

# INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES AND TRANSITION'S DYNAMICS IN URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS

FROM A GLOBAL TO A LOCAL FOOD CHAIN:  
-THE CASE OF ALMERE-

Piero Scrobogna

931215756120

07/09/2018

MSc Thesis Environmental Policy Group

Thesis supervisors: Peter Oosterveer, Sigrid Wertheim-Heck





## LIST OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	4
ABSTRACT .....	5
1. INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH .....	5
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	5
1.2. THE CASE, THE PROBLEM AND THE OBJECTIVE.....	8
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
2.1. TRANSITION THEORY: THE MULTI-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIO-TECHNICAL TRANSITIONS (MLP).....	11
2.2. INSTITUTIONAL THEORY .....	14
2.3. CONCEPTUALIZATION .....	15
3. METHODOLOGY .....	18
3.1. STUDY DESIGN .....	18
3.2. DATA COLLECTION .....	19
3.2.1. INTERVIEWS .....	20
3.2.2. OBSERVATIONS AND SECONDARY DATA .....	21
3.3. SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES.....	22
3.4. DATA ANALYSIS.....	22
4. FINDINGS.....	25
4.1. STAKEHOLDERS OVERVIEW .....	26
4.1.1. EXPERTS.....	27
4.1.2. RETAILERS.....	28
4.1.3. PRODUCERS.....	29
4.2. STAKEHOLDERS INTERACTIONS .....	30
4.2.1. FLOWS OF FOOD PRODUCTS .....	30
4.2.2. MONETARY FLOWS .....	31
4.2.3. INFORMATION FLOWS .....	32
4.3. STAKEHOLDERS POWER AND INFLUENCE .....	34
4.3.1. RETAILERS INFLUENCE AND INTERESTS .....	38
4.4. LOCAL FOOD AVAILABILITY and some challenges.....	40
4.4.1. THE LOCAL FOOD AVAILABILITY IN ALMERE.....	40
4.4.2. INTERNAL POLICIES OF RETAILERS.....	42
4.4.3. ANONIMITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION.....	44
4.5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE POLICY AMBITION.....	45
4.6. TRANSITIONS, POLICY WINDOWS AND INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE .....	46

4.7.	LANDSCAPE CHANGES AND INTERCONNECTED WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY ENHANCING THE TRANSITION PROCESS .....	47
4.8.	INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES .....	50
4.8.1.	COERCIVE PRESSURES.....	52
4.8.2.	MIMETIC PRESSURES .....	53
4.8.3.	NORMATIVE PRESSURES .....	55
4.9.	A THREAT FOR THE POLICY AMBITION: DISCREPANCY IN THE ISSUE ATTENTION CYCLE .....	57
5.	SOLUTIONS.....	59
5.1.	IMPROVING SOCIAL INCLUSION .....	59
5.2.	PROCESSING IN REGION AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION CENTER.....	61
6.	DISCUSSION.....	65
6.1.	REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS AND THE THEORETICAL APPROACH .....	65
6.2.	LIMITS AND STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH .....	68
	CONCLUSION .....	70
	REFERENCES.....	73
	CITED WEBSITES.....	76
	LIST OF INTERVIEWS .....	77
	EXPERTS INTERVIEWS.....	77
	RETAILERS INTERVIEWS.....	77
	PRODUCERS INTERVIEWS .....	77
	ANNEX 1: CHARTING – DATA ANALYSIS EXCEL SHEET TEMPLATE.....	0

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisors Prof. Sigrid Wertheim-Heck and Peter Oosterveer for their assistance during the writing process of this thesis. Their support has been of primary importance in guiding me through the steps needed to complete the research thanks to their academic expertise and enthusiasm for the topic.

Besides my supervisors, I would like to thank the rest of my colleagues of Aeres Hogeschool Almere for their insightful suggestions and feedbacks.

My gratitude goes also to my closest friends in Wageningen: Gabija, Pablo, Younes, Vinko, and the rest of the friends who blessed me with their moral support and company during my stay in the Netherlands.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family for the extremely important spiritual guidance, encouragement and love they always gave me in my life.

## ABSTRACT

In the last decades urban food systems all around the world are becoming increasingly globalized. However, the incremental institutionalization of sustainable development as a concept is pushing cities towards the adoption of greener solutions. In this context, switching from a global to a local food system is a valuable solution to bridge the gap between sustainability and food. The city of Almere, located in the Netherlands, is an example of a city trying to enhance this transition by setting new policy ambitions aiming to increase the overall local food availability and consumption. By applying an integrative approach that combines the Multi-Level Perspective on Socio-technical Transition and the concept of Institutional Pressures, this paper aims to investigate how much local food is available on the shelves of the most important retailers in the city of Almere and to develop a theoretical lens to study the complexities of transitioning urban food systems. In addition, the opportunities and challenges deriving from possible transitions in the food regime for the most relevant actors involved in the current food chain are highlighted. Moreover, this paper provides recommendations on possible future policy developments and contributes in building up on the theoretical discourse applied.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last decades food systems all around the world are becoming increasingly globalized. The kind of system governing global food flows is also named in the academic literature “conventional food system”. This can be described as a unified, coherent, longer term and larger scale operations with transparent relationships among supply chain actors which substituted the previous dynamics of more localized, short and autonomous networks between the actors (Rich, Perry, & Kaitibie, 2009). As Harris claims, we should be careful in defining this term but in a broad sense, “conventional food systems are globalized networks of food production, distribution, storage and retail that are controlled by multinational agri-business and retail corporations” (Harris, 2010). The conventional system is the widespread nowadays for many reasons. It provides benefits to consumers such as variety of choices and convenience since its market dynamics push for a system in which a great number of products are available on the shelves for low prices. However, it is also advocated to be highly unsustainable since it is debated to be environmentally damaging, leading to social problems and economic imbalance (Harris, 2010). Environmentally, it leads to problems such as soil degradation, climate change, pollution, landscape and biodiversity loss, overexploitation of natural and not renewable resources (Belz, 2004). Moreover, Mount points out that consumers are becoming more and more

aware of the problems deriving from the conventional food supply system (Mount, 2012). They understand that the production and transportation of the goods have not only negative impacts on the environment but contribute also to a decline in food taste and nutrition values and concerns about the source of the products they eat daily (Mount, 2012). Other authors highlight also another social aspect that grows perplexities for consumers towards the conventional food system: consumers nowadays feel disconnected with the food offered by retailers because they are never in contact with producers (Kneafsey, 2010). The connection between consumers and producers is in fact advocated to increase the trust in the food products (Kneafsey, 2010).

The problems cited above are only a partial review of the negative impacts that the conventional food system has on the environmental, social and economic spheres. However, it shows why a change in the paradigm of the current food system and its associated dynamics is needed if we want to keep pursuing the sustainability goals and a food supply chain that would reconnect food with consumers from a point of view of trust and transparency. It is for the sake of sustainability and social justice that the academic literature about alternative food networks (AFNs) finds its roots and “ they emerge in the light of the ‘crisis’ of the conventional agri-food sector” (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). These systems are offering an opportunity to shift from an “industrial mode of production” to a more local, natural and healthy option which has the potential to “short-circuit” the long and wicked globalized chains (Marsden et al., 2016). The attractiveness of these new approaches can be recognized not only by the incremental awareness that consumers have about the quality and provenance of the food but also from the shifting governmental behavior of western countries on this topic. In fact, new politics open the doors and works as incentives for alternative food networks to find a place in the modern society (Marsden et al., 2016).

One central theme in AFN’s literature is re-localization. For many researchers it is a good path to follow to pursue sustainable development (Crivits, Prové, Block, & Dessen, 2016)(Feenstra & Campbell, 2014). The concept of sustainable development has been brought to political attention in 1987 with the publication of “Our Common Future” also known as “Brundtland report” from the World Commission and Development (WCED). It is defined as a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987). Currently, this notion is having a great impact on the society and businesses from an institutional point of view and to what concerns the food supply chain many authors argue that localization of food products would contribute in pursuing this principle. For example, on this topic Harris argues that “AFNs seek to localize food systems and to encourage contact between food producers and consumers, seeking to re-spatialize food systems perceived to have become ‘placeless”” (Harris, 2010, pp 355). Feagan remarks that localization is a central concept to most AFNs projects taking place to contrast the intrinsic nature of the highly globalized conventional food system (Feagan, 2007).

The alternative food networks that seek to re-localize food production and consumption are also called Local Food Networks (LFN). Even if this kind of system is seen and perceived to be a valuable option to pursue sustainability, some authors criticize the logic that smaller food systems in terms of scale are always preferable. Born and Purcell for example, make aware those who perceive local food to be always better using the concept of “local trap”. They claim that the scale does not always matter, in fact, “the outcomes produced by a food system are contextual: they depend on the actors and agendas that are empowered by the particular social relations in a given food system” (Born & Purcell, 2006, pp. 195-196). Thus, the authors are not specifically against local food systems, but they say that this kind of systems has not to be preferred *a priori*. Local food systems for this reason should not be considered as a goal in a research project or as a policy objective because it is not always the way to reach sustainability. Their work is important to understand that often researchers and food planners fall in the so called “local trap” considering this system to be their ultimate goal. However, these alternatives to the conventional globalized food system in this paper will be used as a means to reach other goals such as sustainability, health and social justice that are not a change in the paradigm *per se*.

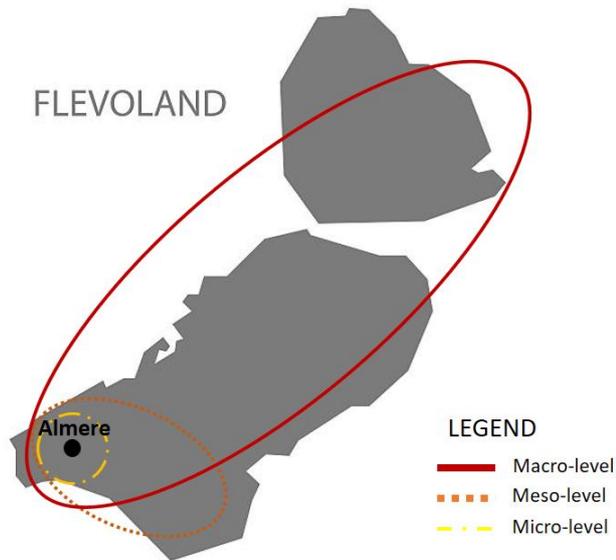
In the context of the research, according with the theoretical framework proposed in chapter 2, the alternatives to the conventional food systems are seen as niches which have the power to shape the dynamics of the current conventional food regime. In the chosen case study these alternatives are considered as contextual pressures to the conventional food actors such as producers and retailers. Therefore, the research will mainly investigate the functioning of the conventional supply chain stakeholders and their interests in moving towards a more regional and sustainable path. Furthermore, the pressures occurring between regimes actors have been identified and the process of institutionalization of this alternative food system has been explored in order to see the possibility of success in upscaling in a context dominated by the conventional food system. More in specific, through the lens of the theories the case study has been analyzed to see how the most important actors of the conventional food supply chain and the ones pushing for the local alternative interact and contribute in enhancing a food system that is local, healthy and sustainable to increase local food consumption.

## 1.2. THE CASE, THE PROBLEM AND THE OBJECTIVE

As mentioned above, the alternatives that aim to re-localize the food system are attracting the attention not only of academics and scholars worldwide but also in the policy landscape. The research therefore will focus on a specific policy ambition launched by the Flevoland Province (Netherlands) which aims to enhance the regional food consumption. The policy objective is to increase the local food supply in the city context of Almere up to the 20% of the total amount of food by 2022 (Renting et al., 2016). The policy ambition intends to shape the dynamics towards a greener future for the city. Almere in recent years opened as a living lab due to its unique characteristics. Living Labs in general act as open intermediaries for innovation. They enhance relations between consumers, public and private companies and researchers aiming to implement innovations by engaging the stakeholders interested in the issue area (Almirall & Wareham, 2011). This is valuable in a system transition perspective since it can play a role in testing new solutions and to give the example to other cities in case of success. Almere is a very recent city with a short history since it was founded only in the 70's. This gave to Almere the possibility to be creative and flexible from a planning point of view (Renting et al., 2016). Moreover, the city in the last decade faced a huge population growth which is expected to continue in next years. On this aspect the author argues that the population of Almere currently counts "more than 190.000 inhabitants, projected to double by 2030" (Renting et al., 2016, pp. 19). Due to this large-scale expansion plans, the city council of Almere included ecology and sustainability as very important themes for the city development (Jansma & Visser, 2011). The direction Almere is orienting their interests and agenda is also demonstrated by the fact that in 2022 the city will be the host of Floriade (the World Horticultural Expo) which has "Green Cities" as its main motto (Renting et al., 2016). The event will take place for 6 months and aims to show good examples of cities implementing green solutions also concerning the theme of local food.

