International Institute of Social Studies

Erasmus

Contradictions on the path towards just and sustainable food worlds

Alternative food initiatives and food (in)justice in the Netherlands

A Research Paper presented by:

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(Germany)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

Agrarian, Food and Environmental Studies

AFES

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The Hague, The Netherlands
December 2023

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Acknowledgments

To the gardeners, harvesters, organizers, activists, and everyone with a heart for food and justice who participated so selflessly in my research path. Thank you for inviting me into your worlds, responding to my questions openly, and thinking along about difficult matters. The ideas gathered in this paper came about while weeding together, chatting over a cup of tea, or in-between moments on the phone, and with a view on your spaces of food. Thank you to the activists and researchers for giving me advice, hearing me out, and opening new doors.

To Cecilia and Roos, your endless warmth and support, the many moments shared in crisis, the unconditional company, and many moments laughing. Cecilia, thank you for feeding me, taking care of me, always up for everything, beyond a doubt…my second me and kindred spirit. Roos, thank you for preaching confidence and sarcasm, for being authentically you in any moment, for caring about me and the world, thank you for the reliable fruit supply and moments of freedom in the sea.

To the committed library crew, thank you for lightening up many moments of pressure and stress, always ready to cheer for each other, and always up for silliness at the end of day.

To my family, your love from faraway and patience with my radicality. Thank you for teaching me joy and open my eyes to see the birds, feel the soil, and taste the rain. Thank you for teaching me empathy and curiosity to see what's out there and what's not.

To Nuno, for the many cuddles, comforting meals, jokes, persistence, and promises of the smell of cake on a rainy Sunday.

To Jun, thank you for taking me seriously, for the beetroot ice cream recipes in between serious activist intellectual talks, and for taking me onto new academic paths.

To Oane, for thinking along and sharing the enthusiasm.

To myself, for writing and walking, thinking and resting, laughing and crying.

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List of Acronyms

AFI	Alternative food initiative
AFP	Alternative food practice
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CSA	Community supported agriculture
NGO	non-governmental organization
NW/POC	Non-Western/People of color
SES	socioeconomic status
US	United States

Abstract

Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) see themselves confronted with many contradictions which mark their vulnerability to logics of the capitalist food system and raise questions about their position in moving towards more just and sustainable food worlds. Food (in)justice represents such a contradiction – one that is relevant in the Netherlands where a pressing food injustice remains largely unacknowledged. Following the question "How can alternative food initiatives in the face of contradictions such as replicated food injustice contribute to eroding the globally dominant capitalist food system and to constructing more just and sustainable food worlds?", this paper explores the reproduction of injustice, the challenges to practice justice, and the heterogeneity amongst AFIs through a lens of plural justice. Centrally arguing that even in the face of contradictions, AFIs are integral to moving towards more just and sustainable food worlds, this paper looks through the lens of an accumulation of strategies and movements in which individually different and perhaps contradictory components can be collectively effective. Alliances become a key consideration in this argument. Fieldwork comprising interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations with AFIs and their organizers in Utrecht (the Netherlands) and interviews with organizers in AFI and agrarian networks and movements in the Netherlands form the empirical grounds of this paper.

Relevance to Development Studies

As the current conventional global food system is under scrutiny with every new wave of crisis, most recently the global covid-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, and consistent underlying crises such as food insecurity and obesity, migrant labour exploitation, and environmental destruction, moving towards alternative food systems is crucial for human and more-than-human flourishing. As Agrarian, Food and Environmental Studies (AFES) is concerned with the impacts of capitalist development on agrarian, environmental, and food spheres, this paper aims at enhancing an understanding of how the capitalist food system impacts struggles against such a system. What is more is that this paper adds perspectives on the complications and contradictions that surface as civil society efforts such as alternative food initiatives are struggling for food worlds that are more just and sustainable. The paper's situatedness in the Netherlands makes this research particularly relevant for understanding civil society efforts in the Global North but is not limited to it as AFIs and similar grassroots food practices which oppose the conventional food system occur across the globe. Assessing alternative food practices and their entanglements with the global political economy and ecology brings to light a chain of contradictions such as reproduced injustices which need to be better understood if we are to take the transformation of the conventional food system towards social justice and ecological sustainability seriously.

Keywords

food justice; alternative food initiatives; Netherlands; alliances; heterogeneity

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The puzzle at hand: contradicting currents

The Netherlands is the second-largest exporter of agricultural goods in the world. Not only is half of the country's land used for agriculture, but the Netherlands is also globally renown for cutting edge food technology. With an estimated 122.3 billion euros export in agricultural goods in 2022 (Jukema, Ramaekers and Berkhout, 2023) and 15 out of the top 20 largest agrifood businesses having major R&D centers in the country (OECD, 2015), the Netherlands seems like food wonderland at the heart of the food chain. Yet, over the past years the country has been confronted with an ongoing nitrogen crisis reflected in nation-wide farmers protests and the emergence of an agrarian, right-wing populist political party. While these events highlight the flaws and worrisome past, present, and future developments on the food production side, dilemmas on the food consumption side are also surfacing although remaining largely under the radar. Food poverty and insecurity, food-related health issues, and obesity do not spare one of the world's richest countries and reveal a worrisome correlation with class and race status (van der Velde, 2022; Haagse Voedselraad, 2023; Dinnissen et al. 2021; Van Erpecum et al., 2022). It is precisely because lower socioeconomic status groups and people with non-Western background/people of color (NW/POC) are disproportionately more affected by those food consumption dilemmas that we can speak of pervasive food injustice in the Netherlands. The confusing contradiction of wealth and food injustice evokes a similar image as the 2012 report of the UN's special rapporteur on the right to food Olivier De Schutter revealing an unexpected food insecurity rate in Canada which also was unjustly distributed amongst the population (Riches and Tarasuk, 2014). European countries, just like Canada or most prominently the US, are not spared from intersecting food and inequality issues.[1] How can we make sense of this inverted logic and understand countries' vulnerability to food injustice despite the apparent abundance of food?

Pointing out the "contradictions of obesity, hunger, poverty and wealth", Patel's book titled Stuffed and Starved (2007, p.3) starts with a very similar question and provocatively states that the "perversity of the way our food comes to us is that it's now possible for people who can't afford enough to eat to be obese" (2007, p.4). Patel's culprit is the dominant corporate food system, a complex system of exploitation and intoxication on all sides of production-distribution-consumption constellations. Authors have used different words to describe the dominant food system – corporate, industrial, and capitalist are the most common terms. This paper refers to the dominant food system as the capitalist food system but conceptually includes its corporate and industrial character. Capitalism is a huge concept, system, set of values, and logic. In this paper it is a lens through which we can understand food injustice in the Netherlands because, as Wright (2021, p. 2) fittingly puts it, "the hallmark of capitalism is poverty in the midst of plenty". Narrowing it down to the food system, capitalism commodifies food – it is "valued not just as sustenance but as potential capital" (Holt-Gimenez, 2017, p. 60). Its exchange value is determined by powerful actors – corporations – and an industrial mode of food production. Unjust food insecurity, obesity, and hunger are by no means accidental but the result of a food system which imposes a class and race differentiated diet (McMichael, 2013; Holt-Gimenez, 2017). In the face of inequality and injustice, what is happening to counter the capitalist food system?

Worldwide, several currents of social movements and civil society projects counter the capitalist food system – from food sovereignty to food justice, local food to agroecology, and now Degrowth is also tapping into food (Nelson and Edwards, 2020). In the Global North in particular, Alternative Food Initiatives (AFIs) counter the capitalist food system through largely localized efforts, oftentimes defined by short supply chains and merging consumer-producer dualities, such as farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), consumer cooperatives, and urban

[1] According to Jones (2017), up to a quarter of the European population might face food insecurity in various.

community gardens. Setting out to reimagine production-circulation-consumption-waste constellations, and redefining social and socioecological relations, they strive for more just and sustainable food worlds. Yet, we find that food producers resort to self-exploitation (Galt, 2013) while consumers enjoy a re-connection to nutritious food and embedded place. We identify an emphasis on individualized consumer behavior (Allen, 2010) and the undermining effect of competition on values of reciprocity and solidarity (Galt et al., 2016) as AFIs establish consumers as important political actors in the struggle against the capitalist political economy (Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman, 2011). And, we see that food injustice along the lines of class and race persist within the internal ranks of AFIs, despite their call for better food worlds (Guthman, 2008). How can we make sense of these contradictions in AFIs while understanding their stance in accomplishing more just and sustainable food worlds?

This question has caused considerable divide amongst scholars and scholar-activists and there is no straight-forward answer. According to Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011, p. 127), AFIs and the likes are unlikely to make a substantial change in the food system as "their disconnected nature risks leaving structural impact on hunger". Only in alliance with social movement currents that directly, openly, and intentionally challenge and attack power imbalances in the current food system is it that AFIs can become significant in the struggle towards more just and sustainable food worlds. Does this mean that we are to entirely dismiss initiatives that strive for sustainable food production while inadvertently reproducing social inequalities?

Following Fraser's (2021) and Wright's (2021) accounts on countering capitalism, AFIs in their current configuration might not at all be a lost cause in moving towards just food worlds. Rather than artificially separating strategies, scales, and social movement strains, Fraser (2021) and Wright (2021) emphasize that an anti-systemic block is necessarily marked by a diversity of struggles. This variety is what in the end can hopefully build a strong enough block and strategic playing field to erode a capitalist system. How exactly do AFIs fit in a movement of movements that is capable of incorporating a strategy of strategies?

Situated within this discussion, this paper interrogates food (in)justice as one of the most significant internal contradictions faced by AFIs as they are captured by logics of the capitalist food system while striving for more just and sustainable food worlds. The specific site of this research is the Netherlands, a country where food injustice occurs perhaps unexpectedly and remains largely unaddressed by academic literature. While the concept and movement of food justice typically refers to multiple spaces, sectors, and scales of impact – from exploited agricultural workers to marginalized urban consumers – in this paper, I am concerned with the consumption end of food (in)justice[2]. The AFIs that constitute the core of this research are located in the urban and peri-urban, mostly in the city area of Utrecht. As almost a quarter of low-income households in the Netherlands is located in the four largest cities (Utrecht being one of them) (Vrooman et al., 2023; Petrovic, Manley and Van Ham, 2021) and food consumption injustice in general especially affects the urban poor (Heynen, Kurtz and Trauger, 2012), the urban constitutes a particular setting for interrogating AFIs in regards to food (in)justice. Finally, taking the "silent" food injustice in the Netherlands as a point of departure, this paper asks: "How can alternative food initiatives (AFIs) in the face of contradictions such as replicated food injustice contribute to eroding the globally dominant capitalist food system and to constructing more just and sustainable food worlds?"

Centrally, I will argue that even in the face of contradictions, AFIs are integral to moving towards more just and sustainable food worlds when looking through the lens of an accumulation of strategies and movements in which individually different and perhaps contradictory components

[2] Food consumption injustice is however not the only site of food injustice in the Netherlands. Much injustice also happens for instance in the agricultural labor sector as migrant workers in the Netherlands experience exploitation and precarity (Siegmann, Quaedvliegand Williams, 2020; Palumbo, Corrado and Triandafyllidou, 2020).

can be collectively effective. Alliances become a key consideration in this argument, and Fox (2010) theorization of alliances as distinct from movements and networks is central to my discussion of their occurrence.

The following chapters adhere to an empirics-theory-empirics structure through which theory is weaved into empirical discussions rather than kept separately. I begin with an overview of food injustice in the Netherlands as induced by the capitalist food system (Chapter 2) to then discuss food injustice as it is replicated in my sample of AFIs (Chapter 3) and AFIs' challenges to practice justice at the current conjuncture (Chapter 4). Having established the justice contradiction as it manifests within the organizational boundaries of AFIs, I propose a lens through which we can understand AFIs contribution to construct more just and sustainable food worlds in spite of inherent contradictions by surpassing the organizational boundaries of AFIs (Chapter 5).

1.2 Methodology

Relying on data collected during field research in the Netherlands, mostly in the city area of Utrecht, this paper applies a qualitative methodology on micro and meso analytical levels. Throughout the paper, I engage with my data in various messy and recursive processes of specifying (observations), generalizing (patterns), and abstracting (theories and concepts) (Lund, 2014). While my observations present the anchor of this paper, secondary data on food injustice is important to generalize the issue and relevance of food (in)justice in Dutch AFIs. Theories and conceptualizations of (food) justice and social change crucially establish abstraction and "define the case" (Lund, 2014, p. 228): we are looking at food (in)justice in AFIs within the frame of countering the capitalist food system and moving towards just and sustainable food worlds. Wright's (2021), Fraser's (2021), and Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck's (2011) theories of system change thus define the research case on a level of abstraction.

