

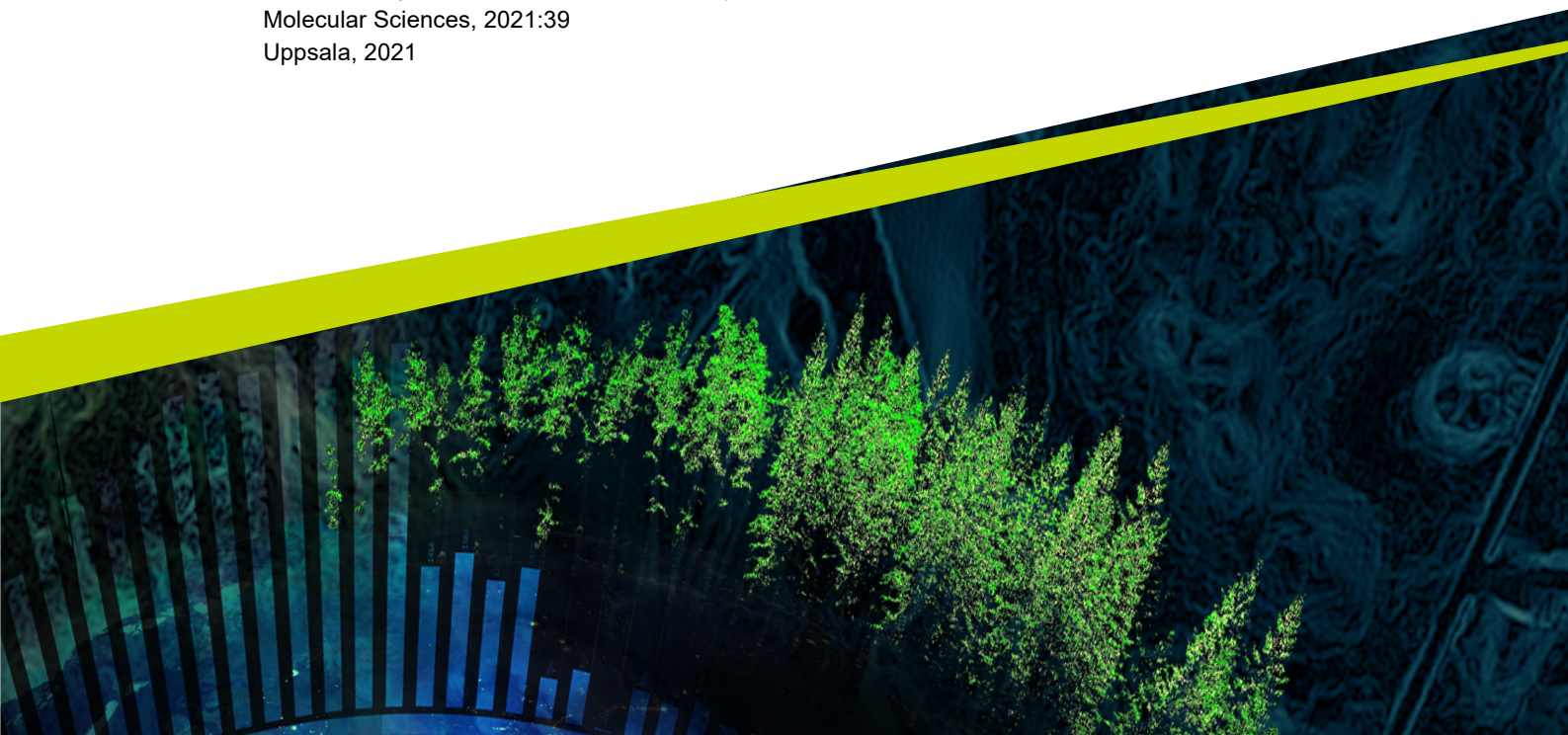


An Ecosystem of Alternative Food Networks in Uppsala:

With Social Innovation Towards Sustainable Food System Transition

Veronika Tietz

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An Ecosystem for Alternative Food Networks in Uppsala: With Social Innovation Towards Food Democracy

Veronika Tietz

Supervisor: Alexandre Dubois, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Urban and Rural Development

Examiner: Anders Larsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
Department of Landscape Architecture, Planning and
Management

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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Molecular Sciences

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Abstract

Sustainable food system transition (SFST) is an inevitable aim for the world's societies to tackle global challenges caused by industrial, neo-liberal food industries such as climate change, biodiversity loss, food inequality and so forth. The social dimension of sustainable transitions is too often neglected by political decision makers and global corporations, highlighting the necessity for more attention regarding active participation of citizens to solve societal food related challenges in their regions. Arising from different motivations, Alternative Food Networks (AFN) are becoming increasingly more important to support sustainable food system transitions in diversifying the food system landscape and fixing food issues at the root. This project aimed at identifying AFNs in the Swedish city, Uppsala, and to investigate their role in achieving SFST through social innovation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to reveal the activities, motivations as well as challenges of Uppsala's AFNs and how social innovation can be used as an instance to achieve sustainable food goals. Additionally, Sweden's National Food Strategy and the regional action plan, Ät UPPsala län, developed by the municipality of Uppsala, were both investigated to find out, to what extent, social dimensions are included, highlighting the concept of food democracy, from active participation of citizens, in achieving national and regional food system goals. The results show that AFNs have the potential to solve context-based food issues, even with little accessibility to supporting resources and active engagement of citizens, but still, it is less likely that they can achieve a SFST. Instead, AFNs are diversifying the food system landscape, giving citizens a genuine choice to engage, participate and educate themselves about local food systems.

Keywords: alternative food networks, local food system transformation, social innovation, sustainable transition, food democracy

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Abbreviations

AFN	Alternative Food Networks
FS	Food Systems
MLP	Multi-Level-Perspective
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SFST	Sustainable Food System Transition
UU	Uppsala University

1. Introduction

This chapter briefly introduces the impacts of human activities on the planet with special attention to the global food system. Continuing, the Swedish food system is being presented, as it is relevant for the geographical scope of this project.

Industrial production of commodities is increasingly criticised by different societal groups, which are concerned by the vast number of impacts threatening the existence of many species including humans themselves. The ongoing intensification of agricultural production contributes to an irreversible change of ecosystems and natural habitats as 50% of the habitable land has been converted into agricultural land (Ritchie 2019). Biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, resource depletion, soil degradation, conversion of food calories into feed and biofuel, world hunger etc. are only a few of the controversies, which can be linked to industrial food production. Food is no longer primary anymore to cover the basic need of nutritional and energy intake, but it rather developed into a commodification, increasing the wealth of a few at the cost of a majority. It is out of question that in a world where 650 million people are obese (WHO 2020) and 821 million being constantly undernourished (WFP 2019) that system dysfunctions are prevalent. Injustice is a recurring term to describe the conditions of workers in the food industry, who are being underpaid, work under hazardous conditions and face racial discrimination, which governments fail to address. The idea of a sustainable food transition is leaping through discussions on social media as well as on political agendas. Competitiveness seems like a recurring driver in different political strategies and a lot of investments and funding are going into technological innovations. One of the many solutions for sustainable transition but often overlooked are civil societies, which are already engaged in creating more just and fair food systems. Social innovation is a sparsely used term, however it can support the understanding of the importance of local, social movement groups. The societal context of regions is also often overlooked by their governments and municipalities. A characteristic of industrial food production is the homogeneity of it based on excessive resource use and mismanagement of land. Alternative Food Networks (AFN) are being continuously moved by the public but also academia into the spotlight and they usually reflect the needs of the society, which engages in them. Different initiatives and businesses deal with the implementation of sustainable

food systems in their region, from production and distribution up to waste management, but also educational services are covered. The current COVID-19 pandemic enabled people to have more time to deal with different issues, which caught their attention and food production is one of them. Meanwhile, in the academical context, new research is continuously being produced with the aim to point out the strengths, but also weaknesses, of sustainable food transition through AFN. Currently, this research fails to include the ideas of social innovation. Therefore, this paper chose the geographical context of the city, Uppsala, in Sweden, to identify the different businesses and initiatives, which are characterised as AFNs and involved in local food production or waste management.

1.1. Anthropocene and the Impacts of Food Production

Over a very short period of time in human history, humans became the single most influential and dominant species on planet earth causing, through their activities, massive, negative environmental and socio-economic changes. Climate change is the more pressing outcome which emerged due to excessive use of fossil fuels. Most recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, short IPCC (2021:5), confirmed with their report “Climate Change 2021” based on physical science “It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.” Meanwhile, Land-use change and deforestation, because of agriculture, also contributes to the alteration of living conditions around the world to different extents. In 2019, 11,000 scientists from around the globe published, with their signature, a warning of a climate emergency, explaining that urgent action is necessary to mitigate the impacts of climate change, which is mostly linked to the excessive lifestyle of affluent nations (Ripple et al. 2020). The earths’ resources are finite and the framework of the planetary boundaries developed by Rockström et al. (2009) explains the anthropogenic pressure of human activities on the geological systems and how visualised boundaries can guide resource use in a sustainable manner. In addition, Raworth (2017) incorporated the social dimension in the concept of the Doughnut Economics, illustrated in Figure 1, which shall serve as a compass to guide humanity to just and sustainable transitions.

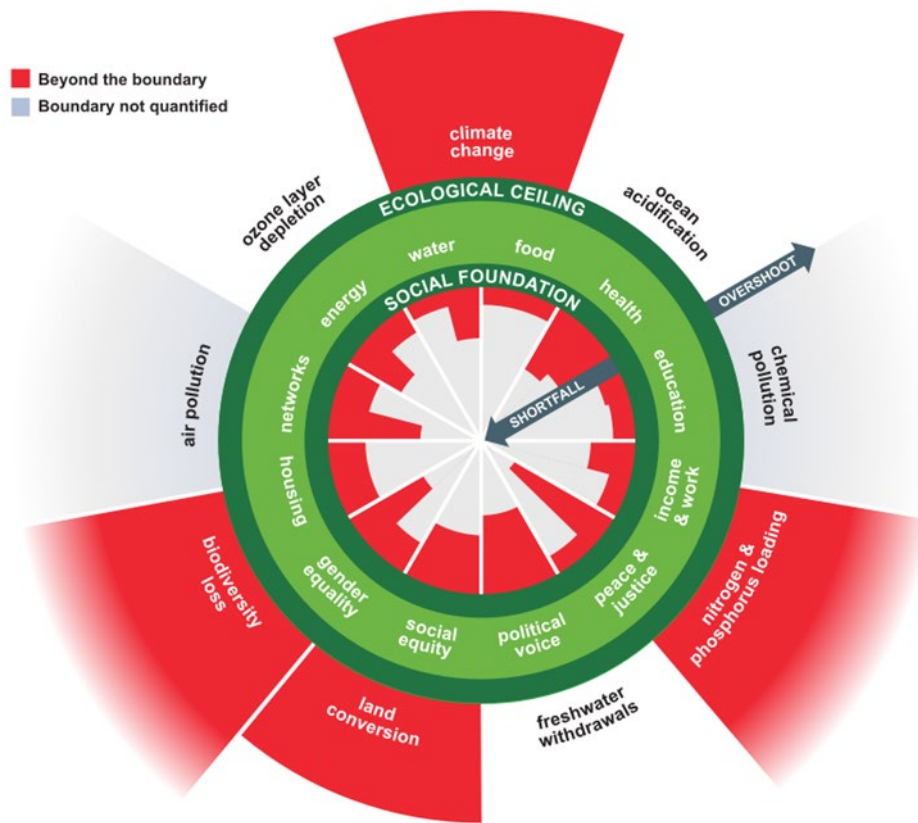


Figure 1. Doughnut Economics (Raworth 2020)

One of the many areas of concern is industrial food production correlating with issues of abnormal greenhouse gas emissions, extensive land and water use, excessive pollution through pesticides and fertiliser, enhanced biodiversity loss and increasing degradation of water and soil quality (European Commission 2006). Many researchers identified that the mechanisms of the dominant neoliberal food economy marked by industrial, corporate and commercial alignment are causing most damage leading to deep socio-economic problems of food injustice and food insecurity (Clapp 2006). Overlapping economical, societal and environmental crises reveal the fragility of the global food system, which depends on the exploitative usage of natural resources and labour and rely on the volatile nature of the global market. Besides all the bad news, there is also good news as the previously mentioned researchers and many more, but also civil societies and individuals as explained later, actively engage in tackling the world's current big challenges.

