona mentions the gentrification that their neighborhood, Poble Sec, is undergoing, to explain why they specifically wanted to work there, to create and maintain social fabric in the community. For another AFN located in the Sant Antoni neighborhood of Barcelona, the location is important as the main aim of this initiative is to fight social isolation, which is quite spread in this area, where many elderly people live. For another AFN, their location in the La Marina neighborhood, where there are few opportunities for social engagement, convinced some inhabitants to participate to their activities even though they do not agree completely with their political vision. This shows how the neighborhood scale can be a space for negotiation between personal and collective views (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*). An AFN that distributes food aid in Milan explained that their choice over the areas to work in was also related to the energy and resources they have to face situations that are sometimes difficult. For this reason, they are operating in San Babila and Centrale, but have decided not yet to operate in Rogoredo, where needs are similar but conflictuality is stronger. Another AFN interviewee explains that their location in the Baggio neighborhood of Milan is important, because they are part of the Parco Agricolo Sud, which grants a common conscience about the importance of agroecology that not all Milanese have,

[37] In this section on locations, the specific interviewee for each statement will not be cited, so as not to provide too much detail on where each interviewee is active.

since most are never in direct touch with the Parco. An AFN that organizes food distribution in the NoLo neighborhood of Milan explains that they also tried to implement some projects in another neighborhood, Corvetto, but the difference between the two areas was striking. In particular, in Corvetto – an infamously known neighborhood often stereotypically associated with conflictuality and low socio-economic and educational levels – they felt they had to gain people's trust and demonstrate they were not gentrifiers. Instead, NoLo is already rich in community initiatives, and inhabitants are used to participation, thus they felt it was much easier to launch the project. All these examples show that, within the same city, the specific micro location of AFNs has a direct impact on their activities, including the engagement of participants, with specific connection to the identities that are more easily engaged, including from a gender perspective but in intersection with other factors such as age, socio-economic background, and personal and collective ethics.

Lastly, interviewees mentioned the role of both bigger cities, and smaller cities surrounding the bigger ones, in urban food systems transformation, thus underlining the interconnectedness of food systems and the need to act collectively over them (B18_I, M14_I). B02_I and B19_I underline the coordination and leadership role that bigger cities can have, which raises the hypothesis that a city with strong commitment to gender-equal urban food transformation might lead the way in this direction and spread this approach. However, Barcelona – the most promising city between the two case-studies considered – so far does not seem to be considering this path, as the gender perspective is still not pervasive to all its urban food governance actions, and rather remains quite confined to a gender-equality goal included on paper and some sparce grassroots initiatives.

3.2.4 Themes emerged from interviews: potentialities of urban food governance

The final question to interviewees was to sum up what they think the main potential of urban food governance is, either specifically for gender equality or more broadly for urban food systems transformation. This question resulted in 707 references over 54 codes, which are listed and clustered into four themes in Table 7.

Table 7: Thematic clusters for codes belonging to Q3 (potentialities).
Codes belonging to Q3 (potentialities of urban food governance), clustered into four themes. See Annex 1 for more details. Source: author's elaboration.

1 IMPACTS (actual or imagined)	2 FAVORABLE FACTORS	3 HINDERING FACTORS	4 NEUTRAL / BOTH FACTORS
• creation of community network in the neighborhood • AFN proposed the creation of a UFP • bottom-up legislation potential • bring up new themes • empowerment and emancipation • importance of UFP to keep the theme after political changes • intention of model repetition rather than AFN's own growth • intersection with other themes like housing • learning about care and responsibility • managing urban-rural relations • mapping of needs • networking opportunity • occasion to contact people from different backgrounds • participation • potential to get resources and space for AFNs • qualitative over quantitative impact • relevance of initiatives like Capital of Sustainable Food to raise awareness • socialization aim before food related aim • socialization of activity's subjects **Total: 19 codes**	• AFN participants are often experts • AFN feels they have political impact • AFN strives to be a safe space • AFNs are privileged space • different but complementary transformation potential institutions-others • generalized interest to FS (food systems) in Catalunya • perceived success of AFN role towards institutions • potential of institutional action • potential of pression to institutions of legitimate actors • potential of UFP • potential of urban planning • relevance of technicians in institutions - professionality and stability • see more potential in inter-AFNs cooperation **Total: 13 codes**	• difficulty related to consumers choices • greenwashing • lack of resources dedicated • limits to big city municipalities • long term potential of AFN-institution dialogue but long way, now conscience lacks • missed potential • more women but no common conscience about the space they occupy in FS • negative impact of administration changes and visions • no intention of FS transformation • not enough transformative potential of municipalities • perceived limited transformative potential of institutions • political power of meat industry in Catalunya • power of agroindustry on institutions • Spanish municipalities have little power on FS • strategy vs actual regulations • time privilege for AFN participation • UFP more useful towards other cities than to impact internal actors **Total: 17 codes**	• city's scale impacts city's capacity for action • pros and cons of voluntary participation • relevance of historical and cultural context • relevance of political views • transformation must come from the bottom up **Total: 5 codes**

Theme 1 regards references to impacts of urban food governance, both real impacts that interviewees consider have already been produced, or potential impacts that interviewees believe might be produced in the future. Theme 2 collects the mentions to factors that support such impacts, while

Theme 3 collects factors that slow them down. Finally, Theme 4 collects factors that might either support or slow down the impact of urban food governance depending on the context. In the following paragraphs, each theme is described more in detail.

3.2.4.1 Actual and expected impacts: participation, socialization, community building, resource allocation

The most mentioned code in Theme 1 about impacts is "participation", to which interviewees have referred both meaning that participation has an impact, and that urban food governance has the potential to boost participation. In Barcelona, many interviewees believe institutional urban food governance has provided spaces to boost participation (B08_I, B10_I, B13_I, B16_I, B17_A, B18_I, B21_A), like the mentioned Agròpolis and Acord Ciutadà spaces, as well as networking and mutual understanding among food system actors (B08_I, B18_I). Also, there are interviewees who underline how AFN initiatives favor the creation of participation dynamics, too, such as by having farmers share a public space for farmers markets (B15_A) or by attending assemblies in consumers groups, which helps create a dialogue over the political meaning of such initiatives rather than just going to pick up the products at a set time and leaving immediately after (B08_I). In Milan, interviewees also agree that institutions – in this case specifically the Municipality's Food Policy Office – set up spaces for participation, such as thematic focus groups at the very beginning of the UFP drafting process (M17_E), online consultations to list the "100 citizens ideas" from which the 5 UFP priorities were selected in 2015 (M17_E), and more recently the mentioned co-planning moments and communities of practice (M14_I, M17_E, M09_A, M12_E, M13_A). However, some interviewees feel like these spaces are not inclusive towards new and smaller actors (M02_A) and generally that participation is quite controlled and aimed at validating the Municipality's own ideas and actions rather than open discussion, as could happen for example with a Food Council (M17_E). At the same time, this "controlled" mode of participation is supported by M14_I, who explains that the tool of communities of practice is indeed more top-down than the usual bottom-up (or horizontal) approach of Food Policy

Councils, but at the same time it allows to show stakeholders what direction institutions are taking and asking for their specific feedback, while also boosting mutual networking among food governance actors, who are not always used to participation modalities and therefore need some sort of guidance and structure to these meetings.

Nevertheless, while in Barcelona the feeling that institutions provide enough participation space is more spread than in Milan, interviewees have also mentioned that sometimes participation modalities make it hard to actually use this space to raise all the topics and themes that participants consider important. Some reasons were previously mentioned, such as conflicting views (B06_A), but also the difficulty some actors, especially AFNs members, face to participate in such processes (B08_I, B10_I, B16_I, B21_A). This is shared also by Milan interviewees, with M01_A stating for example that «the real issue is not 'participating vs not participating', but rather the modalities of participation» and that his AFN believes such modalities are not «horizontal». These insights suggest that participation spaces, although existing and with a varying degree of freedom to introduce new topics, are still subject to limitations – especially due to time constraints, need to reach some conclusions on pressing issues, participants' possible lack of experience on how to participate, or lack of willingness to participate at all. This might mean that, although among urban food governance actors some level of awareness about gender differences might exist, there will be little space (and willingness) to actually bring it up and discuss it extensively, unless this is the top priority of some participant. Indeed, in Zaragoza the proposal to apply gender mainstreaming was made by a feminist collective (Di Masso et al., 2022), while in Barcelona the most explicitly feminist AFN mapped did not participate in the consultation (B06_A), and another ecofeminist cooperative admitted to not having raised the topic during the participatory process for the UFP, since they see ecofeminism as their approach to their own activities, rather than the main claim they prioritize to bring to institutions, which is instead in favor of agroecology (B21_A) (in Milan, no such explicitly feminist AFN was mapped).

Other than participation, another potentiality that was often raised is related to socialization, both in terms of creation of community networks in the neighborhood (32 references), of giving participants

to food-related projects a chance to socialize (15 references, while 27 references even state that the socialization aim comes *before* the food-related aim), and lastly as a networking opportunity among urban food governance actors (7 references). For example, B09_A explains that some participants to her food redistribution AFN are more attracted by the possibility to socialize rather than the actual action of food waste prevention, especially women who are not originally from the neighborhood (or the city) and are looking for a «community», but also older women from the neighborhood who have lost most of their social ties over time, and find «a family» within this project. A similar statement comes from B12_A, whose community kitchen was specifically intended to contrast loneliness in the neighborhood – and some people (mostly women) with a migration background participate with the aim of learning Catalan –, while B21_A, M13_A and M20_A explain that their AFNs (respectively a cooperative, a restaurant and a social agricultural enterprise) create job opportunities for people who are facing social exclusion, thus making sure recipients of their actions also become actively involved. Interestingly, they all detected a reiteration of traditional gender roles in the type of people who usually benefit from such social inclusion initiatives, as previously presented. This shows that the general aim of social inclusion that these AFNs pursue is benefitting a certain gender more, due to the highly gendered character of some roles in the food system (in this case, men over women, but it could be different in the case of other initiatives in roles that are usually more feminized, such as cooks for M02_A's startup). Both M01_A, M03_A and M16_A similarly think that going to collect the food they give out is a chance for people who are often marginalized to socialize and participate in the life of their neighborhood by engaging with inhabitants from different socio-economic backgrounds. M04_A, whose AFN distributes meals to homeless people, underlines very strongly that the food they distribute is only an instrument, which works very effectively to engage people, but their aim is to start a conversation and create ties, which is why they often eat the same meals together with the recipients: «food is a very powerful tool, it works like crazy, like also bringing clothes, it works gigantically, people are always in need. It's one of those things that maybe even work too much: sometimes you feel like it's the final aim, but it's not the aim, ultimately it's the

mean». During the interview to M07_A, member of a community garden in the peri-urban area around Milan, another (female) member of the garden intervened to explain that participating in the garden is not only about learning how to grow food, but also about socializing in a «neutral» space (instead of someone's house, for example), that grants more freedom, and creates a solidarity network. In these cases, instead, socialization opportunities seem to reach mostly women due to the feminization of these initiatives (both in active participants and recipients). However, these socialization opportunities can be hindered by some practical barriers such as language barriers when trying to engage people with a migration background (M16_A), general difficulty in engaging people who are facing social exclusion (M04_A), and time constraints (B04_A, B12_A), as will be discussed in the following paragraph. It is crucial to notice that, in both cases (most socialization opportunities impacting women, most social inclusion initiatives through jobs impacting men), such gendered impact was not planned nor expected in advance, but it was simply observed afterwards.

Especially in projects and initiatives that engage women and/or people facing social exclusion, interviewees explain that the socialization that comes from participating in these projects is also an opportunity of empowerment through the creation of social ties (B09_A) or of income generation (M02_A, B17_A). M01_A says that when recipients – mostly women with a migration background – go to collect the food box from his AFN, the activity often lasts much more than necessary, because they have made friends and use it as an excuse to spend time together. He explains that the fact that mostly women collect the food box is a reflection of strongly gendered roles in households, yet his AFN has no intention to convince the women to send their husbands in their place and share the responsibility for this task, but rather they want to transform this moment in an emancipation chance that makes the women protagonists and gives them a space for personal expression, that they would have to give up in case their husbands started sharing this task (M01_A). This resonates with discussions about women's right to the city and chances of appropriation of public space, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

These opportunities for socialization also provide a chance for learning about caring and responsibility, like through active participation in GAS or consumers cooperatives, whose activities would not work without a collective effort (B04_A, B15_A, M10_A, M11_A, M16_A), but also through learning of the care and time it takes to grow food by gaining first-hand agricultural experience (B06_A, M20_A) and the connection between food and the environment – especially the impact of food waste (B17_A, M03_A). Such increase in people's understanding of ecological and more-than-human interdependencies could support the development of an ecofeminist perspective, and indeed this is the aim of B06_A's urban garden, however she was the only interviewee who explicitly mentioned this connection, showing that while actions on the ground might be feminist in their recognition of interdependencies, awareness about this is not spread.

As for more practical impacts of governance dialogues, interviewees underline the opportunity for AFNs to get resources and space for their activities through engaging in dialogue with institutional actors. For example, B06_A, B09_A, B12_A, M01_A, M04_A, M06_A, M16_A, M18_A are currently operating in spaces that were granted to them by their own municipalities, which is considered a positive, although there are some conflicts, too, such as the mentioned eviction of the community center hosting the AFNs of M01_A, M04_A, M06_A and their relocation to a public space which is however much less convenient for their activities, or the fact that B09_A's space was granted to them «because no one else wanted it». Other AFNs, instead, say they are working very hard to find more space, but often they must rely on private concessions (M03_A). Lastly, M13_A and M09_A explain that they found their spaces through contacts with other third sector actors with whom they had good ties. Other than space, AFNs can also receive financial support, for example by participating in the co-planning process that the city of Milan organized after receiving the Earthshot Prize or other calls for funding organized by the main funders of urban food governance actions (like Fondazione Cariplo) (M08_A, M09_A, M18_A), or in the financial support the city of Barcelona gives to social and solidary economy initiatives (B19_I). However, participating in these calls for

funds, and then managing the received funds, requires skills and time, which prevents some AFNs from applying (M13_A).

Another potentiality of urban food governance according to interviewees is to intersect other relevant themes and act on them as well, such as the mentioned cases of AFNs trying to face gentrification by creating a community network also through their actions. Similar intersections are detected by B21_A, who believes that the issue of food access intertwines with the topic of basic sustainability of livelihoods, as it is impossible to aim for nutritional security when people do not have, for instance, a stable housing condition. M05_A, M08_A and M18_A explain that their actions, aimed at food security, also try to engage with other issues that recipients' households face, to create a comprehensive path to address the social exclusion that food insecure households often face – and mostly women and migrant families (M05_A). These comprehensive projects include psychological support and other necessary support based on each household's needs, with the collaboration of the social services. As a result of this type of attention to other issues surrounding food, such actions also provide an opportunity to map needs (B01_E, B07_A, M01_A, M02_A).

As for impacts that are more explicitly connected to the food system, interviewees mentioned the potential to manage urban-rural relations, although this topic was majorly raised by interviewees in Milan (M07_A, M11_A, M13_A, M14_I, M15_A, M19_I) than in Barcelona (B18_I), thus showing that the presence of the Parco Agricolo Sud is still strongly influencing urban food governance in Milan.

Lastly, interviewees mentioned the impact of having a UFP that legitimizes the topic of food as an urban policy issue (B16_I, M17_E) and of creating flagship projects with international recognition (like the World Sustainable Food Capital event and the Barcelona Good Food Challenge in Barcelona, or the MUFPP in Milan) to keep the topic of food relevant even in the case of a decrease in political commitment, to spread awareness among the population and put pressure on institutions to dedicate more resources to the topic (B11_E, B13_I, B18_I, M14_I, M22_I). The impact of such projects in legitimizing a topic and spreading awareness is agreed on, and it would be interesting to see whether

a similar initiative about gender-just urban food systems could contribute to the consolidation of this perspective, but so far, no attempts have been detected.

3.2.4.2 Favorable factors: different but complementary transformative potentials, role of professionals in AFNs and institutions

Theme 2 under the "potentialities" topic regards factors that, according to interviewees, support urban food governance actors to have an actual impact. Some of them partially overlap with the previously discussed positive factors supporting relations among urban food governance actors – and the same goes for Theme 3 about hindering factors –, but in this case the attention is more specifically focused on the actual impact for (urban) food systems transformation rather than relational dynamics.

The most mentioned codes about positive factors regard actors' perceived power, with codes such as "AFNs feel they have political impact" (20 references), "potential of institutional action" (18 references), and "potential of UFP" (28 references). More specifically, AFNs interviewees think they have the potential to influence political visions over food systems (B14_A) through the legitimization their actions receive from the population (B15_A), through dialogue and/or structured collaborations with institutions (B17_A, B19_I), and through the strength that comes from creating networks with other bottom-up initiatives (M06_A). M11_A and M13_A also feel that AFNs have an impact in terms of awareness raising among consumers and the general population. Interestingly, M13_A's cooperative restaurant is also organizing events to raise awareness about strongly gendered topics, such as the "Menstrual cycle festival" aimed at deconstructing taboos around menstruations, but so far, they have not worked on the topic of gender and food systems in an integrated way (other than paying attention to gender representation within their own activities).

As for institutional actors, interviewees believe they have a variety of positive impacts, provided that political commitment is present. For example, B02_I explains that the specific social approach to public policy of Barcelona en comú – party that administered Barcelona for eight years until 2023 – had a visible impact on public policy (both food-related and in general), and so did their intention to

rigorously apply gender integration to their policies (which is technically requested, but sometimes not rigorously implemented, Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). B13_I claims the OCAS has a «very clear potential» of structuring multilevel collaboration and also underlines that institutional action has a great impact potential as it can act on public policy through well-defined roles and legislative competences. B14_A and B16_I agree that institutions have the potential to impact these processes because of their political legitimization, broader reach and larger power – for example financial –, but at the same time they are slower and less radical than bottom-up initiatives. M14_I explains the impact that political commitment had in scaling up the Milan UFP, that went from having about 6 to more than 30 dedicated professionals. This increase also allowed them to follow bigger projects, such as the mentioned Food Trails, which represented a big opportunity to receive funding and work with international partners. M17_E explains that while sometimes institutional actions seem very small, it is crucial to remember how broad their reach is. She provides the example of how impactful a small change in school canteens menus can be: while swapping meat for beans once a week may seem like a small step, she underlines that Milan serves 85.000 school meals every day, so this small change actually has a very big impact. M19_I also shares an example about school meals, saying that while it is impossible to cover all the food demands for school meals with local products (local production is not sufficient), Milan is trying to organize single days of menus that are completely local, not only to reduce the environmental impact and support local production, but also with the aim of raising awareness among households and education professionals. At the same time, such impact is often unintentionally targeted mostly at women, since they are overrepresented in teaching positions and mothers are often the parent (in heterosexual families) that participates to school-related initiatives (M21_I). Finally, as for the potential of having a UFP, interviewees state again its impact in visibilizing and legitimizing the topic (B16_I, M12_E, M16_A, M22_I), in setting a comprehensive vision (M05_A, M11_A), in coordinating various actors that are already active on the territory (M08_A, M12_E, M14_I, M20_A, M22_I), in giving a city an internationally recognized role

(M11_A, M14_I, M17_E, M22_I), and in gathering resources towards the topic of sustainable food systems (M14_I, M16_A).

