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## Participation for just governance of food-system transition

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### ABSTRACT

Sustainability transitions governance needs to be inclusive and participatory and the question of justice is crucial for making effective and acceptable changes possible. But how do we ensure adequate participation in governance processes and enable reconciliation between competing goals in relation to sustainability transitions? Transition management highlights the need for participatory and reflexive governance processes to enable sustainability transitions. However, due to participant selection and limitations in chosen approaches, deliberative and participatory forums may have difficulties ensuring justice and legitimacy. A systemic and practice-oriented perspective on deliberation points to the need to widen deliberative activities and analysis on multiple sites, but the connection to transition governance and justice remains weak. In the context of food systems, various movements and networks, such as alternative food networks, food-policy councils, and food-sovereignty movements, work to create a more just and sustainable food system. They form an interesting manifestation for participation in just food governance and can provide new ideas for the development of more equitable governance practices. We analyze studies on civil society participation in food-system transitions to develop understanding of how to improve just transition governance. Based on this investigation, more just sustainability transition governance requires systemic and reflexive deliberation that is also capable of accounting for the role of social movements. There furthermore is a need for institutional arrangements to support this kind of decision making.

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Just transition; sustainability transitions; alternative food systems; food sovereignty; food-policy council; systemic participation

### Introduction

Governance is a core research area requiring further attention in sustainability transitions (Patterson et al. 2017; Köhler et al. 2019). There is an increasing need for knowledge on how to facilitate and bring about transitions while simultaneously ensuring their fairness. Appropriate policy mixes (Kivimaa and Kern 2016; Edmondson, Kern, and Rogge 2019) and policy coherence (Huttunen, Kivimaa, and Virkamäki 2014) are crucial in designing efficient transition policies. The understanding of dynamics between policy instruments and how they accelerate or hinder sustainable practices and innovations, as well as how they phase down unsustainable practices, is of critical importance (Kanger, Sovacool, and Noorköiv 2020; Rogge and Reichardt 2016). However, a focus on policy instruments and the interplay of policy mixes is alone inadequate for safeguarding social justice and the legitimacy of sustainability transitions. Thus, a wider approach to transition governance is needed.

Justice in transition has been conceptualized as consisting of three interlinked forms: distributional, recognitive, and procedural (McCauley and Heffron 2018; Williams and Doyon 2019; Kaljonen et al. 2021). These types are derived from research on environmental and energy justice (Schlosberg 2007; Sovacool et al. 2019). Just transition governance needs to account for all three forms of justice. Distributive justice considers the allocation of resources as well as harms and benefits caused by the transition. Thus, this form of justice focuses mainly on policy outcomes. The two other forms of justice suggest a different emphasis. On one hand, justice as recognition pays attention to respecting and valuing different (groups of) people and their specific needs and situations with a particular interest in avoiding cultural and institutional discrimination. On the other hand, procedural justice is devoted to the fairness of decision-making procedures and pays attention to inclusion and exclusion in the procedures, as well as to capacity to influence the resultant decisions (Williams and Doyon 2019). These two forms of justice place decision-making

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processes, participation, and understanding of differences at the center of transition governance.

Food-system transition provides an important example for thinking about just transition and its governance. The current globalized food system is highly unjust and contributes to malnutrition, poor agricultural work conditions, unequal profit distribution within the food chains, and environmental problems (Escajedo San-Epifanio 2015; Kaljonen et al. 2021; Marsden, Hebinck, and Mathijs 2018). Food policies and governance suffer from participation deficits (Hospes and Brons 2016) that can be difficult to address with traditional deliberative practices due to the global nature of the inherent systems and problems are compounded by imbalanced power structures in food chains and rigid policy-making structures at the national level (Escajedo San-Epifanio 2015). Research on food justice, democracy, and food citizenship underlines the need for systemic changes to overcome existing injustices, while actively placing participating people at the center of fair governance procedures (Hassanein 2003). We have witnessed many social and citizen movements that have tried to find solutions to the injustices. Consumers and producers have allied in novel alternative food networks with the aim of building more just food production, distribution, and consumption practices (Baker 2004; Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012). Food-policy councils have also been formed to regain political and economic power at local and regional levels (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015; Prové, de Krom, and Dessein 2019). Worldwide, civic protests have appeared that seek food sovereignty by striving especially to foster the rights of local farmers and indigenous people in the unequal food-production structures (Patel 2009; Wittman 2015).

These emerging movements and participatory governance experiments collectively constitute an important field of research for the governance of just transition. In sustainability transition studies, interest in public participation has long concentrated upon the shielding and upscaling of niches (Smith et al. 2016; Voß, Smith, and Grin 2009). Especially, transition arenas and arenas for development have been created to support the empowerment of niche actors in facilitating change (Loorbach 2010; Hyysalo et al. 2019; Hölscher et al. 2019). Public participation researchers have, however, criticized these approaches as too narrow to account for the multiplicity and potentials of public participation in transition governance (Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves 2018). Recent cross-fertilization with deliberative policy analysis and action research provides support for negotiating and designing transition policies in a

participatory or even deliberative manner (Bartels and Wittmayer 2018; West, van Kerkhoff, and Wagenaar 2019). Furthermore, a constructivist approach on participation has begun to widen understanding of the scope of participatory activities and their interlinkages within sustainability transitions thinking (Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves 2018). These studies see the governance of sustainability transition increasingly as a complex and controversial task which requires understanding of diverse societal processes “of grassroots mobilisation, collective action, cultural expression and democratic struggle” (Stirling 2019). Thus, this work points to the need to explicitly involve civic participation.