Convenience is an important driver, shaping the consumers' behaviour to be passive and disconnected from the production of food. Another indicator, which reveals the injustice of the global food system, is the continuous decline of small-scale businesses relating to food due to the market price pressure, competition from mass

food production and influential retailers (eurostat 2018). This causes an accumulation of market power, decreasing diversified food production, loss of traditional knowledge and decreasing employment in the agricultural sector worldwide. The current global food system is shaped by market mechanisms, which cannot be held responsible for their impacts as it is a faceless entity. It is a system where food is being produced more than sufficiently to provide every single human being with enough energy and nutrients to live a healthy life, but in reality, 821 million people are currently experiencing severe hunger with an upward trend (WFP 2019).

The intensive examination of the global food system leads to endless research, which reveals unnumerable systemic malfunctions as well as progressive disorders and injustice. Nonetheless, globally the awareness about the importance of inclusive and sustainable food systems is gaining increasingly more attention, which can be highlighted by the United Nations Food System Summit 2021 (United Nations n.d.) aiming at mobilising people all over the world to take action in sustainably transitioning the world's food system. Globally, many different grassroots food movements developed from different social, economic and environmental contexts as a resistance to the multidimensional issues of the neoliberal food systems, which favours the dietary abundant lifestyle of rich and upper-middle-income citizens at the cost of the poor and the natural environment (Sage et al. 2021). Nevertheless, "While governance structures shaped by neoliberalism cause significant social and ecological challenges, they also expose cracks in the dominant system, thereby creating opportunities for increased engagement and empowerment of civil society and social movements." (Andrée et al. 2019:7) A reappearing accusation of grassroots movements is the failure of governments to pave the way towards a just and fair food system, leaving the power to big cooperates in the production and retail industries. Increasingly, scholars are pointing out the fragility of the dominant neoliberal food system and constantly add information to the database of sustainable food systems, which can be found throughout this project. Approaches to justify the necessity of working towards sustainable food systems often include passively economic, environmental and societal aspects – known as the triple bottom line (Elkington 1998) – but with less focus on societal aspects, missing opportunities from creating a sustainable transition from civil societies, communities, citizens etc. This phenomenon also occurs in political contexts where civil societies are constantly patronised by their governments and multinational corporations, thus excluded from active participation in policy making (Hylander et al. 2014). This gap in understanding how civil societies can contribute to a sustainable food transition with their own resources lies in the interest of this project and will be elaborated in the coming chapters.

1.2. Swedish Food System Context

When it comes to sustainability performance, Sweden is one of the countries, which comes in the top 10 of diverse ranking lists like the Environmental Performance Index 2020, which measures the “environmental health and ecosystem vitality” within countries (EPI 2020). It seems like those rankings connote that Sweden, as a globally involved import and export force, can be seen as a role model. However, the measurements of the presented data are usually taking place within the national borders and exclude the reality of imports from low economically performing countries (OEC 2020). As in other countries, Sweden’s population is constantly increasing, leading to a higher demand for food. Yet, food production in Sweden seems to encompass high safety and health standards considering environmental protection through the least amount of used pesticides and fertilisers in the European Union (EU), importance of animal health and welfare and a steady growth of organic cultivation (Jordbruksverket 2013). Despite Sweden’s sustainable performance in agriculture, arable land has continuously declined since the beginning of the 1960, from approximately 8,5% to 6,3% with a tendency of continuous decline (The World Bank 2021). Of the estimated agricultural land of 3031.5 ha (FAO 2016) only 20.4% is utilised for organic agriculture (eurostat 2021). Another alarming trend is the declining numbers of small-scale farms and the increase of larger farms leading to less employment in the agricultural sector (Jordbruksverket 2017). Small scale farms are important contributors to employment, crop diversity and environmental and rural development. Additionally, the demographic change in terms of age for farmers is worrisome due to the fact that every third farmer is around 65 years old or older (ibid.). Thus, the Swedish Food System is currently in the hands of fewer and larger farms or corporations who are having more influence on what and how food is being produced and available.

The Swedish government, in particular the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (2017), recognised the future challenges in the agricultural sector and addressed social potential from food production, like employment and competitive sustainable growth, in its National Food Strategy. Beside the National Food Strategy, on regional levels various action plans are under construction such as the Ät UPPsala län, which shall contribute to sustainable and competitive food production in the Uppsala County (Länsstyrelsen Uppsala län 2019). In the strategy as well as in the action plan the involvement of different stakeholders from various food supply chains are seen as crucial to build a sustainable food system. Moreover, the Swedish civil society plays an important role as they will be the entity affected by the changes. In general, according to Hylander et al. (2014) the Swedish society has been rather neglected in contribution and policy decisions, which emphasises that the general population is assigned a rather passive role in shaping the current and

future food system. Especially, food production related issues are more complicated as the majority of food supplied in Sweden is in the hands of a few big retail companies, thus enhancing the anonymity between food producers and consumers. The distancing and commodification of food increases the reliance on international trade which puts the national food system prone to risks of volatility and crisis (Clapp 2006). The missing connectivity of food production and consumption highlights the disconnection of an understanding and awareness of the consumer about how food is being produced and how much work it entails.

2. Aim and Research Questions

This study aims at exploring the role of civil societies in the national and regional political work to enhance the transition to more sustainable and local food systems while meeting context-based social needs. Research and businesses deal extensively with developing novel approaches through innovative methods to tackle the vast amount of challenges deriving from unsustainable agri-food practices, while the potential of social innovation is unexplored. Therefore, the lack of research on social innovation in connection to sustainable food system transition (SFST) leads to the following research questions for this project:

- How are local food initiatives and businesses in Uppsala contributing to a sustainable food system transition?
- How can local food initiatives and businesses be incorporated as a voice and support in the political debate of a national and regional sustainable food system transition?
- How can social innovation be more involved in achieving sustainable and local food goals?

3. Research Design

In this chapter, the process and research structure are presented including the steps of data collection, the elaboration of the interviews and the corresponding choice of analysis method. Moreover, a reflection of the methodological approach in connection to the limitations of this study round off this chapter.

An exploratory research design was used in this project due to a previous identification of an under-researched problem; the lack of research on social innovation in connection to local sustainable food transition. Therefore, the necessity arose to collect various kinds of data due to the currently incomplete research. In this regard, qualitative research is the most suitable as this research strategy facilitates an inductive, constructional and interpretive approach (Bryman 2015). In the first place it was important to gain an overall understanding why local, sustainable food transition is important and how it can be achieved. In the beginning of the thesis process the why and how questions were important to understand the different social perceptions about the subject. Furthermore, the whole process of data collection was conducted iteratively to create a set of qualitative data for a contemporary representation and to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying subject (Robson 2011). Another important step was to narrow the scope of the project down because although the research questions are under-researched, the overall issues of local sustainable food transition are handled broadly but little from social dimensions. Therefore, this study is including the context of local initiatives and businesses in Uppsala, Sweden. To highlight an area where social innovation would have a nurturing ground to be implemented, Sweden's National Food Strategy and Uppsala's food action plan was examined to gain an insight about the current political aspirations regarding SFST.

3.1. Data Collection

In order to get a better insight into the landscape of local food systems in the Uppland region, a basic Social Network Analysis (SNA) of local initiatives and businesses in the beginning of this project was conducted by scanning the social media platform Facebook and usage of the search engine Google. SNA is an

increasingly popular research technique, which is also used for qualitative data procurement to gain a better understanding of existing network structures (Schepis 2011). Nevertheless, during the research limitations were identified regarding the sparse landscape of locally supportive initiatives and businesses thus a comprehensive network mapping could not be accomplished. To gain relevant data about the local food network relationships interviews were arranged with the different actors, which were identified in the SNA. A detailed description of the interview process will be described in the following chapter.

Simultaneously to the SNA, secondary data like scientific publications such as journal articles, reviews and academic books were studied to gain background information about the chosen topics. Additionally, website data from the identified local initiatives and businesses and governmental publications were included in the research. The literature review contributed to an in-depth understanding of the research field, relevant concepts and theories and which methodological approaches were used by other researchers in the field of study (Bryman & Bell 2015). The various data was procured through search engines like Ecosia and Google scholar, the social media platform Facebook and the SLU Library search tool Primo.

3.2. Interview Process

Network relationship landscapes are a complex and extensive area in societal structures, which cannot be solely understood by literature reviews. To determine information about network structures within different businesses, initiatives or individuals, a semi-structured interview offers itself as a suitable method as it can be designed to investigate subjective responses from the interviewees regarding a particular subject (McIntosh & Morse 2015). The selection of the interviewees developed through internet network research and the mapping of local businesses initiatives in the Uppland region with the focus on the areas of Uppsala and Stockholm. One of the main criteria for sending the interview requests was that the businesses or initiatives have a direct link to local food issues such as production, distribution, food waste reduction or promotion of local food. In the end, 10 in-depth interviews in English were held, which took around 35-50 minutes. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic the interviews were held online via the digital meeting platform Zoom, which made it easier to set up the interview and the recording was done by the same program. Only one interview was held in person and outside in the area of the initiative's operation.