Another highly mentioned code is about the different but complementary transformation potential of institutions versus other actors, showing that interviewees recognize the importance of collaboration between different governance scales to strengthen impact potentials. Specifically, interviewees think collaboration between institutional and grassroots initiatives should happen because institutions tend to be slower and less radical or innovative than AFNs, but to also have more power (spending power, legislative power, human resources and structure, …) (B08_I, B14_A, B16_I, M08_A, M09_A, M14_I, M21_I, M22_I). Also, institutions need to be in touch with actors who are active on the ground and close to the specific context they want to address, to be able to connect with the recipient communities and understand their real needs (B13_I, M05_A). B19_I defines as «symbiotic» the relation between Barcelona's Municipality and the various social and solidary economy initiatives in the city, while M17_E explains that sometimes some «top-down processes make it possible for bottom-up processes to emerge».

Lastly, another quite relevant factor is the presence of experts and professionals both in institutional positions and in AFNs. Interviewees underline that people active in AFNs are not only volunteers, but often they are real experts on food issues, and institutions should value their knowledge, as Barcelona's Municipality does according to B19_I. At the same time, interviewees mentioned the important role of technicians within institutions – therefore staff members who are not political representatives and often continue working after political turnovers – because they provide professionality and stability (B08_I, B13_I, B16_I). B13_I explains that the working group dedicated to the project of Barcelona World Capital of Sustainable Food consisted of eight people, of which four were public administration officials, and the other four were food system experts, who were chosen specifically for their expertise. In this situation, B13_I explains that they aimed at equal gender representation, but overall there were more female candidates because generally this field is quite feminized. Similarly, M17_E explains that many professionals who collaborated with Milan's mayor

Pisapia in 2011 – he was mayor when the Food Policy was drafted and launched, while mayor Sala started his mandate soon after –, and who were actively working to introduce a UFP through their previous expertise on the topic, were women. Moreover, B09_A believes these technicians are also more appreciative of AFNs' work because of their expertise, and B18_I explains that often, professionals and technicians know each other due to their time working on the same field, so their presence in various institutions helps to keep up informal but constant dialogue.

3.2.4.3 Hindering factors: time privilege, political turnover, lack of resources and other powers in the food system

The most mentioned factor that contributes to slowing down urban food governance's transformative potential is, according to interviewees, the time privilege that is often needed to be able to take part in AFN activities. This mirrors some of the previously discussed codes regarding in particular the difficulty of carrying out work that is often voluntary and unpaid. While previously this argument was raised to discuss some issues that mostly women face, in this case it is presented by interviewees as a direct cause of reduced impact of AFNs actions. Other than the most evident fact that it can reduce participation and engagement (B08_I, B09_A, B10_I, B12_A, B21_A, M10_A, M11_A), interviewees also mention that this privilege risks favoring the engagement of only certain categories of people, while others tend to remain underrepresented, such as people with a migration background (B06_A) or youths (B16_I). Moreover, the need to dedicate free time to AFNs makes it hard to expand activities beyond typically work-free moments (for example, M03_A's AFN that collects leftover food in weekly markets has tried to expand their activity to markets happening during weekdays, too, but it is immensely more difficult to manage compared to weekend markets, as most of their volunteers are young women who have other jobs and responsibilities), and generally to expand activities beyond the very core ones, as the additional management and planning would need extra effort on the part of volunteers (M06_A, M10_A, M15_A).

Other hindering factors raised by interviewees include the (perceived) limited potential of institutions and especially municipalities, both in terms of actual legislative competences (B11_E, B13_I, B16_I, B17_A, M14_I), but also in comparison to other actors that institutions have to negotiate with, such as large-retail corporations and agrifood industries (B15_A, M11_A, M12_E) – in Catalunya, the most mentioned industry that interviewees believe has strong power over institutions is the meat industry (B02_I, B10_I, B13_I, B16_I). The need to negotiate and find a compromise among actors with different political visions also contributes to watering down the transformative potential of institutional actions (B02_I). The political turnover also impacts the transformative potential of institutions, since a change in administration can result in a sharp decrease of political commitment to the topic, and generally political timings of administrations mean unstable levels of commitment and proactivity.

Other factors that influence the transformative potential of institutions include consumers choices that are difficult to change – especially if a more "sustainable" choice results in more expensive food, or being farther from the shop or market (B02_I, B07_A).

Lastly, interviewees mention the general lack of dedicated resources as a factor hindering urban food governance's transformation potential. This includes not only financial resources, but also space and tools (B10_I, M08_A, M13_A), or human resources (M12_E, M16_A) – which traces back to the issue of voluntary participation.

3.2.4.4 Other factors: vision, daily life, cultural and historical context

Finally, for the topic of urban food governance's potential, interviewees again raised some impactful factors that might both influence positively and negatively the transformation processes of governance actors depending on the context. Two of the most relevant ones are similar to what was already mentioned regarding factors that influence governance relations, namely political views and the pros and cons of voluntary participation.

Additionally, the importance of the historical and cultural context emerged as highly influential over the actual impact of policies and initiatives. B02_I mentions the habit of Spanish institutions of working alone rather than collectively, which she traces back to the Civil War period, which impacts negatively on multilevel dialogue. On the other hand, B08_I and B21_A believe the Spanish cultural context is characterized by a rather spread awareness about gender differences and the need to address them, while B11_E and B17_A think that in Catalunya, interest about food systems is very present – also, but not only, due to the strong connection between Catalan independentism and its appreciation for an edulcorated vision of rural Catalunya –, which makes it a promising context to legitimize food as a policy issue. As for Milan, M20_A believes the highly individualistic society of Milan and its surrounding areas is hindering the chances for organization and collaboration among farmers and more traditional actors of the local food system, but at the same time M17_E and M11_A explain that the city has a long history of grassroots organization related to food, especially tied to the Parco Agricolo Sud. No interviewee in Milan considered the cultural context to be promising in terms of attention to gender differences. Lastly, M11_A underlines the need to pay attention to the cultural background of each individual who is being targeted through food-related initiatives, by providing the example of households with a migration background who might receive food boxes or products from a GAS that contain types of food that they do not know, because they are uncommon in the cuisine to which they are culturally used to, and this means that they (most often women) do not know how to cook them. This alone can mean that the food ends up wasted anyway, decreasing the actual impact of the food box. Indeed, international guidelines on how to grant the right to food not only state that food should be available, but also that it must be nutritious, healthy and culturally appropriate (FAO, 2024).

3.2.5 Outline of main results and what they mean for gender-just urban food systems

This paragraph sums up the main findings from interviews by underlining the connections between themes, with a specific focus on what these results mean for gender-just urban food system transformation.

The most striking gender difference regards gender representation in the various roles of the studied urban food systems, which raises questions on gendered power dynamics and intersectionality. For example, interviewees in both cities state that most volunteers in AFNs are women, and some of them assume this is due to the fact that such activities are essentially acts of care (for the environment and for communities), which is still a feminized attitude. At the same time, though, women tend to also have more care-related responsibilities for their close ones, and in some cases this means that more women are interested in participating in AFNs, but they also have less free time to do so. Some AFNs have applied strategies such as providing childcare during their meetings and scheduling the meetings at specific times when usually people do not have to carry out these care-related tasks.[38] A prevalence of women is also to be found in Barcelona's institutional urban food governance – the Municipalities' UFP team, as well as the project team dedicated to the World Capital of Sustainable Food event, as well as the responsible people in other institutions such as the Diputació and the AMB all have a female majority –, but not in Milan, where interviewees stated that there are many women working for the Food Policy Office, yet not in such a strong prevalence as in other cities, and the hierarchically higher roles are covered by men. Lastly, in Barcelona a female prevalence was also detected in the participation to consultation processes held by the Ajuntament to draft the UFP, although again, this overlaps with time constraints that people who have care-related responsibilities might encounter. All these elements draw a picture of a feminized interest towards urban food systems transformation, that interviewees often relate to the feminization of care attitudes, yet this same feminization of care

[38] Again, it is fundamental to underline that providing childcare should *not* be considered only a strategy for women's inclusion, in the ideal context of equitably shared responsibility over childcare among parents, but because of the still persisting gender roles that tend to place such responsibility mostly on women, such a service still affects women's participation capacity more than men's.

creates barriers to women's participation, both in AFNs and in institutional participatory processes. Also, in the case of Milan, where urban food governance is more institutionalized (both at the institution and AFN level, with many AFN projects being led by big foundations and third sector organizations rather than small, self-managed groups), such female majority disappears in roles that are hierarchically higher, while it stands among volunteering positions. Such female majority must however be looked at with an intersectionality lens, as interviewees agree that participatory processes tend to disfavor the youth, people with a migration background and people with lower educational levels, while engaging with AFN activities is often easier for the elderly (due to their larger time availability) and less encouraging for migrant communities.

Instead, people with a migration background (and again especially women) represent the majority of recipients of AFN activities aimed at food aid (such as food boxes distribution, community kitchens…). This is due to the feminization of poverty which is even stronger among migrant women, to the gendered division of reproductive labor that sees women as responsible for feeding their household – so if a whole (heterosexual) household needs a food box, often the wife/mother is going to collect it –, and lastly to the need for socialization opportunities that participating in some AFN activities represent, such as cooking workshops that see a high participation of women who are not originally from that neighborhood, and local elderly women. This shows the tensions between the need to support a change towards more equal distribution of reproductive labor tasks, to relieve women from part of this responsibility, and the opportunity that performing these tasks creates for women who are facing some sort of social exclusion. Indeed, some interviewees explained that the socialization opportunity that comes from gathering with other women every week to collect a food box is extremely important for their empowerment, and for this reason their AFNs do not have the intention of trying to change the gender dynamics of their recipients' households (for example through awareness raising or actions aimed at engaging the fathers/husbands), although these dynamics technically reproduce the gendered division of labor that, in theory, disfavors women's emancipation. It would be interesting to see whether and how queer communities challenge such gendered division

of labor at the household level and beyond, to add one more layer of intersectionality that specifically regards gender dynamics (Hubbard, 2001; Scicluna, 2017), however this topic was rarely raised by interviewees, mostly because they are often not aware of the gender identity and/or sexuality of all the people they work with, or because data is not available.

A few examples of male majority in AFN activities were found by interviewees managing initiatives that offer job positions to people who are facing social exclusion. In this case, jobs in agriculture saw more male candidates, in line with data about gender representation in the first sector, while restaurant jobs, that are usually more feminized, ended up also with more male candidates due to the pool of people that were considered for such positions, namely some categories of social exclusion that are typically more male, like ex-convicts. At the same time, a startup employing cooks with a migration background found many more women candidates. This shows that the gendered character of jobs related to food systems is usually perpetuated by initiatives that aim at transforming these systems – unless they intentionally try to avoid this, or they target a specific social group that is already strongly gendered in itself like ex-convicts. For this reason, certain actions aimed at social inclusion and income support tend to have more impact on one gender or the other, depending on the specific type of job offered. The same goes for the mentioned empowerment opportunity that certain initiatives provide. This is not necessarily bad, but it shows the importance of being aware of gender differences when setting up a specific action or project, as they might have an impact on who gets to benefit from it. Among interviewees for this research, such initial awareness was mostly lacking, and gender representation in participants and recipients was simply detected later through observation.

A similar lack of awareness exists about the space that women occupy in urban food governance, especially in Barcelona where female prevalence is quite strong also among paid and institutional positions. Although interviewees stated that women occupy much space in this context, they also agreed that a collective awareness about it does not exist. This leads to the consideration that women being present and having power does not necessarily translate into stronger attention to gender equality. This shows in the general lack of strategies to address gender equality admitted by most

interviewees, although with notable exceptions. In institutional project and policies, too, attention to gender seems mostly related to the obligation of providing data about gender representation (as requested for example by EU projects or institutional funding requests), but often it is limited to an *ex-post* declaration of this datum. As for policies, Barcelona's UFP explicitly mentions the need to address gender differences in its food system, and speaks specifically of differences in the division of reproductive labor and differences in representation in food-related jobs (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). However, interviewees agree that such approach has not yet been translated into a concrete strategy of implementation. Indeed, the presence of this goal does not seem to be influencing other urban food governance actors to apply a gender perspective, since the few actors who had some strategy were not aware about the UFP's consideration of gender differences, thus it came from their own will. In Milan, instead, a gender perspective was not present in the UFP and so far, institutions do not seem to have the intention of introducing it. Indeed, in Barcelona contrarily to Milan interviewees felt that at least mentioning gender equality in policies and projects has become normalized, and this political context – supported not only locally by the explicitly feminist previous administration of Ada Colau's Barcelona en comú (Roberts, 2023), but also nationally by the so-called State feminism – might have meant a hollowing out of this approach by turning it into an often unimplemented goal on paper, but also might have contributed to spreading awareness and making the topic more generally accepted, which has not happened in the Italian context (Alonso et al., 2023).

Lastly, in terms of governance spaces that hold potential to drive a gender-just urban food transition, no specific example was found of spaces that are already leading the way, however some hints at possible future paths can be detected. Three elements in particular emerge as crucial for the introduction of new perspectives in urban food governance (such as a gender-attentive one): i) inclusive and trustworthy participatory spaces, ii) individuals/organizations who consider such perspectives as a priority, and iii) informal personal relations among actors.

Participatory spaces (i) already exist in the studied cities (especially those set up by institutions, the Agròpolis and Acord Ciutadà in Barcelona and the communities of practice in Milan), however they

have some limitations that hinder their potential to be the stage for raising truly innovative perspectives. In Milan, the general perception is that these spaces are not completely inclusive to all actors, but rather they engage actors that the Municipality already knows and trusts, who often work specifically on the fields that the Municipality itself is already pursuing. Also, the meetings are very structured and top-down managed, and they aim at discussing specific topics chosen by the Municipality. In Barcelona, the spaces are perceived as more inclusive – anyone can participate – and open to the introduction of ideas, however practical limitations such as time constraints and the consequent need to set priorities make it hard to actually introduce very innovative ideas and perspectives, because often actors' priority is the transformation of food systems in a stricter sense, and introducing a topic such as gender equality would probably shift the focus of the discussion and not allow to reach conclusions about food.

For this reason of priority setting, the chances of actors introducing perspectives that are not yet perceived as strongly connected to food systems transformation (such as the gender perspective) is highly dependent on the presence of actors whose priority is precisely gender equality (ii). As mentioned, during this research only one actor was mapped with this order of priorities (B06_A), who had however not participated in the consultation process due to their fear of co-optation of their radicality. This is why such spaces also need to be trustworthy. Instead, another AFN was mapped that self-defined as ecofeminist (B21_A) and participated in the UFP consultation process, but they explained that this stance is not part of the claims they bring to institutions regarding food systems, thus confirming the relevance of priorities.

At the same time, the existence of actors who are aware about gender differences in food systems and are willing to address them might not be enough for a gender perspective to reach official spaces of participation due to previously explained reasons like time constraints and limitations to participatory spaces. This is why personal relations among actors and the informal spaces of dialogue they create are crucial (iii). The fact that people who are active in urban food governance at different levels (AFNs, institutions, academia…) often know each other and speak to each other outside of formally

structured spaces allows them to overcome the constraints that these spaces have and discuss a variety of topics more spontaneously, also based on personal ideas rather than representing their institution's or AFN's main priorities. This is what happened for the project Dames_Bcn in Barcelona, when some women professionals realized that not enough attention was being paid by women's role in Barcelona's food system, and they contacted other women professionals of the field to set up an initiative to respond to this need. However, due to it not being a priority project, it was not completed. Still, this project shows that professionals who were working in different areas of Barcelona's food governance came up with an idea related to their awareness of gender differences in the city's food system and leveraged their personal relations and positions to put it into practice. In Milan, no similar example of grassroots initiative specifically dedicated to gender differences in food systems was detected. However, the relevance of the Whatsapp group of socially active women from M13_A's neighborhood and their impactful role in the city-wide network that was created to respond to increasing food insecurity during Covid-19 again shows the importance of informal spaces and personal ties to overcome some issues of slowness, rigidity and need to compromise that characterize more structured spaces of participation.

While neither of the two case study cities presents all three elements that were just described, Barcelona seems closer to satisfying these conditions (as well as representing a political context that has normalized paying attention to gender differences more than Milan), and indeed results show more awareness about the topic, and more strategies to address it, among interviewees in Barcelona than in Milan, with some exceptions.

Lastly, the relevance of the local scale – not only urban but even micro scales such as neighborhoods and households – seems confirmed, both as impactful on gender differences in food systems due to the ever-mentioned gendered division of reproductive labor, and as powerful in addressing such differences. Indeed, neighborhoods and local communities appear as relevant spaces to notice these differences on the ground and detect practical expressions of gendered experiences related to food systems that urban food governance actors had not previously thought about nor planned, or that are

often simply discussed in theory. Shedding light on practical examples of gender differences also showed how important it is to apply an intersectional perspective, as the detected differences often intertwined with elements like age, class, education and origin. Also, these scales provide citizens with reasons of engagement beyond one's interest for food systems sustainability, for example by supporting the construction of social ties. In the interesting B21_A case, this led some elderly people to join the activities of an ecofeminist AFN in their neighborhood, creating the occasion for dialogue over political topics, with both sides negotiating their stance for the sake of the AFN itself.

All these results contribute to the advancement of knowledge about gender-just urban food systems transformation by underlining what shape these differences take, what actors are already doing or could do, and what governance spaces are more promising to address them. In the next chapter, they are interpreted based on the theoretical framework to highlight how these results contribute to broader theoretical discussions on right to the city, practice of everyday life and feminist ethics of care.

3.3 Summary of chapter 3

Chapter 3 started by describing the methodology (qualitative, semi-structured interviews) and positionality of the study. Then, it provided details on the interviews that were conducted and relevant events that were attended. It then deep dives into the results, which are divided into three topics mirroring the interview main questions: gender differences (Q1), governance relations (Q2) and potentialities of urban food governance (Q3). For Q1, the most recurring themes regard existing gender differences in the studied contexts (especially gender representation in different roles and positions, with a strong feminization of the context, although with differences in power and important intersection with elements like origin or age), strategies to tackle them, and factors that hinder the possibility for urban food governance actors to engage with gender differences in their activities. For Q2, the main themes regard actors' visions and ideals, the impact of procedures on urban food governance initiatives, and generally the different relational dynamics that exist between grassroots and institutional actors. Lastly, for Q3 interviewees mostly discussed the impacts that urban food

governance is already having on their cities' food systems, as well as factors that either favor or hinder such impacts. In the last paragraph, an overview is provided of how all these results interconnect, and especially what they mean for gender-just urban food systems. The results detect three main elements that seem necessary for an urban food governance landscape that is attentive to gender differences: i) the existence of inclusive and trustworthy participation spaces, ii) individuals/organizations who consider gender equality as a priority, and iii) informal personal relations among actors. The next chapter applies the theoretical framework to the interpretation of these results.

Chapter 4: Interpretation of results in light of the theoretical framework

Chapter abstract: The fourth chapter is dedicated to interpreting the results from chapter 3 in light of the theoretical framework of feminist urban theory that was introduced in chapter 1. It first presents some fundamental concepts, such as the feminist interpretations of the right to the city and the practice of everyday life, then applies the lens of feminist ethics of care to the analyzed urban food systems cases. Through this lens, differences based on gender and power are unpacked, especially regarding ethics informing action and the feminization of collective and private care practices. A relational social ontology, that is at the basis of a feminist ethics of care and recognizes interdependencies among scales and actors, is presented as transformative for urban food systems, and the chapter argues that many interviewees already apply a similar understanding to their actions, whether aware or not. Lastly, the potential of urban food governance in enhancing women's right to the city "in the meantime" is discussed, in tension with the persistence of gendered roles in food and care matters.