For the reasons explained above the project "Feeding the City" was launched. The project involves academics, researchers and planners for its success. Currently the project is ongoing, and it aims to contribute to pursue the goals set by the policy ambition by researching ways to increase urban agriculture and to enhance relations between the city and the countryside of Almere for the sake of a more regional food system. This means that researchers and planners have to work at three different levels of scale (figure 1): micro-level, meso-level and macro-level (Renting et al., 2016). As the authors argue, at the first level initiatives such as community gardens and organic farms within the city context are increasing in these last years. For the second level a peri-urban park situated in the Oosterwold region was developed. It is an area of 4300 hectares that aims to strengthen connections between the city and the countryside by creating a great opportunity to build more space for local agriculture. Finally, for the macro-level the project wants to increase the linkages between the city and the Flevoland region countryside. Flevoland is a region that is "highly-production

oriented” with agri-food companies that are present in the global market. At this stage, the network connecting the producers and companies to the city of Almere is still poor and underdeveloped.



**Figure 1: Levels of action**

Since the research that has been done is prevalently on the first two levels (micro and meso) the scope of this research will be macro-level oriented (figure 1). The creation of new links between producers in the Flevoland and retailers in Almere might need to be strengthened and this paper will contribute in providing new insights and knowledge on this problematic issue. My hypothesis is that the policy needs to count also on these connections to be successful. In particular, the motivation behind this belief is that nowadays most of consumers rely on retail chains to purchase their food products (SITE 1) and if solutions are lacking to what concerns the links between local producers and retailers the policy outcomes might be not successful. Therefore, the actors involved in the conventional food system can contribute and need to play an active role in this shift towards a greener and more sustainable future of the city. By analyzing the “state of the art” in the current situation about local food provision in the macro level and by investigating the interests and influence of the actors involved in the chain and their future ambition in achieving a sustainable transition this research will contribute to inform policy makers for future opportunities for the policy developments and on the challenges they can face in meeting the policy objectives.

After this introduction of the case on which this research will be focused it is now possible to formulate a problem definition which will guide to the general research objective of this study. The research therefore

intends to deal with the following problem: the city of Almere wants to achieve the policy goals in order to enhance a regional food system to feed the citizens with more local food products. However, it is problematic to achieve this ambition without knowing the main actors in the playing field and which pressures or incentives would act as drivers for such a change.

Therefore, the objective of the research is to explore the transition's dynamics in the Almere's food system and to identify how the main actors considered can facilitate a more local food chain.

In order to achieve the main objective of the research a theoretical framework has been constructed. This has a great importance since some theoretical terms and concepts repeat across the whole paper and is expected to contribute in generating a deeper understanding of the case study. After presenting and conceptualizing the theories, or integration of theories, on which the research is based, and the case study is rooted, the main research question is presented to the reader followed by a set of specific questions.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following sections two theories are introduced: Transition theory and Institutional theory. The combination of these two theories is expected to be instrumental to investigate the challenges of urban food systems aiming to develop a more local focus. To investigate this topic the logic behind this thesis is to look at a specific case study, Almere's food system, through the lens of a purposively constructed theoretical framework. Therefore, this paper uses an explorative approach in order to highlight the major opportunities and challenges coming up in the light of the policy launched by the Province which, as mentioned before, aims to increase the local food supply in the city context up to the 20% of the total amount of food by 2022. Moreover, this approach is expected to inform policy makers on the constraints they can face in implementing a regional food system that would comply with this new policy ambition in a context that is still dominated by a conventional type of food system.

After describing the two theories individually the conceptualization of the framework is presented in the section that follows and the research questions coming from the theoretical framework are stated.

## 2.1. TRANSITION THEORY: THE MULTI-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIO-TECHNICAL TRANSITIONS (MLP)

Through the lens of this theory the given case study of this research can be better defined, by enhancing a deeper understanding about what are the main causal dynamics, actors and events which generally empowers a transition process. Therefore, it provides a theoretically sound model on which a practical case study as the one investigated in this research can fit in.

The Multi-Level Perspective on Socio-Technical Transitions (MLP) aims to describe and conceptualize how socio-technical innovations can find a place in or substitute current regimes. Its origins come from the combination of different principles of various theories such as evolutionary economics, technology studies, neo-institutional theory and structural-functionalism (Geels, 2011). Geels is the main theorist and he identifies three levels that are important to consider for system transitions which act as a “nested hierarchy” (Geels, 2002): socio-technical regimes, socio-technical landscape and the niches.

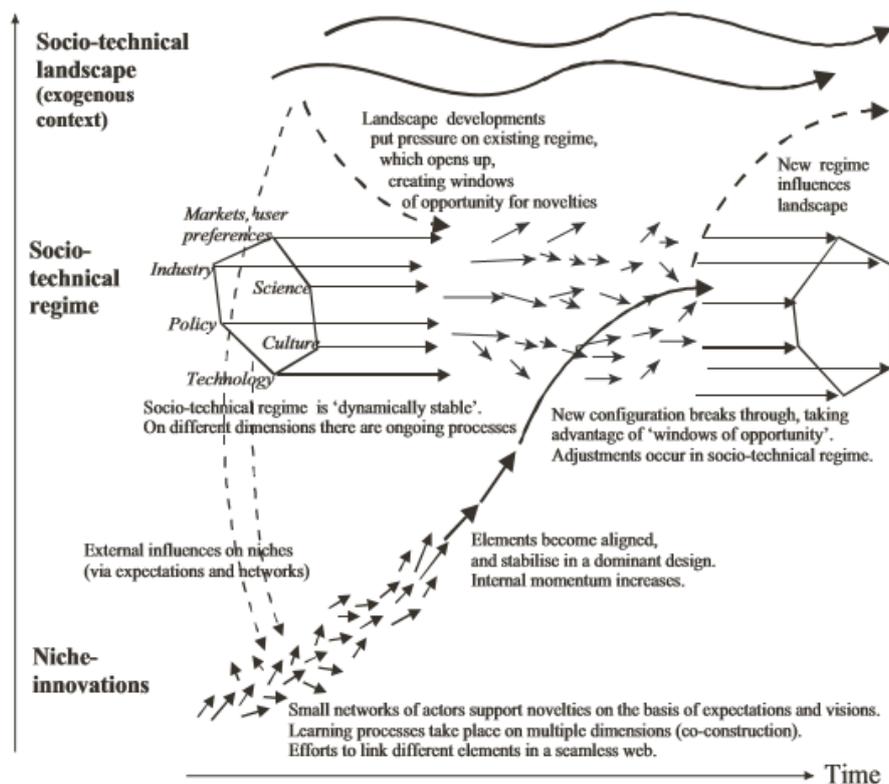
**Socio-technical regimes:** the regimes are described as “semi coherent sets of rules carried by different societal groups” that, by orienting the activities of the actors, provide stability to the regime itself. The author argues that they are dynamic, and changes can occur within this level. However, changes at this level are “incremental” and occur in a “selection and retention” way. It means that the regimes never aim at radical changes (Geels, 2002). The regimes are the level of major interest when we speak about transition since for definition “transitions” implies the “shift from one regime to another” (Geels, 2011).

**Socio-technical landscape:** It is under this level that the regimes take place and operate. They are described as the place in which “set of heterogeneous factors” such as economic growth, environmental problems, cultural values are contained, and they are the “external structure or context” in which the stakeholders operate and interact (Geels, 2011). This as we can see in figure 2 occupies the highest position. Thus, they are the most difficult level to change.

**Niches:** These are the core for radical innovation. They are in fact ideas, or innovations, that are ideologically and substantially alternatives and deviations of the regimes. Novelties are created and carried out and developed by the niche level in form of experiments (Jurgilevich et al., 2016) and niche actors intend to enter into the regime so that their novelties can be used inside of the regime or to substitute it radically (Geels, 2011). Thus, local niches can also be described as “protective spaces” for new ideas to be developed and evolve in order to find a wide relevance in the societal context through several up-scaling mechanisms (Jurgilevich et al., 2016).

In general, the Transition theory suggests that economic activities are embedded in socio-technical systems, which are controlled by sets of norms and rules also called regimes (Rip & Kemp, 1998). The regimes are

stable in time and most innovations contribute to their equilibrium. However, there are variables and pressures that can be a threat to current socio-technical systems. These pressures from the so called “landscape” cannot always be solved by utilizing existing paths of innovation. Such pressures can open a **window of opportunity** for new ideas of innovation to come into action. The window of opportunity concept plays an important role when it comes to explore a phenomenon and it can be used to understand why certain dynamics are changing due to pressures external of the regimes. This concept is only a part of Transition theory, but it has been used in the research to define at which stage of the transition is Almere currently in. It suggests that there are multiple streams of problems, politics, and policies which together they have the potential to open a policy window (Rose et al., 2017). This offers to policymakers the opportunity to set a particular problem higher on the policy agenda. The policy windows open to novelties which are able to contribute in altering or substituting a regime when they are already developed and organized as “niches” and changes might occur in the regime. Thus, as Brunori et al. claim “innovation paths initiated by niches contribute to change the dominant socio-technical system through integration or even replacement” (Brunori, Rossi, & Malandrin, 2010, pp.29). For a better understanding about these dimensions and the dynamics governing socio-technical transitions Geels provide us with a visual representation that I will further explain (figure 2).



**Figure 2: Multi-Level perspective on Transitions (Geels, 2011)**

As it is possible to notice in Figure 2, Geels explains the dynamics behind how transitions happen. The essential part of this model is the central level, the one of regimes (involving the whole set of current markets, industries, supply chains, policies, technologies, as well as people's practices). The arrows at that level runs from the current regime (on the left) to the new regime (on the right). However, the change from one regime to another cannot occur without the intervention of the niches. These are presented in the model as the element of disturbance of the current regime with small arrows running from the niche level to the mid-level of the regimes. Many of the project of novelties protected by the niches fails as it is possible to notice in the bottom-right part of the model. However, some succeed to scale-up and develop until the point they make a crack in the current regime. It is thanks to these cracks that eventually a regime transforms into a new one. The third level called socio-technical landscape, is the external context in which regimes exist, operate and change. Large scale factors from this level may also play a role in pressuring the current regimes opening windows of opportunity for niches to disturb them, enter and create cracks. However, as represented by the dotted arrows at the left of the model, changes not always happen following this bottom-up dynamic. In fact, changes can occur at the regimes level or at the landscape level. For example, an environmental crisis would push for niches innovation or even regime actors may aim to a transition and give space and help niches to scale-up. Furthermore, Geels, speaking about sustainability transitions argues that *"sustainability transitions will be full of debates about the relative importance of various environmental problems, which entail deep-seated values and beliefs. The latter means that private actors have no immediate incentive to address sustainability problems. Public authorities and civil society will therefore be crucial drivers for sustainability transitions. Their actions will need to change economic frame conditions and/or consumer practices, which subsequently incentivize private actors to reorient their innovation and commercial activities"* (Geels, 2010, pp. 507).

During the research the two drivers pointed out by Geels (public authorities and civil society) will be analyzed for further discussion. The case study might support these remarks or deny them. Since the investigated case is indeed what can be called a sustainability transition, in the discussion section the findings will be interpreted to give a contribution to this theoretical issue.

I believe that to achieve the general research objective of the research and to reach a deeper understanding about the dynamics of change inside the regime the Transition theory can only partially help. The problem definition in fact highlights a great importance in finding also some specific pressures that push the food chain actors to change their behavior accordingly to institutional changes. If the Transition theory explains which are the main events which potentially open some cracks at the regime level from both the landscape and niche's developments, it lacks in exploring the regime's responses to these trajectories. It is for this reason that the institutional theory presented in the next paragraph is applied in the research.

## 2.2. INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Institutional theory is used in this research to be coupled with the Transition theory introduced above for analytical reasons. I believe that the two theories if taken separately would help in understanding only particularities of the chosen case study. It is for this reason they need to be considered complementary. By merging them the bigger picture and the factors contributing in enhancing the transition can be investigated deeply and solutions can be suggested. If on the one hand Transition theory is used to explore the current situation and to provide insights on how changes at a landscape and niches levels act and influence the regime, on the other hand it lacks the component describing the mechanisms which happen between regime actors and their adaptation to be legitimized in the bigger context due to the niches and landscape pressures but also from inside the regime itself. De facto, in a complex system such as the conventional food chain, regime's actors might also be potential initiators of pressures which need to be identified and analyzed for the sake of a wider comprehension of the case study. Institutional theory helps to investigate and explore the rationale behind the reasons *why* firms (or businesses) decide to undertake a sustainable path for the future and which are the pressures that are enhancing a regime change. The following theory represents a way to analyze how the regime's actors, in the given case retailers, producers and policymakers respond to different changes and why sometimes they modify their behavior towards greener practices. As Glover claims, Institutional Theory is "traditionally concerned with how groups and organizations better secure their positions and legitimacy by conforming to the rules (...) and norms of the institutional environment" (Glover, Champion, Daniels, & Dainty, 2014, pp.104). The institutional theory argues that some firms adopt greener practices to increase their legitimacy in the market and society (Zhu & Sarkis, 2007). Moreover, the theory asserts that there are different kinds of pressures that lead firms to adopt new practices and adapt to changes. These pressures in fact, act as internal and external drivers for the adoption of sustainable practices that will consequently give to a firm advantages such as legitimacy (Glover et al., 2014). Di Maggio and Powell distinguished three different kinds of pressures: normative, coercive and mimetic (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983).