1.2.1 Through the lens of scholar-activism: positionality

My research is scholar-activist in nature and qualitative in its methodological approach. The qualitative research approach places me, the researcher, at the core as the instrument of research (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). Who I am, and the position that my research takes, in relation to the subject and the people that constitute this research reveals a scholar-activist stance.

Some years ago, I got my first vegetable package from a consumer cooperative in Amsterdam. Around the same time, I started gardening in a community garden in one of the city's "troubled" neighborhoods and through an internship with a grassroots activism group I got in touch with many AFIs like CSAs, garden networks, and food waste projects. Entering this other world of food surrounded by hard-core Dutch capitalism was equally overwhelming and beautiful. Yet, after some time – I became an organizer in the consumer cooperative and participant in some other projects – I started noticing the cracks, flaws, and imperfections on the initiatives' shields against the capitalist food system. I started thinking about those contradictions – the issues that were picked-up and others left aside – and especially people's attitudes towards them. It was then when a seed got planted in my mind to wonder: what does it mean to be anti-systemic and is it happening here?

In this research, I make the imperfections and contradictions the very core of interrogating the AFIs. "Questioning appearance and asking uncomfortable questions" (Edelman, 2009, p. 249) to movement interlocuters thus puts me in a sweet spot of tension and particular category of scholar-activism. Following Edelman (2009), scholar-activism is ripe of tensions that play out differently for each "type" of scholar-activist along varying degrees of engagement and commitment. My engagement and commitment to AFIs and towards truly just and sustainable

food worlds is undisputed but this does not mean that I must take a stance of pure advocacy and praise. Rather, my commitment puts me to the very important task of "posing difficult questions and especially reporting the testimony of the disaffected" (Edelman, 2009, p. 258), that is paying attention to those who are alienated from the social movement. Following an intellectual, political, and moral compass towards more just and sustainable food worlds, this research "necessarily takes a bias in favor of the exploited and oppressed classes and social groups" (Borras and Franco, 2023, p. 1). Thus, my commitment to AFIs generates a critical viewpoint which might be in conflict with some of the AFIs' official narratives and representation claims (Edelman, 2009). Indeed, during my fieldwork I encountered confused and even slightly offended reactions when asking questions about the exclusionary and elitist nature of initiatives, questions that are clearly sensitive and difficult. However, it is these questions which constitute the normative character of my research – rather than focusing solely on the world *as it is*, this research is concerned with the world *as it ought to be*: "We choose to study different social problems because we judge them to be problems. How we define problems entail some kind of social values, and addressing such problems require normative judgments" (Borras and Franco, 2023, p. 1).

Social justice represents such a normative judgment and is what directs the course of this research paper. My analysis is further guided by central questions of political economy – who owns what, who does what, who gets what, and what do they do with it (Bernstein, 2017).

1.2.2 Methods and methodological considerations

Considering the lack of research on and general acknowledgment of food injustice in the Netherlands and my own involvement in AFIs, I decided to conduct field research and leave aside a macro analytical approach. The data gathering process can be roughly distinguished in three overlapping phases:

1. Getting to know the AFI landscape in the Utrecht region
2. Closer contact with few AFIs in Utrecht and interviews with organizers
3. Interviews with activists/actors from Dutch food movements and networks

The sampling method for AFIs followed a mix of snowballing and intentional selection considering organizational model or particularities related to food justice. Based on early insights about what factors could impact decision-making, organizational structure, and food justice practice, I aimed for a diverse sample set to include different types of urban agriculture AFIs (CSA, community garden, and "care" garden) with different land ownership models (private or public, rented or owned), and different (demographic) locations in the city. Throughout my analysis, I will engage with these differences. Further insights about initiatives and my interaction with them are laid out in a table at the end of this paper (appendix 2).

Actively avoiding methodological individualism (Jepperson and Meyer, 2011), I weave a micro approach of engaging with initiatives on the ground into a meso approach of interviewing activists/actors involved in regional and national food movements, networks, and organizations. This, and my previous involvement in initiatives in other cities in the Netherlands, allowed me to cross-check observations and recognize patterns. As Jepperson and Meyer (2011) point out, creating a dialogue between various levels of explanation and impact can elucidate aspects which otherwise might go unnoticed.

The specific research methods applied are interviews, informal conversations, and participant observation. Going beyond a singular method of interviewing, a situated, contextual qualitative field research approach allowed me to not only gather "what people say they do" but also "what people actually do" (Tracy, 2013, p. 5). Participant observation expanded the empirical reach of interviews and informal conversations to the "unexplicated, unacknowledged, or tacit knowledge, sometimes referred to as practical consciousness, which underlies all social interaction" (Burawoy,

1998, p. 15). For several weeks, I volunteered in six alternative food initiatives in Utrecht. Gardening alongside each other allowed me to get to know the initiative, the people, and the social climate. Informal conversations while planting lettuce or weeding through beets proved essential for my analysis and helped me contextualize findings from the interviews. Besides my engagement with AFIs, I volunteered in a food bank and attended two food council meetings, one in Utrecht and one in the Hague.

Following semi-structured and unstructured interviewing methods, I interviewed several strands of participants. Ten organizers (mostly gardeners, social workers, and board members) of AFIs in Utrecht (for the purpose of validation usually two organizers per initiative) were interviewed following an interview guide (appendix 1). Here, the semi-structured interviewing method was chosen to keep a certain level of control (Bernard, 2002) that allows me to compare observations from different AFIs. Following an unstructured interviewing method, I spoke to four organizers of initiatives from other regions in the Netherlands of whom three are affiliated with regional, national, and international food and agrarian networks and movements. Besides, also following an unstructured interviewing method, I spoke to the founder of a food bank (Utrecht), an employee of a municipality-funded urban agriculture organization, a Dutch food justice activist (national), and an employee of a company renting out greenhouse allotments (Utrecht and national). Here, I chose an unstructured interviewing method due to the variety of contexts and occupations of my interviewees. While I had some guiding themes in mind, it was crucial to "let the informant provide information that he or she thinks is important" (Bernard, 2002) rather than aiming for standardization through an interview guide. In total, 18 people were interviewed over the span of three months.

On all occasions of data gathering, I made clear that I am interacting as a researcher. Before all my interviews, I ensured informed consent (orally) by introducing my research project and affiliation and requesting approval for taking notes or recording. Most quotes presented in this paper are non-verbatim. For the sake of readability, sentence structures were adjusted and, in few cases, translated from Dutch. Since some interviews were not recorded, several quotes were reconstructed from notes. Every single quote still represents the voice of my participants and the meaning they have conveyed during interviews. As Fujii (2012) notes, obscuring identities of research participants to ensure their safety and comfort can impact the writing an in-depth analysis and engaging academic work. In this paper, I prioritized obscuring identities to ensure my participants comfort and safety and avoid sentiments of feeling judged, which at times meant excluding quotes or stories, and so strive towards a "mindful ethics" (González-López, 2011).

1.3 Scope and Limitations

This paper comprises four main sets of limitations. The first set of limitations concerns my sample of initiatives. On the one hand, given the variety of AFIs, I was unable to get to know the reality and structure of each single initiative. On the other hand, it is important to consider that AFIs in the urban comprise much more than urban agriculture, at the same time as urban agriculture involves much more than those sites typically identified as AFI (for example allotments). My sample of initiatives therefore provides only a glimpse of the world of urban agriculture and AFIs. The second set of limitations concerns the set of actors related to AFIs. The focus of this paper has centered civil society actors and the state has been largely left aside in this paper. A third set of limitations relates to this paper's account of food injustice as experienced by marginalized groups. Only few of my research participants have themselves experienced (food) injustice or are in close contact with those most vulnerable to food injustice. Further, and related to my own positionality as a white, middle-class, highly-educated person, I as a researcher am far removed to the embodied reality of food injustice and it was more difficult for me to reach out to marginalized groups or know about marginalized groups' own initiatives and projects to counter food injustice. This has

major implications for what this paper can offer, that is an account of food injustice largely based on secondary data. Finally, limited time for fieldwork and limited space in this paper carry as a consequence that findings captured in this paper encompass some barriers, some challenges, and some alliances and though there might be many more.

Chapter 2: Food (in)justice: conceptualization and context

"What do you mean with justice?", a question many participants asked throughout my research, and it cannot be answered easily. Oftentimes, participants jumped to topics of inclusion and access and I do not exclude myself from this intuitive logic. Is it not limited or distorted access to food which is causing food insecurity, and which is the source of criticism towards AFIs? As discussed throughout this paper, justice and injustice are complex and multifaceted practices and concepts and material access to healthy food is only one puzzle piece on the way to food justice.

This chapter first encompasses an introduction to the conceptual discussion and tools relevant for the interrogation of (in)justice in this paper. Having a clear conceptualization of justice serves two purposes. It allows us to evaluate and understand the current situation of injustice and it offers a framework for action towards justice and for analysis of existing efforts to achieve justice.

2.1 Conceptualizing plural justice

The field of food justice is dominated by distributional justice frameworks and viewpoints (Murray et al., 2023; De Bruin et al., 2023) as expressed in Gottlieb and Joshi's (2010, p. 6) most cited food justice definition as "ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly". Within the field of social justice theory, the one-dimensional distributional take has been widely criticized as limited to abstract fairness and impartiality and insufficient to be transformative of oppressive structures and complex food inequalities (e.g. Young, 1990; Schlosberg, 1990).

Nancy Fraser (1996; 2000; 2005) has made significant contributions to approaching social justice beyond redistribution to include recognition and representation. Justice, here, is understood as parity of participation, that is the "social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers" (Fraser, 1996, p. 30). Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of justice must account for maldistribution of economic resources, misrecognition induced by an institutionalized hierarchy of cultural values, and misrepresentation in the realm of political economy through which subjects of justice are not only excluded from decision-making but from the very framing of justice they are subject of (Fraser, 2005). Much in the same way, Young (1990) calls for expanding justice beyond redistribution because undermining oppressions requires recognizing social group differences in terms of privilege and oppression. While Young understands recognition through a politics of difference, Fraser (1996, pp. 32-33) follows a pragmatic approach to recognition meaning that "the form(s) of recognition justice requires in any given case depend(s) on the form(s) of misrecognition to be redressed". This tension reminds us of how immensely complicated implementing justice can become and how important it is to consider not only what "type" of recognition is demanded but also by whom and thus how. For Fraser (2005, p. 6), this question manifests in the political dimension of justice – "the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out". The political determines who counts as a member, who "belongs", and thus "who is included, and who excluded, from the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition" (Fraser, 2005, p. 6). Corresponding to the political is thus the issue of representation, a third integral part of participatory parity which cannot be reduced to either maldistribution or misrecognition (Fraser, 2005, p. 7).

Why does all this matter in the interrogation of food injustice in the Netherlands and AFIs' positioning in fostering justice? Firstly, a plural conceptualization of injustice helps to better grasp who is affected by food injustice in the Netherlands and why. Moving beyond distributional injustice we can see how poverty (attributed to class as social differentiation) extents to the realm of misrecognition of NW/POC in the Netherlands (attributed to race as social differentiation).

Secondly, a plural justice conceptualization helps to understand where AFIs stand regarding reproducing injustice while being confronted with challenges to practice social justice. Nuances are important to consider here as initiatives do differ in their stance towards justice. Distributional justice as picked up by participants through linking inclusion and accessibility finds much more resonance than recognition, let alone representation. Thirdly, and integral to my argument, a plural justice frame can shed light on AFIs position in working towards food justice. Plural justice might indeed need plural approaches and plural pathways, at least in the current configuration of social movements and food projects countering the capitalist food system.

2.2 Food injustice in the Netherlands

Since food (in)justice in the Netherlands, and Northern Europe more broadly, constitutes a largely unexplored topic in academic literature, my account on the issue is at best incomplete. Yet, it is immensely important to come to terms with why food justice in the Netherlands is integral for any efforts towards an alternative food system that tries to tackle the many problematics of the conventional food system.

Given this paper's focus on food consumption injustice, food insecurity is an important indicator. But, what exactly makes food insecurity unjust? Essentially, food insecurity affects certain groups in society more than others meaning that those groups disproportionately suffer from the negative health implications of food insecurity and unhealthy food consumption. Food injustice in the Netherlands evolves along lines of class and race.[3] In this paper, class is understood as inherently relational. Accordingly, sets of individual attributes such as education and interrelated material conditions such as income find expression in "inequalities in life chances and material standards of living" (Wright, 2005, p. 180). A widely used synonym for this definition of class is socioeconomic status (SES) which I shall sometimes use in this paper. Following Thompson (1968), it is important to understand class not simply as a static category defined by certain standards of attributes or material conditions but as relational. Class is produced by a historical articulation of relations of different interests and power bases (Thompson, 1968) which constitute particular logics within classes, meanings for individual attributes, and different material conditions. The forms of historical and relational class exploitations, oppressions, and marginalization are therefore important to consider. Following critical race theory, race is understood as socially constructed and racism as an organizing social paradigm which advances the interests of a dominant group (largely white Dutch) and marginalizes a racialized other (see Delgado, Stefancic and Harris, 2012). In the Netherlands, the racialized other is largely constituted by people with non-Western background and people of color (NW/POC), whereby Turkish, Morroccan, Surinamese, and Indonesian constitute the largest racialized minorities (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2023).