In this article, we examine emergent public participation in food-system transition and ask how these multiple civil society movements can improve our understanding of just transition and just governance of the food system. We start by introducing deliberative policy analysis, its connections to transition management, and the systemic turn to participation which sets the groundwork for analyzing social movements as relevant for governance. We continue with examples from public participation in food-system transition and conclude with the key lessons for just food-system governance.

## Participation for just transition

### *Deliberative and participatory practices*

Governments and policy and transition scholars increasingly apply and study different deliberative and participatory practices as methods to improve the opportunities for public participation in decision making (Warren 2009; Elstub and Escobar 2019) and with respect to sustainability transitions (Bartels and Wittmayer 2018; Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves 2018). In the context of transition management, researchers have emphasized the role of participatory instruments in developing pragmatic approaches to govern and facilitate such transformations (Voß, Smith, and Grin 2009; Loorbach 2010; Goddard and Farelly 2018). Deliberative and participatory practices hold promise for improved trust and legitimacy in the policy processes, increased knowledge and empowerment of participants, and enhanced delivery of policies (Warren 2009; Wyborn et al. 2019). Hence, these procedures can be seen to contribute to all dimensions of just transition.

Deliberative and participatory practices include different kinds of forums, processes, and arrangements that are used to involve the public and stakeholders in decision making on public matters (Fung 2006; Moore 2016). They differ in the breadth of

participant involvement, communication, and collaboration utilized and how much influence they may have on policies (Fung 2006; Elstub and Escobar 2019). Traditionally, deliberative practices aim at creating a representative public sphere for debate around a selected issue and arriving at a judgment on the matter (Moore 2016). From a wider perspective, participation also involves partisan stakeholders with the aim of stimulating genuine debate. Instead of just consulting the public on their perspectives, the aim is to enable changes in perspectives and to reach an agreement. Thus, effective participatory and deliberative practices involve learning, knowledge exchange, and equal consideration of different arguments (Moore 2016).

Specific participatory mechanisms for sustainability transitions have been developed under the concept of transition management. Transition management focuses on long-term policy designs by creating spaces for searching, learning, and experimenting for key frontrunner groups (Hyysalo et al. 2019; Loorbach 2010). Transition-arena methodologies assist in participatory and more reflexive policy design, including creation of long-term visions, setting of goals, and establishment of transition pathways to realize the visions (Loorbach 2010; Hyysalo et al. 2019). Reflexivity and learning are key to transition arenas as the participants are expected to question their original positions and even to overcome power relations and the influence of dominant actors (Voß, Smith, and Grin 2009; Voß and Bornemann 2011).

From the perspective of justice, participatory and deliberative practices should enable negotiation on distributive impacts and mediation between different value positions resulting in public judgment on the matter (Moore 2016). They should provide space for recognizing diverse societal groups and provide means for monitoring and evaluating expert governance (Moore 2016). When connected to formal policy procedures, the deliberative practices bear the risk of being used as management and communication or research tools rather than actually allowing them to influence the decisions and resultant policies (Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016; Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2018).

Furthermore, while the aim is to facilitate recognition, enable equal participation, and increase democracy, the practices are not necessarily democratic and inclusive. This is often due to self-selection or pre-selection of participants. Deliberation among experts and other elite actors risks exclusion of perspectives not shared by the elite group and also influences which issues come to the political agenda and how the political processes are understood (Moore 2016; Voß, Smith, and Grin 2009). This

characterization also applies to transition arenas which aim at facilitating transitions and improving the capacities of the involved frontrunners (Hölscher et al. 2019; Hyysalo et al. 2019).

Even with the objective of representativeness, public consultations with deliberative participation often fail to include the weakest or the most vulnerable groups and their unique concerns (Wyborn et al. 2019). The selection of participants and the organization of the discussions in a specific event create a particular form of participation, which influences the outcomes, for instance, by framing the discussions under a distinctive context or by managing to engage a discrete set of people with power dynamics created in the process (e.g., Kok et al. 2021). This situation calls for increasing reflexivity regarding the assumptions behind participation and there clearly is a need for developing more inclusive procedures in which marginalized or vulnerable groups can also engage in shaping transitions (Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Kaljonen et al. 2019; Turnhout et al. 2020).

### ***Systemic approach to participation***

As a response to the criticisms, several scholars have in recent years taken a more systemic approach to deliberative democracy and participation (Elstub, Ercan, and Fabrino Mendonca 2016; Braun and Könniger 2018; Chilvers and Longhurst 2016; Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves 2018; Chilvers et al. 2021). From a systemic perspective, the context within which the deliberative practices operate is understood more widely. This also involves examination of the relationships between deliberative and non-deliberative practices in the political system, widening the notion of consultation to include multiple different venues. Thus attention is paid to the ways deliberative activities occur in multiple sites in society including legislative committees, social movements, mini-publics, social media, and even everyday conversation. Instead of making one excellent event, the focus is on the functioning of the wider deliberative system (Mansbridge et al. 2012) and the connections between the diverse deliberative activities and their linkages to the policy system (Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016). In practice, this can mean mapping the multiple ways participation around a particular issue occurs and using this diversity to create a more holistic picture of the different perspectives on the matter (Chilvers et al. 2021).