4.1 Feminist urban theory

In this chapter, the previously presented results are interpreted in the framework of feminist urban theory that was briefly explained in chapter 1, both with the aim of contextualizing them within the broader field of urban studies, and of understanding what these results – albeit very specific to the topic of urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona – can in turn contribute to urban theory and especially feminist urban theory. The discussion starts from theory and literature by raising concepts and studies that are considered useful to frame the results that were presented in chapter 3. For each of these concepts, it then connects it to the fieldwork results that resonate with it, by presenting how they link and how such results contribute to further developing the theoretical discussion.

As anticipated in the first chapter, this thesis will use two fundamental concepts of urban theory, namely the right to the city elaborated by Lefebvre (1968) and the practice of everyday life developed by de Certeau (1988), but they will be re-read to include a gender, and more specifically feminist, perspective.[39] Indeed, scholars have long ago started recognizing the lack of a gender perspective in these works (Langer, 1988; Martin, 1999) and criticized the fact that the urban experiences they

[39] In this context, I intend a "gender perspective" to be a perspective that explicitly considers gender as a relevant variable in analyzing social phenomena, but not necessarily addressing in a critical way the power dynamics that stand at its basis, while a "feminist perspective" explicitly considers power dynamics and has an aim of social change, even more so in the case of "intersectional feminist perspectives", which explicitly include other axes of discrimination in the analysis and critique of power dynamics (Few-Demo & Allen, 2020; Paganini et al., 2024).

represent are mostly the experience of men, and specifically middle-upper class, white and heterosexual men, from an intersectional point of view (Fenster, 2005). To be fair, after the first main volume of "The Practice of Everyday Life" – which is arguably the most famous one and presents de Certeau's theoretical vision – his work included also a second volume of empirical application of such vision that somehow considers gender (De Certeau et al., 1998; Martin, 1999). Tellingly, the second volume's title is "Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking", and according to Martin it was «designed to introduce women's lives into the research project» (1999, p. 208), thus confirming that women's lives were not much considered in the first volume, and at the same time tying women's everyday experiences to food practices, more specifically the practice of cooking for household nutrition. This volume – which was authored not only by de Certeau but also colleagues, including female colleague Luce Giard who authored the chapter on "Doing-Cooking" (De Certeau et al., 1998, pp. 149–248), is rich in considerations about the gendered distribution of domestic labor, its invisibility, and how it has often meant for women to find their place in the private of the home – «At this level of social invisibility, at this degree of cultural nonrecognition, a place for women has been granted, and continues to be, as if by birthright, because no one generally pays any attention to their every day work» (De Certeau et al., 1998, p. 104) – , while the public space remained mostly the place of men (with exceptions, such as grocery stores). However, it lacks a critical perspective on the power dynamics that such gendered roles entail, and it mostly seems to be interested in analyzing, separately, the female experience of everyday life, rather than questioning this division and the patriarchal power structures that have led to its affirmation. Still, it is interesting to assess that food – in this case the food practices related to household nutrition, rather than food as a system – has long been considered central to the everyday urban experience of all people (De Certeau et al., 1998, p. 101), and also to the different spatial practices of urban dwellers based on their gender (in these volumes, gender is mainly intended as binary and often referred to as "sex").

In any case, other scholars have been performing the work of questioning gender power relations in urban spaces and everyday urban life, already at chronologically similar times as de Certeau, such as

Hayden (1980, 1981) or Massey (1994), and later also explicitly based on de Certeau's and Lefebvre's work with the intention of keeping their main theoretical contributions while integrating a gender perspective (Beebeejaun, 2017; Collie, 2013; Fenster, 2005; Peake, 2016; Vaiou, 1992; Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006).

Both Massey and Hayden challenged traditional dichotomous ways of thinking as they argue that these stand at the basis of the «construction of the radical distinction between genders in our society, to the characteristics assigned to each of them, and to the power relations maintained between them» (Massey, 1994, p. 256). Hayden noticed how material feminists have criticized the vision of private space (home) as separated from public space, as well as the separation of domestic economy from political economy, as such dichotomous understandings contribute to the gendered division of labor and the consequent oppression of women (Hayden, 1981). She argues that such separation, materially represented by the «conventional home», serves women badly, especially employed women (Hayden, 1980, p. 174). Rather, she underlines that rapid urban growth requires a recognition of social and economic interdependence (Hayden, 1981, p. 9). More recently, Peake (2016) argued that binary conceptions of urban space such as productive/unproductive (or productive/reproductive), urban/suburban, public/private, that are often related to a gendered labor division, have long dominated urban studies, although critical perspectives have been emerging that invite to rethink both the ontology and epistemology of the "urban" (Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Peake, 2016).

Feminist urban theory has precisely addressed this need to rethink the ontology of cities, and among many approaches that scholars – including feminist geographers (McEwan & Goodman, 2010) – have developed overtime (Peake, 2016), the specific lens that in this context seems most appropriate to apply is that of a feminist ethics of care.

4.2 A feminist ontology of cities

A feminist ethics of care is usually defined starting from Tronto and Fisher's definition of "care": a «species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so

that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web» (Tronto & Fisher, 1990, p. 40). More recently, scholars who have been using this concept and lens have further elaborated on what it means to apply such a vision: Midgley explains that it means to «recognise the situated, interdependent and collective relational bases of our responsibilities both to the self and to others» (Midgley, 2016, p. 265), while Lawson underlines that «care ethics begins from a relational social ontology, understanding our world in terms of the connections that bind us together» (2007, p. 4).

Feminist ethics of a care as a lens to understand cities and social relations happening within and around them seems to espouse the critique of dichotomous thinking introduced by Massey and Hayden, in favor of a vision that recognizes and questions interdependencies, and supports the need to share a collective responsibility to «maintain, continue, and repair» our world (Tronto & Fisher, 1990, p. 40).

Indeed, some urban scholars have used this concept to support a different idea of cities, such as «care-full cities» by Williams, who «explore[s] the possibility of the feminist ethic of care to enhance urban theory by placing emphasis upon our collective interdependence and responsibility to one another» (2020, p. 1). It is also important to underline that scholars using the concept of "feminist" ethics of care are not only using it in contrast to dichotomous thinking and binary visions of separation between urban/suburban, private/public and in favor of recognizing interdependencies and supporting caring relations, but rather also in contrast to a "neoliberal" ethics of care (as Borgerson states, «not all caring relationships are feminist», 2007, p. 490). This latter concept still sustains, somehow, the relevance of care, but does so by continuing to confine it to an individual responsibility that should be performed privately, rather than collectively (Hobart & Kneese, 2020; Williams, 2020; Williams & Tait, 2023). This is problematic as it «erode[s] our collective sense of responsibility to care for each other and our worlds as interconnected» (Williams, 2020, p. 2). Indeed, by casting care to the private space of the home, neoliberal ethics of care reiterate, rather than question, the separation between

private and public (both space and responsibility), do not support an interdependent understanding of urban spaces and social relations happening in and around them, and consequently – from a purely gender perspective – reinforce the unequal distribution of care labor that historically and culturally has long been based on gender (and mostly continues to be), thus weighing disproportionately on women, and some women more than others from an intersectional perspective. As Williams underlines, «who does the work of care in our worlds remains deeply political, as it is gendered, classed and often racialized» (2020, p. 1). Also, neoliberal care ethics have been found to provide mostly "band-aid" solutions – often in the form of top-down charity – to urban problems, as they tend not to address, nor question, root causes and power dynamics causing such issues (Cloke et al., 2017). These arguments have also been used more specifically in literature about urban food systems and AFNs.

4.2.1. A relational social ontology for feminist urban food systems

How does this discussion apply to urban food systems transformation and the gender differences that are to be found in this field?

4.2.1.1 Caring "at a distance" and recognizing interdependencies

Firstly, it must be remembered that urban areas and their impact on global food systems have long been overlooked as relevant players in the quest for sustainable food systems, due to a perceived disconnection and "disembeddedness" of cities – as sites of consumption – both from surrounding rural areas of production and broader global food chains (Borrelli et al., 2017; Stierand, 2012). Such perceived disconnection caused, for a long time, a general disinterest on the part of cities and city dwellers about food system issues, but also for food to generally be considered an agricultural, and therefore rural, issue (Halliday, 2022), thus overlooking cities' potential in addressing food systems' shortcomings. As seen, this perception has started reversing in recent years and cities are increasingly considered as relevant actors for the food system transition (Moragues-Faus et al., 2024; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010). From a feminist ethics of care perspective, it could be argued that the relational social

ontology that stands at its basis is fundamental in boosting this vision of urban areas as interdependent with global food chains, since urban food systems are impossible to understand and analyze as confined within their own municipal or metropolitan borders (Sonnino et al., 2019). Also, a feminist ethics of care fosters the ability of individuals to «care at a distance» (Cox, 2010, p. 1), thus supporting the need to recognize and make visible the interdependence between scales and areas, and consequently the importance of "caring" for distant others, too, human and non-human (Beacham, 2018; Pettersson & Tillmar, 2022). Indeed, this discourse emerged during fieldwork, with some interviewees explaining that their actions are not only tackling local issues, but rather they are also intended to care for the Earth in a broader sense (M11_A, B05_A, B06_A, B21_A), including specific reference to the soil (M11_A, B06_A). B06_A also refers explicitly to the fact that their urban garden helps participants learn about nature cycles and how much "care" – meaning an interconnection of both human labor and natural resources like rain/water, seeds, soil, as well as time and patience – is needed to «grow even a single tomato». She states that it is important to re-learn about this, as many people have lost awareness about how and where food is grown.

4.2.1.2 Questioning power and gender relations

Secondly, a feminist ethics of care invites to question all power relations, not only along the lines of gender, to detect responsibilities – in this case, over the unsustainability of food systems – and highlights the often unequal distribution of care actions performed to fix food system issues (Williams & Sharp, 2023). In this sense, a feminist ethics of care explicitly recognizes the need to collectively share the responsibility to care for food systems, rather than placing it onto individuals and households (Organo et al., 2013; Williams, 2020), which is often the case in food system issues that are more evident in urban areas, as they mostly regard consumption-related phases at the end of the food chain. Two examples relating to the problem of unequally distributed responsibility that were raised by interviewees (B17_A, M09_A, M22_I) are food waste and bad consumption habits, that tend to be blamed on individual households and consumers rather than bigger players of global food

chains or food environments – and literature has also shown that responsibility over food waste and healthy diets within households is often placed on women (Martin & Lippert, 2012; Staeheli, 2003). Indeed, the profoundly unequal distribution of power in global food systems has been unpacked and discussed by scholars (Clapp et al., 2025), and while this type of lens might seem to regard global scales more than urban ones, some of the effects of such power concentration can easily be interpreted as impacting everyday life in urban areas, too, even in a gendered way. For example, as stated by Clapp et al., «the kind of influence that large and dominant firms have over the material conditions or features of the marketplace can have real consequences for people's lived experiences and agency because it shapes their capacity to make and act on choices» (2025, p. 8). Also, they underline the disproportionate power that some actors of global food systems (often private corporations) can have over local food environments, food security (for example due to their power over prices, that might increase inequalities) and food quality, access to technologies, but also on people's agency by shaping the materialities of their everyday food practices (Clapp et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2025). Interestingly for this thesis, all these food system aspects – food environments, food security, access to technologies, everyday food practices – have been proven to be characterized by gender differences (Bergonzini, 2024b; Broussard, 2019; Fodor, 2022; Groverman & van der Wees, 2016), as elaborated in previous chapters. Additionally, the mentioned impact on the agency of individual people is also relevant because a disproportionate concentration of power can shape who gets to influence food policies and governance processes, but at the same time the lack of accountability and responsibility often showed by these powerful actors has been found to stir bottom-up participation by grassroots movements willing to address injustice (Clapp et al., 2025; Rao et al., 2025). A similar argument was expressed also by some interviewees who feel that change must come from the bottom up (7 sources for the code "transformation must come from the bottom up", see Annex 1), and have little trust over institutional actors' actual potential in transforming food systems in a sustainable and socially just way (e.g., code "not enough transformative potential of municipalities" was mentioned by 5 interviewees, and "perceived limited transformative potential of institutions" by 9, see Annex 1).

Indeed, some interviewees stated that they decided to take action also because of a disagreement and/or lack of trust with the ways institutions were addressing food system issues, and others stated that, while commendable, institutional efforts cannot, by definition, be as radical and transformative as grassroots initiatives and for this reason they feel that bottom-up forms of governance for the urban food transition are needed (e.g., B15_A, M13_A, M18_A).

4.2.1.3 Urban subjects vs urban objects in the production and appropriation of public space

Lastly, a feminist ethics of care invites not only to detect, but also to address such power relations in a transformative way, by acting on the root causes that sustain and perpetuate inequalities rather than only providing "band-aid" solutions to the problems caused by this unequal distribution of power (Cloke et al., 2017). As for urban food systems, this argument has been used to distinguish between urban food initiatives that have a mutualistic approach rooted in an «ontology of connections» (Pettersson & Tillmar, 2022, p. 1453) and that rely «on working with communities and asking them what they need rather than making paternalistic assumptions» (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 10), thus resonating with a feminist ethics of care, and those that have a top-down charity approach (often related to religious groups, Cloke et al., 2017), relying on «discourses of moral obligation or individual character» (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 10), thus resonating more with a neoliberal ethics of care. The latter type was for example used in literature about food banks arguing that often, their model is a «benign, […] short-term emergency response to problems of food insecurity [that] will become accepted as a response to an issue they cannot solve» (Cloke et al., 2017, p. 3). This argument criticizes the fact that such initiatives do not necessarily address, or even question, the root causes for the inequalities they respond to, as a feminist ethics of care instead would invite to do. Similar arguments were raised by some interviewees, for example criticizing food waste collection and redistribution initiatives that do not tackle the root causes of waste but rather rely on the very existence of waste to continue functioning (M17_E). Other interviewees claimed that their approach is intentionally aiming at engaging with the recipients of their activities, especially in the case of food

aid distribution initiatives, to build a relation and listen to their actual needs rather than assuming that any type of food aid is acceptable for food insecure people (M01_A, M05_A, M18_A). Some go as far as reclaiming a mutualistic approach that tries to dismantle a purely "passive recipient-active giver" relation in favor of a more active role on the part of recipients (M01_A, M04_A, B05_A, B21_A). Such intention resonates with the refusal of dichotomies firstly introduced by Massey and Hayden and later assumed by feminist care ethics to underline the relational social ontology on which it is based.

Moreover, this attitude could also be interpreted as a practical way of tackling the distinction between "observer/observed" urban dweller, presented by Collie as a criticism towards de Certeau's argument on the role of pedestrians (2013).[40] This requires a brief recount of some concepts from de Certeau's work. More specifically, in his "Walking in the City" chapter (1988, pp. 91–110), he introduces a differentiation between distant and opaque observation points of view – through the example of looking at New York City from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center –, which, he claims, belong to urban planning representing a «panoptic power», and only provide a «concept» of the city, and on the other hand the on-the-ground point of view of pedestrians, which he defines as more operational, since pedestrians' practice of walking produces and appropriates the urban space at the same time. While the invitation to focus on practical uses of the city by urban dwellers remains relevant, Collie's feminist re-reading of de Certeau's work underlines power inequalities that are intrinsic to his discourse, and yet not explicitly engaged in "The Practice of Everyday Life". De Certeau does engage

[40] I take this occasion to discuss a seemingly paradoxical attitude towards dichotomies that is to be found throughout this thesis. While the thesis welcomes Massey's and Hayden's critique of dichotomies, especially those that are relevant for the evolution of feminist urban theory such as urban/suburban, private/public space, productive/reproductive, it might also seem that it is sometimes perpetuating a dichotomic vision by presenting binary distinctions between, among others, feminist vs neoliberal care ethics, or urban observer vs observed. Surely, this seems like a paradox, or at least incoherence. However, I argue that, first of all, especially Hayden's critiques were aimed at dismantling strictly binary distinctions that were imposed by what de Certeau would call a "panoptic power" (referred later in the text) and systematically used to justify the strict division of labor between men and women, resulting in women's disempowerment and often confinement to the "periphery" of society, both physical and ideal. Thus, if refusing this type of understanding of society and urban theory to propose a different one – that is situated and based on a relational social ontology –means to reiterate a dichotomy, I welcome and reclaim this paradox. Secondly, a critique of dichotomies does not necessarily refuse the existence of juxtaposed concepts that, in theory, are one the contrary of the other, rather it invites to assume a situated perspective to try and detect nuances of how these concepts are performed in practice, to avoid blindly categorizing anything in one or the other. As will be seen with empirical examples, sometimes both concepts are true, or a middle-way exists, what Massey calls «third possibilities» (1994, p. 256).

with the concept of power, specifically through the criticism of the "panoptic power" that comes from distant observers and only provides an abstract, conceptual understanding of the city. However, Collie underlines that he does not engage with the different powers and privileges urban dwellers can have based on their identity. Collie compares de Certeau's "pedestrian" subject to the flaneur, an urban subject that «not only uses, but witnesses and responds to the city» (2013, p. 4). She argues, then, that de Certeau's pedestrians not only produce urban space, but are also active observers of it, although from a much more grounded point of view compared to the mentioned distant "panoptic power". However, she underlines that being able to assume the position of anonymous observer – thus active subject reading and interpreting the city – is a privilege that often resides with male, middle-class and educated urban subjects, while «people's gender, class and racial background, and to what degree their bodies conform to conventions of desire, or movement and anatomy […], affect their ability to extricate themselves from the spectacle of the city enough to be its observer» (2013, p. 5), thus confining them to an urban "object" (passive), rather than "subject", or at best to both things simultaneously (subject and object). The point of view of the female urban dweller, specifically, is often «split between that of a privileged observer (in terms of class and culture, for example) and that of the object» (*ibid.*, p. 6), again underlining the need for an intersectional perspective.

To return more concretely to the thesis' topic, this theoretical digression about passive and active urban dwellers can be applied to urban food governance and the specific fieldwork results from this research in two ways. Firstly, a feminist ethics of care lens onto interview results shows that urban food initiatives that are performed through a mutualistic approach by engaging recipients and making them active participants, rather than a neoliberal top-down approach that does not truly engage with them, can contribute to the dismantling of power structures that are sometimes intrinsic to care actions due to a strong juxtaposition of passive receivers of care to active givers of care. Thus, feminist ethics of care in practice – in this case through mutualistic urban food initiatives – can help urban dwellers that have usually been confined to being urban "objects", passively receiving top-down care, to become actively involved in the very care initiatives they benefit from, moving to the side of urban

subjects who can also "observe", rather than only "be observed", and therefore shape urban food systems through their activities and vision. This type of attitude was presented for example by M01_A, M04_A, M05_A, M18_A, B05_A, B09_A, B21_A, who all reclaimed a mutualistic approach to their activities that actively engage the people who turn to their AFNs for food aid or social inclusion, some even explicitly referring to a feminist ethics overarching their AFN's activities (B05_A, B21_A). In this case, the "observed" who become "observers" through participation in urban food initiatives were often women (M01_A, M05_A, M18_A), but most importantly, they were women with a migration background and/or financial disadvantages, as well as men facing social exclusion (e.g. homeless people, mostly men, M04_A, or men with low education, B21_A). This confirms Collie's argument that the privilege of "anonymously observing" is not only related to gender, and indeed middle-class and well-educated women with no migration background were hardly ever mentioned by interviewees among the usual profile of beneficiaries to their activities. Indeed, all these interviewees are involved in food initiatives that provide food aid or social inclusion opportunities, and their role in providing a chance to become active urban subjects could also be defined as an opportunity for empowerment, as will be discussed in a later paragraph from the specific perspective of women's right to the city. Instead, middle-class and well-educated women with no migration background are still overrepresented among volunteers – meaning participants to food initiatives whose engagement is not born out of a need, such as food insecurity –, like the case of M08_A, whose food aid distribution activity relies on many elderly women volunteers who usually come from local wealthy families, but also among institutional positions related to food governance (mostly in Barcelona) and other AFNs (e.g., M03_A, M10_A, M11_A, B04_A, B12_A, B21_A).