Socioeconomic status majorly contributes to the status of food insecurity as it is primarily the poverty-inflicted groups who are impacted by food related health issues (e.g. obesity), food insecurity, and unhealthy food consumption (van der Velde, 2022; Dinnissen et al. 2021; Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid, 2021). Although one might not expect much poverty in one of the richest countries worldwide, around 1 million people out of 17.5 million people in the Netherlands are living below the poverty line right now and the trend is upwards (Centraal Planbureau, 2023). Activists expect that at least this 1 million is experiencing food insecurity (interviewee 13). However, it is likely that people slightly above the poverty line are seriously

[3] Although class and race are the most significant determinants, gender also contributes to intersecting inequalities, poverty, and food insecurity (Vrooman et al. 2023). Due to limited scope this paper does not take gender nor other axes of difference like sexuality, ability, and age into account.

struggling as well which equals approximately twice as many households and 20% more in the case of single-parent families (Frijters, 2023).

To complicate the issue of class, racialized status is strongly correlated with SES (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2018), food insecurity (van der Velde, 2022), and obesity (De Boer et al., 2015). In an analysis of class structure within Dutch society, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Vrooman et al., 2023) stresses that inequality is best understood at the intersection between class and other markers of difference such as gender, migration background, and age. Racism in the Netherlands is institutionalized and reinforces material inequalities through for example marginalization in labor market, education, and housing market (Felten, H. et al., 2021) Numbers are very telling in this regard as for example the percentage of NW/POC in “upper classes” remains between 7-14% while they represent 31-43% in “lower classes” (Vrooman et al. 2023). Many of the poorest neighborhoods in the Netherlands are those with highest percentages of NW/POC population[4]. In Utrecht, these neighborhoods have by far the highest number of customers of food banks (Stichting Voedselbank Utrecht, 2022).

Why are people with lower socioeconomic status consuming less healthy food as the average Dutch middle-class citizen? How is it that migration background, education, and income make one choose the unhealthy? At the current conjuncture of the capitalist food system, it is possible to spend less money on more calories although those are often insufficiently nutritious and can lead to health problems particularly amongst the urban poor (Heynen, Kurtz and Trauger 2012; Nestle, 2002). Nutritious food in contrast is more expensive and inaccessible (Larsen and Gilleland, 2009). A government report shows that healthy food might actually be (too) expensive for lower income groups (van den Brakel, 2023) and instead people fall back on more affordable and filling unhealthy foods (Ludden, 2023). This is strikingly obvious when looking at how much people spend on food. Only 11-13% of income amongst people positioned around the poverty line is spent on food, which is still relatively close to a national average of 8% (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2018).

Yet, price is insufficient to fully grasp the structural impacts that make food insecurity unjust. The Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (2021) identified food environment as impactful for (un)healthy diets. Although food deserts[5] as a phenomenon in the Netherlands have not been confirmed (Helbich et al., 2017), food environment disparities contribute to food injustice because fast food restaurants and other unhealthy food stores are more concentrated in poorer neighborhoods (Pointer, 2021; Smagge, van der Velde and Kiefte-de Jong, 2022). Unhealthy food outlets are on average twice as prevalent in low-income neighborhoods compared to high-income neighborhoods (Pointer, 2021) which has been found to increase childhood overweight (Smagge et. al, 2022), diabetes (Ntarladima et. al, 2022), and body mass index (Van Erpecum et. al, 2022).

Food prices and allocation of food outlets are by no means accidental nor innocent but rather the outcome of structural inequality along lines of class and race. This becomes even clearer when considering how psychological and material burdens further impose disproportionate consumption of unhealthy foods. Marginalized groups report that time needed to prepare healthy unprocessed foods and psychological stress make them chose easily accessible and quickly prepared unhealthy foods (Ludden, 2023). Here, poverty is not the only relevant stress factor. NW/POC experience of discrimination can impact their mental and physical health in such a way that it increases their prevalence for obesity (Ikram, 2016). As the founder of a food bank in Utrecht puts

[4] Utrecht’s neighborhood Tigrisdreef is one of the poorest neighborhoods in city (income close to poverty line is 40% in comparison to 11% Utrecht average) while the population with, especially non-western, migration background is much higher than the Utrecht average ("Dutch" + Western background is 38% in comparison to 74% Utrecht average) (Gemeente Utrecht, 2023).

[5] The concept food desert refers urban areas, usually low income neighborhoods, where fresh and healthy food is not easily accessible (see Wrigley, 2002)

it: "They are already haunted by many ghosts, they do not think about taking care of themselves with vegetables" (interviewee 17).

Afterall, many factors associated with marginalized status are reinforcing each other so that for instance poverty and racist discrimination increase obesity while obesity can decrease employment which can increase obesity and poverty (see van der Velde, 2022). What makes food insecurity and food-related health issues unjust then, is that institutionalized arrangements and structural inequality prevent marginalized groups "from participating on par with others in social life" (Fraser, 1996, p. 36). Through the lens of maldistribution, we could see how class, and class at its intersection with race, constitutes an economically defined collectivity suffering from injustice. The lens of misrecognition emphasizes how institutionalized and structural racism constitute a collectivity that is more culturally rather than economically defined. In the case of food justice in the Netherlands, Fraser's (1996) argument for integrating issues of redistribution and recognition proves important because (many of) the collectives suffer from injustice in bivalence that is they are suffering both from maldistribution and misrecognition.

2.3 Addressing food injustice

As of now, food banks are the most widespread yet highly contested mechanism addressing food insecurity and only minimally the injustice accompanying food insecurity (Hebinck et al., 2018). Aside from wide-spread criticisms of their limitations to address root causes of food insecurity, food banks have been criticized for not providing sufficiently healthy food (Neter et al., 2016; Neter et al., 2018) and imposing an emotional burden on those relying on them for covering their food needs (Van Der Horst, Pascucci and Bol, 2014). Aside from food banks, there seems to be a gap of action to address food injustice as it takes shape in the Netherlands. Food injustice still appears to be a silent phenomenon, both amongst civil society actors and within academic literature[6]. While some activists make demands and start initiatives, these remain few and scattered. According to a Dutch food justice activist (interviewee 13), there is no coordinated larger mobilization for food justice in the Netherlands, a situation far off from the food justice movement in the US. Recently emerging food (policy) councils in Dutch cities promoting democratic processes constitute a promising development although their impact on policy making and people's experience of food injustice is still unclear (den Boer, 2023).

Having established that food (consumption) injustice does prevail in the Netherlands and considering that efforts towards justice are at best incoherent, how can we position Dutch AFIs in the struggle towards plural justice? Does food injustice remain a "silent" injustice also amongst AFIs? And, what are the challenges and potentials for AFIs to implement and push for justice within and beyond their organizational boundaries? As a movement opposing the destructiveness of the current food system and striving for more sustainable and just food worlds, the assumption might be that this is exactly where food justice is (supposed to) happen. However, things are much more complicated than that. The following two chapters unpack where AFIs in my sample stand in regards to food justice within their organizational boundaries.

Chapter 3: Replicating injustice in alternative food initiatives

Throughout my conversations with organizers of urban AFIs in Utrecht, most interviewees confirmed the (perceived) low level of participation of NW/POC and people with lower SES. When I asked them what they think is the reason for their predominantly white, middle-upper class, highly educated audience, many would mention their location as a first thing.

[6] Although in recent years there has been an increase in publications (e.g. Ikram; van der Velde, 2022; Dinnissen et al. 2021o; Pointer, 2021; Smagge, van der Velde and Kiefte-de Jong, 2022; Van Erpecum et. al, 2022).

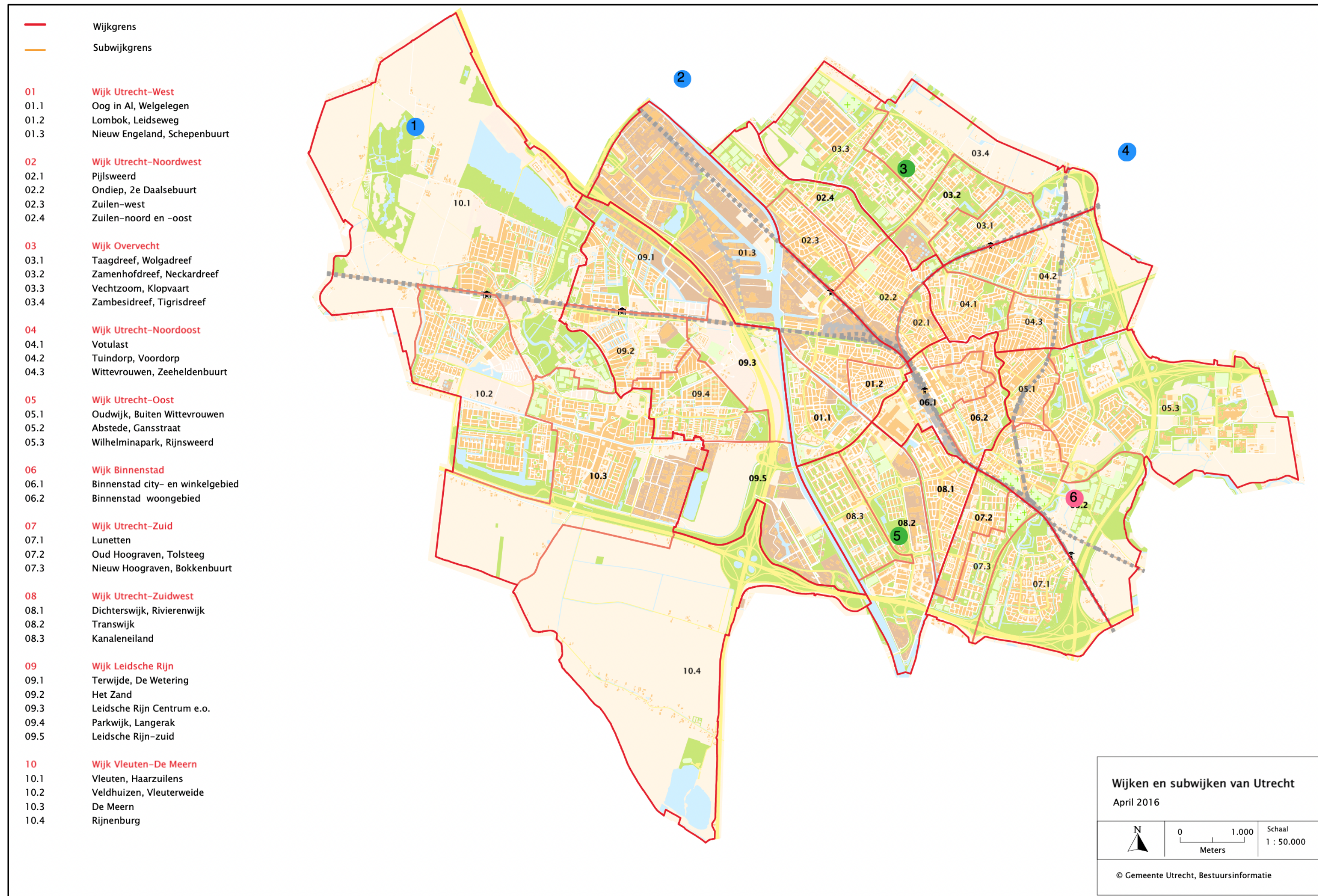
> "the poverty areas are in the West side of the city and we are located in the East side" (Interviewee 7)

> "it's mainly people with white Dutch background, but that is also about the city part where we live in. That's what's around us." (Interviewee 3)

This points at the limited proximity to fresh produce as a first barrier to marginalized people's healthy food consumption (Alkon and Guthman, 2017). Does it mean we simply must find a way to increase the number of initiatives in all demographically different areas? Perhaps not quite. Geographical location does not seem to explain the whole picture, nor does it come innocently. The three initiatives which gave their location as a reason for their demographic composition (see map 1: initiatives 1,2,6) are indeed not located in neighborhoods known as low-income or ethnically diverse. However, the two initiatives (see map 1: initiatives 3,5) which are located in two of Utrecht's poorest and most diverse neighborhoods also report a relatively low participation of the people so highly represented in the neighborhoods around.