**Normative pressures** Occur when organizations understand that adopting some changes would lead to an increased legitimacy. Usually, it happens when other stakeholders are interested in a specific organization and act as pressure groups for a change of their behaviors.

**Coercive pressures** occur because of the influence exerted by power actors such as government agencies. Glover et al. state that coercive pressures are "crucial to drive environmental management and hence sustainability". (Glover et al., 2014)

**Mimetic pressures** occur when a firm try to emulate the patterns of action of other successful competitors. The rationale behind this is that if you follow the example of other successful firms you will be consequently successful.

Therefore, institutions can guide firms in acting conforming to what is considered acceptable, appropriate and legitimate and thus exclude unacceptable actions (Glover et al., 2014).

After having described the problem, the objective and the theories of the research it is opportune to conceptualize how the theories are driving the research and how I intend to study the case from the proposed theoretical lens. Moreover, the conceptualization embeds the research questions that are guiding the methodology and findings of the paper.

### 2.3. CONCEPTUALIZATION

The proposed theories serve to reach a deeper understanding of the case study by applying a theoretical approach to the practical context of the research. The theoretical lenses used in this research are expected to contribute to investigate the problems identified and to help analyzing the situation to reach the main objective of the research. It is important to mention that for this paper I consider the two theories as complementary and strictly connected since, even if they serve at explaining different kinds of dynamics between actors and different types of pressures and mechanisms leading to a change in the current food system, united together the case might be analyzed in a totalizing way. The first theory is applied to explain *how* changes in the regime occur in theory (in this case the regime is described as the conventional food system). The application of the second theory is used to better understand *why* businesses (such as producers and retailers) decide to pursue a more sustainable path such as a localized food system. In other words, it is possible to argue that the combination of the two theories is expected to support the research with a conceptual lens in order to answer the main research question. The general question of the research which derives from the problem investigated can therefore be stated: “What are the constraints and opportunities in enhancing a more local food system in a context dominated by the conventional food chain?”.

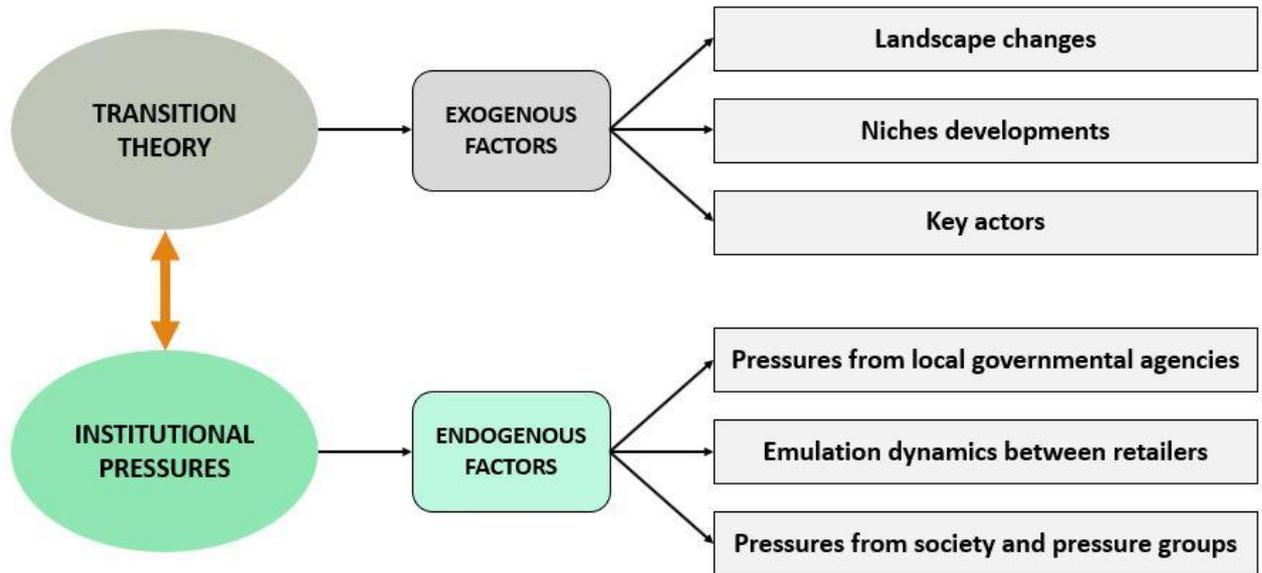
On the one hand, we can argue that the Transition theory, helps in developing a general understanding about what are the main actors to be considered in the research and thanks to concepts such as the one of the *windows of opportunity* it contributes in grasping how the investigated transition can occur, and which are the main events that are enhancing it in the current situation and the potential facilitators for the future. Among the other implications mentioned above, the theory of Geels presented in chapter 2.1. is used to organize the thoughts on the phenomenon and to develop the methodology section. The Transition theory has been widely applied in previews studies and researches on the topic of alternative food systems

(Marsden, 2013)(Jurgilevich et al., 2016)(Lutz & Schachinger, 2013). In this research particular attention will be given to the actors involved in the conventional food regime and the Transition theory is adopted to identify themes to analyze to what extent the conventional food actors such as the main retailers in Almere and policymakers try to resist or open to a more sustainable and regional food system. Moreover, it will be investigated, if at all, the policy launched by Almere's municipality has shaped the attitudes of these actors. In particular, from this specific theory it has been explored if the policy ambition can be considered as a momentum that has the power to create a window of opportunity for new niches to be created and alter the current regime. In the case study therefore, the niches are represented by the alternative food networks that are taking place in the context of Almere and it has been analyzed if the landscape represented by the environmental and social problems has contributed to the implementation of the policy ambition. Both elements are assumed to act as pressures to the current regime represented by the conventional food system. Through the lens of this theory therefore the research will investigate if regime's actors seek to reject changes or if these are seen by them as windows of opportunity that would lead to some innovations for the regime (or to a regime transition).

On the other hand, the Transition theory alone cannot explain all the pressures linked with actor's interactions occurring internally in the regime level, or the actors involved in the conventional food system. It is for this reason that the institutional theory plays a complementary role. The regime's actors are considered in this research as crucial in order to facilitate such a change, and the institutional theory, particularly to what concerns the institutional pressures, can explain how these stakeholders change their behaviors towards greener ones in order to renew or stabilize their legitimation in the market and society. Therefore, from this perspective the research further analyzes the responses of the actors to the changes and the reasons pushing them to adopt new practices.

Coercive pressures such as the policy launched by the municipality of Almere might have caused a destabilization to what concerns a firm legitimacy, but it is also possible that normative and mimetic pressures play a role in changing the practices of retailers and producers towards greener and more sustainable behaviors.

To conceptualize the application of the theories a visual representation has been drawn (figure 3).



**Figure 3: Conceptualization of the integrative theoretical approach**

On the left side of the scheme the double ended arrow connecting the two theories suggests the complementarity of the theoretical approach undertaken. The two theories are expected to complement each other in a nested way to uncover why the stakeholders are willing to adopt changes and which pressures are the most common in the case study.

From a Transition theory perspective, I expect to find out and highlight the exogenous factors which are facilitating or limiting the transition to a more local food system in the current context of Almere. Thus, my intention is to use this theory to identify the main actors in the regime and niches levels and if there are any landscape changes or events that might have had an influence in order to facilitate changes at the regime level and the developments of niches.

The Institutional pressures concepts described in the previews chapter (ch. 2.2) are applied to investigate the reaction of regime's actors to these changes. Hence, the endogenous factors are also analyzed. In fact, I expect that the pressures occurring between regime's actors can be better identified and deepened through this theoretical angle. The endogenous factors can therefore be described as the pressures occurring inside the regime level such as the ones carried out by local governmental agencies, the emulation dynamics between firms (retailers, producers) to what concerns the adoption of greener behaviors and the pressures coming from consumers or pressure groups in case there are any in the given case study.

Furthermore, the integration of the two theories helped me to formulate a set of specific research questions:

- What is the current amount of local food (fruit and vegetables) provided by the main retailers in Almere?
- Which are the main actors involved in the current food system of Almere and their interactions?
- Which are the main changes in the landscape and niches developments acting as stimuli in moving towards a more sustainable and regional alternative food system (exogenous factors)?
- Which are the pressures (coercive, normative, mimetic) for conventional food actors that can enhance a more local food system (endogenous factors)?

I believe that the combination of these two theories if applied in the way described in the scheme (figure 3) can help in answering the main research question. The main challenges to overcome and the opportunities to seize, related with the actors involved in the current food system, can be potentially underlined.

The theories applied can be seen as sound to explain changes at different levels and they both consider stakeholders as central. I assume therefore that this theoretical framework can contribute in solving the problem identified in the chapter 1.2 since it is strictly related with actor's interactions and a poor availability of information regarding local food availability and the factors influencing and stimulating a transition process connected with the progressive adoption of behaviors oriented to re-shape the urban food system analyzed in the research.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The following chapter provides information on the chosen methodological tools such as the study design of the research, the instruments that have been used for collecting data, the sampling method and the data analysis. Moreover, some terms and concepts are operationalized in order to help the reader to better understand the focus of the research.

#### **3.1. STUDY DESIGN**

According to Kumar the term study design "is used to describe the type of design a researcher is going to adopt to undertake his study" (Kumar, 2014, pp.155). The chosen study design for this research is a mixed methods case study approach since both qualitative and quantitative have been collected during the field

work. Qualitative data constitutes the main sources to draw the findings, however, some quantitative data have been gathered to answer the specific research question number 1 “what is the current level of local food (fruit and vegetables) provided by the main retailers in Almere?”. Therefore, it is possible to notice that this research will adopt prevalently a qualitative approach. Qualitative research finds its roots in the field of psychology and sociology and it is usually applied to understand specific social problems (Alasuutari, 2010). It is also defined as an interpretive naturalistic approach. It means that a qualitative researcher studies phenomena in their natural context, trying to interpret and extrapolate the sense of the issue to make them more understandable (Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, 2005). The case study research is often used as a study design in qualitative research because it examines in-depth samples that are purposive (or judgmental) in order to deeply understand a phenomenon (Yin, 2012). According to Baxter, using a “Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts”(Baxter & Jack, 2008, pp.544). Moreover, the following research can be described as *exploratory* since little is known on this specific topic and hypothesis are hard to be drawn and *instrumental* since it intends to “understand more than what is obvious to the observer” (Tellis, 1997, pp.1). The case study approach has been identified to be suitable for researches in which the selected cases are the basis of a holistic and in-depth exploration of a set of questions and aspects that the researcher want to investigate (Kumar, 2014). Moreover, using this approach gives me the opportunity to be more flexible to what concerns the techniques of data collection since usually sampling methods such as purposive, judgmental can be used in the case study design to collect information (Kumar, 2014). Gilbert argue that this design has both advantages and disadvantages. In fact, this gives to the researcher the possibility to be very specific and detailed on the single case, but the results are hardly generalizable to other contexts (Gilbert, 2001). Since this research aims (among other things) to provide valuable insights to policymakers on a very specific issue-area it is not my intention to generalize the findings for other cases that might differ completely from the investigated context of Almere and Flevoland region. However, it is possible that the results of the research could be significant also for other researchers when the case investigated is similar to the context of Almere. For example, the findings may be applicable to cities with a similar area of agricultural hinterland and retail practices.

### **3.2. DATA COLLECTION**

In this section the methods for data collection used for the case study is listed and their application further explained. The main method that has been used to gather the qualitative data needed to answer to the research questions is interviews. However, to answer some of the questions of chapter 2.3 also other methods will be applied such as direct observation and secondary data. The data collected during interviews

have been recorded and transcribed to facilitate the data analysis process. The table below (table 1) serves as an overview on the methods applied and their implication in the research.

<b>Data collection method</b>	<b>Sources of data</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Expert interviews	Semi-structured interviews: LTO Noord, Agrofoodcluster Flevoland, Flevofood, Province, Floriade)	To get insights on the topic in general and to find contacts with fruit and vegetables producers and retailers in Flevoland region
Other interviews	Structured interviews: Producers; retailers	To get insights on the current level of local food provision and attitude towards the implementation of a regional food system (opportunities and challenges)
Observations	Products in the retail shop	To figure out how much local food (fruit and vegetables) is currently offered by the main retailers in Almere
Literature review	Scientific articles, books, journals, statistics etc.	Triangulation of data and to support theories with academic literature.

**Table 1: Overview of methodological tools**

---

### **3.2.1. INTERVIEWS**

As mentioned above, interviews are the main data collection methods used in this research. The advantages of conducting interviews is that they are an appropriate method to investigate a complex phenomenon and to generate in-depth insights (Kumar, 2014). Two different interviewing techniques have been applied: structured and semi-structured. Both interviewing techniques have been important in order to gather consistent qualitative data from experts, major retailers and producers.

**Semi-structured interviews:** this tool has been used to gather qualitative information from experts on the current situation regarding the developments done by policymakers, retailers and producers to offer more regional food to the consumers. These kinds of interviews are useful to get started with a research because the interviewer can grasp and identify the diversity and variety of factors entailed in a determined issue-area. Semi-structured means that the questions asked to the interviewee are exploratory and open-ended according to a set of predetermined topics which need to be discussed during the interview. This technique gave me the opportunity to orient the discussion according to the specific topics, but it also gives the possibility to the interviewee to talk about other related topics of interest. Therefore, the intention is to create a free-flow setting in order to gather information by listening the interviewee without interrupting him/her or to guide the responses.