The systemic perspective can improve the democratic deficit and clarify the function and place of deliberative practices in the policy process (Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016). This is particularly



**Table 1.** Systemic understanding of participation from the perspective of just transitions.

Forms of justice	Wider space of participation
<i>Distributional justice</i> How are benefits and harms distributed?	<i>Object of participation</i> How does the selection and framing of policy issues influence their perceived impacts and resulting distributive effects? What impacts gain weight over others?
<i>Recognitive justice</i> Who is valued and given respect?	<i>Subject of participation</i> What kind of publics and other subjects of participation are involved and produced in the participation? How are the subjects and publics valued and respected?
<i>Procedural justice</i> Who is capable to participate and how can they influence decisions?	<i>Mode of participation</i> How do the modes of participation influence who is involved and how their perspectives are accounted for? How are different modes of participation used in decision-making processes?

relevant regarding recognition of vulnerable or marginal groups (Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016; Ercan, Hendriks, and Boswell 2017). Furthermore, the systemic approach acknowledges that different deliberative practices may perform different functions. Hence, not all single practices need to fulfill all ideals of deliberation. Only together should they create a deliberative whole (Moore 2016). This way, for example, an expert-focused transition arena may be complemented by other deliberative processes, which enable public contestation and critique.

With respect to just transition, it is clear that a systemic perspective on deliberation is needed to address not only procedural and recognitive justice but also distributional impacts. The visioning of transition pathways is not a single event and its realization does not happen within a single policy frame, but rather requires a long-term process, where changes are fitted to existing legislative and governance patterns (Patterson et al. 2017). Policy design is an interactive endeavor and is itself embedded in the political context, which it seeks to reconfigure (Kemp and Rotmans 2009). The systemic perspective to participation enables the following of multiple long-term activities and the accounting for their interactions and the consequences of policies.

In this respect, Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves (2018) propose a useful framework for widening participation in transition governance. According to these authors, (1) modes of participation (how participation happens), (2) subjects of participation (who participates), and (3) objects of participation (what the participation is about) all require extension. These dimensions enable an understanding of different collective participatory practices and how, via their performance, the modes, subjects, and objects of participation are co-produced. Multiple participatory practices connect within the dimensions and form wider spaces of participation. The spaces of participation are affected by and affect the existing political cultures that authorize certain participatory practices as more legitimate than others. This ecology of participation enables an examination

of the dynamics of participation and provides a wider context for exploring justice in transition governance.

We connect the spaces of participation to the three-dimensional view emphasizing the distributional, recognitive, and procedural justice in transition governance (Table 1). Focusing on objects of participation elaborates distributional justice by paying attention to how distributive impacts are perceived by the participants and which impacts appear more important than others in the space of participation. Recognitive justice is connected to subjects of participation, with an emphasis on the kinds of publics and subjects participating, respected, and produced in decision-making processes. Finally, procedural justice resonates with modes of participation and focuses on the ways the participatory practices themselves influence inclusion and opportunities to participate.

### Participation for food-system transition

To map the learnings from the civic initiatives, movements, and networks that aim to build more just food systems—the emergent spaces of public participation—we first conducted an exploratory literature review (Swedberg 2020). We used the keywords “food democracy” and “food citizenship” to focus the review on the core research themes related to participation in food studies. We conducted the exploratory search in December 2019 using the Web of Science database and searching for English language peer-reviewed articles with no limits on search period. As a result, we returned 98 articles, mainly in the field of social and political sciences. Based on these articles, we identified three spaces of civic participation: alternative food networks (AFNs), food-policy councils (FPCs), and food-sovereignty movements (FSMs). In the analysis, we focus on these categories because they are widely represented in the literature and they bring forward different aspects of public participation in food-system transition: local everyday practices as participation, participation in designing and implementing

local or regional food policy, and protests and opposition. The identified spaces of participation also present partially different spatial scales: a local community, a region or municipality, and the planet.

The categories can be seen as part of a more holistic food-justice movement which promotes more socially just, environmentally sustainable and locally rooted food systems and places citizens and active public participation in a key role for achieving those goals (Hassanein 2003; Andrée et al. 2019). However, there is considerable variation regarding the scale and scope of the desired changes between different movements and practices. Together they form an interesting manifestation of participation in just food governance. It is important to note that we are not claiming that these categories are the only ways of participation in moving toward a more just food system, nor that their claims and the practices that they push forward are effective ways for creating more sustainable and just food systems. Rather, our aim here is to analyze how these multiple spaces of participation can offer learning opportunities for more just transition governance.

Due to the explorative nature of our literature search, we do not systematically go through the searched literature, but rather focus on the selected categories. Using the framework presented in Table 1, we assess what kinds of spaces of participation each of these modes propose and how they relate to creating more just food systems.

## Alternative spaces of civic participation in food governance

### Alternative food networks

AFNs include diverse networked forms of food production, distribution, and consumption such as community gardens and farms, community-supported agriculture (CSA), food hubs, consumer cooperatives, and farmers' markets. Often AFNs aim to offer concrete alternatives to the dominant and globalized system of industrial food production (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012). As an object of participation, many AFNs are established to improve access to healthy and affordable food (e.g., Prost et al. 2019; Baker 2004) and they continue over time to be important objects of participation. In addition, the opportunity to participate in collective activities around food production and rebuilding relations between consumers and producers are core goals for the activities (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012). Thus, a central object of participation is also rebalancing power relations between food-system actors by increasing activity among consumers and providing more effective opportunities for small-scale

producers at the individual, community, and local levels. In addition, AFNs operating locally may acknowledge the cultural differences related to food better than the dominant food system and its governance.