Two questions arise from this pattern: why are (certain types) of initiatives predominantly located in wealthier, mainly white neighborhoods and with what implications? And, why are those located in poorer neighborhoods with NW/POC representing big parts of the population still not demographically representative of their location? During interviews and conversations, answers to these questions were much thinner, often coming with hesitation and uncertainty, starting the responses with 'I'm not sure'. But addressing those questions is an important step towards deconstructing the issue of food (in)justice within initiatives. Looking beyond simple explanations of location, the following sections unpack the complexities which reproduce AFIs as white spaces, as harbors of choice, and projects which on several levels reproduce privilege, hinder access, and copy neoliberal values fueling exclusions.

Alkon and Guthman's (2017) formulation of two central critiques of alternative food systems offered by scholars, activists, and scholar-activists over the past decades majorly contributed to structuring the sections below. The authors differentiate between a food justice critique which concerns "the ways in which race, class, gender and other forms of inequality affect both conventional and alternative food systems" (p. 5) and a neoliberalism critique which reinforces the marginalization of certain groups through replication of neoliberalist logics into AFIs. Departing from these main sets of critique, I propose three analytical groupings which respectively respond to Fraser's plural justice dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Those are material conditions of exclusion, cultural conditions of exclusion, and representation complications. Neoliberalist impediments further obscure these mechanisms of exclusion and reproduced inequality.



Map 1: Utrecht; AFI sample

3.1. Material conditions of exclusion

Given initiatives usual support of stable income for farmers, the economic needs of producers are often favored over lower-income people's difficulty to afford these "good" food products. Indeed, next to location, many of my participants jumped to the immediate conclusion that price is a barrier for people to access their foods. Not only might their income be too low to buy their way into the fair and healthy food consumption but as housing costs are escalating, fixed expenses further problematize the purchase of "good" foods (van der Velde, 2022, p. 12).

All CSAs encountered in my research offer ways to slightly alleviate economic burdens through payment in installments as well as solidarity payment schemes (in which prices are set on a minimum and maximum standard to increase accessibility). At the community gardens and the urban agriculture initiative, discounts to purchase the self-grown foods were given to those working in the gardens as volunteers. However, while it is questionable if these mechanisms can make a difference for people with low income, especially those living below and around the poverty line, they also obscure the many ways in which price is not the only or even primary mechanism of material exclusion. One participant noted that their price alleviation schemes are not fruitful as people are not participating in their initiative through those mechanisms. Furthermore, organizers within initiatives varyingly agree with the significance of financial barriers. As one of my interviewees says: *"that unhealthy food is cheaper than ours is a perception"* (interviewee 12) and many of my research participants pointed out that their vegetables more affordable than vegetables from regular supermarkets. Other material and non-material barriers are thus important to consider.

Limited (leisure) time and constrained physical and mental energy for social reproductive activities commonly restrict participation in AFIs (Hilhorst, 2023; Parot et al., 2023). Visiting the sometimes remote locations, harvesting the vegetables and fruit, cleaning them, and processing them are time and energy consuming activities. Remember that proximity and convenience in preparing food next to affordability were the most important factors in food consumption patterns for marginalized groups. Material conditions of exclusion thus likely include restricted time and energy for social reproductive activities such as participating in AFIs.

Addressing the material conditions of exclusion requires addressing maldistribution of (access to) fresh and healthy food caused by but not restricted to economic disparities amongst groups included in/excluded from initiatives. Material conditions of exclusion hence impede on what Fraser (1996) calls the objective precondition of participation. Considering that the distribution of material resources ensures participants independence and voice, justice as parity of participation precludes disparities in wealth, income, and leisure time "denying some people the means and opportunities to interact with others as peers" (Fraser, 1996, p. 31). Measures to balance out economic disparities amongst people who want to participate in initiatives, like solidarity payment schemes or subsidies from (local) governments, could at least partially establish the objective precondition of participation. As mentioned above this is however insufficient or even ineffective considering that maldistribution extends to other factors such as limited time and mental/physical energy and further is not the only dimension of injustice reproduced into initiatives.

3.2 Cultural conditions of exclusion

Following a multiplicity of criticisms, Alkon and Guthman (2017, p. 9) define discourse, or what they call "the language of the sustainable agriculture movement itself", as a significant obstacle and mechanism of exclusion for people of color and lower-income groups to participate in AFIs and access their products. This is an important nuance adding to our understanding of why these initiatives end up being pre-dominantly white and middle-upper class in representation. In fact, the

realization that it is not all about prices became a major consideration of a CSA garden which recently underwent an internal reflection process about mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion and their reproduction of racism and classism (interviewee 14). As Guthman (2008, p. 432) emphasizes, assuming that "knowledge, access, and cost are the primary barriers to more healthful eating" makes projects at best missionary when donating food/selling it at low price and educating people about healthy diets. This might obscure other significant barriers.

A recent research project closely interrogated this topic within an AFI in Amsterdam showing how narratives, self-perception, and material conditions reproduce a white space with underlying oppressions (Hilhorst, 2023). For example, privileged realities dominate the culture of the initiative in which certain conversation topics (like leisure travelling) and set of values (like feminism or anti-capitalism) exclude and marginalize groups which do not share the same material preconditions (Hilhorst, 2023). The dominant culture of agri-leisure (Sovová and Veen, 2020; Farmer et al., 2014) present within all AFIs in my sample similarly generates an exclusive culture. 'Putting your hands in the soil and getting in touch with nature after five days of looking at a screen' (source participant observation and informal conversations) centers agri-leisure as the dominant mode of interaction with nature and food production. Other modes of interaction such as food production as self-provisioning, source of income or alleviation of living costs, or as historical-cultural community activity are sidelined narratives.
Within my sample, I also encountered the dominating narrative that environmentalist or food-nature-health principles must be appreciated as an ideal citizen. Some of my participants believed that people who do not identify with these principles must be educated about human-nature relations so that they would want to join their initiatives. Setting this normative standard might cause exclusions. As Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman (2011, p. 13) argue, "normative, values-based localism leads to an elitist, undemocratic politics of perfection marked by problematic conceptions of social justice and civic tolerance".

Further, the gap between what organizers want their AFI to be like in terms of values, principles, and mode of action and what marginalized groups might identify as their needs appears significant. Several gardens (two CSAs and one community garden) recounted Turkish and Moroccan families (background assumed by my participants) requesting to rent a plot of land for growing their own vegetables. Those requests were declined because people growing their own foods conflicts with initiatives' principles of "community", "reciprocity", and guided education about nature and food production, and would further contradict with gardeners and social workers' occupational function in the initiatives. This clash of interest also brings to the surface how discursive patterns about good food practice can manifest very materially in mechanisms of exclusion. Obviously, those clashes are not of equal nature because one social group – the one which still occupies a certain position of privilege in society in order to engage in an AFI – has more power in the decision-making than the other social group – the one which is likely encountering more socioeconomic barriers to access land for food self-provisioning or start their own initiative.

While I do not claim that those discursive patterns are intentionally excluding some groups and including others, they nuance the understanding of barriers beyond material conditions of exclusion to highlight cultural conditions of exclusion. This is important for considering misrecognition in forms of valuing some subjectivities more than others and thus blocking the intersubjective precondition of participation (Fraser, 1996). In precluding "value schemata that deny some people the status of full partners in interaction" (Fraser, 1996, p. 31), both through the burden of excessive ascribed difference and failing to acknowledge their distinctiveness, equal respect and opportunity for achieving social esteem cannot be guaranteed which hinders recognition justice to unfold.

3.3 Representation complication

If initiatives are to address material and cultural conditions of exclusion, how would justice be claimed and by whom? The current consistency of social groups within AFIs reveals a concentration of privileged groups, that is mostly white, highly-educated, largely middle-upper class people. Material and cultural conditions of exclusions keep this social consistency in place and several barriers hamper marginalized groups agency in becoming decision-makers in initiatives or in starting their own initiatives. For example, there is an internal and exclusionary circulation of actors amongst some types of initiatives, most significantly amongst CSAs. Many gardeners in my CSA sample have changed to farming mid-career through a training at the biodynamic farming school Warmonderhof and some have done internships with the CSA where they are now gardener at. Entering these closely tied circles of people who end up being major decision-makers in CSAs might be difficult, especially as someone who faces economic and/or cultural barriers to attend the farming school or do an internship.

A municipality-funded urban agriculture organization managing eleven community gardens in Utrecht is now considering to actively "diversify" their stuff (Interviewee 16). Strikingly though, the organization does not seem to be open for changing their principles (for example making gardens available for food self-provisioning) according to different needs or demands put forward by marginalized groups. Organizers from other AFIs were similarly hesitant and skeptical about adjusting their principles in case it would be demanded by groups which are under-represented as of now. Thus, while there obviously is an under-representation of marginalized groups within AFIs, it is less clear how it should be addressed and whether "diversity" quotas are the appropriate remedy (Fraser, 2005, p. 8).

This is further complicated when acknowledging the barriers which marginalized communities might face in starting their own initiatives and projects (although I have limited data, I can take some informed guesses here). As has been pointed out by one of my interviewees, bureaucratic literacy is a real concern for getting funds although funding applications were important for almost all AFIs within my sample. Educational or cultural barriers can impede on funding opportunities. Besides, a pervasive disinvestment in marginalized communities (e.g. McClintock, 2011) which seems to be the case in the Netherlands too (Petrović, Manley and Van Ham, 2022) might restrict marginalized groups in receiving funding. Access to land, especially in urban spaces, presents another delicate issue and obstacle for marginalized groups to establish their own initiatives (Tornaghi, 2016). Within my sample of AFIs, all initiators have been in some kind of favorable class-race position to access land in the first place (through ties with landowners requiring a socio-cultural position, through employment in an organization requiring an educational position, or through inheritance from parents). How marginalized groups can access land remains unclear and in the face of eco-gentrification, this question becomes even more complex (Fantini, 2023).

Misrepresentation within the AFI movement as is now alerts us to pay attention to what Fraser (2005) calls "misframing". If some groups are excluded from the political – here the decision-making and participatory realm of AFIs – they are denied the chance to demand justice and frame justice claims, thus being exposed to charity at best (Fraser, 2005). Similarly, Scibba (2018) points out that it is insufficient to provide access to fresh, healthy food and/or to recognize marginalized groups specific experiences or needs. Ensuring that an "equitable process includes the voices and methods of historically marginalized groups" (Scibba, 2018, p. 17) is key to practicing food justice. Through the representation complication, we can also detect a major difference between the Dutch context and the strongly defined food justice movement in the US which is majorly embedded in and led by marginalized groups most vulnerable to food injustice (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011).

3.4 Neoliberalist impediments

Adding to material and cultural conditions of exclusion and representation complications, neoliberal logics replicated in initiatives adhering to a "free" market fixes everything philosophy without much state intervention (Harvey, 2005). A multitude of authors have brought forth a neoliberalism critique to voice skepticism about the (degree of) radical and transformative character of AFIs. One concern is that the overemphasis on individual consumer behavior and good citizenship reproduces a neoliberal governmentality which "puts individuals in charge of their adjustment(s) to economic restructuring" and in the particular case of participatory gardens resorts to "self-help technologies centered on personal contact with nature" (Pudup, 2008, p. 1228). Indeed, most initiatives name nature education as one of their core goals. Those initiatives want to create the space for people to reconnect to nature, the process of growing food, and the value and implications of "good", fresh, healthy food.

> "We want to create an awareness of how important it is to garden with nature and without poison. So that people wake up. The harvesters they find it amazing, they did not know that this is how vegetables grow. To harvest your own vegetables with your hands, that's when people wake up." (Interviewee 6)

Creating awareness, educating people about gardening and nature, is oftentimes perceived as their way towards change. The assumption is that if only people "knew", and would make different consumption choices, then a shift towards a more sustainable food system would happen. For many critics, this is where things go wrong and market mechanisms, again, are the means and the end. To nuance this, I want to emphasize that probably most of my participants actually do not believe in consumption politics as the transformative tool. Still, it is the strategic playing field promoted within their initiatives and my participants view it as within their scope to create change. How though do consumption politics affect access and participation of marginalized groups? Allen (2010, p. 300) bluntly puts it this way: "those with the greatest need often have the least ability to exercise individual choice, as allocations of choices are shaped by the historical demographics of inequality". The many people visiting one of Utrecht's food banks since their childhood certainly do not have much choice (Interviewee 17) and educating them about nature is likely not influencing their consumption behavior. Beyond this extreme case, educational promises of initiatives do not seem to reach those that do not conform with the regular participant base. The logic of education leading to behavioral change misses out on material and cultural conditions of exclusion. Thus, although the mission of reconnecting to nature and gardening is beautiful and valuable in itself, it is reinforcing a logic that obscures obstacles to make a choice and participate.