Secondly, from a more strictly gender perspective, applying Collie's argument to the context of urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona shows empirically how women, especially middle- and upper-class and well-educated women with no migration background, can be urban subjects and objects at the same time. In this case, the objectification is strictly related to their gender, since intersectionally speaking this is the only element that differentiates them from middle-class, well-

educated men with no migration background. Indeed, the fact that women are active practitioners shaping the urban food transition of these cities in unquestionable due to their overrepresentation in most of the cases analyzed and all the space they «occupy» in this context (B10_I). Interviewees generally agree that the urban food transition is strongly feminized (e.g., codes "food as a more feminine topic" or "more women involved", Table 4 and Annex 1). Still, interviewees also raised examples of discriminatory behaviors that make women's participation harder, spanning from silencing dynamics during assemblies on the part of male members of AFNs (M01_A, B20_E), to openly sexist behaviors such as catcalling and sexist jokes against female volunteers collecting food waste in wholesale markets on the part of male market workers (M03_A), or conflictual attitudes within a consumers' cooperative that made it necessary to create an internal care commission (B05_A). Such examples of women's objectification – meant in this case both in its most commonly agreed on meaning of sexual objectification, but also through Collie's distinction between urban subjects and objects – show that the problem of fear (meant in a broad sense) in public space is present in the context of urban food governance, too, despite it being a highly feminized environment. Indeed, fear of harassment or discrimination in public space has long been discussed by feminist geographers and urban scholars as an influential element shaping women's urban experience (Beebeejaun, 2017; Messa et al., 2025; Peake, 2016; Valentine, 1989; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020), and also as potentially abusing their capacity to fulfill their right to the city (Fenster, 2005). While in these cases, none of the interviewees stated that these events caused women to stop participating in their activities, – M03_A explains that they are «always moving in group and prepared, we have a tough skin, as women who are used to going to the market» – it adds a burden that women have to deal with (even the most privileged among women) and men don't, be it the need to grow a "tough skin" or to insist to be listened to during assemblies despite interruptions.

4.2.1.4 Tackling power and gender inequalities "in the meantime" and the role of materialities

Coming back to the discourse on neoliberal "band-aid" solutions in urban food governance, it must be stated that, while the criticism towards them stands both in theory and in empirical results from this research – for not tackling root causes of food system issues such as food waste (e.g., M17_E), but also of unjust power distribution by providing top-down solutions to food insecurity and injustice without actively engaging with recipient communities (e.g., M05_A, M18_A, B21_A) – , literature has also underlined the often unavoidable gap between political vision/ethics and practical actions, which are hardly ever perfectly aligned due to material constraints. Indeed, scholars underline the role of materialities in enabling (or not) care practices that correspond to espoused care ethics (Williams, 2022; Williams & Tait, 2023), and recognize that feminist ethics of care happen "in the meantime" and imperfectly (Cloke et al., 2017; Williams, 2020). Cloke et al. (2017, p. 7) define an "in the meantime" understanding of food initiatives – and in their paper, specifically of food banks – as «social action in the austere conditions of the here and now, whilst at the same time working towards an anti-capitalist sea change to bring about more structural change». They argue that, although food banks may seem not to tackle directly the root causes of food poverty, the people receiving food aid from them would hardly have other options to resort to, if food banks stopped providing their "band-aid" type of solution to focus only on solving root causes at the systemic level.[41] Peake proposes a similar concept, in the more general context of feminist urban theory, by stating the need to imagine alternative (feminist) urban futures that are «open to possibilities of the evolving but 'not yet'» (2016, p. 8). Similarly, Williams (2020, p. 6) underlines that «paying attention to/with care may mean exposing injustices and neglect, proposing solutions and amplifying alternatives that exist and that are realisable in the here and now», thus referring once again to the materiality of what is possible in the here and now (Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2010; Williams, 2017). This is often more limited compared to what a purely aspirational feminist ethics of care

[41] This "dilemma" was conceptualized by Poppendieck as the «dilemma of emergency food» (1994).

approach would intend to put into practice, as «individuals and organizations have different caring capacities» (Williams, 2022, p. 45). This means that, at first sight, an urban food initiative might seem not to tackle root causes of food system issues and to only provide a "band-aid", but in some cases the initiative itself does so on purpose, as it is what they materially can do in the here and now, while not forgetting the broader, systemic vision. Ethics therefore emerge as a place of transformation "in the meantime", since they certainly inform practice, but practice is also shaped by materialities. This suggests that investigating ethics could shine a light on the potential future development of practices based on actors' aspirations, as well as attempts at practicing them in current approaches, rather than limiting the analysis to what is materially possible in the here and now. Indeed, to be more specific about urban food governance, the latter perspective would risk making a mutualistic (or feminist) food aid distribution initiative appear as completely comparable to a neoliberal, top-down food aid distribution initiative due to their practices in the here and now, overlooking the long-term aspiration of systemic transformation of the former, that sometimes is (only temporarily) not being tackled due to material conditions (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*).

In this sense, it is important to underline the power dynamics that shape these materialities. As Clapp et al. explain (2025), actual agency on the part of individual people to act on food system issues is unequal and shaped by «significant power asymmetries» (p. 5), due to, among others, corporate concentration of power in global agrifood systems. While these power dynamics happen at global scales, they have material outcomes at the urban level, too, for example by shaping food environments and influencing policy outcomes at various scales (Clapp et al., 2025; López-García et al., 2025).

Interviewees have often referred to materialities impacting their capacity to perform their activities, thus on their actual capacity to practice the care ethics they espouse.[42] For example, various interviewees referred to limited free time availability hindering people from engaging in AFNs or in

[42] As previously explained, interviewees were not specifically asked about "care ethics", or "care" in general. Rather, this lens was applied *ex-post* to the interpretation of interview results, since many of them spontaneously mentioned that their actions are ultimately caring actions, or referred to the ethics standing behind their actions even without mentioning the word "care" specifically.

public participation opportunities, as well as other practical conditions that disfavor people's engagement in these activities due to a feeling of not belonging in these spaces, such as low educational background, migration background, or young age (B04_A, B05_A, B16_I, B17_A). Also, the theme "procedures" (see Table 6 and related paragraph) included many examples of material obstacles to urban food governance activities, especially grassroots ones, such as bureaucracy or the practical difficulties (e.g. time) that limit the actual chances to integrate a variety of themes and perspectives, such as a gender one. M04_A underlined that his AFN's initiatives are not "volunteering" but rather political action, but he also lamented that sometimes it is hard to successfully engage in purely political action, because all AFN members are volunteers who already dedicate much of their free time to the practical activity of food aid distribution, which tends to absorb all their time and efforts.

In the studied context, materialities are sometimes strongly related to gender differences and traditional gender roles and division of labor. Some interviewees explained that time constraints are often impacting (working) women more than men as they often have more care-related duties to carry out in their free time (B04_A, B05_A, B17_A). Other interviewees noticed that joining a GAS or a consumers' cooperative often requires a change in daily habits, since participants buy fresh produce rather than ready-made meals, and this means they necessarily need to dedicate much time to cooking. If traditional gender roles within participating households are not dismantled, extra time and effort to cook usually end up weighing more on women's shoulders (B14_A). This shows that, while not exactly *material*, the dominant cultural understanding of gender is another element that materially shapes urban food governance actions and their on-the-ground impacts. Other examples come from interviewees who started food-related initiatives without specific expectations or planning about gender representation within them but ended up empirically observing a disproportion in gender representation. Some cases include M02_A, whose cooking workshops employ almost only women, or M20_A whose agricultural cooperative, aimed at employing vulnerable people, receives almost only male applicants, because of what he believes to be a bias on the part of social service workers

that are in charge of putting him in touch with potential employees for farming activities. These are not necessarily examples of urban food governance initiatives that are hindered by material elements, but rather show that cultural elements, including the dominant understanding of gender roles, also have very material consequences on who gets to benefit from urban food governance initiatives.

A slightly different discussion can be dedicated to urban food initiatives in the form of self-organization for consumption, most notably GAS in Milan and consumers' cooperatives in Barcelona. In this case, by joining self-organized consumption initiatives participants try to overcome material constraints related to conventional global agrifood chains that they think prevent them from pursuing some personal objectives and ideals related to food. For example, M10_A explains that she first joined a GAS to improve the quality of food she and her household were consuming and to have a direct relation to producers, desires that she could not fulfill by only shopping at supermarkets. B05_A believes her participation in a consumers' cooperative is not necessarily leading to a big societal change but is surely supporting producers more than shopping at supermarkets would.

Lastly, another element to mention in the discourse on materialities and ethics is the common coexistence of different ethics within a single AFN. As presented in the chapter about results, some AFNs are not self-defining as feminist since only some of their members are openly and consciously feminist, although their activities could easily be defined as informed by feminist care ethics (B05_A, B04_A, M06_A), while other AFNs include feminism or ecofeminism among their core values, but recognize that not all members share this view (B06_A, B21_A). This could be another material element hindering the practical comprehensive application of feminist ethics of care (Cloke et al., 2017), which, however, still seems pervasive as an espoused value even when not explicitly recognized as such by urban food governance actors. This situation also further supports the need to avoid applying a strictly binary distinction between two seemingly contrary ethics – in this case feminist and neoliberal care ethics –, and rather to identify nuances. Among interviewees, indeed, many claimed that their activities are acts of care (see paragraph 3.2.2.1) although not surprisingly

none of them explicitly mentioned neither neoliberal nor feminist ethics of care.[43] Still, the pervasiveness of a feminist ethics of care over a neoliberal one is to be detected not only in the interviewees who spontaneously self-defined as feminists, but also more generically in the understanding of food systems as networks of interdependencies and in the approach of mutualism that many interviewees spoke about. Surely, there were also interviewees whose activities resonate more with a neoliberal ethics, through top-down charity-like initiatives, but the aim here is to underline how a feminist ethics of care can already be detected, at different levels of development and affirmation, and is indeed – albeit timidly, due in part to material constraints – shaping urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona.

All this considered, using a feminist ethics of care lens to interpret the results from interviews entails wondering who is, and who should be, caring for urban food systems (Williams & Sharp, 2023; Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*). Interpretation of this question can both require the unpacking of global power dynamics (such as the mentioned role of corporate concentration in global food systems that shapes urban materialities, too, Clapp et al., 2025) as well as local power dynamics, such as the different power urban dwellers have based on their identity, that leads them to a role of observer or observed based on privilege. In the case of urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona, it seems that both institutional and grassroots actors are taking the responsibility to care for the local food system, although with different ethics and materialities shaping their actions. Inequalities still persist between paid and unpaid roles, an overrepresentation of women, and the fact that vulnerable communities who are often the target recipients of urban food initiatives are not always involved actively in the planning and practicing of actions directed at them, but with examples of mutualism-based initiatives that try to dismantle this dynamic.

[43] Such concepts must be intended as theoretical lenses to analyze results, rather than concepts that interviewees were expected to know. Indeed, interviewees were not asked about the topic of care, as already explained, but even when they raised it spontaneously, they did so through the most commonly understood, generic meaning of the word "care". Interpretation of whether their actions resonated with a feminist ethics of care was based on other elements from their interviews, including but not limited to the topic of feminism. As a matter of fact, not every person, even if well-educated and socially engaged, has a theoretical understanding of the different concepts related to feminism or care that are used and applied in research, «some people are really much more interested in activism than in literature» (Estévez-Saá & Lorenzo-Modia, 2018, p. 12).

Indeed, such considerations show that a feminist ethics of care, as a lens of analysis but even more so as an ethic that informs action instead of neoliberal ethics of care, can be transformative in the quest for more sustainable urban food systems in general, not only in relation to gender dynamics within them. However, this thesis aims precisely at unpacking and questioning gender dynamics within urban food governance, so this specific point of view will be elaborated more in detail.

4.2.2 Unpacking gender dynamics in urban food governance through a feminist ethics of care lens

As seen in the previous paragraph, literature on AFNs and more generally about food systems transformation has already started underlining the care ethics that often stand at their bases, although an explicitly feminist ethics of care has been used much more rarely (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*), and often the gendered nature of care has been overlooked, with contributions that frame urban food initiatives in a care perspective without considering gender aspects (e.g. Corubolo et al., 2024). However, caring – as a practice and as an ethic – is profoundly gendered, as literature has proven multiple times (to name a few: Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017; Thelen, 2015), and this emerged also from the fieldwork presented in the previous chapter.

Applying a feminist ethics of care lens to these results means, first of all, to wonder who is currently responsible, and who should be responsible, to/for care in the considered urban food systems, thus focusing on power and gender relations in the sustainable food transition of Milan and Barcelona. This perspective invites to unpack the distribution of care practices in a specific context (Williams & Sharp, 2023) – in this case, urban food governance – by questioning who is performing care in the here and now, thus resonating with the mentioned "in the meantime" perspective that accounts for the role of materialities in limiting the actual capacity of actors to translate their ethics into practice (Cloke et al., 2017; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2010). While focusing on the here and now allows to detect power relations shaping the distribution of care practices in this context, a feminist ethics of care lens maintains an aspiration of social change, so it also invites to

start from the here and now to imagine future alternatives (Beacham, 2018; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Williams, 2017).

Regarding results from the field, two main interconnected elements emerge about gender and power dynamics characterizing the pool of actors that are "taking care" of the urban food transitions of Milan and Barcelona. They have to do with i) the overrepresentation of women (that however must be observed from an intersectional perspective, namely *what* women?) and ii) the large presence of unpaid and volunteering roles – especially in AFNs, but also in institution-led projects such as municipal food hubs in Milan. A third one can be noticed mostly in Milan, and that is iii) the gatekeeping attitude that interviewees from some grassroots initiatives perceived on the part of the Municipality when they tried to access the «closed circle» (M02_A) of actors engaging with the administration on projects about food.

4.2.2.1 More women in urban food governance: what women, in what roles?

Firstly, the research detected a general overrepresentation of women in urban food governance roles, both grassroots, institutional and research-related, albeit with distinctions (see Table 2). In Barcelona, this overrepresentation is to be found in AFNs as in institutions, with teams dedicated to food at the Ajuntament, AMB, Diputació and OCAS all including more women than men also in top positions, and interviewees agree that the field is very feminized. In Milan, instead, the overrepresentation of women is still present, but less striking and mostly limited to AFNs, with interviewees claiming that both volunteers and recipients are often women – with exceptions mentioned in previous paragraphs –, but institutional roles (at the MUFPP and Food Policy Office), as well as managerial roles within well-structured AFNs (such as AFN-like projects funded and managed by big foundations) do not see a similar female overrepresentation. Men's prevalence in Milan, also, is mostly to be found in top positions (Director of the Food Policy Office, MUFPP's Secretary, managerial roles for foundations promoting AFN-like activities). Lastly, almost 80% of participants to Barcelona's UFP consultation were women, but this datum is not available for Milan.

Secondly, it is important to address *what* women are represented in what roles. In both cities, interviewees state that recipients to initiatives aimed at food security and food aid are mostly women with a migration background, due to the spreading feminization of poverty that mostly regards migrant women with low socio-economic status (e.g., M01_A, M05_A, M18_A, B02_I). Instead, the women who cover institutional positions, participate in public consultations and other participation opportunities, and have responsibility roles in AFNs, are mostly middle-class (or even upper-class), well-educated women with no migration history (M03_A, M12_E, B16_I) – or at most, women with a migration history but middle-class and well-educated, such as South American women participating to B12_A or B09_A's activities with the aim of creating social ties in their neighborhoods and learning Catalan. B04_A and B05_A agree that consumers cooperatives are privileged spaces, where people facing some sort of social disadvantage tend not to feel welcome, or feel that participating is too much effort. B16_I feels the same for participation spaces set up by institutions, where youth, people with low education and with disadvantaged socioeconomic situations tend to feel like they do not belong, or again that the required time effort is unsustainable for them. As said, some initiatives try to engage recipients in a mutualistic dynamic that overcomes the distinction between passive receivers and active givers (e.g., M01_A), yet the reasons for participation in such dynamics still hide power inequalities, since the people who need the food support, even though they become actively involved in the AFN, are still somehow driven by a need that other AFN members do not have.

4.2.2.2 Responsibility vs right to care

These insights can be interpreted through a feminist ethics of care lens in terms of who is currently responsible for caring for urban food systems, but also in terms of who has the right (or privilege, even) to perform this care. Indeed, care is a complex concept, and its practice has both positive and negative implications, it carries both «problems and possibilities» (Cox, 2010). It simultaneously connects with the burden of responsibility, and with the impetus of people and communities to

perform their ethics of care towards human and non-human others to «repair our 'world'» (Tronto & Fisher, 1990, p. 40).

The concept of responsibility is first of all to be found in the reasons driving some grassroots initiatives and their members to engage in urban food governance, according to those interviewees who believe that institutions are not transformative enough, or who do not trust institutions' intentions and approaches (see codes "not enough transformative potential of municipalities", "perceived limited transformative potential of institutions" and "transformation must come from the bottom up"). Indeed, the perception that institutions – and also other powers of the food system, such as corporations – are not doing enough is spread and often leads to grassroots mobilizing to care for the urban food system. As seen, the people who mobilize to care for the urban food system in Milan and Barcelona are often women. Indeed, interviewees explain that both "care" and a general interest in "food" matters is still perceived as more feminine, again showing the material consequences of cultural elements.

However, the responsibility to care (for the collectivity) that people (mostly women) in grassroots food initiatives take on to make up for the inaction (or unsatisfactory action) of more powerful actors, while grounded in a feeling of need, is arguably less imposed and more free and voluntary than another type of responsibility, that is still connected to care in the food system, namely the responsibility for care labor at the household/private level. The latter is also feminized, and arguably much more strongly, due to a historically developed and hard to dismantle cultural understanding of gender roles (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Bergonzini & Acetino, *forthcoming*, DeVault, 1994; Williams-Forson & Counihan, 2011). This type of labor division is confirmed by interviewees, despite some timid changes, such as an increase in male shoppers at farmers' markets in Barcelona compared to the past (B15_A). This creates a situation in which women are overrepresented among people who are willing to engage in the care for food systems in their free time and as volunteers – taking up a collective responsibility – but are also expected to spend more of their free time performing private care labor, for family or close ones, thus their *responsibility* to care (privately) enters into conflict

with their *right* to care (collectively) (Bergonzini & Di Masso, *forthcoming*; Marrades-Puig, 2024; Rocha, 2022). Indeed, some interviewees in Barcelona mention this tension as a limitation to women's participation, such as B17_A whose AFN tries to offer childcare during their events to respond to this problem.[44] In Milan, instead, the main responsibility that is mentioned as a limitation to people's participation in urban food initiatives is related to jobs or study (M06_A, M10_A), or simply to «tiredness of daily life» (M20_A). Rather, the responsibility for care labor is sometimes presented as a reason for women not to have an employment and therefore have more time to engage in AFNs, especially for older generations (M08_A, M10_A).[45]

At the same time, the strong feminization of care labor is sometimes seen as an opportunity, both for women and for the engagement of people and communities in the transformation of urban food systems. Some interviewees explain that they actively target women in projects aimed at household food security due to them being promising points of contact to get in touch with families (B08_I).[46] The feminization of care is also visible in the prevalence of mothers engaging with school initiatives and of female teachers (M21_I), and given the variety of initiatives related to school canteens that Municipalities organize,[47] such as educational meetings and trainings (that Milan is also offering to

[44] Again, the fact that childcare services are mostly intended as actions to favor women's participation does *not* mean that childcare is recognized as a responsibility that *should* belong to women. Rather, this is a practical example of "in the meantime" initiative, which recognizes that, in the here and now, childcare is much more a female responsibility and hinders women's participation much more than it does to men. Therefore, offering this service is intended to help women's participation in the here and now, while working towards a societal change that grants an equal sharing of care responsibilities in the long term.