The choice of conducting semi-structured interviews can be justified by the objection of sampling the reflection of the own network structures the interviewees operate in. More importantly, due to its qualitative characteristics semi-structured

interviews enable to obtain data exploratory, giving the interviewer the chance to unfold the conversation based on the interviewees responses (Magaldi & Berler 2020). Before the interviews took place an interview guide was developed, which encompassed four main themes: sustainable transition, network structure, relational-capital and business opportunities. In Appendix 1 the guiding questions can be found but during the interviews the interviewer did not strictly stick to the exact order of the questions. This should warrant that the interviewees have the chance to follow their intention about what they perceive as important (Longhurst 2009) and give “space to follow topical trajectories as the conversation unfolds” (Magaldi & Berler 2020). According to Mack et al. (2005:2) “*qualitative data can often be extended to people with characteristics similar to those in the study population, gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon [...] that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations*”. Furthermore, used quotes from the interviews are handled anonymously in this report due to an ethical agreement with the interviewees to avoid traceability.

Respondent	Role	Type	Date
Bruised Food Club	Chairperson	Zoom	24.02.2021
BraMaten (1)	Founder	Zoom	26.02.2021
Sweden Food Arena	Director of Operations	Zoom	01.03.2021
Från Sverige	Quality Assurance	Zoom	11.03.2021
BraMaten (2)	Project Manager	Zoom	15.03.2021
The Campus Garden	Project Leader	Zoom	16.03.2021
UltiMat	Communication Coordinator	Zoom	17.03.2021
REKO Uppsala Bolendärna	Administrator	Zoom	18.03.2021
Svenska Delikatesser	Shop Owner	Zoom	22.03.2021
Flogsta Mat/(Flogsta Matkooperativ)	Board Member	In-person	25.05.2021

Table 1. Information overview about the interviews

For the analysis of the interviews the method of thematic analysis developed by Clarke and Braun (2017), which supports the researcher to analyse data systematically by generating codes and derive key themes guided by the research questions. Six steps guide the researcher through small or big data sets:

familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up (Clarke & Braun 2006). Following those steps facilitated a thorough study of the interview material and supported the identification of important themes.

3.3. Methodological Reflection and Limitations

When it comes to reviewing the methodological approach, there are some steps which would have been usefully done in a different order. The exploratory nature of this project enabled the possibility to deal with themes, which seemed relevant at the time. If the conceptual framework would have been developed and refined in the early stages of this project, certain themes would have been discarded earlier and not elaborated. Based on this, the interview guide could have been more in line with the aim.

Additionally, dealing with an under researched concept like social innovation in theory as well as empirics is favourable as well as elusive. As a basic definition of social innovation is missing, also, there is little research on social innovation in connection to SFST. It might be difficult in the first place to identify the suitable understanding, which contributes to rather than impairs the quality of the research. Therefore, a core understanding of this concept's true nature was essential to fulfil the aim of this research.

The most complex phase of qualitative research is the data analysis (Thorne 2000). To create useful results from a complex subject area, the data analysis was important. The thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun 2006) enabled a systematic elaboration of the interviews to provide a more in-depth understanding of the interviewees' perceptions and motivations.

Despite the challenge to provide useful results from a qualitative research with a holistic nature, it was helpful to work with initiatives and businesses in Uppsala, a context, which is familiar. The results would have benefited from an interview of the people responsible for the Ät UPPsala län action plan of the Uppsala's municipality. There is a lost potential, which could have brought clarity in what way it is organised and what possibilities citizens have to participate either individually, as an initiative, or as a business. It might have also shed light on how collaborative efforts could either be beneficial or not to achieve regional food sustainability goals. Furthermore, it is likely that there are AFNs, which were not identified due to little presence in the public or on the internet. It stands out that most of the identified AFNs are student led organisations.

4. Literature Review

In this chapter the delimited research on AFNs and social innovation, in regards to SFST, is presented. Theories as well as concepts are described, which reoccurred in the literature about AFNs and social innovation. Additionally, AFNs are described in terms of landscape, systemic impact and sustainable transition, societal benefits and limitations.

In the light of the present intensifying crisis and challenges on economic, environmental and societal levels, increasingly more researchers dedicate their attention to alternatives, which oppose the dominant food system. Due to its multidisciplinary characteristic, food system change can be viewed from several perspectives. The literature includes different aspects about the studied field regarding vocabulary, theories and phenomena about the subjects (Randolph 2009). The spectrum from revolutionary standpoints to distrust in AFNs can be derived from the literature about sustainable food systems transition. However, many researchers agree that the dominant global food systems marked by industrial methods and corporate control are expanding rather than solving societal challenges and crises (Clapp 2016) and thus the pressure for a “deep socio-economic change” increases constantly (Lutz et al. 2017). On the one hand, AFNs entail the opportunity to achieve social transformation on both local and global level through active engagement in solving local food system issues (Grauerholz & Owens 2015) but on the other hand, the systemic impact of AFNs coming from civil societies is being overestimated to bring about desired change and is thus beyond the AFNs scope (Holt Giménez & Shattuck 2011). Nonetheless, at the same time the instrumental power of AFNs is recognised as a non-trivial mechanism and impetus to drive a food system transition from a long-term perspective (ibid.).

There has been much research on SFST from different angles, but few researchers take social innovation from AFNs into consideration. Social innovation is not a new concept, but it appears to gain more attention as it offers new solutions, which address conflicting systemic and structural issues (Nicholls et al. 2015). Innovation systems are mostly studied from technological dimensions leaving societal approaches neglected, and thus, decreasing the possibilities to involve affected

stakeholders and multi-level mechanisms to achieve sustainability transition (Desa & Jia 2020). The mechanisms of social innovation are important because social movements, businesses and groups can envision in their own specific context, their local interests, to contribute more to their society's needs (Juárez et al. 2018). New relationships or collaborations to meet social goals with new ideas, the empowerment of societies to act on their behalf and the improvement of quality of life are a few contributions (European Commission 2013; Nicholls et al. 2015), which derived from various research and policy agendas. Nicholls et al. (2015) argues that social innovation can evoke human capabilities, but that there is a need to understand how societies can make use of it. Some argue that social innovation is marked with imprecise terminology and lacks a fundamental conceptual foundation to be used for scientific work (Pol & Ville 2009). This is highlighted in the book, *Theories of Social Innovation*, by Danielle Logue, where she compiled different samples of definitions of social innovation, which describes the same phenomenon but with different weightings. In summary, it can be derived that social innovation contributes significantly to the common good of society with new approaches, which not only benefit the public interest, but are also profitable for private businesses. Instead of passive participation in societies, social innovation drives social interaction and activities to achieve a common goal, benefiting current and future generations.

A reoccurring theory in scientific publications about AFNs is the multi-level perspective (MLP). Geels (2011) explains MLP as a multi-dimensional, heuristic model, which distinguishes between niche, regime and landscape level. This model is often used to underpin socio-technical transition, especially in the context of a regime shift (Hinrichs 2014; Bui et al. 2016; von Oelreich & Milestad 2017). Furthermore, the empirical research about sustainable transition of agri-food systems has broadened significantly and expanded geographically (El Bilali 2019) so that models such as the MLP gained more significance due to its inclusion of changes in technology, consumer behaviour, cultural aspects, policies, infrastructure and business models to achieve transformational shifts of addressed problems (Geels n.d.). Sustainable change requires a holistic, interdisciplinary and systemic approach on different structural levels to understand the different mechanisms, which influence processes and outcomes (Moscatelli et al. 2016). While many scholars make use of the MLP, critique emerged about lack of agency, operationalization of regimes, bias towards bottom-up change models, epistemology and explanatory style, methodology, socio-technical landscape as residual category, and flat ontologies versus hierarchical levels (Geels 2011). Additionally, the use of those theories and concepts is questionable when it comes to the adaptability for the non-academical world as there is a discrepancy about how civil societies, but also private enterprises can benefit from academic work.

On account of little power from civil societies to have an influence on political decision making in regards to food system transformation, more people-centred approaches developed. Food issues are for the most part controlled and handled by economic and agricultural actors within the regime (Bui et al. 2016), which makes it challenging for other actors to participate in the discussion and remodelling of food system change. Nicol and Taherzadeh (2020) worked with a people-centred approach, which is all about the democratisation of processes including power redistribution, participation strengthening, justice and equity and the transformation of governmental structures. A co-operative approach of different stakeholders with different ideas is crucial to increase the potential to address societal and environmental challenges, according to these authors. The capacity for citizens to be able to participate in the decision making in their region is an important achievement, which can be successful if capacity-building within the current food systems takes place by involving various actors (ibid.). The challenges deriving from agri-food systems are a global problem, but there is capacity within regions to strengthen local food systems by implementing local and context-oriented solutions. The interest of citizens in food issues is reflected by the additional time they gained, while the COVID-19 pandemic forced many to stay or work from home. More people engage in debating about food production such as bread baking, general cooking etc., making them more aware that good quality food is important and contributing to their well-being. Online events such as the Klimatvecka 2021 (Climate Week 2021) in Uppsala provided digital lectures, workshops, exhibitions, panel discussions and other activities, mobilising the citizens to engage, critically assess and learn how they can contribute to a climate smart living.

Overall, there is an awareness in the political, public and academic context that a food system transition is beneficial in many regards. Nevertheless, there is an imbalance in the interest of the different instances on how, and in what way, this transition should take place and who has the resources to achieve set goals and where those resources are allocated to. There is a discrepancy of power, which is in favour of authorities on a national and regional level. AFNs challenge corporate food regimes but political authorities and those in charge of decision making, such as big retailers, prefer to stick to the common patterns and improve existing mechanisms towards sustainability (von Oelreich & Milestad 2017). This seems like a business-as-usual approach, which can be nicely packaged through marketing to the public, but it is still excluding the local context. According to Bui et al. (2016), public policies in regime reconfiguration by local authorities play a crucial role to achieve deep rooted change. Furthermore, governments can play a key role on a national, regional and local level to enhance co-operative values within a society by establishing policies and laws, which encourage co-operative ways of working towards a common goal (Nicol & Taherzadeh 2020). Community-based and co-operative approaches to make food production, processing, distribution,

trading and consumption more sustainable, are in need for just capacity-building within societies (ibid.) to address their needs. However, looking at the two presented strategies of competitiveness and profitability on the market seem more important to the government and municipality. It is of interest that social innovation is mostly overlooked in those campaigns due to the broader focus on technological innovation. It does not always have to be new, sometimes working with what you have can achieve the same as trying something completely new. Hinrichs (2014) uses the term ‘to reskill’ in connection with capacity building in communities to empower them to use their own resources and capabilities.

Individual food movements can lead to change through demonstrating viable ways forward, thus from a sustainability transition perspective, “even small-scale change is valuable” (von Oelreich, Milestad 2017:1143). In this regard the importance of a shared vision or goal appears to be embedded in public action and local policies (Bui et al. 2016). Lutz et al. (2017) argue that a shared objective can support the establishment local and national networks and help strengthen those. Those networks contribute to providing healthy, affordable and diverse food in light of ecological and cultural aspects. A common goal seems important to achieve a wider impact in regards to a SFST. Local food initiatives and businesses come with a wide range of positive outcomes: impact on food behaviour, consumption practices, creation of local economy, short-chain opportunities for farmers, building of social networks, new modes of transmission of knowledge and know-how, access for young people to land and influence on local public policies.