From the analysis of maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation which are complicated by neoliberalist logics it appears that groups marginalized along axes of class and race in wider society are encountering serious barriers to participate in par in alternative food initiatives. Already before starting my fieldwork with initiatives in Utrecht and based on my own experience within AFIs in the Netherlands, I was expecting an analytical outcome like this. What interested me then was how organizers think about (in)justice within their own initiatives. Are they aware of the demographic consistency and mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion within their own initiative, what do they make of it? Are they interested in addressing those mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion and working towards justice? And, what are perceived challenges and missing "tools" to practice justice?

Chapter 4: "it is going to be very difficult" – challenges for justice

In a conversation with the CSA that recently underwent an internal reflection process, a gardener told me: *"I think everyone should make a reflection about their position and privilege, and become aware"* (interviewee 14). When asked about concrete action after such a reflection, the gardener shared much more pragmatic thoughts: *"the question if people should put more effort in this is more difficult"* and *"once you set the basis of a project, and it is mainly white and wealthy, the project takes one direction. If after this you want to change the course it is going to be very difficult"* (interviewee 14). While reflecting and learning about what makes their spaces prone to privilege was of interest (although varyingly) amongst many of my interviewees, taking action, and "changing things" within their initiatives received much more hesitance and skepticism.

4.1 Precarity and self-exploitation

A first challenge towards inclusion/accessibility takes shape in the condition of precarity and self-exploitation which many initiatives see themselves confronted with. Although initiatives dependent on income from food production (in my sample mostly CSAs) mentioned this barrier most strongly, other initiatives which rely heavily on external funding (in my sample mostly community gardens funded by the municipality) also perceive it as a hindrance towards inclusion/accessibility. Still, precarity and self-exploitation mean different things and unfold differently per source of income.

The issue of self-exploitation has persisted in AFIs as farmers often do not earn enough to cover their cost of labor (Guthman, 2004; Galt, 2013). To all CSA farmers I spoke, the struggle to reach the minimum wage was all too real: *"We need to have a sustainable living wage. We all earn $20 an hour, but we still have to pay income taxes, our pension and our insurances from that. If you deduct that you come below minimum wage"* (Interviewee 3). Even though profit is not of interest for most AFIs which implement other sets of values within their exchange processes, they are not separate from a capitalist political economy and hence "remain subject to many of capital's logics, even if they attempt to counter or ignore them" (Galt, 2013, p. 347). Amongst CSA initiatives, very few receive subsidies through the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy). A report by Urgenci (2016) on CSA in Europe shows that only 18% of initiatives receive any form of subsidies. In a study on US American CSAs, Galt (2013) finds that half of the 36 farms interrogated are positioned in a super self-exploitation category (income below agricultural workers' income). Although a key principle of CSAs is to guarantee a stable, risk-sharing income for farmers, financial precarity seems to persist. Many of my research participants perceived their financial precarity as a main hindrance to achieving better accessibility and inclusion: *"We do need a certain income to be able to do what we're doing. So we can't just say it's free for everyone"* (Interviewee 3). As accessibility was oftentimes defined in monetary terms by my participants, they see the solution in lowering the prices – a move that clearly contradicts their own precarious status.

Another perception was that scale would enhance the ability to have "extra", that is profit through up-scaling.

> "We hardly can sustain ourselves. We have no profit. Sometimes we are below zero and we need to get more money in. So, we are too little to make it more accessible. If you are bigger, you have left-over. It takes money to be more inclusive." (Interviewee 6)

Whether alternative food initiatives can (or have the ambition to) tackle food injustice through lowering prices has been interrogated before and as Guthman, Morris and Allen (2006, p. 682)

conclude "it is not clear that these AFIs can provide an easy win-win solution for lower income consumers".

In the case of funded community gardens, the topic of self-exploitation is less pressing as people working in the gardens (within my sample) usually receive a salary through external funding. A third income-model within my sample group relies on organizers and farmers voluntary labor. Those groups not relying on income from food production mention limited time and resources as a barrier to improve accessibility and inclusion. As one garden staff described to me: *"I think we need to connect more with all kinds of different groups and organizations. But yes, that's also at the same time a problem because that takes so much time and we don't really have that"* (Interviewee 9). Seeing their own time limited to a 20 hours contract, this participant is confronted with outreach to under-represented communities as outside of the paid task-scheme. This hints at another issue related to funding precarity.

Several participants, explicitly and implicitly, connected the implementation of a holistic inclusion and justice approach with limited resources related to their funding. Long-term funding in particular was described as scarce. One garden from within my sample was previously a separate, more neighborhood-oriented initiative before joining a local NGO (managing eleven gardens throughout the city) due to funding scarcity. In another conversation with a food activist working towards social justice I was told about the difficulty to receive funding if the impact of action is formulated too broadly and hence funding opportunities often incentivize addressing symptoms and not roots of injustices such as unequal economic opportunities for racialized people.

All in all, my participants' perception of precarity and precarious material conditions present a major obstacle to work towards inclusion and accessibility in redistributive terms. This manifests itself more strongly but is not limited to initiatives relying on revenue from production where any financial or time (thus labor) investment might enhance self-exploitation. As one participant puts it: *"It is very important to reflect and think about if this is really what you want to focus on. We are in a precarious situation. Maybe we [farmers] first should make sure we all have fixed contracts and insurances"* (Interviewee 14).

4.2 Distance to marginalized realities

A second challenge concerns what I name distance to marginalized realities. Here, I do not speak of spatial distance, although it might play a part, but I describe the sociocultural distance which disables understanding, communication, and ultimately recognition of food injustice as it is experienced by marginalized people. Robbins (2015) discusses how a set of distances disconnect sectors (like consumers and producers) and geographies (like consumption and production) in the dominant food system and how in the current configuration, local food systems can bridge those distances in only limited and fragmented ways. Expanding to sociocultural distance, I argue that AFIs are restricted in bridging sociocultural realities which are compartmentalized by the capitalist food system in camps of access to and agency over healthy fresh food and limited access to and agency over healthy fresh food. This takes shape in two ways.

Firstly, there is a general unawareness and missing information about what barriers and mechanisms of exclusions within AFNs marginalized groups encounter. How do people with lower socioeconomic status and people of color think about initiatives? Why are they not participating? Several organizers (gardeners and social workers) from both community gardens and CSAs acknowledged that their understanding of the situation is quite limited and easily infiltrated by assumptions.

> "There's oftentimes groups that you're just not aware of existing, probably even within your own community. So, who is actually in need of a place like this? I wouldn't even be able to identify the group. Or I could give it a try. But you know, it's all based on assumptions." (Interviewee 3)

One participant drew conclusions about their own positionality affecting the extent to which they could understand potential barriers: *"I am also from this country and I am also white. I can't imagine that people see that [the organizational concept] as a real concern, but if they do, I would like to know"* (Interviewee 9). As doubts about needs and barriers are accumulating multiple organizers mentioned the need to *"reach out and listen to their stories"* (Interviewee 3) in order to overcome gaps of awareness and unsubstantiated assumptions. This step often turned into doubt as well. More than expressing concerns related to precarity and self-exploitation when it comes to establishing contact with marginalized/under-represented groups, participants also implicitly and explicitly expressed unwillingness to change their principles and adapt to the needs of under-represented groups.

A second layer of sociocultural distance to marginalized communities finds expression in an apparent unawareness of the creeping food injustice in the Netherlands. Generally, participants refer to food and agrarian problems in the Netherlands in ecological terms whereby big agrifood corporations, supermarkets, and industrial modes of farming stand out as the culprits. Many participants are concerned with negative impacts on human health and environmental degradation and in terms of socioeconomic impacts, some referred to farmers' financial instability and threatened livelihoods. None of my participants mentioned disproportionately allocated food insecurity or food related diseases (beyond the generic 'fresh food is healthier for the body' theme) as a consequence or related to the conventional food system. One gardener explained when I asked directly about people's awareness of social injustice caused by the dominant food system:

> "They [AFI participants] think the food web is so big and so abstract. If you see that the beans are coming from Africa for example. I think not a lot of people are relating that to the working circumstances in a place like that and why the price is so low and why it's even cheaper than our little beans here." (Interviewee 7)

As shown in this quote, the immediate association with injustice in the food system are faraway places, "developing" countries, and working conditions of people at the other end of the food chain. Hardly any of my participants made associations with groups of people from within the Netherlands. A gardener and activist makes a comparison between the awareness of food injustice in the US and in the Netherlands pointing out that *"there are much more facilities here, it is a generally wealthier country"* (Interviewee 15). In the public discourse in the Netherlands, obesity and other food related health issues are strongly de-politicized and pushed upon misinformed choices requiring education about healthy food as a major intervention (De Boer et al., 2015). There seems to be a general misrecognition or lack of informed awareness about the state of poverty, inequality, and inter-related structural, institutional, and everyday racism in the Netherlands.

Arguably, the specific form that racism takes in the Netherlands contributes to the unawareness and challenging distance of AFIs to marginalized communities. While institutional and everyday racism persists in the Netherlands, a discourse of colorblindness undermines the validity of people's experience of discrimination and marginalization. As a concept, colorblindness describes the belief that universal egalitarianism can defeat all forms of racism. However, widespread criticism has revealed that colorblindness obscures the lived and embodied forms of inequalities, discriminations, and marginalizations that people continue to experience on the basis of historical racism (Crenshaw, 2019). The Netherlands has in various ways become and promoted a colorblind society (Rose, 2022), as racism has long been thought as non-existent in Dutch society despite a continuous persistent and institutional racism (Weiner, 2014; Ghorashi, 2023). Scholars

have argued that several discourses about the Dutch self-image as for instance, a charitable, open, and historically progressive society (Weiner, 2014; Ghorashi, 2023).

In the case of consumption-oriented food injustice in the Netherlands, the denial of racism contributes to the lack of knowledge and unawareness of the reality of food injustice in the country and of how and why AFIs are exclusionary and inaccessible. Since a wide-spread assumption is that money is the key problem, although I have suggested differently in the sections above, AFIs remain exclusionary partially because they are not aware of or do not acknowledge how racism produces marginalization and perhaps reproduces it within their initiatives. Most of the initiatives have stated at some point in the conversation, that of course they are 'welcoming everyone'. In two conversations, participants described to me the ways in which they cherish diversity and a few "diverse characters" which have participated in their initiatives. While their welcoming attitude is probably genuine, it can obscure the patterns of exclusion built on racist assumptions.

As there is little exploration of how racism manifests in AFIs and in the food system in the Netherlands specifically – both from the perspective of initiatives and marginalized groups – and due to my own limited research scope, I refrain from going further into the manifestation of racism in Dutch AFIs. Yet, considering racism in this discussion is important to highlight and understand the challenge it poses to initiatives for becoming more inclusive and accessible. Initiatives' distance to marginalized groups, in terms of understanding barriers for participation, differing needs, and general food injustice, contributes to a widespread misrecognition of marginalized groups.

4.3 Unreachable food justice?

> "We should tax the rich. Fixing inequality is systematic and political, it is about bigger things and companies." (Interviewee 5)

Resulting from their own precarity and distance to marginalized realities, AFIs perceive social injustice as an out of reach issue for which they do not have the capacity nor scope to change it. In the view of many, it should be the state who is responsible for (tackling) social injustice and who actually can do it. Food injustice is perceived as systemic, and rightly so. However, because of the scope and scale of the issue, some initiatives do not believe they can play a big part in this systemic change.

Those initiatives which intentionally and explicitly generate an identity of being "political" and "anti-systemic", that is overtly and intentionally opposing the conventional food system through offering and advocating for an alternative food system, tended to be more eager and interested in implementing food justice principles and followed the believe that they also can contribute to more just food worlds. In these AFIs, several actors in decision-making positions have a background and involvement in activism, especially environmental and peasant activism.

Still, the general view is that the state must take a crucial role in tackling injustice. For instance, AFIs demand state assistance in becoming more accessible themselves. The assistance of the state or other external parties providing funding indeed seems crucial in implementing distributional food justice, at least empirically. A NW/POC-led organization in Amsterdam relies on external funding for maintaining their social justice mission and a CSA initiative which solely supplies low-income families is equally dependent on external funding.

While demanding responsibility and action from the state is empowering and important, it can become passivating on a grassroots-level. Perceiving food justice as out of reach within their own unit of action, some initiatives tend to apply a 'we are already doing all we can' discourse. Although to a certain extent this idea must be taken seriously (especially considering precarity), it might also prevent initiatives to reflect on their practices and address issues of misrecognition.

4.4 Wrapping up the state of justice in alternative food initiatives

Following Fraser's (1996, 2000, 2005) plural justice conceptualization, three dimensions of justice must be addressed coherently in order to erase any obstacles for parity of participation. Throughout my analysis, I have shown how material conditions of exclusion uphold socioeconomic disparities amongst privileged and marginalized groups. Access to fresh and healthy food thus cannot be guaranteed equally and justly, and marginalized communities continue to be disproportionately affected by food insecurity and food-related physical and mental health issues. The precarity and threat of self-exploitation which many initiatives see themselves confronted with presents a major challenge to address maldistribution within their organizational structures, especially without any external funding.