[45] In both cases, interviewees say that some members are now retired, and this is why they are not currently working, but they also state that some women indeed joined in the past due to being unemployed and stay-at-home wives, especially in the case of women coming from wealthy, Catholic households who volunteer in M08_A's AFN. For M10_A, members are more varied, of different ages and coming from diverse backgrounds.

[46] This might be a good moment to specify that this thesis in no way believes that performing care labor for family and close ones is in itself disempowering, nor that it is always imposed on women rather than chosen by them freely. What this thesis criticizes is the cultural understanding of gender that often drives (and is used to justify) the unequal distribution of (unpaid) care labor, which not always is chosen by women consciously, but simply accepted. As a matter of fact, women, too, are raised in a patriarchal society that teaches people this type of gender-based labor division, and indeed the existence of a "freedom of choice" is sometimes criticized as being a paradox based on neoliberal discourse (Moser, 2024). Still, surely some women choose freely and based on their preferences (as well as ideological orientation) (McDowell et al., 2005). Yet, at the systemic level, the disproportion is too large and spread, often unquestioned, and self-reiterating, with women who "leave" care labor duties – for example because they have an employment and can afford to pay for help – often resorting to the paid help of other women, usually migrants and/or women with a disadvantaged socio-economic status (Allen & Sachs, 2007).

[47] School canteens – and more broadly public food procurement – are one of the main areas of action for municipalities willing to engage in urban food governance (Gaitán-Cremaschi & Valbuena, 2024; Manson et al., 2024; Retière & Darly, 2023).

its schools, M21_I), often women "benefit" from these learning and training opportunities more than men. Lastly, the most striking positive impact on women that can be considered as a consequence of their overrepresentation in care labor is the empowering opportunity represented by the participation in AFNs activities, including as recipients who "simply" collect a food box for their household (M01_A, M18_A), or as participants to cooking workshops (M02_A, B12_A). These initiatives are often aimed at the socialization of people who are facing more or less extreme social exclusion – such as food insecure people, unemployed people, but also people who do not have (or have lost) social networks of support, like elders, or newly-arrived migrants – and due to gender-based care labor distribution, often women participate more than men. M01_A explained that, while as an ideal his AFN is against the feminization of care duties and supports the equal sharing of caring responsibilities, they are not actively trying to change the gender dynamics of the households to whom they distribute food boxes, as the weekly moment of collection of the box has become an empowering moment of socialization for migrant women, who otherwise tend to rarely leave their house, or at most always do so with their family rather than alone or with friends. This is another example of "in the meantime" tackling of issues, grounded in the materialities of the here and now. In this case, these women's *responsibility* to care actually supports their capacity to appropriate the *right* to care, in this case for themselves and their inclusion in the social ties of their neighborhood, as well as for the collectivity of the other women of the neighborhood.

So far, the analysis has focused on unpaid roles of urban food governance, but women are present also in paid and/or power positions, such as in institutions. As a matter of fact, in Barcelona they are overrepresented in these roles, too, while in Milan they are not, especially in hierarchically higher roles. In Barcelona, interviewees believe this is in part due to food still being perceived as a feminine topic (B08_I), which in turn makes it so that there are more female professionals available for these positions (B13_I). In Milan, a similar perception was not raised. It is interesting to underline that Milan's municipal food governance is much more institutionalized, and larger in terms of number of employees, than most cities' (Minotti et al., 2022), including Barcelona, thus its employees are not

all necessarily experts in food systems sustainability, but rather public servants who gained their experience directly by working at the Food Policy Office, or experts in project management and other roles that are necessary to manage large projects such as those that the Municipality of Milan takes on, also through the MUFPP Secretariat. Moreover, Milan's approach to urban food governance has been defined as top-down and managerial, both in literature (Bergonzini et al., In press) and by interviewees (M02_A, M14_I, M17_E). While this was not investigated on the field, and therefore a mere supposition that needs to be questioned unless further research is able to confirm or deny it, it seems that the different approaches of the two municipalities to food governance and participation (more horizontal in the case of Barcelona, although with practical limitations, B16_I; more top-down and institutionalized in Milan, M02_A) bring about a different gender representation. Again, this was not investigated specifically, so a causal relation is not claimed, but literature exists demonstrating that men are less interested than women in work that has a community-orientation, and more interested in the power that comes with a certain position (Block et al., 2018; Einolf, 2011; Kinahan et al., 2025). Such literature, if applied to these cases, could suggest that the strongest institutionalization of Milan's Food Policy Office, with hierarchically "powerful" positions (or at least positions that can be perceived as such, including Secretary of the MUFPP, an international Pact that is recognized worldwide), might have a role in attracting more male candidates than is usual for this field – M21_I confirmed that most cities they work with through the Pact have a much larger representation of women than Milan.[48]

Whatever the reason for this difference between Milan and Barcelona, it is still interesting that the situation in Milan adds another layer of inequality related to who is practicing care for urban food systems, more than in Barcelona. Indeed, even though in Milan as in Barcelona the field of urban

[48] This in no way intends to suggest that the professionals working at Milan's Food Policy Office are driven by power over purpose. Rather, the focus is on the different representation of men and women in two contexts that, although comparable in terms of objectives, are organized very differently. The different representation, with more men in a more structured, managerial, and arguably "prestigious" (or perceived as such) context and more women in a less institutionalized, smaller context that has recently lost political commitment after the change in administration (B10_I), seems to mirror what literature has found about men and women's attitude towards jobs, as cited in the text. However, I repeat again that this was not investigated specifically (nor suggested by any interviewee), so it should be taken as speculation aimed at suggesting future paths for research, rather than something I claim to be true.

food initiatives is highly feminized in volunteering and unpaid positions, with women taking on the responsibility to address collective issues, in Milan such feminization does not translate in more representation in positions of power. Surely, women are not absent from power, but they are underrepresented compared to their pervasive presence in the broader context of urban food governance. This is relevant, as representation in decision making is one of the main gender differences of food systems (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025; Groverman & van der Wees, 2016), as well as one of the ways to fulfill the right to the city (Fenster, 2005), but also because of the problematic masculinization of powerful roles in traditionally feminized fields (Bergonzini & Acetino, *forthcoming*; Meschitti & Marini, 2022). At the same time, though, it must be underlined that the mere presence of women in powerful positions does not necessarily lead to more gender-attentive urban food governance, as will be discussed in a later paragraph.

Similarly, whether urban food initiatives are more mutualistic (thus more in line with feminist ethics of care and rooted in a relational social ontology, as this thesis argues), or more top-down and charity like (thus more in line with neoliberal ethics), does not depend on their gender representation. For example, in Milan M01_A and M04_A are two of the most explicit supporters of a mutualistic approach and their AFNs are not characterized by such a striking overrepresentation of women compared to other interviewees. As M13_A explained, women are not to be considered as a whole, and they have very different ethics informing their approaches and practices – one element that seems relevant in Milan is religion (M13_A, M08_A), as many AFNs come from religious groups (Davies et al., 2025). Also, different ethics often co-exist within a single AFN, sometimes leading to a need for negotiation (B21_A).

To sum up, traditional cultural understandings of gender-based distribution of care responsibilities is still highly influencing who takes the responsibility to care for communities and territories, including in the field of urban food governance, and more strikingly in the context of volunteering (thus unpaid) roles, where women are more represented both in Milan and Barcelona. At the same time, the feminization of private care duties can sometimes hinder women from participating in these collective

efforts to care for urban food systems, thus creating a tension between the responsibility to care and the right to care, as well as private and collective spheres. However, participation is also often a privilege, in terms of time and social capital (such as education level, socioeconomic status, race…), and indeed *what* women take *what* roles is relevant. Interestingly, for women facing some type of social exclusion (such as unemployment, food insecurity, or lack of social ties outside of their household), the responsibility to provide for the household's nutrition can become an opportunity to engage in urban food initiatives that serve also as opportunities for socialization and empowerment (sometimes even financial empowerment, M02_A). Indeed, women are also prevalent among recipients of food initiatives aimed at addressing issues like food insecurity or social exclusion. Regarding positions of power in urban food governance, in Barcelona the prevalence of women is confirmed in institutions, too, while in Milan it is not, although an explanation for this difference remains to be investigated. Returning to the initial questions of who is currently responsible to care for urban food systems, and who should be, allows for some considerations. Surely, both grassroots and institutional actors are very active in both cities. In Barcelona, the urban food transition is largely performed and operationalized by women, at all levels. In Milan, a prevalence of women is to be found in grassroots initiatives and in volunteering roles for institution-led projects, but not in the hierarchically highest positions of power. Generally, the on-the-ground operationalization of activities is often performed by women for free through volunteering, and often such actions are directed to women, too, for reasons that have to do with social exclusion, unemployment, feminization of poverty, and the fact that women are often responsible for household nutrition. Such prevalence of women on both sides of the care practices suggests the need for an intersectional perspective. Lastly, in both cities the relevant institutions are in contact with AFNs, but while in Barcelona this relation seems more open and collaborative, in Milan the perception is that of a closed circle of selected participants, with some AFNs strongly collaborating with the Municipality, and others feeling left out. In this case, the Municipality has a very active role, but it seems to be also gatekeeping resources and access to some actors who would like to be engaged in dialogue. Indeed, both municipalities (and other

institutions) are taking on the responsibility to care for their urban food system, but with different approaches to collaboration as well as different results, that lead grassroots initiatives to feeling they need to step in, for reasons such as an alleged lack of inclusiveness in Milan (M02_A), generic lack of trust in the transformation potential of institutions (e.g., M13_A, B15_A), a focus on environmental aspects and quantitative results over social aspects (M17_E), or limitations to participation modalities in Barcelona (B16_I, B10_I).

So far, the focus was on gender and power dynamics among actors who are involved in urban food governance, at different levels and with different roles, but what are the results in terms of gender equality and fulfillment of right to the city in the considered urban food systems? And who is taking the responsibility for gender justice in urban food systems? The next paragraph addresses these questions.

4.3 What right to the city?

4.3.1 Women still carry the responsibility for gender justice, also in urban food systems

The tension between the responsibility to care and the right/privilege to care that was previously discussed raises questions about how gendered caring relations in urban food systems influence the fulfillment of the right to the city from a gender perspective.

First of all, the overall prevalence of women does not seem to be leading to a strong increase in attention towards gender equality in the urban food transition. As presented in paragraph 3.2.2.4 on strategies to tackle gender differences, few interviewees had specific and comprehensive plans to try and make their initiatives more gender-equal – not even the UFP team of Barcelona had an operationalization plan for the gender equality goal of their policy (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025). Indeed, women should not be considered as a whole who only act based on their gender (McDowell et al., 2005), and the mere presence of women should not be expected to bring about change in terms of gender equality (Noddings, 2001).

Still, by shifting the focus to the few – and yet innovative and pioneering, considering the overall lack of gender attention – strategies that interviewees presented, again the responsibility to care, in this case for gender justice, seems to be taken on mostly by women in grassroots initiatives, thus for free, with some exceptions of interviewees from AFNs with many male members also presenting concrete efforts to reduce inequalities. For example, B05_A mentioned a care commission that was created in her AFN and always had only female members (and one non-binary member for a short time), B17_A's foundation (that has mostly female members and volunteers) offers childcare during events – and one of the members was also among the working group for the Dames_Bcn project –, B07_A says they appoint only women to directive positions on purpose. Among interviewees from AFNs that are not characterized by a majority of women members, M13_A says his cooperative restaurant offers paid menstrual leave to women workers and organizes educational events regarding gender-related topics, and B15_A mentions educational projects about co-responsibility in care labor. Another type of effort regards the spreading of a feminist discourse and awareness-raising on the connections between feminism and food systems, carried out by the few interviewees whose AFNs explicitly include feminism or ecofeminism in their values (B06_A, B14_A, B21_A). This effort might appear more abstract, but in the long-term it could arguably be more transformative, given the strong influence of the dominant cultural understanding of gender that was assessed through this research, too. However, B14_A also argues that the spreading of such discourse should not be only a women's responsibility, as it would risk becoming their third workload, after paid employment and care labor (as already seems to be the case in the here and now).

Institutional efforts are more abstract. In Milan, the UFP does not have a gender equality goal (Bergonzini, 2024a), and gender-disaggregated data is usually collected only *ex-post* for reports of projects that require it (M21_I). In Barcelona, the UFP has a gender equality goal, but no operationalization strategy. Among institutional interviewees, only B18_I mentions an effort to visibilize women's role in food systems, for example by using inclusive language, while other

attempts at tackling gender differences are mostly aimed at internal gender representation (B10_I, B13_I), rather than external actions.

4.3.2 Implications of gender dynamics in urban food governance for the right to the city

The right to the city, initially conceptualized by Lefebvre (1968) and later picked up, rethought, and sometimes even «overstretched» (Purcell, 2003, p. 576) by scholars in various disciplines, is constituted by the right to appropriate urban space – which can be understood as a right to «live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize, and occupy urban space in a particular city» (*ibid.*, p. 578)–, and the right to participate in the production of urban space, thus to participate in decision making (Fenster, 2005; Purcell, 2003). Fenster argues that Lefebvre's conceptualization, while not completely blind towards social difference, is not engaging sufficiently with patriarchal power relations that «abus[e] women's right to the city» (2005, p. 219) at all scales (from the private of the home – which she criticizes Lefebvre for not including in his discourse – to public spaces), and she shows it empirically by analyzing women's experiences of the urban through the notions of comfort, belonging and commitment.

For women in the context of urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona these two rights (appropriation and participation) might seem granted at first sight, as they are generally well represented in institutions (although with differences between the two cities, and unequal representation from an intersectional point of view) and engaged in grassroots initiatives. However, the unpacking of gender and power dynamics that are at the basis of such representation raises questions about whether it is actually the proof of a fulfilled right.

Starting from discussing the right to participation in decision making, three elements of complexity must be underlined. First of all, while women are indeed granted the access to these spaces *in theory*, it is important to question *what* women actually have access to decision making spaces, and to acknowledge the persistence of some material obstacles that limit their actual capacity to access them. As mentioned multiple times, migrant women, women with low educational levels or facing other

types of social exclusion, as well as the youth, are much less represented in decision making spaces compared to middle-class, well-educated women, and women with no migration background. For open consultation processes, this is in part due to a feeling of not "belonging", thus confirming the validity of Fenster's choice of concepts to investigate women's actual right to the city. Secondly, in Milan women's prevalence in grassroots initiatives and especially unpaid positions of volunteering is not mirrored in institutional representation, especially in hierarchically higher positions. So, while they surely have a right to access decision making spaces (more so if they belong to privileged categories), in the here and now an issue of unequal distribution of power positions persists that cannot be justified with a general lack of women in the field, so it could be considered an example of glass ceiling (Purcell et al., 2010). In Barcelona, women are very well represented in institutions and also among participants to consultation processes, but interviewees agree that these women are all well-educated, mostly from Barcelona or Spain, and middle-class, while these spaces are still hostile to other types of women and people in general. Lastly, actual capacity to access decision making spaces, especially when considering open consultation processes rather than appointment to institutional positions, is also influenced by material elements – beyond the more or less inclusive approach of the institution that sets them up, which is also relevant as seen in the differences between Milan and Barcelona. The main element mentioned by interviewees is the lack of free time due to the need to prioritize other responsibilities (possibly connecting to the notion of "commitment" selected by Fenster, 2005), and in the analyzed cases the burden of care labor responsibilities was often mentioned as a possible reason for women (more than men) not to participate. Instead, in the case of AFN assemblies – that can also be included among decision making spaces –, some interviewees mentioned silencing dynamics or conflictual attitudes of male members towards female members (and this could be connected to the notion of "comfort", Fenster, 2005), which again shows that women are *in theory* admitted to these spaces, but the reality in the here and now is that they might face more challenges than men to fulfill their actual right to participate.

Moving on to women's right to appropriate urban space in and through urban food governance, the discussion is more stratified. In both cities, women – although some women more than others – are vastly represented and already actively shaping urban food initiatives at various levels through their participation and expertise. Women's presence in these spaces is, broadly speaking, not questioned, rather it might even be said that it is expected and seen as the norm, due to a still vastly spread perception of food matters as more feminine (as well as care practices), as demonstrated by the code "food as a more feminine topic" (see Annex 1). Indeed, as de Certeau and colleagues already noticed in the second volume of "The Practice of Everyday Life" (1998, p. 104), «a place for women has been granted» in food practices, although at the time they referred only to domestic food practices carried out in the «invisibility» of the home. Still, drawing from results of this research, it seems that women have kept their "place" in food matters even as these have entered the public sphere, with food gaining relevance as a public, and also as an urban, issue, rather than being confined either to the privacy of the home or to rural areas, as presented in the first chapter. As of now, then, the right to appropriate public spaces connected to urban food systems does not seem dependent on gender itself, but rather on other dimensions of privilege, especially financial, social, educational, racial.

However, there is an evident tension between private-sphere and public-sphere implications of this perceived "belonging" of women to food (and care) matters, which can be said to simultaneously boost and abuse their capacity to fulfill their right to appropriate urban space. At the private sphere, it was shown that women are still mostly in charge of care labor duties, including those related to household nutrition, and because of the time and effort needed to carry these out, sometimes this can hinder women's capacity to engage in public initiatives, including but not limited to urban food initiatives. On the other hand, interviews also included cases of women facing some type of social exclusion – mostly migrant women in conditions of food poverty, and often unemployed and with few or no social ties outside of their households – who, precisely because of their assigned role of responsible people for their family's nutrition (private sphere), were able to access and appropriate some urban spaces related to collective food initiatives, such as food aid distribution initiatives

(public sphere). While their main goal was procuring food, these became occasions for socialization with other women from their neighborhoods, and some AFNs with broader views of food – not only as an end, but also as a mean – leveraged these chances of engagement to organize together other activities (thus allowing them to move from the role of passive recipients to that of active participants), such as leisure activities, and to build a relation with these women and inquire about other needs they might have besides food, including social and entertainment needs (M01_A, M18_A, B12_A, B09_A). This situation creates a tension between the final goal of dismantling disempowering gender and power relations at the household level, and the "in the meantime" opportunity to re-appropriate these very roles in the public space and in collective processes rather than only privately. By doing so, women who are still not "admitted" to the public space – for example in cases of husbands who are not willing to let them go out alone (M01_A), but accept to do so as they are "just going to get food", or because they are getting some financial support (M02_A) – can appropriate their right to the city by entering the public space and the social relations that happen within it.