AFNs enable participants to directly shape their food system in everyday food practices and to participate in food production, distribution, and consumption. Through engaging with AFNs, consumers can practice political consumption (Hashem et al. 2018) and take actions toward building more sustainable food systems (Forssell and Lankoski 2015). Simultaneously, some AFNs also create collectives and contribute to community development by aiming to create a more inclusive and sustainable food system that meets the needs of local people (Rico Mendez, Pappalardo, and Farrell 2021). As people participate in AFNs, they can learn about the food system, acquire new competencies and skills, and develop openness to different kinds of food and cultures (Hassanein 2003; Carolan 2017). Participation in an AFN can also act as the first step toward food citizenship and influencing food-system transition in society (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012; van Gameren, Ruwet, and Bauler 2015; Meyer et al. 2021; Rico Mendez, Pappalardo, and Farrell 2021).

Instead of pushing their goals in national policy arenas, AFNs usually focus on making the food systems more sustainable in practice. This enables participants to shape their own food system and related networks. In doing this, AFNs can, however, turn selective with regards to *subjects of participation*. In general, the AFNs lift up consumers and local and often marginalized food producers who might otherwise have difficulties in reaching consumers, representing an important shift from the dominant market logics in food systems (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012). Sometimes AFNs can also support the well-being and empowerment of vulnerable populations, for instance via the promotion of healthier and more sustainable eating (Baker 2004; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013; Malberg Dyg, Christensen, and Petersson 2020; Soper 2021). However, food-justice scholars have criticized AFNs for remaining silent on issues of ethnicity, gender, and class and replicating existing structural inequalities (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Bradley and Herrera 2016). Participating in AFNs requires resources, time, knowledge, and motivation which may not be accessible to all (Schupp et al. 2016; Fourat et al. 2020; Moon 2021).

Thus, the question of inclusion and exclusion connected to recognition is created via the modes of participation, which in AFNs are typically tangible and mundane practices such as partaking in cultivation practices, organization of collective activities,

and consuming more sustainably produced food. The modes of participation also influence the issues the AFNs are capable of addressing. From the perspective of food production, the creation of local food niches does not directly confront issues related, for example, to the employment conditions of food-chain workers (Myers and Sbicca 2015). However, when AFNs connect small-scale producers and consumers, they can raise the visibility of producers and increase appreciation of their work and products (Opitz et al. 2017). Then again, AFNs aiming at ecologically sustainable farming practices and fair prices for producers often require higher financial capacity, supplemental revenue streams, and sufficient access to land for those who operate the farms (Bruce and Som Castellano 2017; Hunter, Norrman, and Berg 2022).

Different AFNs have developed modes of participation to tackle justice-related problems. They have also committed themselves to social justice by recruiting women farmers and minority or immigrant-led businesses and focus on their capacity building as well as providing explicit recognition for conventionally unrecognized groups (Moon 2021; Soper 2021). The need to be more inclusive has engendered new forms of action such as farmers' markets operating in low-income black communities or campus farms for queer youth (Smith 2019). AFNs can also develop solidarity mechanisms related to payments and adapt cooperative operations and work slots to meet participants skills, resources, and preferences (Fourat et al. 2020).

Letting members participate in internal decision-making practices is typical for AFNs (Behringer and Feindt 2019). Some networks even represent participatory anti-politics which means an aim to advance alternative processes of social organization by rejecting political, economic, and social elites and emphasizing equality and building alternative sites of legitimacy (Flinders, Wood, and Corbett 2019). Certain AFNs pursue these objectives by working outside the formal political system which enables the creation of alternative spaces for more inclusive and democratic self-governance. In addition, by engaging citizens frustrated with processes of representative democracy and institutions these AFNs may also have transformative potential beyond the community. For example, they can launch discussions about food politics and create pressure to change regulatory frameworks or adjust the existing rules regarding organic farming (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012). However, disengagement with formal food politics, a frequent phenomenon for AFNs, can also mean that their transformative potential remains relatively low (Levkoe 2011).

### Food-policy councils

Food-policy councils (FPCs) are forums designed to address diverse food-system problems in access, distribution and sustainability of food, especially at local and regional levels (Bassarab et al. 2019; Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015; Sonnino 2019). FPCs originated in North America where the first council was established in 1982 (Blay-Palmer 2009; Mooney, Tanaka, and Ciciurkaite 2014). Since then, FPCs and other urban and regional food-policy initiatives and networks have gained momentum across Europe (Calori et al. 2017; Sieveking 2019).

The *objects of participation* in FPCs are constantly evolving and have also increased in scope over time. The evolution of policy issues in a Toronto FPC presents an example of this trajectory. The increased levels of hunger and poverty in the Canadian city were the fundamental reasons that advocates established one of the first FPCs (Welsh and MacRae 1998). Over the years, issues around food sovereignty and sustainability have multiplied the agenda and organizers have more expansively taken into account the concerns of farmers (Blay-Palmer 2009). While the initial focus clearly limited the understanding of food-system impacts around the availability of food, the ability of the FPC in Toronto to embrace a broader perspective on sustainable food systems demonstrates the capacity of FPCs to evolve and change according to the problems that they encounter.