4.1. Alternative Food Networks

Alternative Food Network (AFN) emerged as a response to the globally dominating food systems, which are characterised by economies of scale, commodification of food, environmental degradation and societal injustice. In light of this, AFN “describes the practice and an academic body of work surrounding the emergence of alternative food practices that emerged in the 1990s as a reaction against the standardization, globalization, and unethical nature of the industrial food system” (Edwards 2019). Globally, a variety of practices developed, taking local, societal and environmental realities into account, which challenge the nameless and placeless corporate mainstream food industries (Goodman 2011). These alternative mechanisms aim to produce, distribute and consume food in a more sustainable and socially equitable way. Furthermore, AFNs want to stop the continuous loss of small-scale farmers around the world to the dominant agro-food players, which increase the vulnerability of many families, local industries and communities (Hinrichs 2014; Lutz et al. 2017). Therefore, resistance from local communities emerged to gain food sovereignty and develop new pathways for a sustainable and

inclusive local food production (Lutz et al. 2017). One of the characteristics of AFNs is their small-scale structure with bottom-up approaches, widely known as grassroot movements. AFNs reflect the context they are based in and reflect the need and desire of the society on how a food system shall be organised.

Landscape

Over the last decades, different kinds of models developed from various social and local contexts, diversifying the landscape of AFNs. Some of the identified AFNs are farmers' markets, inner-city markets, organic agriculture, community supported agriculture, short supply chains, fair trade, urban agriculture, self-harvest gardens, direct farm retail, food coops, slow food movement, food hubs, veggie boxes etc. (Anderson et al. 2014; Grauerholz & Owens 2015; Clapp 2016; Lutz et al. 2017; Opitz et al. 2017). Those different models and projects express the diversity of possibilities for societies to engage in their local food production, distribution and consumption. Conventionally produced and supplied food by the big three areas international trade, industrial food production and big retail chains in the food supply chain are in focus to be changed sustainably (Goodman et al. 2011). Additionally, many initiatives are also focusing on post-consumer waste, which highlights a societal issue of abundance and declining valuation and knowledge of food. The diverse landscapes of AFNs differ in their potential to influence the even more diverse and complex corporate food regimes (von Oelreich & Milestad 2017).

Systemic impact and sustainable transition

AFNs are not only representing local and healthy food choices and highlighting injustice practices but rather address deep institutional and societal problems. Furthermore, AFNs are passionate about reaching a wider, systemic impact by increasing their engagement in governance decisions (Andrée et al. 2019). Researchers connect AFNs with different concepts such as food justice, sovereignty, democracy, equity, security, safety, sustainability and literacy, highlighting the societal importance of well-functioning and resilient food systems. Other terms such as fair, local, quality, healthy and seasonal appear frequently in different studies about the understanding and functioning of AFNs in different geographical, political and economic contexts. According to Andrée et al. (2019:21) the implementation of successful AFNs should be based on “supportive and mutual beneficial relationships”, which regards the engagement in governance on multiple levels. The complexity of food systems is in need of multi-level perspectives, taking the contexts of everyone involved in the food supply chain into account. Active participation is a crucial requirement to keep an AFN going, which is increasingly more difficult due to the increasing disconnection of food consumption and production in mainly urban areas (Clapp 2016).

“Transitioning to sustainability starts with questions, responses, and dialogue to engage everyone on the bus. It includes documenting and interpreting the complex, rushing scenery in all its strangeness, beauty, challenge and chaos. It involves clear-eyed discussions about both the pleasing and the unpalatable choices along the way. It may be debatable how much we or anyone can actually guide this bus.” (Hinrichs 2014:153)

Researchers highlight the importance of a shared objective towards SFST to provide citizens with healthy, affordable and sustainably produced food (Lutz et al. 2017) but without a common food strategy on a national and regional level and active involvement of citizens a joint vision is missing. Achieving a systemic impact in food system transition via AFNs is an immense hurdle, thus as important as it is to have the big picture in mind, it is also necessary to consider that change can occur within the range of one’s own reach. The research, which deals with specific context-based AFNs convey a more precise picture of the reality than research, which deals with a theoretical view of the food system.

Societal benefits

According to Bui et al. (2016), AFNs have positive societal impacts such as healthy food behaviour, consumption practices, the creation of local economies, short-chain opportunities for farmers, building of social networks, new modes of knowledge transmission and know-how, accessibility to land for young people and a positive influence on local public policies. Locally produced food is attributed with terms such as fair, quality, seasonal and healthy, contributing to the health of its consumers and expanding the knowledge about food items and its different values. A people-centred approach is necessary to re-embed food issues within societies to strengthen its role in supplying nutritional sustenance and cultural importance (Clapp 2016). This approach highlights the opportunities for civil societies to engage with issues they are affected with.

Limitations

Clapp (2016) identified three key challenges for AFNs; the relocation of food systems and the reduction of intermediaries in the supply chain, the creation of more just and equitable food systems by solving the imbalance of global food systems and drawing the attention of environmentally destructive industrial farming and facilitating ecological farming methods. In general, the overall aim of food initiatives is to “re-embed food within society in order to enhance its role in providing nourishment and cultural significance” (ibid:167). Another challenge is to translate the practices and values of AFNs into mainstream, reaching different stakeholders to achieve a bigger impact (von Oelreich & Milestad 2017) as AFNs practices can be categorised as bottom-up solutions (Bui et al. 2016). Bottom-up

solutions are needed for active participation. Due to the commodification of food, eradicating small producers and gradually contributing to a loss of traditional agricultural knowledge and skills, which are being replaced by conventional practices of mass production and unsustainable use of resources, active participation of stakeholders might increase the possibilities to solve the problems at the root. Nonetheless, “It is highly unlikely that alternative food systems will take over from the industrial food system, but rather they will exist side by side, thus giving consumers a genuine choice” (Booth & Coveney 2015). This choice is crucial in a democratic system.

5. Conceptual Framework

Due to the importance of active political participation of civil societies to achieve SFST goals, the concept of food democracy will be presented. A clarification of social innovation follows, addressing its role in achieving a systemic impact.

5.1. Food Democracy

When it comes to the contribution of AFNs to local food systems, food democracy is a recurring term in AFN literature, which emphasises active participation of citizens in decision-making processes regarding food issues. In the words of Booth and Coveney (2015:13) “Democracy refers to a form of government in which people have the right to control their own destiny.” Local food initiatives offer the public different opportunities to actively participate in the development of their local FS, educational offers about alternative perspectives on how food can be produced, distributed and consumed sustainably (Petetin 2016). Food democracy is an important political intervention by citizens, which challenges the dominant, neo-liberal FS by redistributing the power within (Booth & Coveney 2015) and increasing democratising opportunities, thus leading to a change of the consumers perception from a mere consumer perspective to a more active and responsible agent of change (Prost et al. 2018) instead of delegating the power and responsibility to players outside the local context (Booth & Coveney 2015). For a more theoretical exploration of food democracy Hassanein (2008) presents five specific key dimensions of food democracy:

- 1) Collaborating towards food system sustainability
- 2) Becoming knowledgeable about food and the food system
- 3) Sharing ideas about the food system with others
- 4) Developing efficacy with respect to food and the food system
- 5) Acquiring an orientation towards the community good

Those five dimensions can be used for support in the analytical framework when it comes to examining food initiatives and their contribution to food democracy.

But there is also criticism about food democracy as being too elitist, which romanticises the idea of a sustainable food system. In regards to the elitists' interests, marginalised groups seem often excluded from access to healthier food options be it because of inconvenient factors such as lack of time and accessibility of information but more importantly the price differences between food from AFNs and food from conventional supermarkets plays an important role. Another criticism is that the actual interest in a specific context might not be sufficient to support such movements dealing with sustainable food systems.

Other concepts in connection with SFST are food justice, food sovereignty, food security etc. Dealing with SFST opens the opportunities to apply holistic approaches instead of focussing on one pathway. However, due to the scope of the project, food democracy has been solely chosen to demonstrate the important issues of active participation in political decision making by civil societies but also the responsibility of political instances in enable and facilitating active participation of citizens.

5.2. Social Innovation

At first glance the term social innovation seems misleading as innovation is in the first place connected to images of technological progress. Currently, no universal definition is available to address a clear understanding of social innovation. Instead, many different researchers and scholars deal with the conceptualisation of social innovation as its potential for societal change has been recognised despite the lack of a basic understanding of the term. One of the many definitions of social innovation, which fits with the notion of this paper, was published by Van Wijk et al. (2018, p.3): *‘Social innovation for us describes the agentic, relational, situated and multi-level process to develop, promote and implement novel solutions to social problems in ways that are directed towards producing profound change in institutional contexts.’* Yet, this definition lacks the reference of the civil society as an active part for societal change, which this paper aims to address.

In general, social innovation can be understood as meeting social needs or common problems with new social practices and better context-based solutions through capacity building. According to Hylander et al. (2014), social innovation can be understood as an inclusive approach, which supports building new social relationships or collaboration between different stakeholders to enhance sustainable development. Social innovation helps to address problems at the root in different systems, by aware or affected citizens, who want to make a positive change. Furthermore, as an “inclusive development process” social innovation unfolds itself more effectively when the organisational efforts are performed in various ways

(ibid.). New ideas, products, services, processes, business models or rules and regulations can evolve from social innovative endeavours (Nicholls et al. 2015; Logue 2019), which encompass societal development through the combination of different knowledge, competences and resources (Hansson et al. 2014). It is important to emphasise that social innovation is a process with continuous steps and changes and not a “defined end state” (Pue et al. 2016). Social innovation is continuously progressing and depends on the different resources, which are being used to address social needs in a specific context. The outcome of social innovation is always social change (ibid.) entailing economic as well as social progress (Logue 2019). Social innovation can be characterised as polysemous due to the broadness of societal problems and the immense possibilities of applying innovation (ibid). Therefore, social innovation can be seen as an adaptable theory, which still needs more clarification but well-understood, it can be used more efficiently to address social problems.