4.3.3 Relevance of the neighborhood scale

In this context, the neighborhood scale emerged as crucial, confirming an insight that feminist urban scholars had already underlined in previous works (Beebeejaun, 2017; Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006). Indeed, in this research neighborhoods were often presented as spaces for negotiation of care ethics and for collective caring, but they also appear as a relevant scale to address gender dynamics because they are more easily unpacked and observed on the ground rather than through generic, city-wide data. One interesting example is B21_A, whose agroecological cooperative self-defines as ecofeminist and espouses values such as a critique towards meat consumption. She said that, while these are the values of the cooperative, not every person who participates in their activities necessarily espouses them. She gave the example of some elderly women who participate in a "political" cooking workshop despite disagreeing with some of the cooperative's views, such as the decision to avoid meat. Because they live in a neighborhood that has newly become residential and still lacks spaces

and occasions for socialization, they still participate in the workshop, and this creates opportunities for dialogue about each other's ethics. In the case of B09_A, instead, the interviewee explained that participating to her AFN was also an occasion to build stronger social ties among neighborhood inhabitants that in turn favored collective action on other issues such as gentrification. Also, neighborhoods provide urban dwellers with practical, everyday life reasons to engage in urban food initiatives, such as socialization opportunities. In some cases, the wish to "belong" in the neighborhood is more of a driving force for participation in urban food initiatives than the very desire to contribute to the sustainability of the city's food system (e.g., B12_A, B17_A, M16_A). Moreover, most interviewees refer to their actions more in terms of what they can do for their neighborhoods rather than the whole city, confirming that this scale is a relevant referent for everyday life and for urban dwellers to detect issues on the ground and try to face them. Finally, also the gender differences that interviewees notice in their actions are often related to the neighborhood, such as M18_A and M08_A noticing that the gender representation in their activities is related to the communities that inhabit the neighborhoods where they are based.

4.5 Contributions of this research to feminist urban theory

This section summarizes results from previous paragraphs to provide an overview of the contributions of this research to feminist urban theory, which can be grouped into three main points: i) the potential of feminist care ethics in addressing urban issues, ii) the relevance of intersectionality, iii) the implications of this research for the discourse on the right to the city.

Firstly, a feminist ethics of care appears as transformative to address urban issues through a vision of interdependence, an attitude of questioning towards power dynamics, and an aspiration for social transformation in the long-term to dismantle such dynamics. Such ethics support an understanding of care as a collective, public practice, that responds to urban challenges in the here and now, sometimes even with initiatives that might look like "band-aid" actions, while "in the meantime" not forgetting the power and patriarchal dynamics that stand at their basis. A feminist ethics of care can provide a

promising ethical basis to address urban issues – including but not limited to urban food systems' issues – by questioning the unequal distribution of responsibilities over such issues (including from a gender perspective). This attitude is in contrast to a neoliberal ethics of care, that instead tends to confine care to a private matter based on morality, only aimed at responding to emergencies in a top-down way, rather than pursuing a dismantling of the very systems that cause such emergencies – in this case, the most evident examples would be food insecurity and food waste. Also, the relational social ontology on which a feminist ethics of care is based can support the overcoming of a dichotomous understanding of people's roles in the city and in urban caring initiatives, namely the division between passive recipients and active givers, as was demonstrated by the mutualistic approach of many interviewees, that aimed at engaging recipients in actively shaping their activities. In this discourse, the role of materialities emerged as crucial in enabling (or not) practices that correspond to people's ethics. For example, time and resources constraints, as well as other material constraints related to procedures, have been found to negatively influence people's and organizations' capacity to engage in more openly political actions that tackle systemic issues while at the same time carrying on with their core activities of responding to present needs, such as in the case of AFNs distributing food aid. Moreover, dominant cultural understandings of gender roles, in particular the unequal distribution of care labor, also have material impacts both on who gets to participate in urban transformation initiatives, and on the impacts of such initiatives.

The second point, namely the relevance of keeping an intersectional perspective, is strongly connected to the latter comment on participation in urban transformation initiatives. Indeed, results from this research show that the element of gender is strongly influencing participation in urban food governance at various levels, but other elements intersect with gender to create a more complex picture. In the case of urban food initiatives, women are overrepresented in almost all areas and levels of governance, but on the one hand, active roles and participation to decision-making spaces mostly see middle-class, well-educated women with no migration background. On the other hand, women facing some types of social exclusion like food insecurity, poverty, lack of social ties, as well as

migrant women with low socioeconomic status, are mostly represented among people who turn to these initiatives for food support or social inclusion, while still not "belonging" to decision making spaces or managing roles. This shows that privilege of participation is mostly based on financial and social status rather than gender, at least in the context of food. Still, gender alone also influences participation, with evidence of sexist behaviors, silencing dynamics and other obstacles to women's participation – even middle-class and well-educated women with high social capital – like the need to dedicate more of their free time to private care duties. Such obstacles are much less impacting men's experience, at least in the examined contexts.

Finally, the third point is tightly connected to the topic of participation and regards the implications of this research for the concept of "right to the city". As said, scholars have defined the right to the city as composed of a right of appropriation of urban space and a right to participate in its production through decision-making (Fenster, 2005; Purcell, 2003). In this context, matters that have long been considered "feminine", or generally women's prerogative due to cultural understandings of gender roles, such as food and care – which, importantly, are mostly matters that were long considered "private" – can grant a "place" for women also in the public space when they become public issues to be addressed collectively. However, this creates a tension between "having a place" and the questioning of the patriarchal power relations that are at the basis of the granting of such a place. Indeed, this "place" is often granted based on the very gender roles that historically confined women (and in many cases continue to confine them) to "peripheries", both physically and ideally, and that still place most caring duties and responsibilities on them. So, ideally, the perception of food and care matters as a female prerogative should be challenged and dismantled to guarantee a fairer distribution of care labor and the overcoming of confining gender roles.[49] Still, by focusing on the here and now and what is materially relevant "in the meantime" – as in, while the long cultural work of dismantling gender stereotypes continues on the background – this research showed that some women were able

[49] See also the concept of "democratization of care" (Ezquerra & Mansilla, 2018).

to fulfill their right to appropriate the urban space precisely by leveraging these traditional gender roles that place the responsibility for household nutrition on them. For example, they did so by becoming the responsible person for the collection of food boxes destined to their households, which granted them the chance to leave their house unaccompanied and socialize with other women from the neighborhood and AFN members, as well as to become actively engaged in the organization of some leisure activities. This example further reiterates the importance of keeping a grounded perspective rooted in feminist ethics of care, which allows to tackle issues in the here and now – such as these women's need for socialization – while keeping an aspiration of long-term societal change that will eventually dismantle the power and patriarchal relations that cause such needs in the first place.

4.6 Summary of chapter 4

This chapter applies the theoretical framework that was presented in chapter 1 to the interpretation of fieldwork results. It starts by introducing the feminist re-readings of two fundamental concepts of urban theory, namely the right to the city and the practice of everyday life, and also underlines how food matters intertwine with such concepts. Later, it introduces the lens of feminist ethics of care, that is used to analyze gender and power relations in urban food governance by operationalizing the question of who is and who should be caring for urban food systems. Results underline the important role of women at all levels, but especially in volunteering positions in grassroots initiatives. This shows a still persisting understanding of care and food matters as mostly feminine based on traditional gender roles. By applying a right to the city lens to this result, two main insights emerge. On the one hand, the feminization of care still represents a burden on women's shoulders that can abuse their right to the city. On the other hand, the feminization of food and care matters, that has traditionally regarded the private sphere, seems to resist even in the context of public initiatives for the collective care of food systems, such as urban food governance activities in the public space. In this case, leveraging traditional gender roles can become an opportunity of appropriation of the public space

for women facing more or less extreme social exclusion. In this sense, an "in the meantime" understanding of practices reveals the importance of a situated analysis, that recognizes the materialities of the here and now – such as the importance for these women to have an opportunity to appropriate public space based on the feminization of food and care practices – while not forgetting the long-term aim of societal transformation, which in this case is the dismantling of power and gender relations that cause such feminization of food and care in the first place.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Chapter abstract: This final chapter provides an overview of the previous chapters to explicitly connect the premises, results and contributions of this thesis in a concise and integrated manner. The aim is summarizing the connections between the fieldwork that was conducted, the literature it was inspired from, and how the results in turn add a piece to the field of urban food systems transformation research and feminist urban theory. It does so firstly by retracing the literature background and connecting it with the fieldwork that was conducted. Then, some limitations of the study are addressed. Later, the main research question presented in chapter 2 is answered, along with the supporting questions. Also, the interpretation based on feminist urban theory is summarized to further underline the theoretical contribution of this thesis. Finally, some overall conclusions are drawn, and future research paths are presented.

5.1 Connecting the dots between literature, field results and the theoretical framework

5.1.1 Summary of literature supporting the relevance of this study

This research was based on the premise that food systems at all scales, including urban food systems, are characterized by both environmental sustainability issues and a variety of social inequalities, that include but are not limited to gender inequality (Bedore, 2010; Bergonzini, 2024a; Crippa et al., 2021). After years of being overlooked, cities have started to be recognized by researchers and practitioners worldwide as relevant actors in the quest to transform food systems globally towards greater sustainability (Moragues-Faus et al., 2024). At the urban level, urban food governance research and practice has identified two main types of actors[50] that are recognized as pivotal in advancing transformation, and these are institutions – especially in the form of public administrations acting through tools like urban food policies – and diverse grassroots initiatives that can be grouped under the umbrella term of alternative food networks (Brunori & Di Iacovo, 2014; Matacena, 2016; Polman & Bazzan, 2023; Zerbian et al., 2024). While urban food governance has increasingly been considering social issues connected to food – such as inaccessibility, food poverty, issues related to

[50] Research does not overlook the relevance of other actors, either, such as corporations, that were extensively mentioned in the paragraphs dedicated to power dynamics (Clapp et al., 2025).

labor, etc. – through concepts like food justice and right to food (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Estevez Magnasco et al., 2024; Gómez-Escoda, 2025; HLPE, 2024; Michel et al., 2022), a preliminary review conducted to assess attention to gender differences in urban food policies showed that a gender perspective is often lacking from institutional engagement with food matters (Bergonzini, 2024a; Di Masso et al., 2022). This is despite the fact that urban scales have been found to be promising to act on gender differences, too (Andreola & Muzzonigro, 2022; Beebeejaun, 2017; Fodor, 2022; Vaiou & Lykogianni, 2006), and the existence – albeit still under-addressed in research – of intersections between urban food matters and gender differences taking place at the urban scale (Bergonzini, 2024b; Di Masso et al., 2022).

In this context, the case of Zaragoza was considered pioneering, in that it performed a complete gender mainstreaming process to its UFP, which was suggested bottom up by a feminist collective during the open consultation process set up by the Municipality (Di Masso et al., 2022). This case suggested the relevance of participation spaces that favor dialogue between grassroots and institutional actors for the introduction of innovative perspectives that are not commonly considered in a certain policy field, such as a gender perspective in urban food policies (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025).

To summarize, literature confirms the important role of urban-scale governance in addressing both issues of gender inequality and food systems unsustainability, and in few stances, it has already detected areas of possible integration of the two topics, including the potential of applying gender mainstreaming to urban food policies. Also, in one of the very few cases of gender mainstreaming application to UFPs (the mentioned Zaragoza), the role of participation emerged as crucial in providing a space for dialogue between bottom-up and top-down forms of governance that can lead to the introduction of innovative perspectives.

5.1.2 Connections between literature, the theoretical framework and results from the field

Given the literature background that was summarized above, a research project was constructed with the aim of exploring more broadly the role that urban food governance could have in addressing gender differences in food systems, not only through the more codified and top-down managed tool of urban food policies, but also by focusing on the role of grassroots actors who, as seen in the case of Zaragoza, can be responsible for the introduction of innovative approaches and perspectives. At the same time, studies assessing the on-the-ground impacts of gender mainstreaming in UFPs had not been conducted yet (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025; Di Masso et al., 2022), so it was decided to choose two case-study cities that differ on this point – namely a city whose UFP has a gender equality goal and one whose UFP does not have it – to also investigate whether this element influences gender consideration in urban food initiatives. The chosen cities were Milan and Barcelona, since Milan's UFP does not mention gender as a point of attention while Barcelona's has an explicit gender equality goal, but also due to their internationally recognized engagement in food governance and the lively and historically rooted landscape of grassroots initiatives that characterize their food systems.

The main research question is: what governance space holds most potential for a gender-just urban food transition? However, to answer this question other points were addressed in this research, namely which gender differences are most relevant and evident in the actions of the interviewees, whether they have strategies to tackle such differences, and if so, what strategies, as well as a general investigation of relational dynamics between different levels of food governance in the chosen cities. These questions allowed to collect a variety of insights into gender representation and roles in urban food initiatives, and also to detect other relevant themes that had not previously been considered for investigation but emerged as pervasive, such as the importance of (care) ethics in informing practices. In turn, these results were a strong basis to conceptually explore how gender dynamics in urban food governance initiatives can be read in a framework of feminist ethics of care due to their recognition

of interdependencies between scales and actors (Williams & Sharp, 2023), but also how such dynamics can open new perspectives in (feminist) discussions on the right to the city.

5.1.3 Limitations of this study

Despite my efforts, this study had some limitations that I want to explicitly acknowledge. Firstly, I did not include representatives of the private sector among interviewees – except for some AFNs who are for-profit, yet as I argued at the beginning, in this case they were chosen because they apply a vision to their for-profit activities that still challenges the dominant food system's dynamics and therefore can fall into the AFN definition I provided. This was primarily due to the need to set a limit to my pool of possible interviewees for reasons of practical feasibility of the research. Therefore, I decided to focus on the types of actors who are mostly recognized as innovative and transformative in urban food governance research, and in this context the rare literature addressing gender also underlined the prominent role of institutional and grassroots actors (Di Masso et al., 2022). Secondly, the private sector has sometimes been assessed as more involved in regional, national or even global scales rather than urban ones (de Graaf & van der Schans, 2016), generally less included in urban food governance networks (Brons et al., 2022) or not among those «already convinced» (Zerbian et al., 2023, p. 8) on the need for urban food transitions. Still, the private sector is clearly very influential (as noted by some of the previously cited studies, too, e.g., Zerbian et al., 2023), and interviewees often mentioned its role in influencing urban food governance results, so future research that considers its role would add an important piece to this discussion.

A second point is the fact that I rarely interviewed volunteers, participants or beneficiaries, but rather I focused on people who have some level of responsibility (even simply to be spokesperson for a group) – except for the cases in which all members of a certain organization were volunteers with the same role (e.g. consumers' groups), or when interviews happened during the activities and participants/beneficiaries spontaneously joined the conversation. This was mostly due to the exploratory aim of the research project – as well as, again, feasibility reasons. As said, there was

virtually no literature specifically focusing on gender differences and dynamics in urban food governance, so it was considered more relevant to include diverse actors in the pool of informants, rather than focus on a few organizations or institutions and interview many people within them. Still, while interviewees could easily comment on gender differences in their activities and groups, it would be important to further advance this investigation by including the individual voices of volunteers and participants, especially given the relevance of individual ethics and personal relations that emerged among the results. Future research involving their points of view would be very enriching. Lastly, as already mentioned throughout the thesis, this research adopts a non-binary vision of gender as a premise, yet results from the field are mostly framed within a binary distinction between women and men. The reasons for this were already discussed, but it is necessary to further underline the need for future research going in the explicit direction of overcoming similar limitations in favor of a comprehensive and more inclusive gender perspective.

5.2 Answering the research questions

5.2.1 What governance spaces hold most potential for a gender-just urban food transition?

Table 8: Elements that could characterize an urban food governance landscape that is attentive to gender differences.
Elements that could characterize an urban food governance landscape that is attentive to gender differences and pursues a gender-just urban food transition, and current state of each element in Milan and Barcelona. Green means the element is fulfilled, red means it is not fulfilled, and yellow means it is partially fulfilled. Author's elaboration based on fieldwork results.

Elements	Milan	Barcelona
i) Inclusive and trustworthy participatory spaces		
ii) individuals (or entire organizations) who consider gender equality in food systems as a priority		
iii) informal personal relations among actors		

The title of this paragraph traces back to the main research question, which was answered at the end of chapter 3 after the presentation of results. This research did not identify a specific governance space that holds more potential than others, but rather three elements that could characterize an urban food governance landscape that pursues a gender-just urban food transition. These are: i) inclusive and trustworthy participatory spaces, ii) individuals (or entire organizations) who consider gender equality in food systems as a priority, and iii) informal personal relations among actors. Based on the fieldwork that was conducted in Milan and Barcelona, these elements are not all present in neither of the cities, as shown in Table 8.

Yet, the picture shows differences between the two cities. Both cities have participation spaces, however that of Milan was defined as inclusive by some actors – namely, those that are usually involved in such spaces – and not inclusive by others, while that of Barcelona was assessed generally as inclusive, yet some grassroots interviewees – and importantly, these include the most active interviewee on the intersection between gender and food systems – decide not to participate due to fears of co-optation (Hobart & Kneese, 2020) or low expectations in the transformative potential of institutions. This is why these spaces must be inclusive *and* trustworthy at the same time (i). The presence of actors who consider gender equality in food systems as a priority (ii) was considered a crucial element due to the material constraints that influence the number of topics actors can raise and discuss when they meet, based on their own priorities. In the case of Milan, no one was detected with this priority, while in Barcelona B06_A has this priority, but as said, does not wish to participate in these spaces. Yet, the case of Zaragoza shows that, when these two conditions are met, the topic has the chance to be raised and discussed (Di Masso et al., 2022), while neither in Milan nor in Barcelona was this topic ever raised during public consultations, according to interviewees. Lastly, informal personal relations among urban food governance actors (iii) proved as promising in the sense that they are not characterized by the material constraints that more official consultation spaces have – like the mentioned need to set priorities or to respect time schedules. Interviewees from both cities

agreed on the existence of strong networks of interpersonal relations that go beyond formal meeting opportunities, and indeed the project Dames_Bcn was born in this context.

At the moment, the presence or absence of a gender equality goal in a city's UFP does not necessarily prove so crucial as to be included as fourth element, since it could remain a statement on paper without a proper implementation strategy, like in the case of Barcelona. Still, future analysis of the implementation of other cases of gender-attentive UFPs (Bergonzini & Donati, 2025), as well as keeping track of whether Barcelona develops an implementation strategy, could lead to its addition as fourth element. However, considering both the better performance of Barcelona on the other elements (Table 8) and in its consideration of gender in the UFP (at least on paper), it appears that the general context of normalization and acceptance of the topic of gender equality as a collective endeavor that should also be pursued by public institutions plays a strong role, too, and research has shown that such normalization is more progressed in Spain than it is in Italy (Alonso et al., 2023). This arguably confirms that investigating two cases rather than one was useful, to detect differences that might be shaped by different historical and social contexts, while also noticing recurring patterns that instead are similar in both cities despite contextual differences, such as the overrepresentation of women in volunteering roles and the persisting unequal distribution of care labor based on gender.

Lastly, the relevance of individuals covering specific roles must be again underlined, as well as their turnover. The values and commitment of individuals strongly influence which issues are tackled and in what way by organizations (as reflected in element ii), thus the situation in Table 8 could change, even drastically, through the arrival of new actors or departure of those that are currently present.

The paragraph presenting the main research question (2.1.5) also included four supporting questions, that are addressed in the paragraphs hereafter.

5.2.1.1 How does the dialectic between AFNs and institutions/UFPs work? What happens in the "interstitial space" between these levels of governance?

The dialectic between grassroots and top-down levels of food governance includes a spectrum of relation types that span from complete refusal to dialogue (e.g. due to political disagreements or lack of trust) to structured and continued collaborations (e.g. through projects like Milan's food hubs). I argue that such variety of relations (or lack thereof) confirms the validity of the term "interstitial space" to define it. Such term was first used by Matacena 2016 in this context, but scholars have applied it in other contexts, too, to define «location[s] somewhere between what are currently recognized as key domains […], existing between what is currently identified as apparently separate core spheres of action, but effectively functioning as a space in which crucial information and materials are exchanged» (Wickson & Forsberg, 2015, p. 1175). Indeed, this research shows that there is a continuous exchange, at times even conflictual and indirect, between the considered "spheres" (institutional and grassroots), where information is exchanged, values are negotiated, and sometimes synergies emerge. Also, such term has been defined to include a level of informality (Steele & Keys, 2015), which as seen in Table 8 is crucial in this context, too. Therefore, I argue that interstitial spaces (both intended as physical and relational) in urban governance emerge as fruitful spaces for the introduction and negotiation of innovative perspectives, including a gender perspective, in food matters and beyond.