**structured interviews:** this specific methodological tool has been used to gather information from respondents working in the retail sector of Almere and producers in the context of the Flevoland region. The use of this technique serves in generating both qualitative and quantitative data since numbers on the amount of local food production and consumption have been asked to both the stakeholders categories identified in the research. The application of structured interviews implies that the interviewer is allowed to ask a predetermined set of questions accordingly with the interview schedule using the same sequence and wording from interview to interview (Kumar, 2014). This means that a schedule must be prepared before the interview phase. It is a list of open-ended or closed questions that are asked during a face-to-face or telephone interaction. The advantage of using the structured type of interviews lies the fact that it is supposed to provide uniformed information that leads to a better comparability of data (Kumar,2014).

---

### **3.2.2. OBSERVATIONS AND SECONDARY DATA**

Even if interviewing is the main technique used for the data collection, the first research question has been investigated also with the help of observations. In fact, it serves as a tool to confirm the information gathered in the interviews. For instance, if a retailer says that the 20% of the fruits and vegetables are local, with the help of an observation frame (a list of items and issues to be observed) it can be checked if the source of fruits and vegetables in the shop is understandable and what can be perceived as a consumer. Moreover, with the help of the observations, it is possible to check if local brands are present in the retail shops of Almere and if there is any promotion of local products. According to Kumar, the use of observations in the case of a researcher that want to gather quantitative data implies “a predetermined framework and the recording is either categorical or on a scale” (Kumar, 2014, pp. 173). The problems with this kind of tool is that the researcher can be biased and that individuals or groups becoming aware of being observed change their behaviors. Since no individuals or groups have been observed but only the shelves of the shops this

possible problem does not subsist. The bias has been countered thanks to the design of a frame aimed at objectivity and reliability.

Finally, the last tool used for gathering information will be secondary data. This method will be applied for all the research questions and will serve not only for a more exhaustive explanation of the studied phenomenon but also as a method to confirm the data gathered with interviews (triangulation of data).

### **3.3. SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES**

As mentioned above this research is characterized by being explorative. Therefore, the first step to take in order to explore the topic is to select experts on the subject to interview. They experts were expected to provide me with insights on the issue-area and with several contacts of producers working in the region context. In this preliminary phase four main experts have been identified as expert interviewees: LTO Noord, Agrofoodcluster Flevoland, Flevofood and the Province. This approach for the selection of interviewees is called snowball sampling. According to ResearchMethodology.net “this sampling method involves primary data sources nominating another potential primary data source to be used in the research” (SITE 2). In other words, it implies that the first interviewees, in this case several experts, redirected me to additional subjects for further interviewees such as producers and retailers. Therefore, “when applying this sampling method members of the sample group are recruited via chain referral” (SITE 2).

### **3.4. DATA ANALYSIS**

This section intends to explain how the data gathered during the field work will be analyzed in order to answer the research questions. The method that has been applied to do so is a recent approach developed in the context of applied policy research that aims to reach the information needed by a researcher and further formulate recommendations or provide insights (Lacey & Luff, 2007). This approach, called Framework analysis (or thematic analysis) consists in a systematic line of stages that must be taken during the analysis process (figure 4). Doing so, the links between the case study and the theoretical framework of the research can be identified and analyzed in an easier way. According to Lacey and Luff the key stages when undertaking this kind of analysis are 5: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation (Lacey & Luff, 2007).



**Figure 4: Framework analysis scheme**

- **Familiarization:** is the stage in which a researcher transcribes the data collected in the field and read them carefully;

After all the interviews have been transcribed the familiarization has been performed by printing the transcripts of the interviews and underlying key words and sentences which were relevant for answering the research questions and to have a first understanding about both the theoretical concepts hidden in the case study and other issues that emerged during the field research.

After this first identification all the underlined issues have been transcribed on a word document. All the similar topics identified have been grouped in diverse key words which helped for the following phase of the data analysis.
- **Identification of a thematic framework:** is described as the stage in which an initial coding framework is elaborated on the base of *a priori* issues as well as emerging ones coming from the familiarization phase; The coding of data have been performed by utilizing Microsoft Excel to group the information in the appropriate theme category. The key words identified during the familiarization phase served to describe groups of variables which could be used to interpret 3 major themes deriving from the research objectives. Thus, the identified themes are: current situation, stakeholder analysis and theoretical concepts.
- **Indexing:** is “the process of applying the thematic framework to the data” (Lacey & Luff, 2007, pp.14). In this phase the researcher finds correspondences between the data and the coding framework elaborated in the previews stage;

During this step the thematic framework have been applied to the data through adding comments containing the correspondent theme and variable to the different pieces of the digital files of the interview transcripts. Doing this allowed me to greatly facilitate the data charting phase.
- **Charting:** at this stage the researcher organizes his/her data in charts using the headings identified in the thematic framework in order to make them easier to read for the following analysis; The themes (current situation, stakeholder’s characteristics and theoretical concepts) and the correspondent variables have been written down respectively in the first and second columns of an

Excel sheet. For example, concerning the current situation I selected variables such as: internal policies, market dynamics, social inclusion, local food availability, logistics etc.; To what concerns the stakeholder's characteristics the variables were related with the influence and interest of stakeholders such as retailers, producers, governmental agencies and consumers as well as key words like "facilitators" that are directly connected with the questions prepared for the interviews. The theme of theories was built based on concepts such as momentum, niches, pressures, change, short chain etc. In the first top line of the sheet is possible to see the stakeholder type (retailer, producer and expert) and in the second the correspondent interviewee names/firms/organizations. In this way it was finally possible to give an overall representation of the data by inserting the voices pre-organized during the indexing phase under the correct category and stakeholder interviewed. A graphic representation of the excel sheet after the charting phase can be found at the end of the report under the voice Annex 1 (table 6, annex 1).

- **Mapping and interpretation:** During this stage the researcher uses the charts in order to find associations with the data but also (depending on the themes) to define some concepts or describe a phenomenon. The main aim of this stage broadly speaking is to answer the research questions or to see whether the initial hypothesis can be validated or rejected.

The charts constructed, in fact, showed a great number of correspondences which built a good basis for the findings section of the research. Moreover, the data concerning the stakeholder's relations and influence could be analyzed in a reliable and unbiased way and graphic representations could be drawn to better explain the dynamics and processes behind the investigated food system.

Therefore, from the data analysis of the interviews and observations the results linked with the research questions and theories could be found. The next chapters consist in the results section of the paper and answers are built through the analysis of the actors in the playing field of the food system of Almere as mentioned in the conceptual framework.

## 4. FINDINGS

The findings section opens with an in-depth stakeholder analysis which functions as an exploration of the current situation about what is happening in the food chain and which are the possible facilitators for the investigated transition. The stakeholder analysis is constructed to understand the relations in the playing field regarding local food provision in the context of Almere. After presenting an overview of the actors the analysis is based on three core principles, namely: interactions between stakeholders; interests of stakeholders concerning the local food system; and influence of stakeholders on this issue. These three principles are highly interrelated. For example, many interactions can lead to a large network and having this network is one of the components of being influential (Rowley, 1997). Understanding the relations between stakeholders helps to better describe the current situation concerning the researched theme, how certain best practices can be implemented and how the practical case can be understood and analyzed thanks to the application of the constructed theoretical framework.

Moreover, the analysis of the interests and influence of the considered actors leads to some graphic representations to better visualize the potential changemakers in the analyzed transitioning food system. Brugha and Varvasovszky argue that mapping stakeholders on the base of their interests and influence is important also to underline the differences between them and aims to understand the policy process and context (Brugha, 2000).

The links between the stakeholder analysis, theories and the case study are deepened in the last part of the research and in the discussion section. Before doing that, a rough estimation about the local food provision in the most important retail shops of Almere is provided, followed by several explanations of the challenges limiting the channels linking producers, retailers and consumers.

The events and development of novelties in the food chain represent the main exogenous factors which can potentially influence Almere's food regime. Thereafter, the interest and power of each actor have been analyzed in order to find out which are the main events and dynamics that are contributing in the transition, who has the power to enhance a change and which actors need to be encouraged to take more action. The relations occurring between stakeholders and their individual interest and influence concerning the case study helped in defining the regime actors, niches and which are the windows of opportunity that might lead to the achievement of successful results in terms of the policy ambitions.

Finally, it has been possible to grasp which are the institutional pressures pushing for changes as well as highlighting which are the pressures that need to be enforced in order to obtain the best possible results concerning the achievements of the policy ambition's goals. The pressures analyzed in this case are the ones occurring inside the regime level and represent the main endogenous factors. To analyze these specific

dynamics the case study has been looked at through the lens of the institutional theory. More in specific, it has been possible to analyze the institutional pressures (coercive, normative and mimetic) that the regime actors are already carrying out and which ones are lacking.

#### 4.1. STAKEHOLDERS OVERVIEW

The interviews taken during the data collection stage, as mentioned in the methodology section, represent the main source of information in order to analyze the actors at stake. The stakeholders interviewed can be categorized in three different groups: experts, retailers and producers. The retailers differ in size and type of shop, in fact, there are big scale retailers such as Albert Heijn and Jumbo, smaller retailer's chains such as Vomar and Deen, and Natuurwinkel, which is a shop specialized in organic and biologic products. The producers have been more difficult to reach, mostly to what concerns bigger scale producers which were not interested in participating in a research about localization; However, two producers were interviewed (Stadsboerderij and Kersenboertje) and a great amount of additional information about food production has been gathered thanks to the interviews with experts. A good variety of expert's interviews have been conducted with stakeholders that are directly linked with the local food chain and are important also concerning a possible transition towards a more regional food system in Almere. The following tables show an overview of the stakeholders interviewed.

##### RETAILERS

NATUURWINKEL	JUMBO	VOMAR	DEEN	ALBERT HEIJN (Almere)	ALBERT HEIJN (Groningen)
Shop manager	Shop manager				

##### PRODUCERS

STADSBOERDERIJ	KERSENBOERTJE
owner	owner

## EXPERTS

PROVINCE	AGROFOODCLUSTER	FLEVOFOOD	LTO-NOORD	FLORIADE
----------	-----------------	-----------	-----------	----------

Table 2: stakeholders overview

---

### 4.1.1. EXPERTS

- **Agrofoodcluster Flevoland**, according to the official website is “an independent cluster that has three cornerstones: spreading knowledge, boosting innovation and stimulating business opportunities in open field production” (site 3). It is funded by several Dutch organizations in the field of production and its headquarter is located in Emmeloord that is an area of open-field production. From there they created a cluster of organizations and companies which have both national and international influence.

According to the managing director of Agrofoodcluster, the function of the foundation is not only to promote the area and its open field production but also to give an opportunity to the member companies to have a space to talk to each other and collaborate on different themes. The stakeholders which take part of the foundation are not only entrepreneurs and producers but also governmental actors, education and research institutes. Moreover, it is an open foundation meaning that competitor firms can be part of it and it facilitates mutual learning (expert interview n. 1).

- **LTO Noord** is the agricultural entrepreneurial organization in Flevoland and its objective is to enforce the socio-economic position of its members (farmers, gardeners etc.) (site 4). In general words their function can be described as the farmer’s labor’s party and their aim is to facilitate best ways of production for their members. The organization is funded by the businesses members and LTO plays the role of advocacy having the power to go to talk not only with the local municipality but also to the Province or the national Government (expert interview n. 4).
- **Flevofood** is an emerging cooperation between food producers in Flevoland. This entrepreneurial idea came up after a survey on the different initiatives regarding local food in Flevoland and it found a great consent from the very beginning one year ago. It is a project funded by the Province which

aims to enhance collaborations between producers to sell more local products to inhabitants of Almere. The province is subsidizing the project at this spin-off stage until 2022, the year in which Floriade will take place (expert interview n. 2). The plan for the future is to create new channels in order to sell local products by creating their own brand, namely Flevofood, and a web-shop where it will be possible to purchase a great variety of local food products. Moreover, the association is seeking for professional clients like restaurants, hospitals and catering companies to sell copious amount of goods at a single time (expert interview n. 3).

- **Province:** Flevoland Province plays a relevant role in the policy scenario concerning local food. It is in fact due to this governmental actor that the policy ambition was set. According to Floriade's program manager from the Province the interest for the theme of local food has risen for policymakers due to the fact that Almere will host Floriade in 2022 (expert interview n. 2). This event in fact, represents for the Province an opportunity to strengthen the economy of Flevoland. The main role of the province is to pursue its aim is to stimulate innovation in the food chain concerning the theme of "feeding the city" and to connect entrepreneurs and knowledge institutes. For the sake of strengthening the economy and create connections between the food chain actors they started to fund Flevofood as a spin-off until Floriade starts. Other subsidizes might be given to Flevofood in the case that they demonstrate to be a successful business plan. The role of the Province however is limited to what concerns the enforcement of the local food system since they cannot intervene with regulations for market actors such as retailers (expert interview n. 2).
- **Floriade** is the organizer of the homonym world expo of horticulture that will take place in Almere in 2022. The main theme of the event is "growing green cities" which included 4 sub-themes namely greening, feeding, energizing and healthifying the city. It is a unique concept in the Netherlands for an event since for the first time an Expo will be used to develop a new part of the city (expert interview n. 5). Floriade will take place as a consequence of global urgencies such as overpopulation of cities and climate change and it will be an occasion for mutual learning between different cities worldwide and to raise awareness of citizens to what concerns environmental challenges and sustainability.