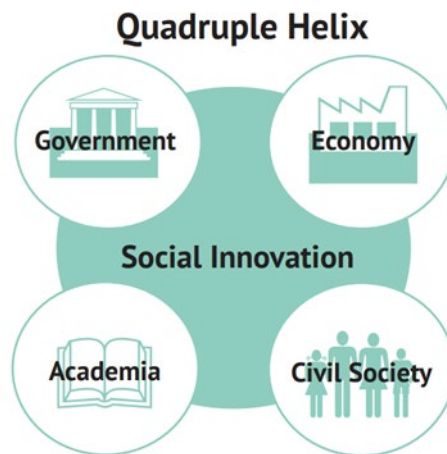


Figure 2. Important actors for social innovation (Domanski & Kaletka 2018:208)

Figure 2 illustrates the possible cooperation of government, economic players, academia and civil society to strive for because for social innovation to be successful an ecosystem needs to be in place where people with different potential and skills work together (Domanski & Kaletka 2018). Institutional change is the process as well as outcome achieved by different and multiple actors in collaborative or complementary effort (Logue 2019). Different agents of change have different perspectives, ideas and expectations thus it is a necessity that open communication takes place in different ways with different actors, which are involved to address social problems and to achieve inclusive social change (Hylander et al. 2014). The governance structure plays a focal role to achieve progress within society and in social innovation it is a true challenge to develop new governance models, which entail empowerment, involvement and co-creation of citizens because its traditional structures are insurmountable and obsolete

(Domanski & Kaletka 2018). Other important terms are also multi-disciplinary and cross-sector interactions because social problems are subject to deep rooted institutional flaws (Logue 2019). Hence, social creative strategies through collective and inclusive approaches make social innovation impacts more suitable in the context of the implementation.

Social, institutional change requires the mobilisation of civil society and the development of suitable innovations according to the context-based social problems because a “One size fits all” attitude is not sustainable (Marchetti et al. 2020). Simultaneously, meeting social problems at their root opens new opportunities for citizens to find a place and role within the given system (Nicholls et al. 2015) where they can achieve self-actualisation. With respect to alternative agri-food networks, the diversity of approaches of social innovation is capable of addressing problems deriving from the lack of local institutions to address the challenges related to food (Chiffolleau & Loconto 2018). Sustainability is not a linear pathway where there is only one direction to achieve it. Multiple possibilities arise when it comes to solving sustainability issues especially in the complex food systems. As Hylander et al. (2014) point out when social innovation is organised in various ways it becomes more effective. This viewpoint is inclusive in regards to diversifying the possibilities of citizens to become engaged with various ideas and motivation to contribute to a future, which reflects their local needs instead of delegating this task to a global economic market, which cannot be held responsible.

6. The Swedish Food Strategies and Uppsala's Alternative Food Networks

This chapter deals with the National Food Strategy of Sweden and the regional action plan Ät UPPsala län. Both strategies have been summarised and examined to find out, to what extent, the social dimension is included.

Increasingly National Food strategies are being developed around the globe. Sweden is one of countries adopting such strategies. In 2016, the Swedish government introduced its long-term Food strategy, which shall encompass the whole food supply chain and create more jobs and contribute to sustainable growth all over Sweden. Summarised, the overall objective of the “*Food strategy is to foster a competitive food production industry in Sweden, thereby increasing innovation, employment, profitability, production and exports while achieving the relevant national environmental targets*” (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017:9) Three strategic areas had been developed to achieve those objectives, which are briefly described in Table 2 In line with the National Food strategy, regional Foods strategies are being implemented such as the Ät UPPsala län, which is more specialised in the local context of Uppsala county. The action plan, which is only available in Swedish and had to be translated into English, has the goal of contributing to a sustainable and competitive food production and to fulfil the goals of the county's regional development strategy for food production and the fulfilment of Agenda 2030 (Länsstyrelsen Uppsala Län 2019). In different processes of knowledge accumulation with various stakeholders five thematic areas were identified, which can be found in Table 2.

National Food Strategy (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017)	Ät UPPsala län (Länsstyrelsen Uppsala Län 2019)
<p>Rules and Regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: “competitive and sustainable food supply chain in which production [and profitability] increases” • Assessments: appropriate taxes and charges, regulatory simplification, a reduced administrative burden <p>Consumer and Markets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: high degree of confidence in foods and make informed and sustainable choices • Assessments: efficient competition, Swedish food exports must meet demand <p>Knowledge and Innovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: support knowledge and innovation system to increase productivity and innovation • Assessments: increased coordination of stakeholders, advice and skills development 	<p>Procurement and Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: procurement of local food for all public meals, enough information and knowledge for producers • Assessments: good communication and network, well-functioning logistics <p>From Farm to Fork</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: securing and strengthening quality through the entire food supply chain • Assessments: develop local production <p>Skills Supply and Labour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: support potential employees and entrepreneurs in the green industry • Assessments: provide meeting places and opportunities for networking <p>Social Development and Sustainable Food Production</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: efficient resource use, considering ecosystem services and reduce environmental impact • Assessments: plan fertile soils and utilise region`s expertise in green industries <p>Simplify for Companies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: prerequisite for a competitive food sector • Assessments: safe and effective supervision, communication and collaboration in the supervisory area

Table 2. The summarised objectives and assessments from the National and Regional Food Strategies in Sweden

6.1. Uppsala's Local Food Initiatives and Businesses

Uppsala is characterized by a high number of national and international students from the Uppsala University with 28.289 students in 2020 (Statista Research Department 2021) and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences with around 4.200 students (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that many student initiatives emerged around the city with different focus and point of interests but in general with the aim of tackling societal challenges with sustainability solutions. Along with food issues, different student initiatives developed from food production, distribution, consumption and waste management. Not only students in Uppsala are drawn to engage in local food supply chains but also locals participate in the construction of a more just and environmentally friendly FS.

In the following the various food initiatives and businesses will be briefly described. However, in Figure 3 are more AFNs located as not every initiative or business was interviewed but it is also likely that Table 1 is missing AFNs, which were not identified.

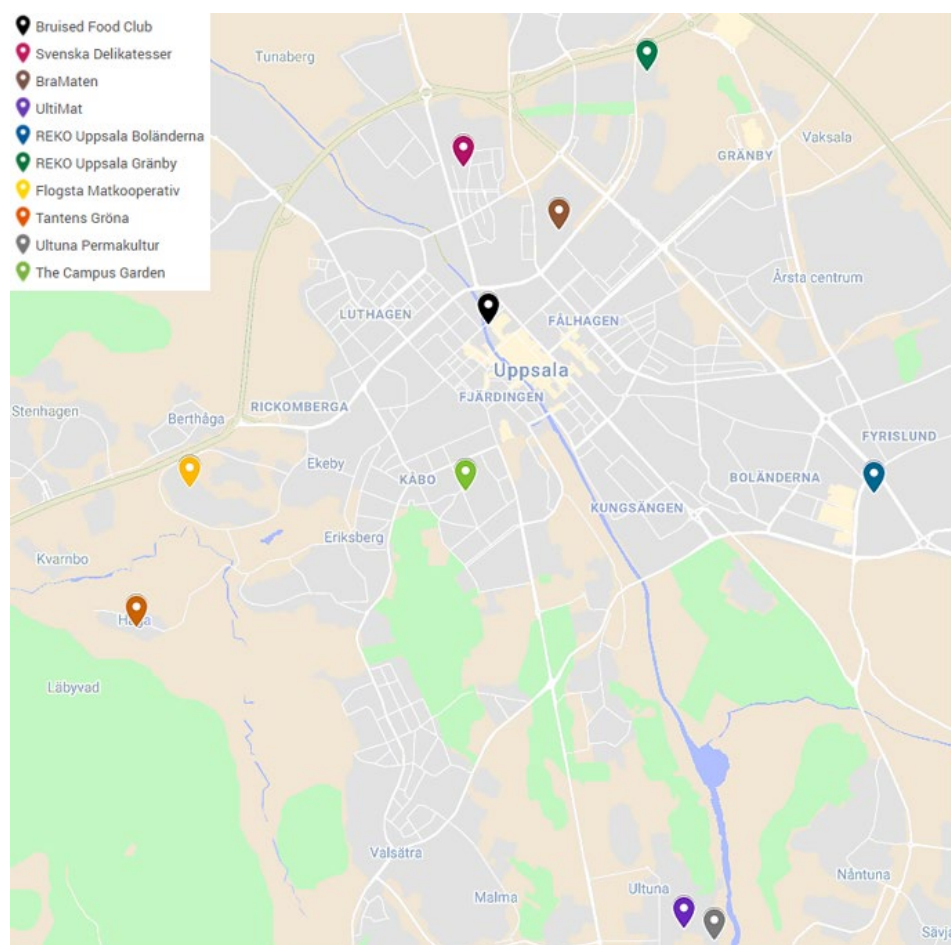


Figure 3. Location of identified Alternative Food Networks in Uppsala

The Campus Garden. This urban campus food farm project started with a successful application of the two founders to the funding opportunity “climate pot” of the Uppsala University (UU). The aim of the “climate pot” is to lower the climate footprint of the University by different ideas from staff and students. The founders who met at the community garden Flogsta Food are developing the part-time project with the mission: Towards a sustainable future! This new communal garden project shall provide a place for collaborative education and research, local food production and community activities. Due to its novelty the project is still in the beginning but on its Facebook page ‘The Campus Garden’ and Instagram platform weekly updates about the progress are communicated such as the successful land acquisition on the UU premises and the on-going gardening work, which is following permaculture principles. Also, other informational posts are regularly added to their social media platforms like factsheets, educational videos or information about food. The project depends on volunteers and a highly important aim of the project is to create a community, which has the possibility to produce food in different ways and can explore and reflect on how food is made. Both founders see their project as a passion project and have many different ideas for the future to make their garden and community thrive.

UltiMat. As a food cooperative and non-profit association at Ultuna Student Union UltiMat acts as a forum for the distribution of local and sustainable food. The food is produced in and close to Uppsala by farmers who are dedicated to environmentally friendly food production. UltiMat wants to help people in their area to have access to locally and organic produced food. The six years old cooperative is entirely run by its voluntary members. Beside its work for sustainable food consumption and distribution, UltiMat also organises a forum for discussions and activities related to sustainable food for example field trips to the farmers, food workshops and markets. The organising board consists of eight members mainly students, who work voluntarily and change every academic year. Over the years the number of members has steadily increased.

REKO Uppsala. With respect to its member numbers on its Facebook platform, REKO Uppsala seems the most successful AFN in Uppsala. It is neither an organisation nor a company, there is no membership and no hidden costs. It is purely a platform to connect local producers from Uppsala County with consumers without any intermediaries. The dialogue of marketing and sale takes place on its Facebook page where producers can offer either raw food (e.g. meat, vegetables, fruits, dairy milk, eggs etc.) or processed products (e.g. juices, jam, dairy products etc.). By pre-ordering the food stuff online, the consumer can decide what food stuff they want to buy and the quantity. The producers are responsible for setting the price for their products and the consumer can pay for their order prior to the pick-

up via Swish. Therefore, all transactions take place directly between the consumer and producer. No sales on site are allowed thus consumers pick up their order either at Boländerna or Gränby in Uppsala at designated spots and times.

Svenska Delikatesser. A grocery shop, which sells organic and local food produced in Sweden. The former owner of the shop was renting out the kitchen space in the back for one of the current owners to produce tempeh and when she decided to close the shop, they took it over from her. The food assortment includes everything for everyday shopping like vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, dairy products, eggs, bread, flour, jams, juices and many other things. The current owners continued where the last owner finished and took on the different Swedish suppliers.