At best, the FPCs have widened *the subjects of participation* and strengthened the capacities of local communities and various food-system stakeholders to participate in food governance at local and regional levels (Blay-Palmer 2009; Gupta et al. 2018). The participating communities are in a unique position to identify local problems and to respond to gaps in food security, to enhance public support for food-policy intervention, and to build capacity across institutions and policy sectors (Siddiki et al. 2015; Sonnino 2019). However, despite the seeming openness to the subjects of participation, FPCs risk the exclusion of more radical voices and the needs and views of those who do not have access to these spaces (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015). Thus also the inclusion of vulnerable or marginalized groups varies considerably across the FPCs (Bassarab et al. 2019; Prové, de Krom, and Dessein 2019). While many FPCs have their origins in food-security concerns, which highlights reaching out to food-insecure people, opening up to these populations would entail a "radically different [vision] than the status quo in which the state characterises the needs and desires of socially vulnerable populations" (Sze et al. 2009; see also Prové, de Krom, and Dessein 2019). In many cases, close



cooperation with formal governance processes and private sector stakeholders has forced the participants to adjust to government language and frameworks and to limit more radical visions from the agenda.

*The modes of participation* in FPCs vary. Most often, FPCs work as forums within or aside municipal or regional governments (Bassarab et al. 2019; Blay-Palmer 2009; Gupta et al. 2018). However, also grassroots-driven, bottom-up councils are increasingly common both in North America and Europe (Mooney, Tanaka, and Ciciurkaite 2014; Sieveking 2019). For instance, in Oldenburg Germany the FCP was established by active civil society volunteers (Sieveking 2019). FPCs provide policy advice ranging from producing full policy plans to specific strategic recommendations and problem identification (Siddiki et al. 2015). The councils also often channel funding to local projects which aim to strengthen selected aspects of the food system directly (Gupta et al. 2018). In this manner, FPCs, have played a major role in supporting community-based, third sector, or grassroots initiatives for enhancing food security or sustainability in cities (Blay-Palmer 2009). The ability of FPCs to build local governance capacity and to address structurally entrenched food-system challenges has depended heavily on how they can integrate both horizontally and vertically into the existing structures of food governance (Gupta et al. 2018; Sieveking 2019). Sourcing and maintaining funding on food issues and community actions forms another challenge for this mode of participation and its long-term governance (Bassarab et al. 2019; Blay-Palmer 2009).

Prové, de Krom, and Dessein (2019) compared FPCs in Ghent (Belgium) and Philadelphia (Pennsylvania, United States) and showed how modes of participation are critically linked to the subjects and objects of participation in the respective networks. In Ghent, the FPC was led from the top-down and the municipal government and its experts played an important role in defining the issues that matter for food governance. By contrast, in Philadelphia the understanding of food justice as grassroots and civic action was emphasized with greater influence being in the hands of local communities and neighborhoods. In Ghent, the organizational configuration resulted in an emphasis on professional farmers and the creation of a productive economic sector while in Philadelphia the focus was on supporting people who lacked access to sustainable food. The FCP actors explicitly recognized this situation and actively supported initiatives focused on the inclusion of minority groups. In Ghent, however, the FCP actors presumed the dominance of white middle-class involvement.

### **Food-sovereignty movements**

Transnational food-sovereignty movements (FSMs) are closely linked to alternative food practices and networks. One of the most visible examples, *La Via Campesina*, initially conceptualized food sovereignty as focused on local farmers and indigenous people and their right to food production and control over their own food system, in contrast to the global food industry (Desmarais 2002; Patel 2009). Thus, democratization of the food system is the core *object* of the FSM. As national governments were too weak to address the problems within the food system, peasants and farmers needed to find ways to be heard and to influence global processes as part of efforts to create alternative agricultural policies. The FSM responds to this need and forms an important movement that unites civic organizations around the world and giving voice to their concerns (Desmarais 2002).

The FSM widens participation from national policies to global trade agreements to make the concerns of peasants and indigenous people more tangible. Food sovereignty is a global question, which needs to be solved at an international level but also acted on locally (Patel 2009; Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). This particular framing of a food-policy problem is able to highlight the global inequalities related to food systems which are most readily visible on the local level. It contradicts the dominant market ideology and right to export food and emphasizes the rights to land and local resources of the inhabitants instead of multinational companies and international investors. An emphasis on agroecology frames the logic of cultivation in terms of ecological sustainability and places it as a central food-policy goal alongside food-related livelihoods and the right to food (Wittman 2011).

At national and local scales, the FSM influences national policies to better enable peasant livelihoods and agroecological cultivation practices (Wittman 2015; Schiavoni 2015). Food sovereignty is or has been part of national legislation for instance in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nigaragua, and Nepal and it has also made its way to municipal policy in Sedgwick, Maine (United States).

*As subjects of participation*, the FSM highlights the role of farmers, pastoralists, food workers, indigenous people, and migrants, as well as women, consumers, and citizens in food systems. The movement strives to make the voices of these actors heard in global trade venues and national agricultural forums (Pimbert 2008). The participation of marginalized food communities is needed in the entire policy process from goal setting to evaluation (Patel 2009) and the movement has made these communities more visible by creating opportunities

for them to advocate on behalf of their concerns. The FSM aims to affect food systems directly and has managed to raise new and previously unacknowledged issues and groups to discussions about food-system change (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). The most important demonstration of this is the concept of food sovereignty itself and the inclusion of peasant movements in the global debates of agrarian policy via *La Vía Campesina*.

The *modes of participation* operate at different levels from local cultivation practices to global negotiations. At the local level, a key way to achieve wider objectives is to empower vulnerable and underrepresented people. Especially in the global North, the FSM is entangled with AFNs and FPCs, which bring the food-sovereignty concern to local action and processes (Figueroa 2015; Routledge, Cumbers, and Driscoll Derickson 2018). Thus, participation in the FSM means diversification of those involved in various processes at different scales, which all contribute to food-system transition (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015).