---

#### 4.1.2. RETAILERS

- **Albert Heijn:** two interviews have been conducted with Albert Heijn shop managers. It is the largest Dutch supermarket chain with around 1000 retail shop in the Netherlands (retailer interview n. 5). The interest of Albert Heijn is primarily economic-driven, and it is a very interesting chain to analyze

due to its influence in the food system. Currently AH's internal policies represent a limit to the enhancement of a more local food system, but it seems to be shifting and embracing changes (retailer interview n.5; producer interview n.1).

- **Jumbo** is the second largest retailer in the Netherlands after Albert Heijn. The interest of Jumbo is also economic, and it is influential to what concerns consumer's preferences. However, in Almere there are only chain shops of Jumbo (retailer interview n.2). As we will see this represents one of the limit for local food availability.
- **Vomar and Deen:** Respectively with 70 and 83 stores around the Netherlands they represent two relatively small supermarket chains. They share similar characteristics; The main interest of these stakeholders is economic as Albert Heijn and Jumbo but according to the interviews they seem to be following the trends of the major retailers and wait for them to take the first steps towards an empowerment of the local food system (retailers interviews n. 3 and 4).
- **Natuurwinkel** is a specialized retailer chain of organic and biologic products with 28 shops in the Netherlands which aims to move towards the progressive promotion of bio-dynamic products which are even more environmentally friendly (retailer interview n. 1). Sustainability is a core principle for the shop managers of this retail chain. This interest is the main characteristic that differentiate Natuurwinkel from the other retailers interviewed. The relation between him and Stadsboerderij, a local producer of bio-dynamic products is strong, and many local products can be found in the shop (retailer interview n. 1). The biggest challenge to overcome in order to get more local products for Natuurwinkel is logistics, since it needs to be organized by him and it costs time and money (retailer interview n.1). From the observations it was possible to see that not only the products of "almerse weelde" (the brand of stadsboerderij) were present in the shop, but also that the fresh vegetables from the region are promoted with a sign indicating the origin transparently.

---

#### 4.1.3. PRODUCERS

- **Stadsboerderij:** local food producer in the outskirts of the city of Almere open to the public and schools for visits and excursions. The food products are all produced with innovative techniques for bio-dynamic farming. To what concerns vegetables it is possible to find a great variety of products such as grain, onions, carrots, spinach, pumpkin, cabbage, beans etc. (producer interview n. 1).
- **Kersenboertje:** is a specialized producer of cherries in Almere who would like to expand its local influence in the market. The interviewee opinion is that retailers should be more interested in buying

local products and their internal policies represent the biggest channel to deliver his products to the city (producer interview n. 2).

## 4.2. STAKEHOLDERS INTERACTIONS

The stakeholders identified in the case of Almere in order to build a comprehensive scheme are actors that operate within the food chain such as producers and retailers, governmental actors, researchers, consumers, the world expo of horticulture organizer namely Floriade, the Flevofood network, the farmer's labor party LTO-NOORD and Agrofoodcluster. Among these stakeholders, many different interactions can be observed. The figures presented in each subchapter that follows show the different categories of stakeholders and the different types of interactions between them.

Three different types of relations between stakeholders have been identified and analyzed: flows of food products, monetary flows and information flows:

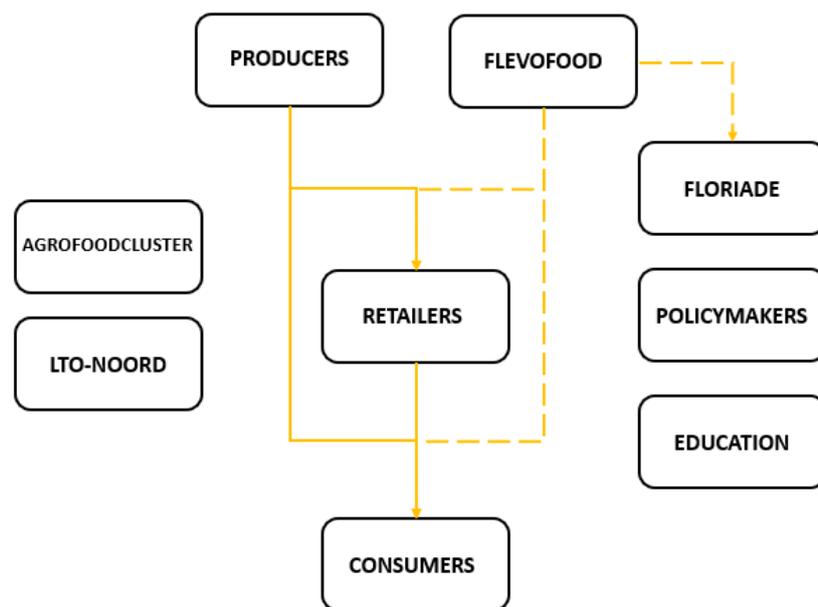
- To what concerns the **flows of food products** the relations have been easy to draw since they follow a logical flow, but it is possible to notice that with the introduction of Flevofood network new channels for delivering local products to consumers would be available.
- The **monetary flows** describe the relations between the actors considered in the research. This is done to provide the reader with a better understanding of the current situation concerning funding and to identify potential lacks in the economic landscape.
- The **information flows** consist in the communication and awareness relations between the actors.

---

### 4.2.1. FLOWS OF FOOD PRODUCTS

In figure 5 the products flows are highlighted, meaning the flows of food between the actors considered in the case study. As it becomes clear from the figure, the flows of food in the current situation follow a linear path. From the producer side, the fruits and vegetables are delivered both to retailers or sold directly to consumers through farmer's markets or local shops in the farms. According to the interview with LTO Noord the passage through retailers is often challenging and producers can have contracts with few retailers (expert interview n. 4). On the right side of the scheme, it is possible to notice a dashed line indicating the potential influence of Flevofood in expanding the chances of achieving new channels for local producers. In fact, building such a network of local producers would give more opportunities to local producers to deliver

products not only to Floriade as it is possible to see in the scheme, but also to other catering companies, hospitals etc. It is possible that such a novelty would have a resonance also on retailers, opening new channels for local products to shops. Flevofood plans are to initiate collaboration to open new channels and to sell products directly to consumers. Delivering products to retailers, in many cases means to comply with their internal policies and therefore as it will be discussed later in the paper, the products need to be delivered to the distribution centers which are located outside Flevoland region. The national (or international) organizational structure of the retailers considered in the research therefore often represents a limit for the local flows of food.



**Figure 5: Products flows**

---

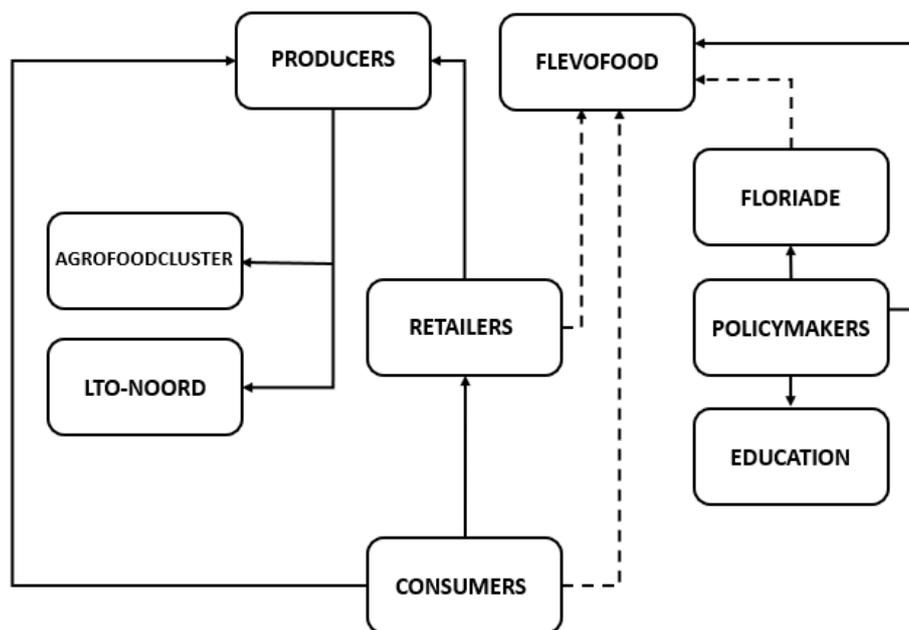
#### 4.2.2. MONETARY FLOWS

In figure 6 the links that connect the actors in monetary terms are highlighted with black arrows. To what concerns the food chain actors (producers, retailers and consumers) the arrows follow a reverse trajectory than the ones represented in the flows of goods scheme. In fact, consumers purchasing goods from retailers and producers are also funding these actors.

The producers are giving funds to two of the actors considered in the scheme, agrofoodcluster and LTO-NOORD, to have intermediaries to protect their interests with other food chain actors (agrofoodcluster) and with the Governmental agencies (LTO).

The interest of policymakers in local food provision and their involvement is clear when we look at the funds delivered to the actors in the field. Local governmental agencies are active in the issue area providing subsidizes to Flevofood to enhance local food and the regional economy and to Floriade and education institutes to achieve long term results on the theme of feeding the city (expert interview n. 2-3-5).

The black dashed arrows show the new plausible economic flows with the introduction and consolidation of the Flevofood network in the market. These flows will be additionally strengthened when the world expo of horticulture Floriade will take place in 2022 opening catering opportunities for local food producers. As it was possible to notice in the previous scheme about the flows of food between food chain actors Flevofood has the potential to create new channels for producers to distribute their products through consolidation of contracts with big events and catering companies. From this scheme we can notice that to what concerns monetary flows it would potentially open new streams from retailers, consumers and Floriade and therefore, it would contribute in enforcing the local economy.



**Figure 6: Monetary flows**

---

#### 4.2.3. INFORMATION FLOWS

The figure 7 shows the flows of communication and awareness between the actors. The scheme representing this type of flows is the most complex since it shows how the actors are connected in mutual learning processes through communication flows and how the awareness dynamics happen between them.

For a better understanding of the scheme it is important to mention that the blue arrows represent the communication streams between the actors and the red arrows the awareness flows. The dashed red lines instead show the potential awareness flows after Flevofood will become a recognized and more organized network of food chain actors and Floriade will take place in 2022.

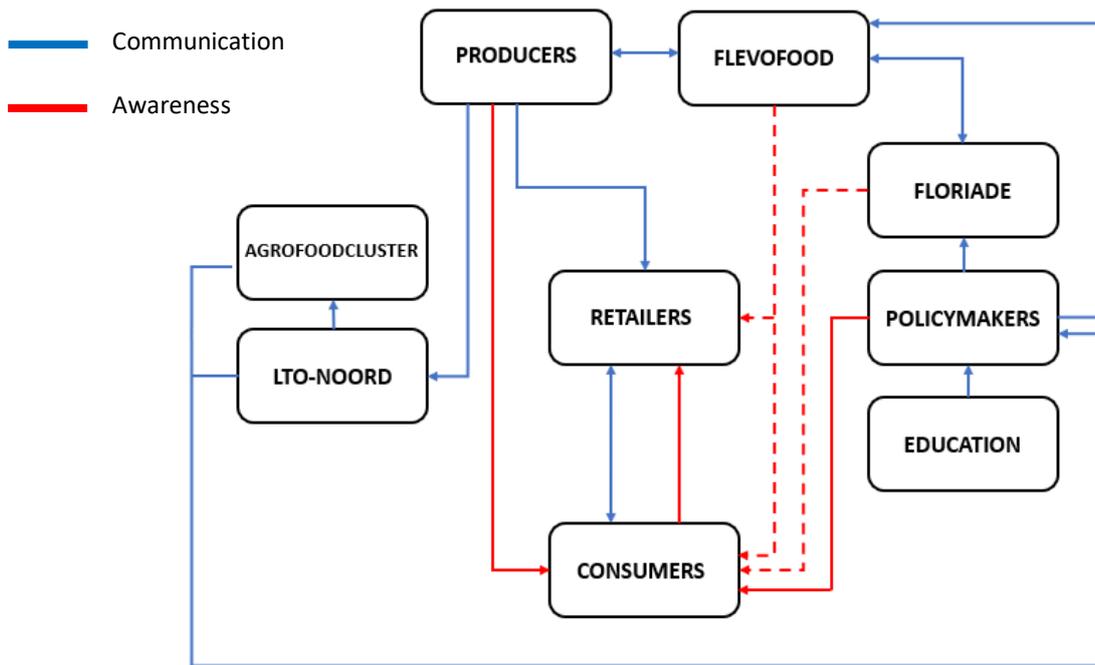
Policymakers in order to act in an effective way they gather information from Agrofoodcluster, LTO, Flevofood and from education institutes such as Aeres (expert interview n. 2). The information they collect help them in setting ambitions and keep track of the current state of art concerning the investigated topic.