BraMaten. The primary idea behind BraMaten was to create a food hub, which is more business oriented and more professional. It is based in the neighbourhood of Våktargatan because there was no close by local food cooperative, which brought locally produced food to its habitants. On a digital platform locally produced food can be ordered but first you have to register as a member to get access to the online shop. The pick-up took place in the communal kitchen of the Våktargaten community. Another aim was to establish a lasting link between the neighbourhood and the food producers. But the creators realised that if they want to be economically viable and not only a community run organisation, they need to use their skills, which are in consultancy and project management. For two years the original idea of BraMaten was on-hold due to the work on a feasibility study on how AFNs could perform better in the Uppland region.

Bruised Food Club. To prevent food waste and stop hunger in the city of Uppsala is the mission of the local initiative the Bruised Food Club. Furthermore, this non-profit initiative aims to reduce food waste in Uppsala and to create a better and sustainable world. The rescued food from different restaurants, cafes and others is distributed on the weekly rescued food market, which is based on donations. Attendants can take the food and pay the value they consider appropriate and according to their financial possibilities. The initiative is run by volunteers who besides preventing food waste from happening are also engaged in raising awareness about food waste through social media, study circles and workshops.

Flogsta Matkooperativ. This coop works a direct link between local farmers and consumers as they are ordering and buying organic products directly from the farmer. Additionally, Flogsta Matkooperativ is a participatory project based on volunteers, which does not only seek to find alternative ways to source locally produced food, but it also provides a platform for the community in Flogsta, Uppsala. Community building activities such as sharing experiences, the network building between local farmers and consumers and the development of a more sustainable way of living are at the core of the organisation. Moreover, it is possible

for everyone to engage in the forest garden ‘Flogsta Mat’, which entails a patch of land in the Flogsta district.

It is important to mention that BraMaten is not active as a local food distributor and Flogsta Matcooperativ closed down this year for an indefinite period. The initiatives, which deal with food production, are The Campus Garden and Flogsta Matcooperative. Food distribution from local farmers, which operate close to Uppsala, is handled by UltiMat, REKO Boländerna, Svenska Delikatesser and currently on hold BraMaten. Also, food waste is being handled by the organisation Bruised Food Club, which is taking care of food waste from different locations in Uppsala and distributing it on their weekly markets.

7. Results and Analysis

This chapter deals with the results from the interviews. The findings are based on the conceptual framework, elaborating on social innovation and food democracy. To avoid incoherency between the different concepts, the subchapter “7.3. Into Perspective” illustrates the possible cooperation to achieve SFST. Lastly, the challenges of Uppsala’s AFNs derived from the interviews are being presented.

7.1. The Impacts of Social Innovation

As the short descriptions of the different initiatives highlight, the spectrum of AFNs in Uppsala is diverse. Different services for community building, education, active participation etc. are being offered regularly in order to engage citizens. Additionally, the possibility to shop local Swedish products is given in small convenient shops, as pick up locations for direct farmer and customer contact and as food boxes. Uppsala’s AFNs offer a diversity of passionate people who demonstrate how local FS can be organised in different ways, while tackling context specific challenges. Those AFNs are not only making it possible and easier to shop locally produced food but they also offer various opportunities for the citizens to educate themselves about SFS via workshops, field trips, study circles and the AFNs social media. There are limitations as most of the AFNs are dependent on volunteers and active consumers and it is a complex endeavour to develop a business plan, which could contribute to make those AFNs economically sustainable. Nonetheless, as social sustainability is often left out in political, national discussions, Uppsala’s AFNs build, probably unintentionally, important networks and contribute to a SFST.

One initiative, the Bruised Food Club, could also rewind their success in numbers for 2020, as they saved 7.5 tonnes of food with 59 volunteers and 1530 market visitors. Despite the ongoing pandemic and other hurdles these number suggest that a huge success as food waste occurs due to the failure of affluent nations to handle their resources sustainably. In regards to social innovation, new ideas lead to overcome the obstacles and continue adapted to the circumstances with preventing food waste. Other AFNs also profited from the COVID-19 pandemic as they could either offer save grocery shopping environments or the generally higher interest of

citizens to support local producers. The affected interviewer stated that due to the extra time people get from working from home, they started to roam through their neighbourhood more and found their local shop. However, the question of “Why shop local?” is on the agenda as it is important to reflect on the impact one is causing either individually or within an AFN. Different opinions are welcome as one interviewee stated *“Different REKO groups have different opinions: I think it's good that we also have a bit of different opinions, because that's how you create something.”* Active reflection and participation in AFNs enable interest to shape the environment in a collaborative manner, where different ideas transform the status quo.

With the BraMaten Research Report students with different backgrounds elaborated the best practices on how to improve the local FS in the Uppland region. *“Our role is indirectly trying to learn best practices and share those and hopefully improve the alternative food networks”* that statement by an interviewee expresses the context-based approach to understand and learn about the circumstances of AFNs in the Uppsala region and thus elaborating best practices to meet real social needs. This very detailed report shows the dedication and beliefs of people who aspire a more just, economically viable and environmentally friendly food system.

Other AFNs are offering active participation in community gardening, giving citizens the possibility to actively engage in food production. *“Planting your own food can really affect the way you think about food”* and help to understand the time and physical effort it takes to grow food and all the steps until it reaches the plate. The educational impact of Uppsala’s AFNs might be an important contributor to make societies aware that they can be part of a food growing community. Not only does community building within the city of Uppsala evolve but some AFNs also connect producers, particularly farmers, with consumers via storytelling on their websites, field trips or online meetings. There is a huge burden on farmers when it comes to sustainability practices as they are expected to grow organically, keep their soils healthy, do not pollute the environment and be resource efficient. However, they are not being compensated for the additional input and output as the economic market only rewards the product and not the actual work. In particular, the *“frustration among small producers to, they need other channels to sell their foods [...] small producers cannot cooperate with retailers”* highlights the importance of AFNs for small producers who are able to get compensated through them. Therefore, AFNs create more just supply chains for sustainable farmers who do not have the extra time and money to invest in the distribution of their produce.

Another social characteristic of AFNs is that they have a common goal they want to achieve. The intention usually regards to *“How can we go one step beyond where we are now, not just selling people food but actually building on the local food network in Uppsala”*. A strong network can help to enhance the intention of AFNs

in their goals as resources become easier to allocate, like people, material, tools, etc. When it comes to competitiveness with other AFNs, it is not seen as a threat but rather an opportunity to spread awareness and contribution to a more sustainable society. As one interviewee stressed, *“we should look at the bigger picture and cooperate rather than keeping the competition even in mind”*. Additionally, every AFN has a different concept and instead of displacing each other, they complement each other, bringing the society different options, which suit them best.

7.2. A Democratic Food System

To get a political view of the local FS in Uppsala, interviews for the municipality of Uppsala and direct contact with the persons involved in the regional strategy Uppsala Ät Upp were tried to be established but unfortunately no interviews could be organised. In the interviews that took place difficulties with reaching the municipality for collaboration were expressed. However, strong collaboration of the municipality and Flogsta Matkooperativ occurs where Flogsta Matkooperativ is taking care of an area, which they turned into an edible forest for the residents in the Uppsala district Flogsta, known for their student housings. Not sufficient information could be gathered to understand the Uppsala regional food strategy in-depth and only the information from the internet could be used for the analysis. Moreover, Hassanein's (2008) five specific key dimensions of food democracy are used to consider Uppsala's AFNs in the light of food democracy.

Collaborating towards food system sustainability

The interviews showed that the collaboration within the initiatives' or businesses' practices is marked by participation of different kinds of individuals who want to do something good related to food issues. Weaknesses in the food supply chain like access to the market, food waste and fair compensation of local farmers, producers and distributors are being addressed with various efforts by the AFNs in different ways. Passion about food is an important driver for people to get involved in AFNs in Uppsala, which highlights the importance of meaningful participation of individuals in shaping the food system (Hassanein 2008) as one interviewee is expressing: *“I have another job and I am able to dedicate my time to this because I am really interested in local food and I want to see the mat cooperative succeed and [...] I feel quite passionate about local”*. A weakness in the ecosystem of AFNs in Uppsala is the little collaboration with other initiatives, businesses or municipality and an overall common goal, which could contribute to a more effective implementation and success. Most of the AFNs enable individuals to get involved with their own ideas and skill set.

Becoming knowledgeable about food and the food system

The disconnection between food production and food consumption has been acknowledged by many researchers. One interviewee identified that *“a kind of political idea that to create a closer relation between consumer and producer and food and also the landscape where the consumer should understand that if they buy food direct from the producer, it will make a difference in their region, in their landscape where they live”*. The AFNs provide through different channels the possibility for the public to get involved in different aspects of the food supply chain. Many of the AFNs offer the possibility to participate in food production and others create a direct link between the farmer and the consumer through local food purchases. The control of the food supply chain is directed to the people in the vicinity of Uppsala County. Food systems is a term for a big summary of different activities, skills and knowledge and through educational offers such as workshops, participation in community gardens, events and social media presence, more knowledge can be channelled to people who are interested in food systems. AFNs established important infrastructure for a SFST and they are *“like the first aid going there just to tackle the symptoms or the first consequences but then the other approach is to try to prevent this problem from happening and raise awareness.”* AFNs are reducing the gap between production and consumption through transparency and locality but also contribute to the education of citizens about food systems. With more knowledge and awareness about existing food issues more participation can be achieved (Hassanein 2008).

Sharing ideas about the food system with others

It is easy to appear overpowering with brighter visions of the future when one is convinced of some greater ideas but it is an important part of democracy to include the views of many. Helpful for better decision making and action is when ideas are shared to work towards a common goal. One AFN describes it that Uppsala's AFNs are *“aiming in the same direction. We all want the same thing”* but *“one of the things, which is lacking, is a more formal, a more structured local food network.”* Due to the weak collaboration of the AFNs important discussions are missing and also citizens do not know of their existence or what they are actually about. From the interviews information about what the initiative or business is about is an obstacle in engaging more people.