Intersubjective preconditions of participatory parity hindered by cultural conditions of exclusion can sideline the needs of marginalized groups. Holding on to their own set of values, a cultural belief over what is good, and a mode of interpretation and communication that marginalizes certain groups is a form of misrecognition. This misrecognition manifests itself materially, it forms structures and ways of food production-distribution-consumption constellations which reinforce maldistribution through restricting access to those "good" foods. An important question which arises from this example and is crucial to any discussion of misrecognition is: what type of recognition is needed to guarantee participation in par in AFIs? Does it mean privileged groups recognize marginalized groups' entitlement to equally valued participation and shared humanity? Does it mean recognizing differences which do not fit into concepts like community gardens as they are set up now?

For Fraser (1996), the type of recognition depends on the forms of misrecognition. This pragmatic approach allows to contextualize the issue of justice but it does not make the answer easier. What could it mean in the case of AFIs and food (in)justice in the Netherlands? Theoretically, two types of recognition could be required with particular attention to the consistency of the marginalized group in question. Acknowledging the food injustice imposed by the capitalist food system, initiatives can actively condemn any group difference that is unjustly created. More importantly perhaps is the recognition of difference – the differing needs, approaches, and principles which underly the creation of alternative food worlds. Universalizing 'everybody is welcome' and claiming that fresh food and the garden space are for everyone obscures different needs, identities, and positionalities in moving towards more just and sustainable food worlds.

Identifying the type and necessity of recognition is complicated by what I have named "distance to marginalized realities". Listening to and acknowledging marginalized realities might prove crucial for a recognition that can ensure parity of participation. Given my own positionality as a person belonging to a privileged social group and as an activist involved in initiatives which seem to largely reproduce maldistribution and misrecognition, I do not attempt to decide nor guess what recognition is needed. This, I believe, should be approached in each specific context and in conversation with, or under guidance of, those who experience misrecognition. Last but not least, the representation complication raises doubts over whether, at the current conjuncture, AFIs are anyways the organizational entity where food justice can fully flourish considering all three dimensions of justice.

Afterall, critical analysis of the sample AFIs reveals a low degree of food justice, a reproduction of inequalities and oppressions (although perhaps unintentional), and focus on a "politics of consumption" within most of them. This would go in line with many critiques of the mainstream alternative food movement which "fails to protect *everyone* from the ills of corporate

agriculture“ (Smith, 2019, p. 828), pointing at its fragile position between neoliberal and openly anti-systemic food projects (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011). Are we now to dismiss the efforts of the numerous community gardens, farms, CSAs, cooperatives, and farmers markets and declare them a failure in generating just and sustainable food worlds which can counter the capitalist food system?

Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) would likely argue that as long as initiatives are prone to being reformist, that is overly relying on individual consumer behavior, they will not be able to significantly contribute to changing the capitalist food system. Similarly, Alkon and Guthman (2017, p. 317) believe a fruitful food activism that is capable of building truly just and sustainable food worlds must address contradictions of injustice and neoliberalism within their initiatives, projects, and networks which will otherwise remain "apolitical and nonstrategic". In starting from the acknowledgment of reproduced inequality, multiple forms of exclusion and continued marginalization, this paper aims to challenge an initiative-bound critique of justice and expectations towards initiatives to practice radical completion. Instead, I argue that analytically and practically expanding the layers of justice implementation might prove fruitful in detecting and fostering food justice rather than (expecting) to transform all AFIs into sites of plural justice. AFIs are indeed valuable in the struggle against the capitalist food system and towards just food worlds. The following chapter engages with this argument.

Chapter 5: Assembling food justice

If initiatives to some degree replicate injustice and face serious challenges to practice justice, what is their place in the struggle towards food justice and against the injustice of the capitalist food system? As suggested at the beginning of this paper, Wright (2021) and Fraser (2021) offer valuable perspectives on this question.

Fraser (2021) argues for social movements to expand their range of concerns to build a counter-hegemonic block against capitalism. Approaching the issue from the understanding that a set of inter-related crises (historically) generated by the capitalist system constitutes a general crisis, Fraser (2021) shows how crises of environment, social reproduction, patriarchy, labor, racism all are significantly linked to the same destructive system. In the case of the capitalist food system, environmental destruction and the commodification of food clearly go hand in hand. Following this argument, would it be insufficient for initiatives to practice ecological farming but reproduce layers of inclusion/exclusion which are inherent to the capitalist food system? To counter the pervasiveness of social injustice and neoliberalist logics, what would it mean for initiatives to transcend the "merely AFI" (following Fraser's formulation)? Fraser (2021) does not elucidate practical or strategic configurations needed to go beyond the realm of a singular crisis and Wright (2021) offers some insight on this account.

Wright advocates for a strategy of strategies in countering capitalism – he calls this Eroding capitalism which entails combining:

> "the progressive social democratic and democratic socialist vision of changing, from above, the rules of the game within which capitalism operates in order to neutralize its worst harms and create alternative anchored in the state, with more anarchist visions of creating, from below, new economic relations that embody emancipatory aspirations" (2021, pp. 62-63)

Wright's (2021) strategic configuration is organized along two axes, one concerned with the objective of struggle one concerned with the level of the system addressed by the struggle (see figure 1). AFIs typically follow an Escaping strategy which entails creating micro-alternatives to insulate from damaging effects of the capitalist food system. Ultimately, the hope is that a combined strategy from above and below can carve out space for alternatives to become sufficiently prominent.

Objective of Struggle

Level of the System		Neutralizing harms	Transcending structures
	The game itself		*Smashing*
	Rules of the game	*Taming*	*Dismantling*
	Moves in the game	*Resisting*	*Escaping*

Figure 1: Wright's (2021, p. 56) typology of anti-capitalist strategies

The view of Eroding capitalism highlights an important consideration. Perhaps not all trends, projects, and movements need to incorporate all strategies equally but in an accumulation

of strategies we can find hope to significantly counter the destructive capitalist food system. From this perspective, Fraser's (2021) take on a movement of movements can be understood in a form of assemblage rather than in judging each movement respectively for addressing all entangled crises. Maybe AFIs then are best understood as part of a variety of strategies and movements which in accumulation are (more) likely to counter the capitalist food system. This "both enticing and far-fetched" vision (Wright, 2021, p. 63) offers an angle on AFIs position in the struggle towards more just and sustainable food worlds that acknowledges the low degree of justice and challenges towards practicing food justice but at the same time analytically and practically pushes beyond initiatives' organizational boundaries to address food justice. How does an accumulation of forces look like in the instance of AFIs' position in the struggle towards food justice?

I suggest two broadly distinct but inter-related angles, the angle of heterogeneity and the angle of alliances, for the discussion of assembled forces towards food justice. Those two angles explore initiatives' stance beyond their organizational boundaries. Neither Wright (2021), nor Fraser (2021), explicitly elaborated on alliances. Nonetheless, as I will show alliances are key to understanding an accumulation of forces against the capitalist food system. To fully appreciate the angles of an accumulation of forces, it first needs to be clarified that AFIs are anyhow part of the struggle against the capitalist food system.

5.1 Political, radical, and reformist

There is a deeply political character inherent to the food practices of AFIs. As Wright (2021) contends, it is easy to dismiss the Escaping strategy because it tends to reflect an individualist lifestyle strategy prone to privileges achieved through capitalism itself and oftentimes remains decentralized and unorganized. Yet, they can serve as models for more egalitarian, collective, democratic ways of life (Wright, 2021) and exhibit a variety of highly political and radical tendencies. Acknowledging that, we can digest the contradictions and explore the nuances and multiplicity of how justice can manifest in the alternative food movement.

A good starting point to this discussion is McClintock's argument that urban agriculture can be both neoliberal and radical:

> "A purely 'urban agriculture as radical' perspective overlooks urban agriculture's role in neoliberal urban restructuring. At the same time, "urban agriculture as neoliberal" critiques elide urban agriculture's radical antecedents and its revolutionary possibilities […] But to debate whether urban agriculture is neoliberal or radical invokes a false dualism that forces us to answer a question that is too simple." (2014, p. 157)

AFIs in the urban (agriculture) format are deeply political and radical insofar that they challenge underlying logics of the dominant capitalist food system even if not explicitly labelled as such. Depending on the analytical lens, various anti/post-capitalist forms of social and socioecological relations comes to the surface.

From a metabolic rift perspective[7], urban agriculture initiatives can mend multiple rifts caused by capitalism: the ecological rift in the bio-physical metabolism (e.g. re-establishing nutrient cycles through composting), the social rift induced by the commodification of land, labor, and food (e.g. reconciling land and labor), and the individual rift meaning the alienation of humans from labor and nature (e.g. reconnecting urban population to nature through food production) (McClintock, 2010). From a political economy perspective, urban AFIs can intervene in capitalisms

[7] Since Fox (1999) revitalized Marx' original conceptualization of the metabolic rift, several authors have critically expanded the concept to account for current day impact of capitalist development and struggles countering it (e.g. Moore, 2011; Schneider and McMichael, 2010; McClintock, 2010)

commodification of food by privileging use value over exchange value. Accordingly, autonomous, democratic, and just relations between producers and consumers or production and consumption can re-establish food as a life-giving right (see Selwyn, 2021).

Certainly, these moves against the capitalist food system are unstable and incoherent, highly contextual, and not always straight-forward. De-commodifying food does require a degree of justice to fully level capitalist obsession with exchange value and resulting inequalities and to make food's use value available to everyone. Yet, AFIs do offer the platform to de-commodify food under principles of justice. Similarly, urban AFI's benefits from mending metabolic rifts could be distributed unequally but it still holds the potential to do so justly.

This standpoint demands caution for using the terms "radical" or "political" as normative judgments. What is political and what is radical becomes very much blurred and unclear if we expand our understanding from the overt and explicit to the covert and inexplicit, from the intentional and conscious to the unintentional and unconscious. As Kerkvliet (2009) suggests, the everyday politics of contesting norms and rules in subtle expressions are valuable acts of resistance fueling change. AFIs constitute a great site for everyday politics in which participants express support for and compliance with anti-capitalist relations through embodied practice of participation. Those forms of radically engaging in politics expands a conventional view of intentional and explicit politics to the entities and agencies of everyday embodied politics (Kerkvliet, 2009). Let us now consider two angles on AFIs' position in an accumulation of forces.

5.2 Heterogeneity

AFIs are highly heterogenous when it comes to how they can address which dimensions of plural justice. In the discussion of the British food movement, Coulson and Milbourne (2020) argue that on a practical level, they do not advocate for food movement groups to incorporate all dimensions of justice[8]. Various degrees of alterity and reflexivity amongst AFIs are common and to be expected (Goodman, DuPuis and Goodman, 2011) and heterogeneity amongst the alternative food movement is persistently fluctuating and unstable (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011). My sample of initiatives is no exception, and an implementation of justice must consider these nuances.

First, source of income plays an important role in approaching the redistribution dimension and ensuring objective preconditions of participation in par. Initiatives which rely largely on income from food production, oftentimes CSA gardens, risk more self-exploitation and precarity when allocating resources to redistribution. Solidarity payment schemes for consumers (or sliding scales as it is called sometimes) appear promising in this regard since they alleviate economic burdens of redistribution from farmers and instead spread it amongst different socioeconomic groups of consumers. CSA initiatives reported varying degrees of success and in cases where this scheme did not appear fruitful for including lower socioeconomic groups it is likely that initiatives would have to address non-financial material and cultural conditions of exclusion. Initiatives which rely largely on external funding seem better equipped for addressing redistribution although they also might face the risk of precarious funding. As I have shown by the example of the NW/POC-led organization from Amsterdam and the CSA initiatives for low-income consumers, external funding does allow those initiatives to address justice and not face obstacles of economic precarity. Yet again, economic redistribution is insufficient in understanding or approaching injustice – the very same initiatives are still vulnerable to non-monetary material and cultural conditions of exclusion. The NW/POC-led organization has been highly committed to recognition but they still face the limited leisure time available to marginalized groups which keeps them from participating in par (interviewee 15). The entirely funded CSA garden faces a similar issue and further encounter situations in which lower-income consumers do not feel recognized (interviewee 11). Source of income hence has an impact over the capacity of initiatives to address maldistribution but is not

[8] what Coulson and Milbourne (2020) call justice multiple, which entails plural justice

enough to practice plural justice coherently. From an academic and activist perspective, considering the economic model of initiatives can still be an insightful indicator over the possibilities of distributional justice.