The producer's interests are protected by LTO which plays a role of advocacy by protecting producer's interests and is able to bring their problems to governmental actors (expert interview n. 4). Therefore, producers are informed by LTO about the challenges they might have which are relevant for producing in the best possible conditions. Moreover, producers are in constant contact with Flevofood to plan together how to proceed, how to build a good network and contribute to the discussion to set the association's goals expert interview n. 3).

Flevofood started recently to communicate also with Floriade in order to participate in the catering of the event to promote local food production and both actors seem to be interested in developing a new win-win kind of collaboration (expert interview n. 5).

To what concerns the awareness flows consumers are the main target group for several reasons. In fact, consumer's awareness plays a crucial role to what concerns possible shifting behaviors of the retailers. They have been identified to be the actors which is the closest to them because their interest is strictly connected with retailer's activity and offer of products. The sources of awareness for consumers are policymakers and producers, but as we will see later in the paper also several cultural aspects are important when considering the awareness of Almere's citizens. Moreover, it was possible to notice from the interviews that pressure groups and media are not active in the field of local food and this might represent a limitation for a behavioral change among consumers and their shopping practices (expert interview n.2). The dashed arrows going from Floriade and Flevofood to the consumers represent the possible awareness flows originated by the new actors at stake.

Finally, retailer's practices, which are advocated to be a relevant factor to consider for a transition towards a more local and sustainable food chain are related with consumer's choices. The communication between these two actors happens in a mutual way through social medias and inside the shops (retailers interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Many times, consumers are satisfied by the offer of retailers, but it happens that if consumers ask for specific products the offer needs to be re-shaped and adjusted.



**Figure 7: Information flows**

#### **4.3. STAKEHOLDERS POWER AND INFLUENCE**

As mentioned above, stakeholders vary in influence and interests they have on a possible transition towards a more local food system. The relation between their influence and interest is shown in the figure 8.

To estimate the interest of the stakeholders groups some variables were taken into account such as the willingness to take steps towards the integration of local food products in the current food system, their interest in sustainability related issues, the initiation of new projects, the investments in this type of products or the funding given for initiatives, the level of acceptance for best practices, promotion of local products, communication with other stakeholders etc.

To what concerns the estimation of the influence that the actor's groups are able to exert variables such as the power to shape consumer's choices, dimension of the actor group, ability of exerting pressures, networking power, influencing consumption trends, money etc.

Moreover, during the interviews it has been asked to each interviewee to identify the actor they perceive to be the facilitator in order to upgrade the local food consumption among citizens of Almere. This question provided many similar responses which helped to analyze in an easier way the data concerning THE stakeholders influence.

A systematic analysis has been conducted looking at the excel sheet with the interviews summaries. Points have been attributed from -5 to +5 to each stakeholder in order to map them in the graph in relation to the influence and interest. The method used to attribute the points is to give a +1 or a -1 to the stakeholder group whenever one of the variables has been discussed in each of the interviews according to the answer given (positive or negative). After all the 13 interviews have been analyzed it was possible to calculate the average of the values (table 3).

	INFLUENCE	INTEREST
RETAILERS	3	-0,3
PRODUCERS	-0,5	1,5
CONSUMERS	1,7	0,5
POLICYMAKERS	1,6	2
FLEVOFOOD	2	3,6
FLORIADE	1,4	2,5
CULTURAL ASPECTS	1,3	-0,3

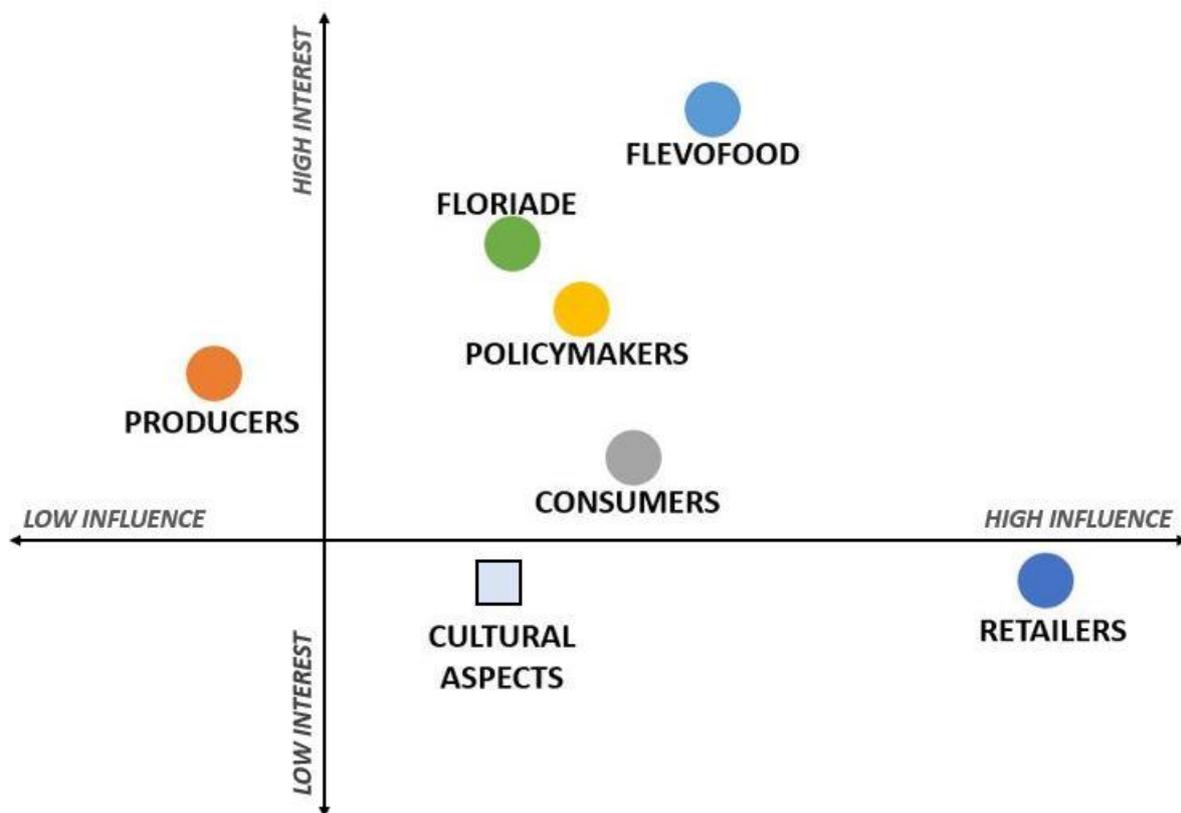
**Table 3: average stakeholders influence and interest on local food system**

In the following graph (figure 8) the actors considered are slightly different than the ones considered in the stakeholder’s relations analysis. The actors identified in this graph are considered the most important ones in the investigated case study. Therefore, it is possible to answer the specific research question n.2 by referring to this graph. The main actors considered are retailers, consumers, producers, policymakers, Flevofood and Floriade.

Since most of the interviewees considered several cultural and contextual aspects to be important in order to achieve effective results for a Transition they have been mapped together with the other actor’s groups and highlighted with a square instead of a circle to clearly visualize this difference. The cultural aspects are not analyzed in this section. However, it is important to mention now that their influence needs to be seen as strictly connected with consumers and retailer’s choices. The graphic representation for this reason is

helpful when considering the normative pressures in the context of Almere and it serves as a basis to analyze the concept of institutionalization of the local food system in the society.

The graph consists in four quadrants indicating the level of interest and influence of the different stakeholders' groups. The bottom left quadrant indicates a low interest and a low influence in the domain of local food system. The top left indicates a high interest and a low influence. The bottom right shows the stakeholders which have a higher influence but a low interest in the topic. Finally, the top right quadrant, in which most of the stakeholders have been mapped shows differing values to what concerns interest and influence, which are generally high, but some distinctions between the actors can be described.



**Figure 8: stakeholders influence & interest map**

The figure shows several interesting insights. First of all, it is possible to notice that no actors are present in the quadrant of low interest and low influence. Most of the actors considered in the graph have the possibility to influence in different ways the food system by rising awareness, shape the amount of local food available

in the city or redirecting the policy landscape towards a more local food system or at least they show some interest in the topic.

The actors that have been identified to be the most influential for a change in the current food chain regime are retailers, which do not have a high interest in changing their behaviors and facilitate the hypothesized transition. Due to their influence in the case they will be analyzed separately in order to underline the differences in terms of interest and influence between them.

Flevofood is the most interested stakeholder because, besides economic reasons, its main interest is to promote local food by enhancing cooperation between producers but also involving decision-makers from all the municipalities of Flevoland. It is a newborn network which still needs to find its spot in the market but can create new channels for local food product, as we noticed also in the stakeholder's relations schemes. It is able to raise awareness of different actors such as consumers, producers, and policymakers and it can enhance a local food culture by promoting the great variety of food products grown in the region.

Floriade is also a highly interested actor to what concerns local food and innovation. Among other themes, the event will take place to promote the local production and to show to the world the positive examples and stimulating the sustainability goals. 2 million visitors are expected to attend the event and the possibility to have an influence on their level of awareness and shaping their consumption behaviors by creating green attractions is high (expert interview n. 5). However, the influence of Floriade as an event cannot be considered as high as other stakeholders' groups since it will take place for a limited period of time of 6 months but as we will see in the chapter 4.7 it can be considered as very significant moment when looking at the case through the lens of the Transition theory.

Consumers are directly related to retailers since they can exert influence and shape the offer. For this reason, during the interviews they have been identified as a highly influential group (retailers interviews n. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). The interest of consumers as it is possible to notice from the graph is not very high. In fact, there are no pressure groups asking for local food (experts interviews n. 1 and 2) and their interest seem to be addressed more towards price than locality (experts interviews n. 1 and 2; producer interview n. 2). However, this seems to be related more with cultural aspects than with a low interest in sustainable related topics. Themes such as animal welfare and biologic production are already trends, making it possible for pressure groups and individual consumers to shape the food products offered by the retailers.

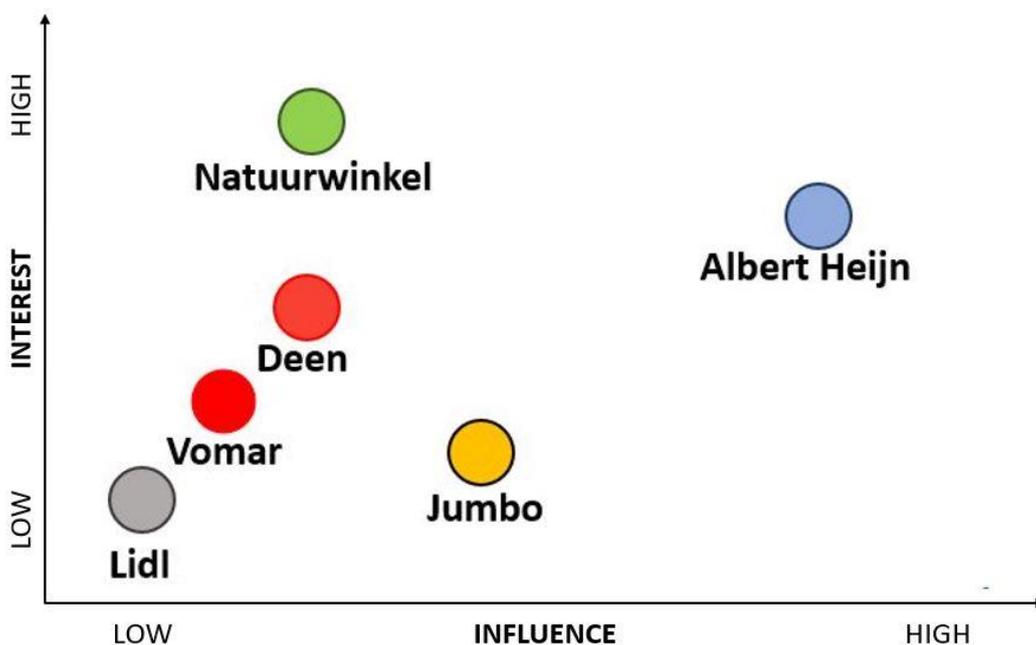
Finally, we can notice that the producers are placed in the top left quadrant, meaning that even if their interest in expanding their local channels is considerably high the influence they can have in the transition is not comparable with other stakeholders' groups (expert interview n. 1; producers interviews n. 1 and 2). In fact, they would be interested in finding new local channels and in expanding their influence in the local

market, but they have few solutions to enhance this kind of system by their self and most of the times they need to adapt to the current system (or regime) if they want to keep pursuing their economic interests (expert interview n.4).

---

#### 4.3.1. RETAILERS INFLUENCE AND INTERESTS

As mentioned above retailers play a crucial role in the transition process. For this reason, a focus on this stakeholder group is needed. Separating the retailers is helpful to better understand who of them can facilitate this process in order to try to achieve the policy ambitions. The following graph helps in visualizing the distribution of the different retail categories in relation to their interest and influence in the context of the case study.