Developing efficacy with respect to food and the food system

The AFNs in Uppsala offer the citizens to switch from being passive consumers to actively engage in the process of food production, food waste prevention or getting more engaged in terms of knowing where their local food comes from. A big challenge for AFNs is that societies are pretty much built on convenience and

AFNs, which deal with the distribution of food, make it a bit less convenient for the consumer to shop locally and *“in order to if you want to change things, you cannot have passive consumers and you cannot have people who just look upon themselves as consumers. You must have consumers that think that they are also citizens”*. Nevertheless, the added value of locally produced food such as organic, emission reduced, animal friendly, freshness, support of local farmers and the knowledge for the consumer that they know where their food comes from is important. Even though the majority of the AFNs in Uppsala are organised by students, they are inclusive to national as well as international people. Some of the AFNs run by students want to become more professional and economically viable, so that the work of AFNs can be more established and offer employment. *“We were just like a bunch of young people wanting to do something good but now we want to take this seriously, I think it is about time to think about a business model ... we have the right to have a business model and a part of the sustainability of the organisation is economical viability.”*

Acquiring an orientation towards the community good

Food democracy is inclusive for the human and non-human world, thus people in the AFNs are aware of the impact of industrial food production and the untransparent processing and distribution systems, *“it is absolutely necessary to have a local food system if we are going to have a more sustainable, not only food system, but also a sustainable society”*. The pandemic showed that Uppsala’s AFNs could adapt to the safety measures or even beyond, as for controlling the numbers of customers in the shop to make a safe shopping experience possible, organised pick-up events with social distancing or switching meetings, workshops, lectures or online events added the opportunities for citizens to participate safely in activities. A strong community is an important factor in food democracy as it not only highlights the importance of support and interdependence, but also the public good and well-being gets into the focus. People want to be able to participate in the decision making of their community in their area of interest and in a democratic society this should be possible.

7.3. Into Perspective

A systemic change comes down to the fundamental change of the status quo within a system and can be applied in the development from a global food system to a local food system when the awareness about necessity for change reaches the society. Figure 4 visualises how AFNs can reach different outcomes derived from the analysis such as SFST, food democracy, community resilience and economic development. From the literature review other possible outcomes were identified

such as the concepts of food justice, food sovereignty and food security. As demonstrated with the theoretical exploration of food democracy, AFNs with the help of social innovation have different approaches to develop their local FS. The influence of the National Food Strategy and the Regional Action Plan can alter the effect of AFNs. Those two can impose essential influence on either support or hinder AFNs work in achieving their goals. Support can be financially but also collaboration or supporting policies can contribute to the effects of AFNs and facilitate a local SFST. However, no support or even making operations of AFNs more difficult can not only eliminate already existing structures but also weaken the effects. Therefore, the National Food Strategy as well as the Regional Action Plan have the power to either increase or decrease the value AFNs are bringing to the society.

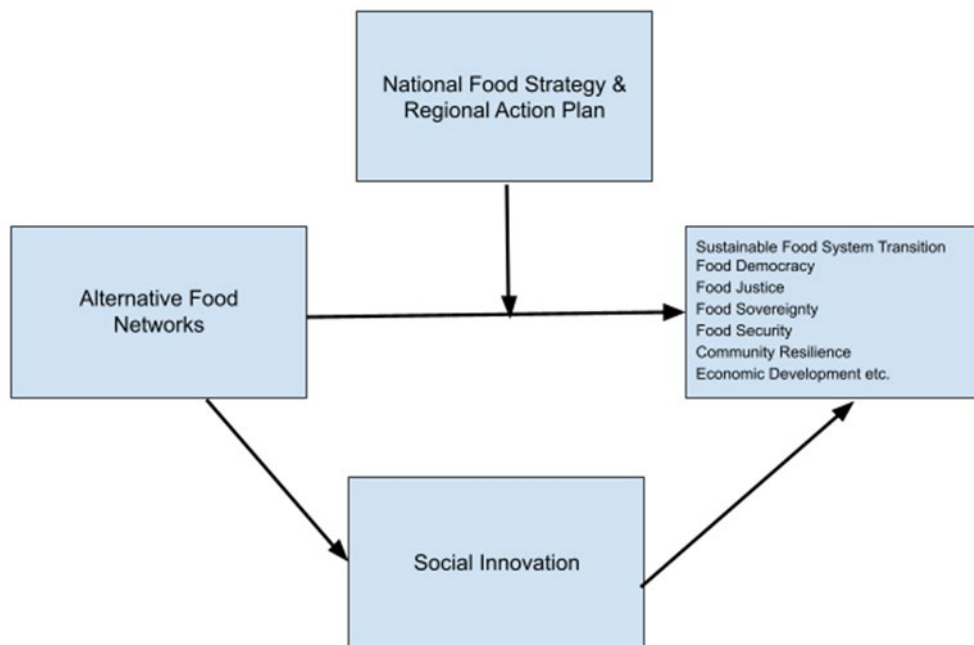


Figure 4. The interrelation and effect of AFNs when taking strategies and social innovation into account

7.4. Challenges for Alternative Food Networks in Uppsala

From the interviews, different challenges have come up, which make it difficult for AFNs to develop in certain areas and fulfil their potential. The main challenges can be summarised into economic viability, the discrepancy of interest and engagement of citizens, a missing organisational network system in Uppsala and partially the current COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the challenges align with what other

researchers found, especially economic viability is seen as a big challenge to achieve in AFNs.

Not every AFN has a focus on economic gain, but it becomes clear that in relation to the time invested and the passion about one's own work and dedication, economic viability becomes more important. It is different when people rely on monetary compensation when it is their business and in one case the owners need additional separate jobs to be able to continue their business. The interviews highlighted that there is little turnover, which already needs to be used to cover expenses. The drive to achieve an economic stand varies as one AFN describes it as *"it is economically viable, we are not making a loss but we are not making a huge profit [...] we are floating"* and they had to raise their membership price not for economical gain but to be able to run more activities like study visits or starting a podcast. On the other hand, some want to take their ambition more seriously and develop a business plan, reinventing themselves and produce a source of income for providing services or selling products: *"We do not really know how to run this and we do not want to run a community organisation based on volunteers, so moving more into consultancy and project management."* It seems like the opinions are divided and although passion plays an important role, those AFNs cannot only run on passion as a lot of time and effort are being invested. Furthermore, there is the polarisation about AFNs being compensated when they offer farmers like digital solutions to sell their produce. So, AFNs *"are just doing it for free, so they are making it work but they are not getting compensated."*

Beside economic viability, another challenge is the low engagement level of citizens but also the discrepancy between knowledge and interest and actual support from the academical side. It seems like the commitment of the citizens is a big obstacle to grow for AFNs and continue their activities. *"It's not just members who, you know, pay for the food, but it's having active members who can do stuff"*. The passivity of consumers was brought up as one factor, which needs to change as part of the sharing economy is the reliance on free labour like volunteering. Another aspect is the misleading high member numbers on the social media platforms, which indicate that a certain amount of people knows about those AFNs but those numbers can be classified as passive because they are not indicating the actual active participation. According to AFN with 15.000 members on Facebook, *"most of that people, they have not been visiting [...] at all [...] I mean, it is nice that they are member but I also been thinking about why are they members when they are never shopping [...]"* The passivity can be also observed in the academical sphere where there is a high interest in working with questions about food sustainability connected to locality but from personal experience of the interviewees, there is a huge gap between theoretical interest and active participation. One interviewee phrased it that way:

“Put your money where your mouth is. No, but it is amazing, actually, I am always amazed the amount of people who are doing research, you know, like doctorates and whatever, doing all this research on local sustainable food systems who go on and on and on about how it is so good to have these local sustainable food systems and we should all be doing this and supporting all of this and they do not become members of their local food cooperative at SLU, which is the very place where they work. [...] It never stops amazing me why these people do not do in practice what they talk about in theory.”

Another interviewee also pointed out that beside the low active engagement of academics the knowledge gap of hands-on experience diminishes the efforts of improving a food system when they do not know anything about farm labour; *“if you look upon a lot of the research that is being done on how we shall create a sustainable agriculture, it worries me because there you have a lot of people who does not know anything at all about how agriculture functions. That is a problem. That is a great problem.”* It is possible that the passivity can be also observed in the academical rows but it might be also related to that the useful knowledge generated in universities is not reaching the public.

What has been pointed out in some interviews is that an organisational and local food network system is lacking in Uppsala to drive forward a more SFST. *“I think it would be really, really good if there was a local food network, an actual structured, formal local food network”*, which is aware about the AFNs, a contact point for diverse issues and which helps to strengthen collaborative relationships. To strengthen the existing AFNs the wish was expressed to have an organisational office or *“umbrella organisation”* with one or two people in charge who *“may be working a lot with finding new producers and one network may be one to focus and the delivering part or how to get the food in the countryside into the city in a cheap and effective way”*. The interviewed AFNs are very busy and do not have time and resources to organise and manage every single task and drive the change forward. The general network is not very strong between the AFNs as mostly the student-run AFNs are aware of the presence of the other ones but still do not collaborate effectively or at all. *“I think establishing networks is a very important step to take towards the driving change or transitioning to a more sustainable way of living because we need to stay united and work together.”* A coordinator could be helpful with communication and organisational work and allocating and managing different kinds of resources. Apparently, cooperatives never lasted long and *“the problem with those initiatives as well, that it is hard to get them sustainable and for a long term”* but a central coordination office might be helpful to support the AFN landscape. Another obstacle might be that the student-led AFNs are marked by a continuous change of members as new (international) students want to get involved in the community and benefit from the socialising opportunities but when they

finish their degrees, they leave Uppsala. The Swedish context needs to be examined as well because things are handled differently and as AFNs rely on social contribution the barrier of inclusion can be either higher or lower.

Regarding the Swedish innovation system, one interviewee points out that it “*is not designed for small companies in the countryside*” and therefore “*apart from describing the needs of innovation and research, is it to describe these gaps and we need a restructured innovation system*”. Moreover, not only should the innovation system include small companies in the countryside, but also small initiatives and businesses in the urban setting are being left out. Those gaps are for example little financial support, little power of decision making, access to resources and policies, which support small-scale ideas.

8. Discussion

For this chapter the previous three research questions serve as a structure. The contribution of AFNs to a SFST, active, political participation of citizens in food issues and the involvement of social innovation to achieve local food goals are being discussed.

The results indicate that the investigated AFNs have a diverse potential to influence the FS in Uppsala. The findings suggest that there are passionate people in Uppsala who want to establish a local food network benefiting the people in the region; from farmers to volunteers and businesses up to consumers. In line with Grauerholz and Owens (2015), the results show that through active engagement, AFNs imply positive impacts in the society and solve local food system issues. Not only do the AFNs actively address food supply chain dysfunctions, but they also build a diverse infrastructure in the community. Even though social innovation is not a known concept within the AFNs, those AFNs incorporate, to certain extents, meaningful participation and social implications of social innovation, regarding sustainable development. In connection to food democracy, the AFNs have the capacity to support a local SFST through their range of services and give citizens the opportunity to actively participate.