5.2.1.2 What are the most relevant gender differences in urban food systems? And is urban food governance influencing them (intentionally or not)?

The most striking difference in the studied contexts is gender representation in urban food governance roles, with Barcelona seeing a striking overrepresentation of women in all positions – volunteering, paid/power, and also among beneficiaries and participants – and Milan seeing more women in volunteering positions and among beneficiaries, but not in positions of power. Also, gender roles in food related labor that the OECD detected in its broad analysis (2022) seem confirmed. Initiatives

that employ people in agriculture-like activities receive more male candidates, markets have more male workers, and cooking activities receive more female candidates. Gender differences are also found in roles related to food at the household level, with interviewees confirming that the unequal distribution of caring duties is still skewed in disfavor of women in both cities, and this is visible for example in the fact that more women go grocery shopping at markets, pick up food aid boxes, or take part in educational activities organized by schools. In this research, no example of urban food governance action directly influencing gender differences was found, except if we consider the strategies employed by some interviewees to favor female participation (see the next paragraph), that however is already largely granted. Still, projects that specifically target mothers to grant households engagement could partially contribute to the reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles at the household level, although the "in the meantime" relevance of actions should be considered, too, as discussed in chapter 4.

5.2.1.3 Are urban food governance actors employing strategies to act on gender differences? If so, who is doing it and through which strategies? If not, why not?

In the analyzed contexts, few strategies were detected, mostly coming from grassroots initiatives, and often planned and implemented by women themselves. Some examples are the creation of care commissions within AFNs to prevent violent attitudes and discuss conflicts, the offering of childcare services to favor participation of people who have caring duties (often women), the use of inclusive language, paid menstrual leave, the appointment of female board members, and the collection of gender-disaggregated data (although often in a binary way and with no plan to use it critically). While these strategies tackle everyday issues, some interviewees explained that spreading the feminist discourse through an educational strategy that aims at a cultural change to dismantle gender stereotypes (in food and beyond) would be the most transformative action, but also the most demanding, and they express the worry that this might become yet another work that women perform

for free. Reasons for the absence of strategies include the lack of awareness of how gender differences pervade food systems, lack of time and lack of professionals that can work on this topic.

5.2.1.4 Does the urban space (physical space, relational space, governance space…) influence gender differences in food systems?

The characteristics of governance spaces – such as participatory spaces, but also power positions – seem to influence who gets to participate both in terms of actual access (materially shaped by time availability, acceptance by the organizing institutions…) and feelings of "belonging" that encourage or discourage people to participate. This happens based on gender, but in intersection with other elements like age, education level, or migration background. Moreover, the location of initiatives influences gender participation and dynamics, for example initiatives happening at wholesale markets were said to sometimes be characterized by sexist behaviors. Also, physical accessibility to initiatives is important, with interviewees explaining that if someone moves to a different neighborhood, they tend to stop participating, so phenomena like gentrification can impact people's capacity to access these initiatives both as participants and beneficiaries. While this is not directly impacting gender differences, it was shown that most beneficiaries are women – again to be analyzed intersectionally and critically observe *what* women –, who face situations of food insecurity and poverty more than men, and are responsible for their household's nutrition security more than men.

5.2.2 Contributions to feminist urban theory

Other than the empirical results that have been described so far, this research also contributes to feminist urban theory through more conceptual discussions and insights, as described in chapter 4. The following paragraphs summarize these contributions.

5.2.2.1 Feminist ethics of care for care-full and collectively cared-for urban food systems

Feminist ethics of care have proved fruitful both as a lens to unpack gender and power dynamics in urban food systems, by wondering who is and who should be caring for them (Bergonzini & Di Masso,

forthcoming, Williams & Sharp, 2023), and as a framework to investigate how ethics shape practice in urban food initiatives. In this sense, understanding urban food initiatives as care practices – for communities and territories – emerged as a pervasive perspective among interviewees, who often spontaneously referred to their actions as "care". Although most of them did not refer specifically to feminist care ethics (neither to other care ethics), I argue that most interviewed activities resonate with a feminist ethics of care, which recognizes care as a public, collective endeavor, and is based on a relational social ontology that understands urban food systems as a network of interdependencies among scales and actors, including non-human ones. So, it appears that an ethics of care that could be defined as feminist is already starting to shape "care-full" (Williams, 2020, 2022) urban food initiatives, although with different levels of awareness and intensity. Yet, when focusing on who is actually practicing such care in the here and now, we find that it is highly carried out by women, sometimes also in positions of power, but mostly through volunteering work. Also, the prevalence of women has not (yet?) led to more attention to gender differences in these initiatives, as seen in the paragraphs about strategies. Interviewees believe this is because care work (even collective care work, not just the one done privately at home) and food matters are still highly feminized, so more women are willing to dedicate their time and expertise to these matters, but at the same time their overrepresentation is considered "normal" and tends to go unnoticed and unquestioned.

5.2.2.2. Right to the city "in the meantime"

The prevalence of women in caring and care-full urban food initiatives exists in parallel to the still unequal distribution of private-sphere care, that includes care work related to household nutrition and that still weighs more on the shoulders of women. This emerged in fieldwork, too, with interviewees working in food aid distribution stating that, when the beneficiary is a (heterosexual) household, usually the wife/mother collects the food box for the whole family, often taking children with her. Care, even when it exits the private sphere and becomes a collective endeavor carried out in the public space, remains unequally distributed on the basis of gender. Yet, such shifting from private to public

has the potential to change the impact of care labor on the people who perform it. In the context of urban food initiatives, participation can become a form of empowerment thanks to the opportunity of socialization and appropriation of public space that comes with engaging in the activities. In fieldwork, this emerged mostly as an opportunity for women, such as elderly women who have lost most social ties in their neighborhood, or unemployed migrant women who have few social ties outside their families. For some AFNs, this created a tension between their ideals – that include the support for the equal distribution of care work – and the needs of their beneficiaries in the here and now. Following an "in the meantime" approach (Cloke et al., 2017), they decided that it was more important, in the here and now, to continue providing women with this socialization opportunity, rather than trying to implement strategies that would engage their husbands to pursue their ideal of equally distributed care work. These examples triggered a reasoning on the right to the city, that includes the right to participate in decision making and the right to appropriate urban space (Fenster, 2005; Purcell, 2003). Indeed, the burden related to private care duties can abuse women's right to the city by preventing them from participating to public initiatives in their free time to carry out care labor, but the fact that collective care around food is also perceived as a women's responsibility sometimes provides them with an excuse, or a reason, to enter the public space by engaging in these collective caring initiatives. This situation creates a tension between the long-term ideal – dismantling disempowering gender roles related to care labor distribution – and the "in the meantime" opportunity to re-appropriate these very roles in the public space for collective care.

5.3 Conclusions and future research paths

Investigating gender dynamics in urban food governance in Milan and Barcelona allowed to unveil both empirical insights on gender differences in urban food systems, and conceptual insights on the potential of feminist ethics of care as a lens to unpack and question gender and power relations, as well as on the tensions that the feminization of care in food matters, both private and collective, brings about for the actual fulfillment of women's right to the city.

In this context, the still unequal distribution of care labor appears as crucial in shaping who participates in public initiatives for the collective caring of urban food systems and in what role. While the final aim would thus be to grant co-responsibility over these matters by dismantling traditional gender roles, empirical results show the need for an "in the meantime" approach, that considers the materialities of the here and now to imagine actions that tackle present-day necessities and might even leverage and exacerbate existing gender differences if necessary, while not forgetting the long-term goal of full gender equality. Interstitial spaces between grassroots and institutional spheres are crucial in shaping collective caring initiatives and negotiating ethics and values, even through conflict. Their important role for the introduction of innovative perspectives, including possibly gender perspectives, resonates with the relational social ontology at the basis of a feminist ethics of care. Urban food governance, that interviewees themselves recognize as made up of collective care initiatives, seems like a promising context to start imagining alternative socio-ecological relations in urban areas, also along the lines of gender.

Future research should further explore how other identity elements intersect gender and influence people's right to the city including in the context of urban food governance. Similarly, research explicitly addressing other genders that are not just ciswoman or cismen, as well as gender relations in households that are not heterosexual, would provide further information on gender differences in urban food systems, beyond those that are more immediately visible to interviewees. Also, investigating the role of the private sector would add a valuable piece to the picture that was described in this thesis. Moreover, individual ethics informing participation in urban food initiatives proved crucial in shaping practices, so further analyzing the perspectives of individuals within institutions and AFNs would provide more evidence on how such ethics negotiations happen and their impact on practices on the ground. Finally, I consider it important to continue to monitor whether urban food governance actors implement strategies to tackle gender differences – including but not limited to implementation strategies for the gender equality goals of the UFPs that have them – and their impact on gender dynamics in cities all over the world.

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Photos from the field

Selection of photos from fieldwork in Milan and Barcelona, all taken by the author.

Weekly organic market in the Paral.lel area, Barcelona, April 2024

Urban garden in the Gothic quarter, Barcelona, April 2024

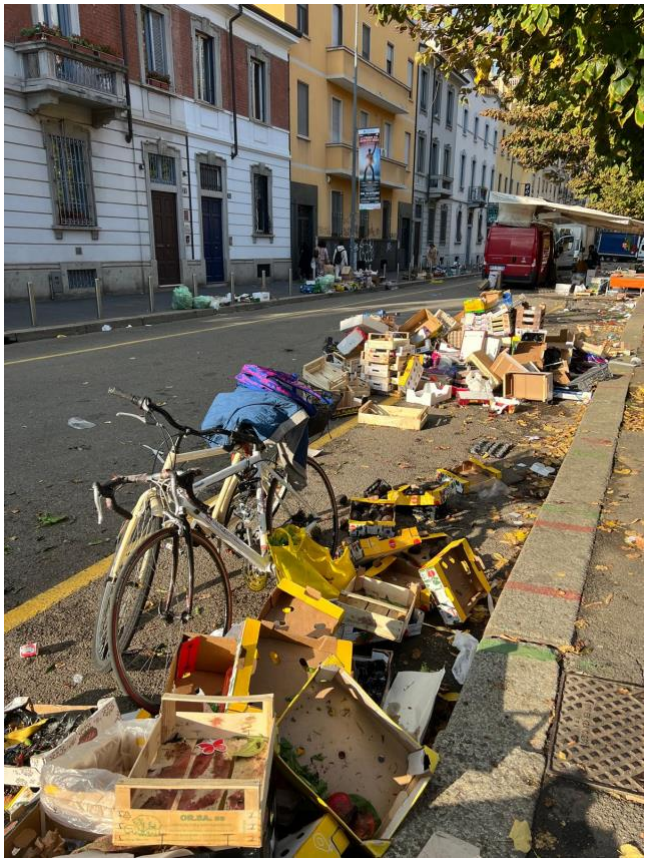
Municipal market in Sant Antoni, Barcelona, May 2024

Large-scale retailer inside El Clot municipal market, Barcelona, May 2024

Farmers' market in the Esquerra de l'Eixample neighborhood, Barcelona, May 2024

Fields interrupted by the highway's toll gates, Gorgonzola (Milan metropolitan area), October 2024

Cuccagna food waste hub on its inauguration day, Milan, October 2024



Aftermath of a weekly open-air market in the Centrale neighborhood, Milan, October 2024

Annex 1: full list of codes from interviews, divided into the three main research topics (Q1 gender differences in pink, Q2 governance relations in blue, Q3 potentialities of urban food governance in yellow) and sub-divided in main themes. The last three rows contain three extra codes that do not related to any of the main topics. Fourth and fifth columns give information about the number of sources (number of interviewees who mentioned the code) and references (number of times that code was mentioned, including repetitions by same interviewees) and are colored conditionally from most mentioned (darker color) to least mentioned (lighter color). The following columns give information about the attributes of interviewees: proportion of female/male, AFN/institution/expert, and Barcelona/Milan interviewees for each code. *Source*: author's elaboration based on interview results. In this context, "FS" means "food system".
A digital version is also available to favor dynamic consultation at https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BXGEWj0ymfRP99r9nBMX1w4j5-heEs-u/edit?gid=474259865#gid=474259865 . It will remain available for a year after the thesis defense, which is held in February 2026.

MAIN TOPIC	Name		Sources (how many interviewees said it)	References (how many times it was said, even by same interviewee)	Tot F	% F	Tot M	% M	Tot AFN	% AFN	Tot Institutions	% Institutions	Tot experts	% Experts	Tot BCN	% BCN	Tot Mi	% MI
	Q1 gender differences		43	620	24	56%	19	44%	26	60%	12	28%	5	12%	21	49%	22	51%
	Theme 1: CONTEXT	Contextual elements that are relevant to gender differences	39	223	23	59%	16	41%	24	62%	11	28%	4	10%	19	49%	20	51%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	care work - motherhood	20	40	13	65%	7	35%	16	80%	3	15%	1	5%	10	50%	10	50%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	cultural understanding of gender	18	28	11	61%	7	39%	13	72%	4	22%	1	6%	5	28%	13	72%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	family roles and ties	18	36	10	56%	8	44%	13	72%	4	22%	1	6%	8	44%	10	56%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	food as a more feminine topic	5	12	3	60%	2	40%	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	4	80%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	gender as a transversal theme	5	7	3	60%	2	40%	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	gendered knowledge	8	9	6	75%	2	25%	6	75%	2	25%	0	0%	6	75%	2	25%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	intersectionality	25	42	15	60%	10	40%	21	84%	3	12%	1	4%	13	52%	12	48%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	men seen as bosses	2	4	0	0%	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%

Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	patriarchal relations and attitudes	5	8	2	40%	3	60%	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	3	60%	2	40%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	rural world is very masculine	9	13	4	44%	5	56%	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%	4	44%	5	56%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	self-admittedly no attention to gender	6	6	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%	4	67%	2	33%	3	50%	3	50%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	sexist environment	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	spanish state situation on gender	10	15	8	80%	2	20%	3	30%	6	60%	1	10%	10	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 1: CONTEXT	women belong to the home	1	2	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	Actual gender differences in the city's urban food system	26	59	13	50%	13	50%	17	65%	6	23%	3	12%	12	46%	14	54%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	access to sustainable food	5	5	4	80%	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	3	60%	2	40%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	differences in access to land	1	1	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	feminization of poverty	3	3	3	100%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	few women in distribution sector	3	4	2	67%	1	33%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	food labor	8	12	3	38%	5	63%	7	88%	1	13%	0	0%	4	50%	4	50%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	internal gender related conflict	3	3	3	100%	0	0%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	3	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	new life attitude by participating in AFN	5	8	3	60%	2	40%	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	restaurant sector	4	7	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Gender	Theme 2: DIFFERENCES	women representation in food production	13	16	5	38%	8	62%	7	54%	5	38%	1	8%	5	38%	8	62%

	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	Gender representation in urban food governance	34	151	20	59%	14	41%	22	65%	9	26%	3	9%	16	47%	18	53%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	AFN founded by women	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	self-perception as gender equal	9	12	4	44%	5	56%	6	67%	3	33%	0	0%	3	33%	6	67%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	gender differences in recipients	10	23	5	50%	5	50%	8	80%	1	10%	1	10%	1	10%	9	90%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	gender representation in institutions	8	10	4	50%	4	50%	2	25%	5	63%	1	13%	3	38%	5	63%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	internal gender representation	14	26	10	71%	4	29%	10	71%	3	21%	1	7%	5	36%	9	64%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	internal gender roles	11	17	6	55%	5	45%	9	82%	0	0%	2	18%	5	45%	6	55%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	lack of planning of gender roles	11	20	5	45%	6	55%	8	73%	3	27%	0	0%	6	55%	5	45%
Gender	Theme 3: REPRESENTATION	more women involved	21	42	13	62%	8	38%	15	71%	5	24%	1	5%	8	38%	13	62%
	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	Strategies for gender equality in urban food systems (implemented or imagined)	28	106	18	64%	10	36%	15	54%	10	36%	3	11%	17	61%	11	39%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	attempted but left mid-way a more structured gender perspective on UFP	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	existing but insufficien attention to gender	12	19	8	67%	4	33%	3	25%	7	58%	2	17%	9	75%	3	25%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	feminism as organization principle	4	8	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	first feminist, then FS transformative	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	funding request asks for gender data	3	3	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	3	100%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	gender equality indicator for activities	5	6	3	60%	2	40%	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	gender goal but no real reflection	6	6	5	83%	1	17%	2	33%	3	50%	1	17%	4	67%	2	33%

Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	importance of data to visibilize differences	6	8	3	50%	3	50%	4	67%	1	17%	1	17%	2	33%	4	67%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	imposition of creating gender attentive indicators	4	5	2	50%	2	50%	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	indicator for gender representation in their activity	5	5	4	80%	1	20%	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	internal body for care work	2	3	2	100%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	only open to women	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	responsability must be shared	8	12	6	75%	2	25%	7	88%	1	13%	0	0%	3	38%	5	63%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	strategy to let women be involved	4	7	3	75%	1	25%	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	use of inclusive-feminine language	3	3	3	100%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	visibilization of gender differences in FS through events and blogs	3	3	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	willing to work more on gender	3	12	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Gender	Theme 4: STRATEGIES	women in charge of directive roles on purpose	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
	Theme 5: SETBACKS	Hindering factors of a gender-just urban food governance	24	81	15	63%	9	38%	13	54%	8	33%	3	13%	17	71%	7	29%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	aware of different access but no connection to gender	1	2	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	gender differences as one more checklist point to address	5	6	4	80%	1	20%	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	5	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	gender differences emerge in data but no attention paid to it	6	10	4	67%	2	33%	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%	3	50%	3	50%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	gender equality is an invisibilized topic in FS	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	if not necessary, no attention to it because of work load	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	lack of awareness about this	9	18	5	56%	4	44%	6	67%	2	22%	1	11%	7	78%	2	22%

Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	need to overcome the simple data on number of men and women	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	no actor specifically involved on gender equality in UFP	6	7	3	50%	3	50%	1	17%	5	83%	0	0%	3	50%	3	50%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	no concrete impact of gender equality goal	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	not right space to talk about gender	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	practices are feminist but no awareness of it	5	6	4	80%	1	20%	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	problem of binarism of gender data	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	risk of gender equality claims remaining abstract	5	6	4	80%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%	3	60%	5	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	risk related to normalization of feminism	3	3	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	3	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	self define as feminist but lacking explicitly feminist approach	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	spontaneous and not intentional attention to gender	8	13	6	75%	2	25%	3	38%	5	63%	0	0%	7	88%	1	13%
Gender	Theme 5: SETBACKS	time and effort cost does not allow to spread the topic internally	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
	Q2 governance relations		43	1621	24	56%	19	44%	26	60%	12	28%	5	12%	21	49%	22	51%
	THEME 1: VISION	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas	40	238	23	58%	17	43%	24	60%	11	28%	5	13%	20	50%	20	50%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with negative impact	33	101	19	58%	14	42%	20	61%	9	27%	4	12%	19	58%	14	42%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	contrasting views	12	19	6	50%	6	50%	7	58%	5	42%	0	0%	9	75%	3	25%

Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	different working cultures hinder dialogue	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	lack of political interest	13	25	7	54%	6	46%	5	38%	6	46%	2	15%	9	69%	4	31%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	political action vs political claim	8	11	2	25%	6	75%	6	75%	2	25%	0	0%	2	25%	6	75%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	political conflict	15	29	6	40%	9	60%	9	60%	3	20%	3	20%	8	53%	7	47%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	priorities are different	8	9	7	88%	1	13%	6	75%	1	13%	1	13%	4	50%	4	50%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEGATIVE	same view but no will to collab	3	7	1	33%	2	67%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	100%
	Theme 1: VISION / NEUTRAL or BOTH	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with neutral impact or that could be negative or positive based on context	16	65	8	50%	8	50%	13	81%	2	13%	1	6%	6	38%	10	63%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEUTRAL	AFN can be more radical than institutions	3	5	1	33%	2	67%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	3	100%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEUTRAL	AFN political stance	14	54	7	50%	7	50%	12	86%	1	7%	1	7%	6	43%	8	57%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / NEUTRAL	various reasons to participate in AFN	4	6	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
	Theme 1: VISION / POSITIVE	Elements related to actors' visions and ideas with positive impact	24	72	13	54%	11	46%	10	42%	11	46%	3	13%	12	50%	12	50%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / POSITIVE	AFN gives sort of free public service	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / POSITIVE	AFN shares the institution vision	3	6	2	67%	1	33%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / POSITIVE	Importance of dialogue recognized	16	33	9	56%	7	44%	5	31%	9	56%	2	13%	11	69%	5	31%
Governance relations	Theme 1: VISION / POSITIVE	importance of sharing a vision	12	32	6	50%	6	50%	5	42%	6	50%	1	8%	3	25%	9	75%
	Theme 2: PROCEDURES	Procedural elements that impact governance relationship	41	346	23	56%	18	44%	25	61%	12	29%	4	10%	20	49%	21	51%
	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	Procedural elements that impact governance relationship negatively	34	204	21	62%	13	38%	21	62%	10	29%	3	9%	17	50%	17	50%

Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	(perceived) lack of organization btw institutional levels	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	complications due to bureaucracy	19	38	11	58%	8	42%	13	68%	5	26%	1	5%	8	42%	11	58%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	difficult to carry on with AFNs activities	16	54	7	44%	9	56%	15	94%	1	6%	0	0%	6	38%	10	63%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	difficulty of translating visions into concrete actions	5	7	3	60%	2	40%	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	feminist dept not participated in UFP project	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	institutions have a sectorial approach	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	institutions make more theoretical projects than concrete	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	lack of connection btw same Municipalitys branches	11	16	7	64%	4	36%	3	27%	8	73%	0	0%	8	73%	3	27%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	lack of coordination	8	14	3	38%	5	63%	4	50%	4	50%	0	0%	5	63%	3	38%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	lack of relation btw levels of gov	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	limit to AFN growth	13	26	7	54%	6	46%	11	85%	2	15%	0	0%	5	38%	8	62%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	limits to public funding	4	7	1	25%	3	75%	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	0	0%	4	100%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	loss of content in the transfer from one level to the other	4	4	4	100%	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%	4	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	many institutional projects before a real coordination	5	7	3	60%	2	40%	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%

Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	participation modalities not ideal for AFN	12	20	7	58%	5	42%	6	50%	4	33%	2	17%	6	50%	6	50%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	urban planners not attentive to food	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEGATIVE	vague definition of limits to AFN action when collab with institution	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEUTRAL	Procedural elements that could impact governance relationship both negatively and positively (or have no real impact)	38	115	21	55%	17	45%	23	61%	12	32%	3	8%	18	47%	20	53%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEUTRAL	AFN internal governance	4	6	3	75%	1	25%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEUTRAL	impact of admin change	20	40	14	70%	6	30%	10	50%	8	40%	2	10%	18	90%	2	10%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEUTRAL	relevance of resource allocation	18	44	9	50%	9	50%	10	56%	6	33%	2	11%	4	22%	14	78%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / NEUTRAL	sharing a space with other actors	17	25	8	47%	9	53%	15	88%	2	12%	0	0%	6	35%	11	65%
	Theme 2: PROCEDURE / POSITIVE		15	27	9	60%	6	40%	10	67%	4	27%	1	7%	3	20%	12	80%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / POSITIVE	collaboration born due to emergency	8	14	4	50%	4	50%	7	88%	0	0%	1	13%	0	0%	8	100%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / POSITIVE	easier organization effort for stable entities	1	3	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / POSITIVE	importance of sharing a plan and methodology	4	5	3	75%	1	25%	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Governance relations	Theme 2: PROCEDURES / POSITIVE	shared but different responsibility	5	5	4	80%	1	20%	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	4	80%
	Theme 3: RELATION DYNAMICS	Relevant elements for actors' relations, and dynamics of relations	42	661	23	55%	19	45%	26	62%	12	29%	4	10%	20	48%	22	52%

	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	Negative aspects of governance actors' relations	32	111	17	53%	15	47%	23	72%	6	19%	3	9%	16	50%	16	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	AFN does not know the UFP	4	6	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	AFNs attempt for participation dismissed	3	4	0	0%	3	100%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	3	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	AFNs not willing to collab with institutinos	7	9	5	71%	2	29%	3	43%	3	43%	1	14%	5	71%	2	29%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	ambivalent position of institution towards afn	5	10	2	40%	3	60%	4	80%	0	0%	1	20%	1	20%	4	80%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	closed group of actors not open to others	1	4	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	co-optation risk	5	8	3	60%	2	40%	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	difficult to involve AFNs	3	9	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	intention of dialogue to the street and not institutions	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	lack of awareness of own's role	4	5	2	50%	2	50%	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	lack of institutional recognition to some AFN	3	8	1	33%	2	67%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%

Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	lack of interest in collaborating with smaller or newer actors	7	12	3	43%	4	57%	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	0	0%	7	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	lack of strategic vision of AFN-instit collab	4	5	2	50%	2	50%	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	lack of success in wanted collaboration	7	10	2	29%	5	71%	4	57%	2	29%	1	14%	4	57%	3	43%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	need to convince politicians	2	5	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	protest against institutions	1	1	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEGATIVE	relationship made of compromise	6	13	2	33%	4	67%	6	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%
	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	Neutral aspects of governance actors' relations (or aspects that can be both positive or negative based on context)	40	236	21	53%	19	48%	26	65%	11	28%	3	8%	19	48%	21	53%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	AFN dependent on institution	1	1	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	AFN must contact UFP, not contrary	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	alternative vs oppositive	10	17	5	50%	5	50%	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%	7	70%	3	30%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	different powers of actors	23	38	13	57%	10	43%	12	52%	8	35%	3	13%	14	61%	9	39%

Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	fluidity in relations btw institutions and afns	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	municipal funds to AFN not because of UFP but bottom-up request	14	20	7	50%	7	50%	10	71%	3	21%	1	7%	3	21%	11	79%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	relation AFN-Municipality	33	79	18	55%	15	45%	26	79%	6	18%	1	3%	14	42%	19	58%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	relation btw different AFNs	23	72	12	52%	11	48%	23	100%	0	0%	0	0%	9	39%	14	61%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / NEUTRAL	relevance of trust in relations	4	6	1	25%	3	75%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%	2	50%	2	50%
	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	Positive aspects of governance actors' relations	39	314	21	54%	18	46%	24	62%	12	31%	3	8%	17	44%	22	56%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	AFN favors institution's dialogue with other smaller AFNs	4	4	2	50%	2	50%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	AFN took part in UFP participation process	9	14	7	78%	2	22%	6	67%	2	22%	1	11%	5	56%	4	44%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	collaboration btw institution and producers	5	11	1	20%	4	80%	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	1	20%	4	80%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	collaboration plan - strategy	9	17	4	44%	5	56%	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%	2	22%	7	78%

Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	coordination attempt	6	9	4	67%	2	33%	2	33%	4	67%	0	0%	5	83%	1	17%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	coordination btw levels of governance	4	7	3	75%	1	25%	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	higher gov level tries to include lower and smaller scales	3	3	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	informal but strong network btw actors	9	20	5	56%	4	44%	7	78%	2	22%	0	0%	3	33%	6	67%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	institution recognizes AFN's role	17	29	8	47%	9	53%	11	65%	4	24%	2	12%	9	53%	8	47%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	institution takes AFN as reference	3	4	1	33%	2	67%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	institution's role in favouring dialogue	4	7	1	25%	3	75%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	3	75%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	intention of collaboration	20	35	10	50%	10	50%	11	55%	8	40%	1	5%	8	40%	12	60%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	lower level of gov contacts higher level	3	3	3	100%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	municipality funds the AFN	19	39	12	63%	7	37%	15	79%	4	21%	0	0%	8	42%	11	58%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	no competition btw AFNs	4	6	3	75%	1	25%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%

Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	personal relationships	10	34	6	60%	4	40%	8	80%	1	10%	1	10%	3	30%	7	70%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	positive but hard dialogue btw institutions	4	8	4	100%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	positive multilevel dialogue	8	13	6	75%	2	25%	2	25%	6	75%	0	0%	5	63%	3	38%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	positive relation with municipality	12	17	8	67%	4	33%	8	67%	2	17%	2	17%	7	58%	5	42%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	reciprocity btw AFNs and institutions	3	3	1	33%	2	67%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	relation to institution as convenience	4	9	0	0%	4	100%	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	role of support of smaller institutions	2	3	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	same professionals moving from AFNs to institutions etc	4	5	2	50%	2	50%	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%	1	25%	3	75%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	same-level governance coordination	2	4	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	spaces for dialogue set up and managed by institution	5	7	3	60%	2	40%	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%
Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	symbiosis	1	1	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%

Governance relations	Theme 3: RELATIONAL DYNAMICS / POSITIVE	tight relation	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS	Relevant elements / actors / tools of governance that impact relations	42	376	23	55%	19	45%	26	62%	12	29%	4	10%	20	48%	22	52%
	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEGATIVE	Relevant elements / actors / tools of governance that impact relations negatively	22	49	13	59%	9	41%	15	68%	6	27%	1	5%	13	59%	9	41%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEGATIVE	relevance of individual people within bodies	22	49	13	59%	9	41%	15	68%	6	27%	1	5%	13	59%	9	41%
	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	Relevant elements / actors / tools of governance that impact relations neither positively nor negatively (or one of the two, based on context)	41	290	22	54%	19	46%	25	61%	12	29%	4	10%	19	46%	22	54%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	BCN - Milan relation on UFP	7	7	4	57%	3	43%	3	43%	3	43%	1	14%	4	57%	3	43%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	higher gov levels (EU...)	12	20	7	58%	5	42%	6	50%	4	33%	2	17%	8	67%	4	33%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	importance of studying international experiences	7	9	5	71%	2	29%	3	43%	3	43%	1	14%	1	14%	6	86%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	more local level - municipi neighborhoods	18	28	9	50%	9	50%	12	67%	4	22%	2	11%	3	17%	15	83%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	multilevel institutional governance	13	30	9	69%	4	31%	2	15%	9	69%	2	15%	10	77%	3	23%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	north and south	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%

Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	private companies	22	32	8	36%	14	64%	16	73%	4	18%	2	9%	7	32%	15	68%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	pros and cons of international networks	7	9	4	57%	3	43%	2	29%	4	57%	1	14%	1	14%	6	86%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relations to NGOs etc	1	3	0	0%	1	100%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of AFN location	21	45	11	52%	10	48%	18	86%	2	10%	1	5%	9	43%	12	57%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of bigger cities	7	9	3	43%	4	57%	2	29%	5	71%	0	0%	4	57%	3	43%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of city's governance	5	9	2	40%	3	60%	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	5	100%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of flagship initiatives for institution	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of MUFPP	6	26	4	67%	2	33%	1	17%	5	83%	0	0%	2	33%	4	67%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of public space	5	7	3	60%	2	40%	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	4	80%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of smaller cities around the big one	3	4	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	relevance of UFP	15	34	8	53%	7	47%	9	60%	5	33%	1	7%	3	20%	12	80%

Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / NEUTRAL	role of private sector in AFN participation	11	15	5	45%	6	55%	10	91%	1	9%	0	0%	0	0%	11	100%
	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / POSITIVE	Relevant elements / actors / tools of governance that impact relations positively	18	37	9	50%	9	50%	9	50%	6	33%	3	17%	7	39%	11	61%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / POSITIVE	importance of networks of institutions sharing the same territory	4	7	2	50%	2	50%	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / POSITIVE	institutions + academy relations	13	25	6	46%	7	54%	6	46%	4	31%	3	23%	4	31%	9	69%
Governance relations	Theme 4: GOVERNANCE ELEMENTS / POSITIVE	relevance of AFN as alternative spaces for transformation	4	5	1	25%	3	75%	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
	Q3 potentialities		43	714	24	56%	19	44%	26	60%	12	28%	5	12%	21	49%	22	51%
	Theme 1: IMPACT	Actual or imagined impacts: what IS the potential or urban food governance? What has it already done and what could it do?	40	325	21	53%	19	48%	26	65%	10	25%	4	10%	18	45%	22	55%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	AFN proposed the creation of a UFP	1	2	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	bottom-up legislation potential	3	5	2	67%	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%	2	67%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	bring up new themes	13	20	10	77%	3	23%	6	46%	5	38%	2	15%	8	62%	5	38%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	creation of community network in the neighborhood	13	32	7	54%	6	46%	12	92%	0	0%	1	8%	4	31%	9	69%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	empowerement and emancipation	5	10	2	40%	3	60%	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%

Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	importance of UFP to keep the theme after political changes	4	9	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%	1	25%	3	75%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	intention of model repetition rather than AFN's own growth	3	4	2	67%	1	33%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	intersection with other themes like housing	10	26	7	70%	3	30%	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	9	90%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	learning about care and responsibility	11	16	6	55%	5	45%	11	100%	0	0%	0	0%	5	45%	6	55%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	managing urban-rural relations	7	19	1	14%	6	86%	4	57%	3	43%	0	0%	1	14%	6	86%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	mapping of needs	4	4	2	50%	2	50%	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	2	50%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	networking opportunity	5	7	5	100%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	occasion to contact people from different backgrounds	2	3	0	0%	2	100%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	participation	24	69	13	54%	11	46%	14	58%	8	33%	2	8%	12	50%	12	50%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	potential to get resources and space for AFNs	20	41	9	45%	11	55%	15	75%	5	25%	0	0%	6	30%	14	70%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	qualitative over quantitative impact	1	2	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	relevance of initiatives like Capital of Sustainable Food to raise awareness	4	7	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%	3	75%	1	25%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	socialization aim before food related aim	11	27	6	55%	5	45%	10	91%	1	9%	0	0%	1	9%	10	91%
Potentialities	Theme 1: IMPACT	socialization of activity's subjects	11	15	8	73%	3	27%	9	82%	1	9%	1	9%	6	55%	5	45%
	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	Factors that support the potential impacts of the previous theme	31	129	16	52%	15	48%	17	55%	11	35%	3	10%	15	48%	16	52%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	AFN feels they have political impact	7	20	2	29%	5	71%	6	86%	1	14%	0	0%	4	57%	3	43%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	AFN participants are often experts	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%	1	50%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	AFN strives to be a safe space	3	3	1	33%	2	67%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	AFNs are privileged space	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%

Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	different but complementary transformation potential institutions-others	12	16	7	58%	5	42%	4	33%	7	58%	1	8%	5	42%	7	58%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	generalized interest to FS in Catalunya	3	6	2	67%	1	33%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	perceived success of AFN role towards institutions	1	2	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	potential of institutional action	9	18	6	67%	3	33%	1	11%	7	78%	1	11%	4	44%	5	56%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	potential of pression to institutions of legitimate actors	5	6	2	40%	3	60%	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	3	60%	2	40%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	potential of UFP	10	28	5	50%	5	50%	5	50%	3	30%	2	20%	1	10%	9	90%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	potential of urban planning	2	2	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	relevance of technicians in institutions - professionality and stability	6	13	5	83%	1	17%	1	17%	4	67%	1	17%	5	83%	1	17%
Potentialities	Theme 2: FAVORABLE FACTORS	see more potential in interAFN cooperation	5	11	3	60%	2	40%	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	3	60%
	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	Factors that slow down impact potential	35	127	20	57%	15	43%	21	60%	10	29%	4	11%	20	57%	15	43%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	difficulty related to consumers choices	2	2	2	100%	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	greenwashing	4	4	2	50%	2	50%	3	75%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	lack of resources dedicated	6	10	3	50%	3	50%	3	50%	1	17%	2	33%	1	17%	5	83%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	limits to big city municipalities	4	4	0	0%	4	100%	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	long term potential of AFN-inst dialogue but long way, now conscience lacks	5	5	2	40%	3	60%	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	3	60%	2	40%

Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	missed potential	9	18	6	67%	3	33%	5	56%	2	22%	2	22%	4	44%	5	56%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	more women but no common conscience about the space they occupy in FS	6	7	5	83%	1	17%	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%	4	67%	2	33%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	negative impact of administration changes and visions	11	12	7	64%	4	36%	7	64%	3	27%	1	9%	9	82%	2	18%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	no intention of FS transformation	1	1	1	100%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	not enough transformative potential of municipalities	5	6	1	20%	4	80%	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	3	60%	2	40%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	perceived limited transformative potential of institutions	9	13	4	44%	5	56%	5	56%	4	44%	0	0%	6	67%	3	33%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	political power of meat industry in Catalunya	4	5	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	power of agroindustry on institutions	3	4	0	0%	3	100%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	2	67%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	spanish municipalities have little power on FS	4	4	3	75%	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%	4	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	strategy vs actual regulations+	3	3	3	100%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	time privilege for AFN participation	14	23	9	64%	5	36%	10	71%	4	29%	0	0%	9	64%	5	36%
Potentialities	Theme 3: HINDERING FACTORS	UFP more useful towards other cities than to impact internal actors	3	6	1	33%	2	67%	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	1	33%	2	67%
	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	Other factors that might be positive or negative based on context	35	133	20	57%	15	43%	20	57%	11	31%	4	11%	18	51%	17	49%
Potentialities	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	city's scale impacts city's capacity for action	6	10	2	33%	4	67%	1	17%	4	67%	1	17%	2	33%	4	67%

Potentialities	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	pros and cons of voluntary participation	11	35	4	36%	7	64%	9	82%	1	9%	1	9%	1	9%	10	91%
Potentialities	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	relevance of historical and cultural context	12	25	6	50%	6	50%	7	58%	3	25%	2	17%	7	58%	5	42%
Potentialities	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	relevance of political views	21	54	14	67%	7	33%	9	43%	10	48%	2	10%	17	81%	4	19%
Potentialities	Theme 4: NEUTRAL FACTORS	transformation must come from the bottom up	7	9	1	14%	6	86%	5	71%	2	29%	0	0%	2	29%	5	71%
EXTRA	extra codes\BCN municipal markets		6	9	2	33%	4	67%	3	50%	2	33%	1	17%	6	100%	0	0%
EXTRA	extra codes\food as instrument not aim		6	12	2	33%	4	67%	6	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%
EXTRA	extra codes\relevance of covid crisis		10	19	5	50%	5	50%	8	80%	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%	10	100%

Annex 2: Co-occurrence of codes represented through conditional coloring, and specific sheets for each topic (Q1, Q2, Q3). It is only available online due to its size, at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VCqQH41xK3CnDOYF23k7-RjByvTJzJ70/edit?gid=1619516246#gid=1619516246 . It will remain available for a year since the thesis defense, which is held in February 2026.