**Figure 9: retailer's influence and interest**

The graph has been drawn after a qualitative analysis of the interviews in which the stakeholders expressed opinions and facts about the different roles played by the retailers. Moreover, the observations conducted inside the shops have been used as a tool to confront the data collected during the interviews.

A common opinion of the interviewees is that Albert Heijn is the key retailer. Its influence is the highest because it is the first retailer in the Netherlands and can shape consumption behaviors changing the products they offer in the stores. Moreover, it is very influential also on other retailers. In fact, according to the interviews with smaller retailers such as Vomar and Deen it emerged that in case retailers such as Jumbo and Albert Heijn would make steps forward towards a more local system they would follow the example (retailer interviews n. 3-4). This specific topic will be discussed looking at the case through the lens of institutional theory and it is based on the conviction that if a firm is successful in implementing green behaviors other companies would emulate them by adopting the same line of action to be legitimized and to pursue the same success. Moreover, it is possible to notice a higher interest of Albert Heijn concerning local food when compared the other retailers selected for this research. This is justified by the interviews with producers and experts such as Stadsboerderij and Flevofood. Representatives of Albert Heijn are in fact often in contact with the new network of producers (Flevofood). They recognize that in this particular moment for the city the local trend might be growing, and some internal regulations would need to change because they represent a limit for local food provision (expert interview n. 3, producer interview n. 1).

Jumbo is the second major retailer in the Netherlands and for this reason its influence is also high. However, in Almere all the Jumbo shops are chain shops and not franchises. As we will see in chapter 4.4.2 this is a considerable point in terms of internal policies limiting local food availability in the retail sector. The interest showed by Jumbo for local food is not very high in Almere, in fact from the interview with the retail manager it emerged that he didn't know about the growing interest of the city for this theme and the interest of the shop is solely linked with economic factors and consumer's preferences. In his opinion consumers don't show a high interest for local food. In some cases, in fact, Jumbo tried to offer more local food, but the interest of costumers was high only initially. The low interest on the topic of local food was demonstrated also by the fact that the interviewee argued that not only the conventional food system is easier and more efficient but also importing products from abroad is more convenient (retailer interview n. 2).

Natuurwinkel is the retail chain that shows the highest interest for local food, but its influence cannot be compared with bigger chains such as Albert Heijn and Jumbo since the number of consumers is lower and the shop has a specific target group. Also, from the in-store observations it is possible to notice that the amount of local food products sold is higher than all the other shops considered. In particular, it is possible to find a great variety of products with the brand Almerse Weelde, the brand of Stadsboerderij, and it is the only shop in which it could be observed that local fresh food is promoted by a plate indicating its source, in the given case Lelystad. The shop manager showed a great willingness to sell more local products in the shop, for example he set for the shop an internal ambition of the 15% of the products to be regional. However, efficiency reasons such as logistics and practical reasons such as the seasonality of the products represent

constraints for this ambition and for this reason in most of the cases the percentage cannot be reached (retailer interview n. 1).

Smaller chain shops than Albert Heijn or Jumbo like Vomar and Deen share some characteristics to what concerns their interest and influence. Their mimetic power is in fact not as high as bigger chains and they don't feel enough influential to make a change in the food system. Both shop managers replied that a transition would be possible if retailers would take action in that direction, but it is Albert Heijn's responsibility to take the initiative (retailers interviews n. 3-4). However, through an internal competition between shops, Deen shows more interest in sustainability related topics such as reducing energy consumption and reducing food waste. Moreover, Deen has horizontal relations with the head office and this allows shop managers to ask for several local products (retailer interview n. 4).

#### **4.4. LOCAL FOOD AVAILABILITY AND SOME CHALLENGES**

In the following subchapter 4.4.1. the specific question n.1 of the research is answered. A rough estimation has been pursued in order to understand how much local food is available for consumers on the shelves of the major retailers in Almere. Moreover, some issues have been identified as the most relevant challenges limiting the empowerment of the local food system. In particular, two aspects linked with the retail sector have been extrapolated and analyzed: the internal policies of supermarkets and the anonymity of food products when entering the conventional food system. The chapter continues with a description of the contribution of the policy ambition which serves as an introduction to the findings related with the specific research questions n.3 and n.4.

---

##### **4.4.1. THE LOCAL FOOD AVAILABILITY IN ALMERE**

The following chapter provides information on the local food availability in the city of Almere. Therefore, it is constructed in order to answer to the first specific research question "What is the current amount of local food (fruit and vegetables) provided by retailers in Almere?".

The findings are based on both interviews and observations. As mentioned in the methodology chapter the observations have been gathered to support the data collected during the interviews and they show some interesting insights. Firstly, the observations suggest that a precise estimation of local food availability cannot be drawn only by using this methodological tool for data collection. In fact, the origin of food products cannot always be observed. The source written on the packaging indicates the country of origin and the manufacturer and/or the distributor. However, a specific indication which would inform the consumer if a

national product comes from Zeeland, Gelderland or Flevoland is missing in most of the cases. Secondly, it is possible to notice similarities between the different retail's areas. All the observed shops had similar proportions looking at the size of areas of fresh, processed and ultra-processed food. Even if it was not possible to understand the exact origin, the fresh products areas in the shops evidenced that a great variety of fruit and vegetables products are nationally produced accounting as the 35% for vegetables and around 20% for fruits. A particular mention needs to be done for three products: potatoes, onions and carrots. For these products the national production was dominant (around 90%). Since Flevoland is the biggest producer of potatoes and onions at a national level, it is assumed that a consistent part of it is regionally produced and can be purchased by consumers in Almere. However, it is not possible to estimate the number of regional products as an individual consumer. Therefore, it is clear that a regional focus is missing or at least it cannot be perceived as an external observer.

Thus, for a rough estimation of local food availability in the city of Almere it is important to consider the opinions of the interviewees. The base to start this estimation is the survey conducted by Mr. Arijan Dekking, one of the founders of Flevofood and founder of the website Lokaal Voedsell (SITE 5). In the survey were considered all the local initiatives of Flevoland to investigate the amount of local food availability. In the interview he mentioned that the number is around the 1,5% of the totality of the products, which is very low when we consider the policy ambition of the province. The shop managers interviewed did not have specific data about the source of the products, but they could provide some estimations which are showed in the following table (table 4).

Jumbo	Vomar	Deen	Natuurwinkel	Albert Heijn
1%	2%	0%, only fruit juice	2% depends on seasonality	n.a.

**Table 4: interviewee's estimation on the amount of local food products in store**

It is observable that also in this case the number of local food products is far from reaching the amount set by policymakers. Similar data has been provided by producers. Both Stadsboerderij and Kersenboertje in fact considered that the percentage does not even reach the 1% (producers interviews n. 1 and 2). However, according to the interview with Stadsboerderij the amount of food produced is high and by enforcing the collaboration between the different actors of the food chain of Almere it would be possible to reach the policy ambitions set by the Province (producer interview n. 1). For example, the amount of grain produced

by Stadsboerderij, in the opinion of the interviewee, would be high enough to satisfy the needs of Almere's population in terms of bread. The interviewee argued that primary efforts should be done to push production and local distribution of these kind of ingredients which are fundamental for everyone's daily diet (producer interview n.1).

Another problem is the seasonality of food products. For example, Natuurwinkel, said that it needs to be considered "that a lot of products are not available through the whole year, and 20 % could be reached only in a limited time period". He then continued arguing that "For my shop I already set 5 years ago that when a product is available I want to sell the 15% local. But only when it's available. For example, in some periods I sell 90% of local cherries. It is easy, but for other products I can only sell 20% (radish, lettuce) and for other products that are not produced in the region 0% of course. In the overall shop I would say that only around 1-2% of food is local" (retailer interview n. 1).

Finally, analyzing the interviews of other experts it can be confirmed that the percentage is still low. The actors are positive when considering the most commonly produced products of Flevoland: potatoes, onions and carrots. This finds a confirmation from both the interviews with Mr. Koning, who thinks that the 20 % would not be a problem for these products and Agrofoodcluster, who said that minimum 10% of the potatoes and onions purchasable in supermarkets are produced in the region (experts interviews n. 1 and 2). The production of these products is very high in Flevoland, however, most of the production is exported to other countries. The interviewee in fact argued that "The productivity in terms of tons per hectare to what concerns potatoes in the world it is 18.9 per hectare, in Europe for instance it is 30.3, in this region it is 51.7, but here (Emmeloord) it is 60. For onions it's 19.3 in the world, here in the Flevoland is 56.7 and specifically in this part it's 63. People here know how to grow potatoes and onions really well, but these potatoes and onions are exported and processed somewhere else" (expert interview n.1). According to LTO interview at least 95% of products are exported abroad meaning that the remaining part stays in the national market and only a small percentage is distributed in Flevoland (expert interview n. 4).

Apart from the challenge mentioned above deriving from aspects related with seasonality, other aspects of the food chain regime are currently limiting the local food availability in the shops. For this reason, it is interesting to analyze the major challenges coming from the retail sector such as their internal policies.

---

#### **4.4.2. INTERNAL POLICIES OF RETAILERS**

The internal policies of retailers and in particular of big supermarket chains represent a major problem for an increase in terms of local food availability. First of all, the supermarket chains considered in the research are nationally organized. This implies that a regional focus is neglected in most of the cases by their

internal policies. Retail managers in fact, need to order the food from the main distribution centers, which are not located in the Flevoland region. The interviews highlighted that this happens because the conventional food system is more efficient to what concerns logistics. Moreover, a centralized distribution center facilitates the ordering system and creates a uniformity of food products that possible to find in all the shops of the same chain. The national (or international) organizational structure of supermarkets implies that even if the food is produced in the region, in most of the cases it needs to be transported to a distribution center outside Flevoland before coming back to the shelves of Almere's retailers. It is clear that this kind of method has a negative impact on the environment by empowering the phenomenon of food miles, the distance of transportation of a food items during the journey from producer to consumer, as a unit of measurement of the fuel used to transport it. Moreover, it can be added that the fact that food products are transported out of the region represent the biggest challenge for the policy ambition, because a short food chain connecting the producers and consumers is the base of a local food system.

Furthermore, considering the internal policies of the retail sector, in Almere two typologies of retailers can be found: chain shops and franchises. Chain shops and franchises are different in terms of internal policies they need to comply. Chain shops are limited in the choice of the products to sell in-store since they must order all the food items from the distribution center of the chain with no exceptions (retailers interviews n. 2, 3, 4). Instead, franchises benefit from a higher level of freedom in choosing the food products. In this case, retail managers are allowed to select part of the products independently according to the specific percentages written in the contracts with the retail chain (expert interview n. 2). For example, as already mentioned, Natuurwinkel is a franchise shop and the shop manager have the freedom to choose the 20% of the items in an autonomous way. For this reason, it is easier for franchises to build their own connections with local producers and have greater percentages of products inside the shop which are locally grown, and it is possible to arrange the logistics within borders of the region. The retail manager of Natuurwinkel also set a percentage concerning the amount of local food that he would like to have in his shop which correspond to the 15% of the total of the products (retailer interview n. 1). However, due to logistics problems, agreements need to be arranged between the franchise's retail manager and the producers. According to the interview with Natuurwinkel in fact, collecting food from the producer is time consuming and expensive (retailer interview n. 1). Only in rare occasions the transportation is arranged by producers, especially because the amount of food items needed in the case of small retail shop such as Natuurwinkel is not high enough for a producer to make enough profit. Many times, it is impossible to reach the percentage set because of these kinds of problems and not only because of the seasonality issues related with the regional fruits and vegetables (retail interview n 1). In the case of bigger franchise shops, the problem is linked with the bureaucracy behind the contracts with producers. In fact, according to the interviewee of Albert Heijn it takes between one to two years before it is possible to sell the products (retail interview n.5). It is interesting

to highlight also that in the case of other franchises, such as Jumbo, there is a restriction to what concerns the percentage of local food products allowed to have in the store. In fact, as mentioned by Mr. Koning, even if they are allowed to choose the 20% their food products independently, there are other contract limits to what concerns local food. On this topic he explained that “Jumbo franchises, even if they would like to sell more local products they have to respect the internal policy that does not allow them to sell more than the 7-8% of locally grown products. It has to do with logistics and money as well. Organizing a lot of small trucks coming into a local store from local farmers is much more difficult than only one big truck coming from the distribution center of AH or Jumbo” (expert interview n. 2). This is related to efficiency reasons such as logistics difficulties.

Moreover, other internal policies of supermarkets lead to problems related with anonymity of food products. It is therefore possible to state that the internal policies of supermarkets are not taking into account the regionality of food products and are currently limiting the policy ambitions.