Secondly, state of reflection and level of awareness over marginalized realities importantly impacts potentials and challenges for approaching the recognition dimension and ensuring intersubjective preconditions of participation in par. As mentioned before, AFIs with activists in decision-making positions were more eager or already underwent reflection processes over their initiatives' material and cultural conditions of exclusion and generally showed greater awareness over injustices and exploitations inherent to the capitalist food system. Activist background is however not the only thing that fosters reflection and awareness. For the organizer of various AFIs, communication and building relationships of trust has become integral to moving towards recognition. Efforts to build those relations appears to rest on the agency of actors in decision-making positions although many organizers uphold the perception that it should be state actors who foster social cohesion and integrative communication.

Thirdly, the representation complication urges us to expand the AFI dimension all along to ask what forms of urban agriculture practices can and already do correspond to issues of representation and also constitute radical food practices? Expanding our understanding of sites of alternative food practice to incorporate sites of "quiet" practice can shed light on this question. Other authors have previously conceptualized this analytical perspective as quiet activism (Pottinger, 2016), quiet sustainability (Smith and Jehlicka, 2013), and quiet food sovereignty (Visser et al., 2015). For the sake of coherent terminology, I refer to this analytical lens as quiet alternative food practice (AFP) but it is largely synonymous with Smith and Jehlicka's (2013) original conceptualization of quiet sustainability of food self-provisioning as the "practices that result in beneficial environmental or social outcomes" although not related to market transactions or represented by practitioners as environmental or sustainability goals (2013, p. 155). Quiet AFP thus "draws attention to the quiet power of small, everyday, often overlooked actions and practices" (Pottinger, 2016, p. 216) and appreciates "cultures of sharing, repairing, gifting and bartering" (Smith and Jehlicka, 2013, p. 155). Food self-provisioning as quiet AFP holds much potential for addressing the representation complication as especially NW/POC are much more represented in allotment garden as in the typical AFI (source several informal conversations with AFI organizers and social workers). For example, a company renting out allotments in greenhouses reports that up to 60% of the allotments are maintained by ethnic minorities (interviewee 18). It is in those gardens that NW/POC can frame their own food needs and values.[9]

Afterall, plural justice dimensions have differing prospects and challenges throughout initiatives generally. Various degrees of reflection, system awareness, will, interest, and attitudes make clear that there is no one size fits all when it comes to practicing justice. Thus, I propose to understand AFIs in terms of different possible strategic playing fields for justice. For example, redistribution is better facilitated in case of external funding. Changing the organizational structure to accommodate redistribution through emancipatory restructuring might be more likely for those who underwent reflection and/or have genuine interest in making this a priority. Representation might happen somewhere else entirely. Having established the accumulation of forces in terms of accumulating differing strategic playing fields of initiatives – hence understanding initiatives as individually heterogenous and collectively resourceful – we can move on to the angle of alliances.

[9] My example remains on the surface here. There is much to unpack about the accessibility of allotment gardens and other barriers to food self-provisioning. Still, it is an interesting case to consider in the question of representation.

5.3 Alliances towards food justice

Alliances are a core mechanism through which AFIs can transcend the "merely AFI" and importantly position themselves amongst accumulated forces for just and sustainable food worlds. Amongst food justice scholars, activists, and scholar-activists, alliances have taken center stage in the struggle towards justice (e.g. Scibba, 2018; Alkon and Guthman, 2017; Cadieux, Slocum, Blumberg, 2019). Alliances are immediately compelling because, as Fox (2010, p. 486) says quite bluntly, "successful collective action in civil society often depends on the formation and survival of coalitions – insofar as the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts". What exactly are alliances and how do they happen? Fox (2010) presents some important general indicators and patterns. Alliances are distinct because they involve joint action which involves a set of shared goals, mutual support and an exchange of information (different to networks) while they do not necessarily involve shared political ideology/values nor collective identities (different to movements) (see Fox, 2010, p. 488). This distinctiveness becomes a pre-condition for when alliances emerge. Let us consider two alliances which foster food justice by transcending the organizational boundaries of AFI.

5.3.1 Two cases of justice through alliances

The first example (source interviewee 8) of an alliance takes centerstage in Utrecht. There, a consumer cooperative has recently made a link with a neighborhood food bank led by Moroccan women thus ensuring access to fresh food to groups who are usually excluded from this access. Both the cooperative and the food bank are located in one of the poorest and ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Utrecht. While the consumer cooperative remains predominantly white, the food bank is closely tied to NW/POC groups in the neighborhood who are most affected by poverty and food insecurity. Before this collaboration, the food bank sourced vegetables from a regular (not organic) supermarket. The alliance was initiated by the founder of the consumer cooperative who is personally and professionally involved with food and social issues in this under-privileged neighborhood for decades. Since then, the cooperative supplies vegetables to the food bank and while most of the vegetables are paid for by the food bank, a part of it is subsidized by the cooperative through extra activities.

The second example (source interviewee 15) is situated in Amsterdam where a collective of urban farmers has been collaborating with a NW/POC-led organization for trainings in the organization's "healing gardens" for women. In the process this encouraged more alliances between other projects of the collective and marginalized groups involved at the organization. While most of the farmers collective represent the "typical" alternative food movement audience – white, middle-upper class, highly educated – and the collective has so far never formulated nor implemented a justice agenda it has involved itself in projects which are more explicitly in line with food justice. The organization maintains various gardens in "troubled" neighborhoods in Amsterdam offering spaces for women – women of color in particular – to garden in spaces of healing, food and community. The farmer from the collective who is now a garden coach at the organization describes their collaboration as extremely valuable and unique because the reach of the organization into communities experiencing food injustice most harshly is much better than of the farmers collective or other "elitist" projects. This collaboration is interesting insofar as it is able to bridge separation along lines of class and race but also in terms of linking agroecology and sustainable urban farming (principles of the collective) with the organization's social mission of offering a safe healing space to grow food and connect for those marginalized in society. The collaboration also facilitated more alliances between marginalized groups and projects linked to the farmers collective. For example, the collective's CSA project has offered free summer memberships to women of color with lower income who participate in the organization's gardens. Those memberships were given out by the CSA's paying members who went on summer vacation and the collaboration was made possible by the farmer who was giving trainings in the organization.

The alliance between collective and organization also encouraged reflection processes amongst the collective which will, at this very moment, be discussed within the collective's annual meeting with all 24 members located in three European cities (Amsterdam, Berlin, Barcelona).

Both examples highlight how AFIs which at first sight seem to lack food justice but are actually able to generate justice principles in alliance with other initiatives. Through alliances, these AFIs extended the "capitalist crisis" they were dealing with and the strategic configuration they adhered to, thus actively assembling justice through a strategy of strategies and a movement of movements[10]. The mostly environmental, health and farmers-focused motive of AFIs joined forces with the food security objective of the food bank and racial justice motives of the NW/POC-led organization. This alliance did not necessitate shared values nor collective identities which is arguably precisely what allowed for food justice to emerge. Moreover, the respective groups differ in strategic configuration[11]. The AFIs are establishing alternative structures to transcend capitalist relations (like de-commodifying food in direct consumer-producer relations, or mending the metabolic rift through agroecological urban food production) while the food bank and healing gardens are more focused on neutralizing harms imposed by the capitalist (food) system on NW/POC and lower-income groups (like ensuring access to fresh and healthy food, or embodied healing through connecting with nature). Hence, this alliance did not require a shared general interest nor common strategy but instead flourished by creating a shared goal that is making benefits of AFI practices more justly distributed.

So, what kind of justices are generated and what challenges could be overcome? Redistribution could be achieved by overcoming challenges of precarity and distance to marginalized realities. Further, these alliances between generally white, middle-upper class initiatives and NW/POC-led initiatives may nurture justice as recognition and representation. For example, the alliance between the urban farmer collective and NW/POC-led organization has encouraged the collective to reflect on their justice practice in their upcoming annual meeting.

What remains a question is to what extent initiatives and/or key actors (need to) undergo an internal reflection process prior to building or looking for alliances. The collective's initiator has been involved in a reflection process on whiteness, racism, and oppression within a CSA garden. The consumer cooperative organizer has been engaging with topics of inequalities, poverty, food injustice, and food insecurity for many years. In these examples, actors and/or initiatives have raised the question of "who benefits" to uncover power asymmetries, a question arguably very important to foster alliances (Cadieux, Slocum and Blumberg, 2016). Remember at this point the heterogeneity of AFIs vis-à-vis plural justice implementation. Some initiatives might be better equipped for forging alliances due to specific pre-conditions of recognition. Given this uncertain and unstable positionality, alliances which "facilitate shared learning and initiate or strengthen imaginative, collaborative strategies" (Coulson and Milbourne, 2020, p. 56) can be crucial in overcoming initiatives' challenges for practicing plural justice.

5.3.2 Tracing room of and for more

Besides existing alliances, an analysis of potential alliances is pivotal to "identify challenges and opportunities for food systems change" (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, 2011, p. 132). But, how do we find these potential alliances and should we necessarily push for them? Although the positive impact of active alliances on fostering food justice is clearly compelling, an accumulation of forces

[10] Wright (2021) and Fraser (2021) operate on a macro-level of analysis. These examples however operates on a micro-level of analysis and thus Wright's and Fraser's arguments take on different scalar shapes.
[11] Both strategic configurations resemble "moves in the game" and differ more in objective of the struggle. This, again, reveals my level of analysis.

perspective invites us to broaden our understanding of what alliances are. Distinguishing between objective and subjective alliances is helpful in this regard.

In the context of populist movements, Borras (2019, p. 18) contends that objective allies act independently from each other and "may even take an adversarial stance against each other, [although] they actually reinforce one another". (Objective allies, however independent or adversary, push for the same general goals (Fox, 1993, p. 37). Subjective alliances in contrast entail "the conscious construction of an organized coalition of forces and actions." (Borras, 2019, p. 18). Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) similarly distinguish between conscious and unconscious forms of alliances. Making this distinction is important because the basic assumption of an accumulation of forces against the capitalist food system is that all components are individually important and collectively effective. Thus, even if subjective alliances do not emerge, objective alliances still exist and are integral to a combined strategy of assembled food justice.

Let us consider the example of two Dutch food councils here. During my field research I have participated in the first meeting of a new food council in Utrecht and a meeting on food poverty at the two years old food council in Den Haag. They brought together a variety of actors ranging from civil society, municipality officials, NGOs to urban gardeners. While one would expect a systematic and critical view on the food system, many people were mostly concerned with immediate and urgent issues such as food poverty/insecurity. Further, in both food council meetings, food producers were completely absent from the table of discussion. Even urban food producers were heavily under-represented. On the other side of the coin, food producers in my sample are more linked to rural farmers movements than consumer networks, such as the food councils. Clearly, the groups of actors involved are different and disconnected. The agendas of food councils and most farmers networks and movements also appear distinct. Both food councils are majorly concerned with poverty and food insecurity and structural barriers and problems related to health and inequality. The Dutch CSA network, which many of my food producer participants are part of, does not mention much of food insecurity or food consumption injustice and inequality.

Those food councils and AFIs and their movement nodes and networks constitute an objective alliance. They are entirely independent from each other but actually enhance their seemingly separate goals – to counter some of the harms induced by the capitalist food system and at times even through common solutions (e.g. the food council's proposal to foster urban agriculture). Two reflections appear from this alliance. Firstly, and in the eyes of HG and Shattuck (2011) necessary, the objective alliance could become a subjective alliance since shared goals can likely be established. This subjective alliance could be fruitful and bring big advances to nurture just and sustainable food worlds for example by connecting marginalized groups to AFIs or advocating for each other in their own realm of political impact. Secondly, and slightly on the contrary, an objective alliance is also useful in itself because in an accumulation of forces, both the food council and the AFIs are individually integral to collectively countering the capitalist food system.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

> "We all have one pie of 100%. And I don't think in one pie we can address everything. I don't think there's one thing that will fix the world, you know, on every level" (interviewee 3)

I have started this paper by asking "How can alternative food initiatives (AFIs) in the face of contradictions such as replicated food injustice contribute to eroding the globally dominant capitalist food system and to constructing more just and sustainable food worlds?". It is due to the inherently political, radical character of AFIs as well as current challenges to practice justice, especially all dimensions of justice, that AFIs' contribution to eroding the capitalist system is best understood as part of an accumulation of forces which are strategically and thematically heterogenous and yet might collectively advance more just and sustainable food worlds. Although a low degree of justice in AFIs appears disheartening, AFIs are not per se uninterested nor irrelevant in advancing social justice and have quite distinct possible strategic playing fields to address justice. Essentially, I have argued then that a more complete consideration of AFIs vis-à-vis justice surpasses the organizational boundaries to account for alliances as a key mechanism through which AFIs do practice justice *at the same time as* the contradiction of replicated injustice within the AFI persists. Let us revisit some key components of this paper to clarify these arguments.