Addressing the first research question about the contribution of Uppsala's AFNs to a SFST, the results might suggest that the AFNs have true potential to achieve a systemic change. However, based on Booth and Coveney (2015), it is very unlikely that AFNs can achieve a deep, systemic impact within the industrial FS but rather coexist within the current system and give citizens a choice in supporting local FS. SFST is not built on the all or nothing principle and, as simply as von Oelreich and Milestad (2017) are highlighting it, "even small-scale change is valuable". The added value through community building, education, participation etc. is rather, enriching the diversity of a community to shape a food system, which addresses various social needs. The AFNs offer, with their holistic approaches, resistance against agro-food players like big retailer chains and industrial farming, which are undermining the work of local small-scale farmers and make it more difficult to receive fair wages. More importantly, AFNs invest the time, which small-scale farmers usually do not have, in promoting locally produced food and in providing

farmers a platform to be seen and heard. The impactful problems deriving from a globalised food system cannot be tackled by a single society and shifting the focus to raise awareness about local food related issues makes it possible to find solutions which are achievable. The biggest local problem is not the global food systems, but it is convenience, which nurtures unjust and destructive structures within. As Clapp (2016) framed it, a people-centred approach can mobilise people to strengthen their position to achieve societal benefits and lead to the increase of local food economies.

When it comes to the political dimension, as the second research question aims to discover, concerning the presented national and regional food strategies, is it astonishing that AFNs are not being considered in the efforts of a SFST. Collaboration is one of the major gaps in achieving SFST between government, economical actors, academia and civil society. The results agree with the claim Domanski and Kaletka (2018), who see governance structure as a central role for achieving progress within a society. Nonetheless, AFNs derive from civil societies, but they are little, or not involved, co-creation endeavours within their region. Unfortunately, clarification regarding citizen involvement in achieving regional, sustainable FS ambitions, could not be obtained as interviews with those responsible for the action plan Ät Uppsala län were rejected. From the interviews arose that collaboration with Uppsala's municipality could be beneficial for some AFNs as access to different resources like stakeholders, material, special area etc. could be easier. Not only AFNs can contribute from a collaboration, but also the municipality can gain support in reaching their food sustainability goals from the diverse portfolio of Uppsala's AFNs as Figure 4 illustrates.

Including the concept of food democracy leads to importance of active participation of citizens in the decision making of their region. There is a lot of knowledge and, in particular, passion, from the people engaged in AFNs who recognised the necessity of taking action. Consumers became very passive in the last decades and more disconnected from the food they are buying. The results have demonstrated that AFNs can contribute to a more democratic FS but with the support from political instances, the work of AFNs would gain more value and develop better. When it comes to SFST it is not only about the right balance between the actors, but it is about sustaining liveable conditions on our planet. As the planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009) and additionally, the Doughnut Economies (Raworth 2020) emphasise, there is currently and probably only one planet which can be inhabited by the human species. Therefore, it is alarming that in multiple dimensions, human influence has crossed the borders for a dignified and safe livelihood in the nearby future. It is not surprising that researchers are constantly alerting the world population to take action.

The third research question elaborates how the social dimension of sustainability work can be strengthened through the implementation of the concept of social innovation. Spreading the ideas of social innovation might help to manifest the importance of social sustainability in policy making, as it is being neglected in the presented national, as well as regional strategies. Giving civil societies more power of decision enables them to participate in the construction of values and ideas, which meet the societies' social needs with social services. Creating such opportunities is being supported by different researchers, such as, Clapp (2016), Hassanein (2008), Prost et al. (2018) etc. Through diverse options, from new ideas, products, services etc., citizens can self-actualise themselves and find a role in society, which might suit them best. Uppsala's AFNs derived mostly from strong ambitions, different skills and potential and even though economical validity is difficult to reach, it does not stop the AFNs to continue with what they believe is right and what is good for the society. Yet, little collaboration is a hurdle to develop full potential and it might be important to investigate if the AFNs offer what Uppsala's society needs for a systemic change. In particular, Logue (2019) stresses that the process and outcome of institutional change is a joined collaboration of multiple actors together bringing social innovation into focus. Consequently, SFST can be achieved through collaboration of the government, economy, academia and civil society as demonstrated in Figure 2 when it is based on "supportive and mutual beneficial relationships" (Andrée et al. 2019:21). The role of civil society in SFST can be promoted through the support of increasing the presence of social innovation in use of language. Technological innovation experiences already an understanding of many people that it has the potential for transformation, thus if social innovation could reach a similar level of understanding, people might understand their own power to achieve change.

Another aspect which arose from the results is that more collaboration and stronger networks could be beneficial to spread more awareness and make participation more attractive. Just because there is little network collaboration does not mean that there is no interest, but rather the lack of time, or other reasons, are obstacles. As most of the AFNs are run voluntarily, not enough time due to studies or work is left to engage thoroughly in an AFN. Additionally, the lack of volunteers makes it harder for the AFNs to fulfil their potential. The lack of a formally structured food network in Uppsala is missing where a person in a paid position, as in other countries, has an overview about the regional food landscape. From the results, it is also up for debate if the central organisation should be done by Swedish locals or Uppsala based individuals who have a better understanding of the societies mechanisms.

Social innovation is a concept, which addresses humans' abilities to actively participate and, on the contrary, technological innovation gives the impression that

technological forces bring the necessary change, but it might not bring about the change within societies to achieve SFST. AFNs are not the only solution for SFST and as Booth and Coveney (2015) pointed out. Nevertheless, the presented AFNs from Uppsala enable the possibility for consumers and active participants a direct connection with farmers, although Clapp (2016) identified the reduction of intermediaries as a challenge. The limitation about the level of just and equitable FS from AFNs in Uppsala is beyond the scope of this project, but the facilitation of sustainable farming methods, even though classified by Clapp (2016) as another limitations, is being solved by Uppsala's AFNs in various ways as the impacts of conventional, industrial agriculture is a main concern. Social innovation leads to social interaction and activities when organised, for example, around a common goal what benefits current generation, but with the perspective of sustainability, future generations might be able to benefit as well. As an example, the communal gardens are benefiting to the understanding of citizens how food is being produced, while benefiting from healthy, fresh food but also the more people get educated about food systems, the more ideas can be generated to tackle problems, which might not yet be identified.

The main limitation of this study was to work with polysemous terms such as sustainability, local, social etc. and concepts, which are not well-defined. Losing track on the journey to work with bottom-up solutions, in regards to SFST, is easy as there is a difference between theoretical and application-related possibilities to contribute to sustainability matters. As described in Chapter 3, the research design was structured to bring about validated results as much as possible. Nonetheless, exploratory research design might reflect a current situation of a phenomenon, but it can change over a period of time. Therefore, this research draws attention to current landscape of AFNs in Uppsala, their current contribution to food democracy and their connection to social innovation. The pandemic is another major influence as it disrupted the AFNs actual operations, sometimes for the negative, but also to the positive. In the beginning of the research, this was not considered, but during the interviews, the influence of the current pandemic were mentioned repeatedly. Even though the impact of the pandemic on the AFNs affected the capacity of AFNs to continue their missions, it also revealed the capacity and resilience to deal with external shocks.

9. Conclusion

In the light of intensifying global imbalances, systemic change is an urgent necessity to be steered onwards. Global challenges, which are connected to the FS, are too big a task to be resolved by individuals due to its complexity and notion of economical scale up. Nonetheless, narrowing the scope of reach to regional contexts is a possibility to achieve change, which is urgently necessary. AFNs are playing an important role because they not only identify the regional problems in the area, they have the chance to achieve change, but they also address with a diverse portfolio of solutions the societal needs. Specifically, Uppsala's AFNs developed their strategies to tackle problems in the supply chain, creating opportunities for the public to not only develop their sustainable practices but also engage in community building, education opportunities and the support of people who, not only produce healthy food, but also take care of the land and the resources they are using: farmers. The Swedish food strategies imply that competitiveness and economical gain are still prevalent in achieving SFST, even though those two drivers cannot be held responsible to achieve sustainable goals. Contrary, AFNs are taking over the responsibility increasing the democratic landscape within Uppsala.

Social innovation is not given enough attention in its capacity to achieve SFST. The change towards sustainability within a system cannot be implemented by governmental instances but rather bottom-up participation from AFNs can bring about the change, which is needed to achieve regional goals. In Uppsala, the two main barriers for more impact of AFNs are the low level of participation from the civil society and the underdeveloped network system. Further research would be necessary to elaborate why there is little engagement, possibly connected to insufficient knowledge about the existence of the AFNs, mere lack of interest or other. Particularly of interest is the academia and the discrepancy of theoretical knowledge and actual engagement in AFNs.

In the end, it comes to deal with the issues, which are individually most relevant, and this happens when within its own reach, the current problems are identified and the social resources are mobilised to create context-based solutions.

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Appendix 1. Interview Guide

A starter

- Could you briefly describe your role/position in ... [business/initiative]?

Topic 1 (Sustainable transition/transformation)

- How do you view a sustainable food system?
- What do local sustainable food systems mean to you? And what is their impact?
- What is your opinion on sustainable food transition/transformation?
- Which role do you take part in to foster a sustainable food transition?
- What do you consider key challenges to achieve sustainable food systems in Sweden/Uppsala/Stockholm?

Topic 2 (Networks)

- What is your opinion on food networks? What do you include in it?
- Could you briefly describe how your organisation is connected to other businesses/initiatives/persons?
- How do you perceive the local connectedness within your network? X
- Which opportunities or prospects do you see within your current network?
- What do you consider as key challenges for collaboration? What do you suggest to improve those network relationships?

Topic 3 (Relational-capital)

- Where do you see necessary improvement for cooperation? Which stakeholders would you like to involve?
- Which potential opportunities do you see in co-creation?
- What do you consider to be the main barriers/opportunities of working as a co-operative?
- Which modes of coordination are useful for you? What could be developed more?

Topic 4 (Business opportunities)

- What are current trends in terms of sustainable food transition?
- How do you think network relationships can support the sustainable food transition?
- What do you consider to be the main opportunities in sustainable local FS?
- How can food sustainability be translated into the mainstream?
- How does your business/initiative relate to competitiveness with other businesses/initiatives?

Popular Science Summary

The mass production of food brings many challenges like global warming for future generations thus it is important to make food systems sustainable. From a political perspective, many ways to improve food systems focus on efficient resource use and how to save money but social movements usually do not get attention. Citizens around the world found different possibilities to improve food production like organic farming or to reduce CO₂ emissions from delivery to supermarkets and people who buy food. Fixing food related problems where they happen is important to those citizens and their activities are often referred to as Alternative Food Networks (AFN). What I wanted to achieve with this project was to identify different AFNs in the Swedish city Uppsala and to find out what those AFNs do to make food systems more sustainable. To gather information, I decided to hold interviews with people who are engaged in AFNs. Social innovation became important because it shows how citizens can achieve change with the resources they have in a community. Moreover, political strategic plans were looked at like the National Food Strategy of Sweden and Åt UPPsala län. Active participation of citizens in solving food related problems showed a strong connection to food democracy to achieve goals and to help solving challenges, which is investigated in this project. The results show that AFNs can be helpful to support the goals of the political strategic plans even though they are not getting enough support where they are based such as money, political support or helping hands from other citizens. AFNs will not solve all the problems from food systems but they are helping to give people who consume food different possibilities to buy food or even produce it thus helping to make food systems better.