As a heterogeneous social movement, food sovereignty includes radical variants (especially in the global South) such as land invasions to ensure the rights of peasants to land in Bolivia (Tilzey 2020) or similar land occupations in Bangladesh (Routledge, Cumbers, and Driscoll Derickson 2018). Protests, resistance, and opposition are important ways of participation, when participation via official political processes is difficult due to undemocratic or otherwise nonfunctional systems incapable of advancing radical transformations. Thus, instead of participating in existing decision-making structures, the movement often seeks to create new arrangements (Andrée et al. 2019).

Within the movement, food sovereignty emphasizes the roles of learning and knowledge exchange as modes of participation and as factors enhancing capacities for political involvement (Anderson, Maughan, and Pimbert 2019). In *La Vía Campesina*, for instance, a central component is the so-called *diálogo de saberes* (dialogue of knowledge) which is a multilevel dialogic process for exchange between different knowledges and ways of knowing (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014). It enables the building of internal consensus by creating hybridizing discourses that enable going forward with respect to the different traditions and conceptions (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2010). At the local level, learning in the FSM has occurred via farmer-to-farmer agroecology processes, where farmers communicate horizontally with their peers to learn agroecology practices. Similar learning occurs between farmer organizations.

The broad and sometimes conflicting objects of the movement have led to concerns regarding disparity as well as ability to incorporate its goals into government policies (Agarwal 2014; Wittman 2015). While the sovereignty movement emphasizes deliberation, consensus-seeking practices may downplay inequalities related to gender, race, and class as well as farmers' right to choose how to farm, implicating narrow framings in relation to subjects of participation (Agarwal 2014). The sovereignty movement often struggles to simultaneously account for global, national, and local autonomy and what it would mean in terms of democratic and deliberative governance (Wittman 2015). Wittman (2015) suggests pursuing food sovereignty via place-specific incentives, supported by a state and reinforcing participation in global policy arenas, most importantly the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, if food sovereignty means decentralizing power in the food system, it might even be impossible for national and global governance mechanisms to fully embrace its goals (Levkoe and Wilson 2019).

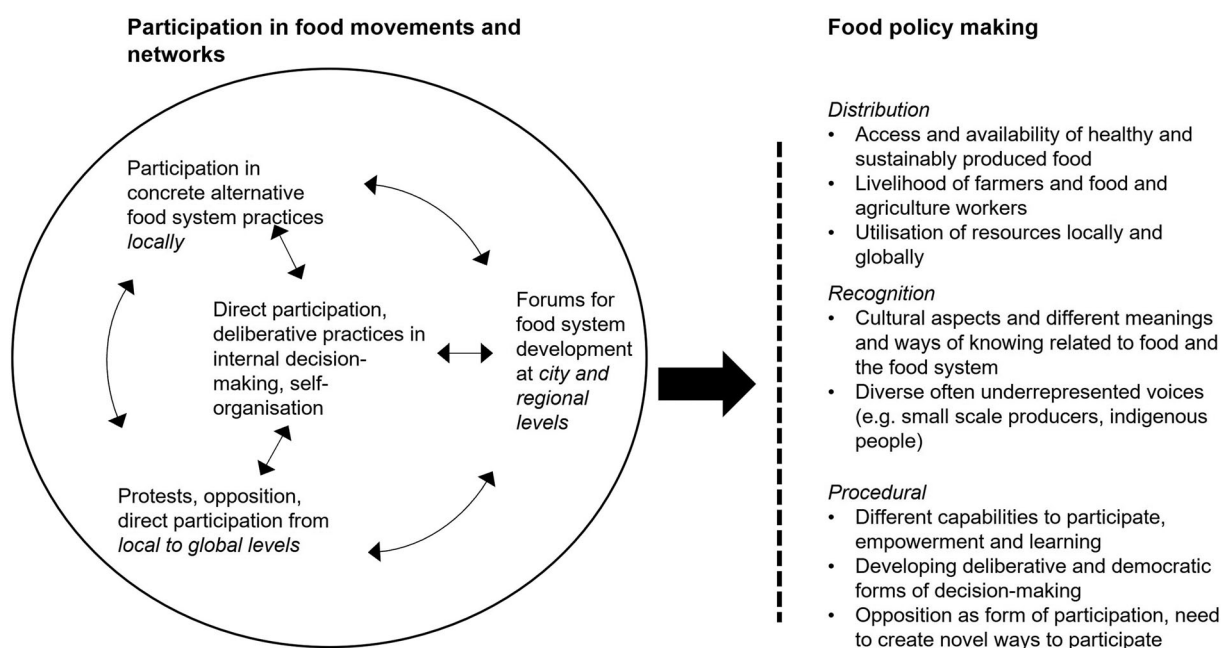
### **Alternative spaces of participation and justice**

The social movements and ways of civic participation examined in the prior parts of this section widen the objects, subjects, and modes of engagement with food-system governance with particular relevance for how justice could be better accounted for in food governance (Table 2; Figure 1).