Having established the necessity to address food injustice also in a country like the Netherlands, I discussed how AFIs indeed reproduce injustice by maintaining material and cultural conditions of exclusion. Neither location nor price sufficiently portray how AFIs remain harbors for largely white, middle-upper class, highly educated participants. Exclusionary discourses further marginalize cultures and values which do not fit the ideals of good food and neither the privileged realities dominating in AFIs. While this evidence brings forth the persisting maldistribution and misrecognition amongst AFIs, initiatives see themselves confronted with challenges towards redistribution and recognition. Precarity and the risk to self-exploit as well as distance to marginalized realities are to be taken seriously. Some challenges are self-constructed, some are imposed by a larger classist and racist political economy, some challenges are more distinct for certain types of initiatives, and some appear universal across AFIs. The representation complication is of particular nature because it emphasizes the difficulty of practicing plural justice in completion as initiatives' offer little space for marginalized groups to make their voices heard but also as there are limited prospects for marginalized groups to start their own initiatives.

With this bleak outlook, we find ourselves at a crossroad: dismiss AFIs as justice failures *or* explore their potential in still contributing to build more just and sustainable food worlds? If we chose the second path, yet again we stand at a crossroad: do we expect a change within every single AFI towards a complete practice of plural justice or do we expand the viewpoint beyond the singular strategic and organizational entity of an AFI? In this paper, I argue for the latter path that advocates for an accumulation of forces through which various distinct movements and strategies collectively are more likely to forge more just and sustainable food worlds. The implications of this viewpoint to on-the ground activism can be significant. Walking up to the gardener of a CSA who is at the brink of minimum wage or a social worker in a community garden whose own positionality of privilege allows for little imagination of what marginalized groups experience of racism is – and simply demand them to guarantee access to fresh food or changing their beliefs to recognize marginalized groups' needs and realities is rather impractical. Instead, I suggest to acknowledge serious challenges and the inherent anti-capitalist radicality of alternative food practices and then move on to explore which dimensions of justice can likely be addressed within distinct initiatives and to explore how justice emerges through alliances. Both subjective and objective alliances are already there – signs of food justice right under our eyes and they do require our attention if we are to embrace the idea of an accumulation of forces to build more just and sustainable food worlds.

Not only can AFI's challenges to practice justice be overcome through alliances but in particular the representation complication *might* be resolved through alliances. As I have noted earlier, plural justice could indeed require plural pathways.

Reflecting on theoretical sources of this paper, significantly Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011), Fraser (2021), and Wright (2021), and McClintock (2014), I built on important contributions authors have made on the topic of systemic change towards more just and sustainable food worlds. Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck's (2021) take on different food movement strands and inherent contradictions as well as their argument for alliances formed the theoretical starting point of this paper. I have aimed to add some important nuances and depth to this discussion which acknowledge AFIs' coexisting contradictions, heterogeneity, and radicality. Moreover, I reflected on the types and conditions of alliances which can become significant in the struggle to counter the capitalist food system. McClintock (2014) critically engages with key arguments of Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck (2011) in a discussion of urban agriculture's neoliberal contradiction in a similar way that this paper does:

> "Rather than an end unto itself, we should instead view urban agriculture as simply one of many means to an end, one of many tools working in concert towards a unified vision of food justice, and of just sustainability, more broadly." (McClintock, 2014, p. 166)

My discussion of the food justice contradiction builds on this standpoint and further highlight the heterogeneity amongst AFIs in relation to the justice contradiction and to explicitly explore how exactly it is that they are part of an accumulation of strategies and movements which collectively can path the way towards more just and sustainable food worlds. Here, Fraser (2021) and Wright (2021) were important sources of inspiration and although they do not speak of opposing the capitalist food system nor of alliances, many analytical tools could be borrowed and brought to different analytical scales and research topics.

My methodological merging of micro and meso analytical levels and data gathering through including participants from several levels of engagement with AFIs – such as individual AFI organizers as well as network and movement organizers – essentially allowed me to identify patterns and incorporate assembled experiences. A combination of analytical levels and data gathering enriches the research of contradictions amongst AFIs insofar as it is able to recognize embodied realities of AFI participants and identify where structural impact hits and patterns emerge. However, future research could helpfully expand insights of structural impact on AFIs' contradictions through a macro-analytical level such as a review of policy impacting urban agriculture and AFIs generally. Besides the level of analysis, participant observation and informal conversations during six weeks of field research at AFI sites importantly contributed to contextualizing and deepening my insights from interviews with AFI organizers and thus situating my research findings in a way that interviews do not allow for (Burawoy, 1998).

Last but not least, several recommendations emerge from this research. In terms of policy, this paper highlights the need of state support for implementing food justice within AFIs and beyond. Although it is in itself a debate whether tackling food injustice in and through AFIs is counter-productive in the struggle towards just and sustainable food worlds because it supports the neoliberal roll-back of the state (see Alkon and Guthman, 2017), AFIs at the current conjuncture are in dire need for external support. In terms of political activism, spreading knowledge tools and resources about food injustice in the Netherlands and addressing justice varyingly within AFIs might be an important step given that misrecognition is fueled by distance to marginalized realities. Moreover, since alliances are key to move towards just and sustainable food worlds, networks and social movements might be crucial for facilitating alliances themselves as well as for generating knowledge tools for building alliances. As literature on alliances for food

justice emphasize (e.g. Scibba, 2018), labor unions might be particularly important allies in moving towards food justice.

Finally, this research has opened up new avenues for future research by highlighting the relevance of understanding the heterogeneity of initiatives and their challenges vis-à-vis contradictions such as reproduced injustice as well as alliances to foster justice where it seems unlikely. Future (scholar-activist) research can play an important role in enhancing knowledge about alliances and systematizing these insights also in support of political activism fostering food justice. Another important research field that needs exploration is the manifestation of food injustice in the Netherlands under the capitalist food system and in alternative food worlds. Here, it is vital to co-constitute knowledge with those who experience and are most vulnerable to food injustice so that misrecognition and misrepresentation can be addressed suitably.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Interview guide – semi-structured interviews with AFI organizers in Utrecht

STEP1: Introducing myself and my research

- Student in Den Haag at ISS - this research is for my MA thesis
- Organizer and participant in alternative food initiatives - I am personally interested in the topic. While I was an organizer in a food cooperative and during my participation in community gardens and CSAs, I have observed certain things and experienced the difficulties and rewards of food initiatives. In my thesis, I wanted to engage with initiatives to better understand what is going on and how other people feel about it
- The topic of my research:
    - Alternative food initiatives, mostly urban agriculture in Utrecht o Organizers - so those mostly making decisions - and how/why they make decisions
    - Focus - social impact of initiatives
    - Why? Oftentimes under-privileged and marginalized groups are under-represented within initiatives but also have limited tools to draw up their own initiatives. Want to understand better what people think about this, if there is an interest and capacity, and if people want to do something about it/how.
- Consent: All the information is for the purpose of my thesis. You can at any point stop the interview or later withdraw yourself and I will not use any information from the interview for my thesis. Some questions might be triggering or uncomfortable. You can always ask me to skip the question or ask for explanation why I am asking this question. I would like to record this conversation so I can listen back to it for details. Is that alright with you?

STEP2: Introduction

1. ROLE / goal: position in decision-making
    - What is your role in the initiative?
    - Are you involved in decision-making? How?
2. MISSION / goal: what is the goal/principles/mission of the initiative
    - What do you think is the mission or goal of the initiative?
    - Is there something missing that you would like to include?

STEP3: How do people view the issue?

1. AWARENESS/goal: are people aware of social justice issues in the food system and in their initiatives
    - How would you describe the community in your initiative?
        - What is the background of people participating
        - Do you feel like certain groups of people are under-represented?
    - Do you think people need to bring privileges to participate? Privileges could be income, education, social status, skin color
    - Do you think your initiative supports or includes people with less privilege, who are somehow disadvantaged? Who are these people?
    - Have you heard about the idea of social justice or food justice? What do you think about it? How do you understand this term? This means not only inclusion/diversity but also who has power/makes rules/can decide to access
    - Would you be interested in learning more about the exclusions and op- pressions happening in your initiative? E.g. anti-oppression training or more training at Warmonderhof? Do you think you know/understand why people are not present in your initiative?

2. INTEREST AND RELATION TO OTHER ISSUES / goal: are people interested in implementing social justice and do they think it is relevant to them

- Are there things your initiative is doing about including/empowering under-privileged groups? Is there something you would like to happen?
- Do you think it is important or that you "should" address social justice? Do you think it is relevant to your initiative or yourself to address the issue? Do you think there is a link between your goals and social justice?
- How do you see the connection of social justice to the goal/mission of your initiative?

3. TOOLS AND DECISION-MAKING / goal: do people think they have the tools

- Do you have ideas of how to address social justice?
- Do you think you can implement these ideas? Do you feel equipped?
- What do you think you need to implement them?
    - What tools do you think you have and what tools do you think are missing?
- What do you think impacts your decision-making? E.g. landownership, participants/members (legitimacy), practicality

Appendix 2: Initiative sample overview

	Type	Organizational structure	Land ownership	Food production	Demographic location	(Perceived) Demographic reality	Food justice	My engagement
1	CSA – self-harvest	Actors: gardeners, landowner members/volunteers Decision-making: gardeners, landowner, Volunteers/members	Private (partner of gardener, previously farmer)	Productive: 350 households?	In-between medium/high income neighborhood and low-income, "diverse" neighborhood	Mostly white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-representation of people of color, lower-income groups	Solidarity payment, U-Pas	Strong: Volunteering, interviews, chatting
2	CSA – self-harvest	Actors: gardeners, stichting/board, members/volunteers Decision-making: gardeners, stichting/board	Private (Natuurmonumenten)	Productive: 250 households	Medium/high income neighborhood	Mostly white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-representation of people of color, lower-income groups	Solidarity payment, U-Pas	Strong: Volunteering, interviews, chatting
3	CSA – self-harvest	Actors: gardener, landowner, members/volunteers Decision-making: gardener, landowner	Private (son of farmer family, not farming)	Productive: less than 100 households	Medium/high income neighborhood	Mostly white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-representation of people of	Solidarity payment	Strong: Volunteering, interviews, chatting

						color, lower-income groups		
4	UA – on-farm market + allotment gardens	Actors: gardeners, landowner, stichting/board, volunteers, customers, allotment garden holders Decision-making: gardeners, landowner, stichting/board	Private (father of gardener, previously farmer)	In-between	Medium/high income neighborhood	Mostly white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-representation of people of color, lower-income groups	Unclear	Medium: Volunteering, one interview, chatting
5	Community garden	Actors: gardeners, stichting/board, volunteers Decision-making: ?	Public (municipality Utrecht)?	In-between: food production not main goal	Low-income, “diverse” neighborhood	Still mostly white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-representation of people of color, lower-income groups considering the neighborhood demographic	Justice principles part of mission	Weak: On interview
6	Community garden	Actors: gardeners, Utrecht Natuurlijk (organisation/stichting), volunteers Decision-making: gardeners, Utrecht Natuurlijk	Public (municipality Utrecht)	In-between: food production not main goal	Low-income, “diverse” neighborhood	Still many white, middle/upper class participants; perceived under-	Unclear but some justice principles in mission of	Strong: Volunteering, interviews, chatting

						representation of people of color, lower-income groups considering the neighborhood demographic	umbrella NGO	
7	CSA – self-harvest (special)	-	Private (company)	Productive: 110 households	High-income neighborhood	All lower-income households, ca. 50% refugees and people of color	Intentional Providing food for low-income families “for free”/funded by business network	Weak: One interview

Appendix 3: Interviewees overview

Within Utrecht sample of initiatives:

Reference	Initiative	Role	Interview date and format
Interviewee 1	1	Gardener	14.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 2	1	Gardener	21.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 3	2	Gardener	18.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 4	2	Board member	18.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 5	3	Land owner	12.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 6	3	Gardener	18.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 7	4	Founder and gardener	19.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 8	5	Founder and gardener	17.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 9	6	Gardener, care coordinator	16.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 10	6	Gardener, care coordinator	23.08.2023, in person

Outside Utrecht sample of initiatives:

Reference	Affiliation	Interview date and format
Interviewee 11	Gardener, CSA for low-income groups	05.10.2023, online
Interviewee 12	CSA gardener, organizer national CSA network, organizer national agroecology network	18.09.2023, online
Interviewee 13	Food justice activist	07.09.2023, online
Interviewee 14	CSA gardener, organizer European Coordination LVC – youth articulation, organizer national agroecology network	03.&04.10.2023, online
Interviewee 15	CSA gardener, urban farmers collective	21.09.&24.10.2023, online
Interviewee 16	Employee municipality-funded urban agriculture organisation	14.08.2023, online
Interviewee 17	Food bank founder and social worker	15.08.2023, in person
Interviewee 18	Employee, company for greenhouse allotments	24.08.2023, in person