The diverse civic movements and networks around food enable the expression of diverse voices often underrepresented in the existing structures of food governance. The three examples are complementary and partially overlapping and can be examined also as working on different levels of the food system. AFNs usually operate locally and remain detached from formal policy making. As such, they can better enable people with different capabilities to participate on their own terms and represent forms of civil society-based self-governance, which can create capacities and space for change toward sustainability (Renting, Schermer, and Rossi 2012; Sonnino 2019). Participation in concrete food practices offers a direct mode of involvement that enables learning and empowerment for those less willing or capable to express themselves in policy debates. The networks often have a small influence on wider food-system change and can connect only concerning selected and limited subjects. However, the engagement opportunities that they create can be highly meaningful for the participants (Aptekar 2015; Bornemann and Weiland 2019). The involvement of wider groups of people, would require also other modes of participation.

**Table 2.** Different aspects of participation in attempts to change the food system.

	Object	Subject	Mode
Community action/ alternative food networks	Rebalancing the power relations between food-system actors locally (increased activity of civil society actors and better opportunities for small-scale producers). Better access to healthy, environmentally sound, and culturally appropriate food. Individual change and empowerment. Community development.	Civil society actors, consumers, local farmers, low-income communities, migrants, elderly, children—diverse underrepresented people, but also those in better socio-economic situations.	Practicing alternative food production and consumption together and related learning Participatory internal decision-making practices. Creating public discussion that is able to change norms.
Food-policy councils	Tackle local and regional problems in food security, nutrition, and sustainability.	Third-sector civic organizations, NGOs, community members, neighborhoods, diverse food-system actors, municipal and regional officials.	Participation in the creation and implementation of a local or regional food policy at established forums. Deliberation and collaboration between actors, sectors, and food-system activities Project funding and support for local and community initiatives.
Food-sovereignty movements	Emphasis on social justice of the food system. Right of people to define their food and agriculture and access their local resources vis a vis the global food system and trade. Structural change in the global food system. Development of an agroecological system and diversity of agricultural and food-related knowledge.	Lift up peasants, farmers, indigenous people, migrants, food workers and women as underrepresented groups in the industrialized food system. Emphasis on the global South and indigenous people in the global North.	Protest and opposition to influence on arenas where formal participation is difficult or promoted perspectives excluded. Networking over different scales: local, national, global to make the connections in the food-system visible. Transformative learning processes to improve and integrate different knowledges.

**Figure 1.** Participation at different levels and connection to justice in food-system transition.

The FPCs function at the levels of cities, municipalities, and regions and are often directly connected to existing governance structures or processes. In many cases, FPCs are linked to local AFNs: they can provide funding, facilitate the operation of AFNs, and provide a forum for AFN actors to be involved in governance processes. The

strength of the FPCs is typically in bridging various food-system activities and bringing the relevant actors together to deliberate about development of the system. In this manner, FPCs are predominantly attempts to strengthen procedural justice and cross-sectoral thinking in food-system governance. They often manage to champion a more holistic

perspective on food systems emphasizing food security, public health, ecological integrity, sustainability, and social justice while lifting up also the social and cultural aspects and meanings related to food (Moragues-Faus and Morgan 2015; Sonnino 2019). By this shift in agenda, the FPCs have managed to give a more prominent role to local communities in food-system governance. Recognition can also extend to marginalized communities suffering from food insecurity (Sonnino 2019). However, the close linkages to official policy processes, which many of the FPCs have, may limit the more radical visions that they can at times be seeking to achieve.

The FSMs, in contrast, highlight the ability to lift up alternatives as a key feature of civic participation in food-system transition. The movement operates at multiple levels from local to global, focusing more direct attention on the livelihoods of farmers and other workers in the food chain. While some AFNs and even FPCs in the global North identify with the FSM and promote similar agroecological visions, the movement stands out with its emphasis on global inequalities. Protests and opposition are important modes of civic participation that give voice to radically different perspectives and alternatives to the current state of affairs. Importantly, all of the three alternatives explored here often champion deliberative and democratic decision-making practices within their own organizations or networks.

## Discussion

The AFNs, FPCs, and FSMs all represent ways of participation for increased food justice and a more sustainable food system (Figure 1). They can elevate actors and issues that risk remaining on the sidelines of food-system development. This means civil society and local communities, including vulnerable or underrepresented groups. Inclusion is enabled via new modes of participation involving practical doing and self-organized participation, which entails elements of empowerment and learning, but also resistance and ability to form radically alternative visions of the future. Currently, the presented categories are not mainstream, nor are they conventionally involved in food-system governance. However, the categories provide seeds for improving just food system-transition governance by showing sites and forms of participation that need to be better accounted for in policy making to create a more just food system. Individually, the examples can be criticized for injustices in their scope of engagement, issue framing, and working methods. Accordingly, the creation of more just food-system governance needs governments at different levels to develop

more systemic and reflexive approaches to participation. This requires an ability to critically account for the diverse modes of mobilization emerging in the society via civic action.

Within the categories, some useful practices have been developed to partially overcome the justice-related limitations. For instance, if an AFN takes equal opportunities of participation as a central value and is open to experimenting and adapting its practices to reduce social inequities, it can promote just transition (Fourat et al. 2020). In a similar manner, FPCs can be organized to explicitly address food justice and the circumstances of vulnerable groups in their communities (Prové, de Krom, and Dessein 2019) and the *diálogo de saberes* provides an interesting way to include different ways of knowing (Martínez-Torres and Rosset 2014). However, in terms of involving and learning from the civil society movements and networks in transition governance, governments and civil servants need to pay attention to understanding variation in the movements and networks and their different objectives and starting points. Thus, the key is not in identifying why some movements and networks are more inclusive than others, but rather in reflexively understanding the limits of the movements and the ways the different perspectives they present can complement each other. For instance, the emphasis on farmers in FSM can be supplemented by understanding different consumer capacities in AFNs, in which one can focus on immigrants and another emphasize families with small children.

Even if a particular mode of participation manages to engage only a specific constituency, the form can be crucial. Hence, also spaces of exclusion are needed (Chilvers, Pallett, and Hargreaves 2018). To force all movements to be inclusive would mean that something important might be lost along the way. Thus, while it is important to strive toward social justice, there is value in accounting for different kinds of participation and perspectives as they emerge. This means taking onboard multiple forms of existing civil society involvement and combining them with more formal deliberative practices in the governance processes. This undertaking requires reflexivity regarding the framings and functions of the specific forms of participation: What and whom do they include and exclude? Are all relevant groups involved? Have they had the possibility to be heard in their own terms without predefined narrowing of agendas or knowledge frames? From the viewpoint of transition governance, the challenge is finding a way to ensure the adequacy of diverse forms of participation and how to connect the different spaces effectively to governance structures. A checklist



**Table 3.** Checklist for more just transition governance.

Object of participation/Distributional justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation needs to be reflexive concerning the different forms sustainability can have and the diverse ways of framing</li> <li>• Participation also as capacity building in transition</li> </ul>
Subject of participation/Recognitive justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broaden the involvement deliberately toward minority groups and more marginal voices and movements in society</li> <li>• Take into account voices from local, national, and global levels</li> </ul>
Mode of participation/Procedural justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create spaces and resources for involvement and networking in governance processes</li> <li>• Account for and support independent movements and include their messages and forms of participation</li> <li>• Be reflexive with regard to the roles and purposes of different movements to create a balanced understanding</li> </ul>

below elaborates the creation of more just transition governance in terms of participation (Table 3).

Civic initiatives often remain poorly connected to policy processes and their capacity to influence policy making varies. Thus, there is a clear need for institutional arrangements and mechanisms to support ways to transmit public concerns to formal policy processes (Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016; West, van Kerkhoff, and Wagenaar 2019). One way for governments to facilitate this improvement is by enhancing the capacities of the civic movements themselves and creating dialogue with them during policy processes. For instance, the core factor behind the success of some FPCs in promoting more just food system lies in the ways they have been able to collaborate with public bodies (Blay-Palmer 2009; Gupta et al. 2018; Bassarab et al. 2019). In Toronto, for instance, this collaboration has involved appointing government staff to FPCs as members, public support for FPCs by offering meeting spaces and knowledge on government resources that are available, direct engagement in decision-making processes, and forums for fostering dialogue between FPCs and governance bodies (Blay-Palmer 2009). In less successful FPCs, the distance to public bodies has been greater and direct collaboration less intensive. Furthermore, the experiences from Toronto, as well as from several FPCs in California, point toward the importance of creating long-term networks, working relationships, and mutual trust and respect between the different actors, including officials (Blay-Palmer 2009; Gupta et al. 2018). In this manner, equal footing in participation can be assured and participants can have confidence that others maintain a holistic concern about food systems and are not just promoting their own parochial interests. The establishment of forums that bring together civil society action and other food-system stakeholders can provide models for collecting and distilling diverse participation. The Los Angeles FPC, Canadian food movements' participation in the development of food policy for Canada in 2017, and local food-action planning in Columbus, Ohio (United States) provide useful

examples (Gupta et al. 2018; Levkoe and Wilson 2019; Clark 2019).

When fostering the connections between movements and governments, we need to be cautious as well. The citizen movements and modes of participation that have been explored in this article have highlighted the deep injustices of the present food system. This experience should not be overlooked, nor silenced. In addition to improving the connections between public participation and policy making, governments should also strengthen the capabilities of the movements (Wittman 2015). Government resources should be allocated to the funding of operations and to capacity building. In practice, this can mean a fortifying of administrative and planning skills, technical assistance, and education related to food systems. The movements also need to be able to preserve their independence and ability to raise concerns outside the system. Attempts by public authorities to empower civil society organizations may make them less capable of changing the system (van Gameren, Ruwet, and Bauler 2015). This can happen, for instance, as a result of institutional structures of funding which function to stifle the innovativeness of local networks. Less formal support, such as the provision of meeting spaces, partnering with the movements in relation to relevant issues, and even providing staff to attend their events can be effective and ensure that organizations also have the room to engage with the state on their own terms (Gupta et al. 2018). Drawing from the experience of an FSM in Bologna, Italy, Routledge, Cumbers, and Driscoll Derickson (2018) suggest relational dynamics between movements and the state, a form of interaction that involves the responsiveness of the state to movement demands and an enabling of the movement to contest state appropriation of food sovereignty.

## Conclusion

Research on food networks and movements highlights the critical need for systemic change and raises important justice concerns. The three



categories examined, AFNs, FPCs and FSMs provide complementary aspects on civil society participation in more just food-system governance in relation to distributional, recognitive, and procedural justice. As such, they indicate ways of participation that need to be better accounted for in transition policy making in terms of diverse civil society perspectives but also as arrangements that can provide lessons for the creation of more systemic inclusion in governance processes. To improve governments' ability to acknowledge and account for different civil society perspectives, the conditions for civic action need to be favorable. This means support for the initiatives and engagement with the civil society organizations and networks. Governments also need institutional arrangements to enable more systemic overview of existing civil society action and reflexivity in understanding the concerns and roles of the movements and organizations. The experimental ways of bringing together different civil society, food systems, and governance actors exemplified in the context of food merit further attention from governments at different levels and could also be opportunities for experimentation in other transition contexts.

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