---

#### **4.4.3. ANONIMITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

The problem of anonymity of food products is directly related with the conventional food system and in particular with actors such as traders and retailers. In many cases, as it could be observed, in the retail shops of Almere, the food products, when entering the conventional food chain, they lose authenticity in the sense that it becomes difficult or even impossible for consumers to understand the origin of the products they want to purchase. On the one hand, fresh vegetables and fruit’s origin is visible at least concerning the country of production. On the other hand, when more processed products are considered and observed in-store it is impossible to know the source of the all ingredients needed for their preparation. As mentioned in the introduction of the research this kind of phenomenon leads to a lack of social inclusion, and it represents a problem since consumers feel disconnected from producers. For this reason, the trust for the quality of the food offered on the shelves of supermarket chains is declining (Kneafsey, 2010). Moreover, this issue represents a problem also for local producers. During the interviews with the producers it was argued that only a very small amount of products can be processed at the place of production, therefore, most of the products are sold to processing companies or traders before entering in the retail sector (producer interview n. 1). During this trade it is difficult for a producer to keep track of the products and retailer’s chains usually prefer to sell the products with their own logo. Stadsboerderij for example has its own brand named “Almerse Weelde”, but when the food is sent to the processing company, the logo and description of the producer is added only to the 10% of the total amount of products, instead, the remaining products are sold to the retailers and labelled as a product of the retail chain itself. The products with the logo of the producer are then sent back to the producer who consequently needs to find his own channels to sell the products

(producer interview n. 1). According to the interview with the owner of Stadsboerderij most of these products are sold in loco, at the farmer's market which is organized in the area of Stadsboerderij every Saturday or in some retail shops directly connected with the local producer such as Natuurwinkel (producer interview n.1). As Kneafsey claims, the connection between consumers and producers is advocated to increase the trust in the food products (Kneafsey, 2010). All the interviewees agreed on the concept of social inclusion and local products, however it was also pointed out that one of the main interests of Almere's citizens is the price of products (expert interview n. 1, 2; retail interview n. 2, 3, 5; producer interview n. 2). This connection as well as the consumer's interest could be improved if the products would be characterized by a higher transparency in terms of their regional origin for example by adding the logo of the producer for local promotion also when they are sold in big retail chains. It would be a win-win situation for consumers and producers since it would mean an increase of trust and promotion of the area with consequent economic advantages.

The problems related with the anonymity of food products in this research are discussed from an institutional point of view in chapter 4.8.3. since they are strictly related with the concept of normative pressures. Before doing this however, it is interesting to see how the policy ambition is contributing in the transition.

#### **4.5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE POLICY AMBITION**

The policy ambition, as Mr. Koning suggests can be described as a question for policymakers and researchers, to investigate the feasibility of an increment in the offer and demand of local food products (expert interview n.2). Even if the goals and its feasibility are not clear yet it is possible to highlight that some progresses are occurring thanks to the process of recognition of the Province that investing in the enhancement of a more local food chain can be beneficial for economical, innovation and sustainability related reasons (expert interview n. 2). As already mentioned the dominant goal to be investigated is to reach the 20% of local food provision by 2022. The interviewee of Flevofood, who is in direct contact with the Province said that a satisfying target for the local government would be around the 10% but the target set for researchers is higher (20%) in order to stimulate the best viable solutions (expert interview n. 3). Therefore, it can be said that the policy definition and process are at an early stage and a precise target has not been defined yet. So, why can it be considered as a crucial factor contributing to take steps forward in the re-localization of the food system?

Firstly, the policy ambition pushed the province to start funding initiatives in line with their aspirations. The biggest contribution in this initial phase can therefore be identified: the monetary flows between the Province and the Flevofood network. Flevofood is in fact supposed to play a primary role in the next future.

Connecting producers and various stakeholders in the food chain to achieve common goals can bring benefits to the local economy and contribute to sustainability.

The second contribution is again related with Flevofood. This stakeholder currently is also playing a role in informing other stakeholders about the policy ambition and raising the awareness of several actors of essential importance for the success rate of the policy ambition. This has been demonstrated by the increasing interest of Albert Heijn in local products and the opportunity to connect retailers with producers.

Moreover, a second contribution is represented by the fact that research is currently ongoing, and it has the potential to provide valuable recommendations on how to proceed in both a structural and political way. Challenges can be identified, and solutions investigated so policymakers can re-orient their efforts to invest in viable solutions by gathering relevant insights on the current state of art on this issue area for future policy revisions.

Therefore, three main contributions can be underlined: it stimulates networks and innovation, it contributes in rising awareness among citizens and businesses, and it enhances research and knowledge.

It is clear that at the moment the ambition is far to be reached but these first steps are crucial in order to achieve these ambitious goals and it potentially helps the local food system to incrementally upscale and interfere with the regime level ascribed in the Transition theory.

#### **4.6. TRANSITIONS, POLICY WINDOWS AND INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE**

In order to achieve a change in the food chain and to explore what are the main achievements and limits so far, the case study requires to be analyzed from different theoretical angles, which intersect to enhance a deeper understanding about the complexities involved in this context. Since the investigated system is complex, the Transition theory alone cannot explain all the behavioral changes occurring at the regime's level. Therefore, in the following chapter several theoretical perspectives will be applied accordingly with the theoretical framework of the research in order to explain different traits of the case study. In chapter 4.7 the Transition theory and its related concept of window of opportunity are used to explain why the policy ambition was drawn in this specific period. Moreover, from this theoretical lens the changes in the landscape and the dynamics behind the creation of the niches are investigated. Finally, the institutional theory, combined with the stakeholder's interactions has been applied in chapter 4.8 to understand how regime's actors in the context of the practical case study of Almere initiate different kinds of pressures (coercive, mimetic and normative) and react to them. The integration of this theory is particularly useful to identify

which pressures are the most used, which are the most influential and which pressures still need to be enhanced so that the policy ambition can reach successful results.

#### **4.7. LANDSCAPE CHANGES AND INTERCONNECTED WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY ENHANCING THE TRANSITION PROCESS**

The following chapter explains how and why the policy ambition was constructed from a theoretical point of view and explores how the transition process is happening in the context of Almere. As described in the theoretical framework, the concept of policy windows emerging from the Transition theory can help in describing the importance of the intervention of policymakers in the case study and in analyzing the transition process by investigating the most important events occurring in Almere to what concerns the theme of local food. Defining the policy windows helps to understand which events, landscape changes and niches developments are entailed in the context of the research. Therefore, as mentioned in the conceptualization chapter (ch. 2.3), through the lens of the Transition theory it is possible to highlight the exogenous factors, or in other words the pressures affecting the regime's level from the outside, that would potentially lead the regime adopting radical or adaptive changes.

From the stakeholder analysis it is possible to make a classification of the actors based on the multi-level perspective's scheme theorized by Geels. This classification (table 5) is useful in order to reach a deeper understanding about the dynamics making the transition to the local food system possible and consequently providing an answer to the research question n.3.

Starting from the regime's actors the case study suggests that we need to consider most of the retailers, policymakers, big producer's companies, consumers, Agrofoodcluster and LTO Noord as actors running their activities at this level since they are the ones that have the power to orient the activities to give stability to the current conventional food system.

To what concerns the landscape level the analysis to be done need to be extended to more historical and contextual factors of the case study. From the stakeholder analysis is important to notice that Floriade can be considered as an event which has the peculiarity of basing its roots from specific changes occurring at the landscape level. As it is deepened later in the chapter, Almere is facing the urgency to tackle the problem of Urbanization, which is identified as the main landscape change influencing the regime's actors and activities and Floriade is a direct result of this environmentally impacting urgency.

Three actors fall in the so-called niche level: Flevofood, Stadsboerderij and Natuurwinkel. They can be considered niches because they represent examples of socio-technical innovations, promoting values which are differing from the ones of the regime and they aim to scale-up and influence the regime's dynamics.

<b>Landscape</b>	Urbanization, Floriade.
<b>Regime</b>	Policymakers, major retailers, big producer's companies, consumers, Agrofoodcluster, LTO Noord.
<b>Niches</b>	Flevofood, Stadsboerderij, Natuurwinkel

**Table 5: Landscape, Regime and Niche's actors of the case study**

The concept of window of opportunity suggests that there are multiple streams of problems, politics, and policies which together they have the potential to open a policy window. This offers to policymakers the opportunity to set a particular problem higher on the policy agenda (Rose et al., 2017).

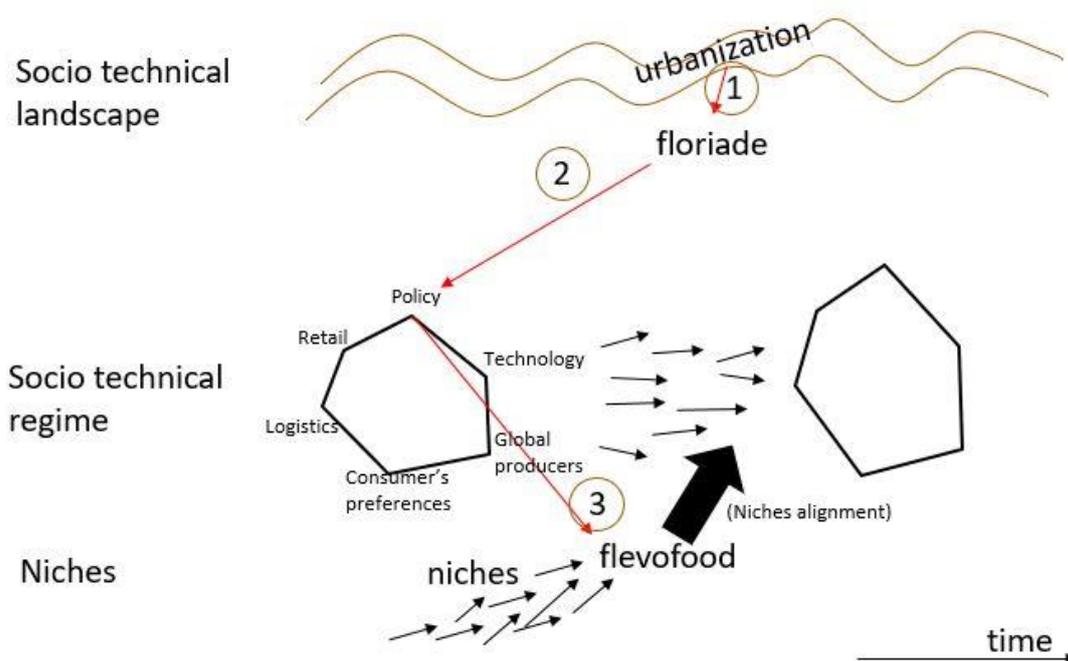
In the case of Almere, the policy ambition represents an intervention due to a particular momentum, or window of opportunity. This window was created by a particular event, Floriade, which is itself a policy decision. When the city of Almere has been officially recognized to be the host of Floriade, policymakers acknowledged that it was important to take action in order to be prepared for the Expo. Floriade, thus, is a response to a window of opportunity coming from the changes happening at the landscape level. In fact, according to the interview with a member of Floriade it is clear that the momentum for Floriade finds its roots from some major urgencies such as overpopulation of the Netherlands and the over urbanization that is currently occurring in the city of Almere (expert interview n. 5). On the topic of urbanization, he argued that “the Netherlands is already urbanized at the 83%, a percentage that overcomes the world average percentage which at the moment is around the 70%” (expert interview n. 5). Thus, the problems related with the density of the country brought Floriade to think to the global urgencies and the sustainable goals. It is in fact true that urbanization has negative impacts on climate, biosphere, air quality and water (Suren & Elliot, 2004). With this event, questions on how to keep the city safe, healthy and green will be brought to the stage, to be inspired by examples from abroad and to inspire others by showing how Almere is facing these problems (expert interview n. 5).

The day in which the Expo will start in 2022, according to interviewees from the Flevoland Province, Flevofood and Floriade itself, is considered by them as a deadline, a *momentum* in which networks of stakeholders need to be set and organized to make the difference to what concerns the theme of “feeding the city” (expert interviews n. 2, 3, 5). This deadline pushed policymakers to intervene by formulating a policy ambition, which determined a higher status of the theme in the policy agenda, and a stimulus for other stakeholders. Consequently, seeing it as an opportunity to enforce the local economy some investments have been done by the local governmental agencies; The most evident is by providing funds to Flevofood, which will need to

demonstrate to be a good business model in order to keep receiving funding from the Province (expert interview n. 2). This step, through the lens of transition theory can be seen as the moment in which a niche has the opportunity to upscale. Flevofood can in fact be considered as a niche, or more in specific as a unification of niches planning to enter in the market by shaping the regime's dynamics of the conventional food system by promoting the local products of Flevoland region.

What is interesting to notice is that in the case of Almere it has been part of the regime itself that opened to niches actors to upscale. Therefore, the regime, to what concerns the stakeholder group of policymakers, responded to the exogenous pressures as a facilitator for the transition. In fact, Flevofood exists thanks to the funds provided by governmental actors. Therefore, the case study analyzed through this theory suggests that the regime is not always seeking for stability by limiting innovations, especially when some of the actors involved in it realize that a re-adjustment of the trajectories behind the regime's actions is needed because of the changes occurring at the landscape level. Thus, the intervention of niches does not represent a danger but is also needed in order to re-adjust to the scenario opened by these changes.

The changes in the landscape and at the niche's level which together have the power to enhance a regime transition by pressuring the current regime are visualized in the figure below. Moreover, the figure shows the different windows of opportunity characterizing the changes which are making the transition process possible (highlighted by numbers from 1 to 3):



**Figure 10: transition's theory applied in the context of Almere's food system adapted from Geels 2011**

Additional evidence for the veracity of the constructed graphic representation can be found by analyzing several auxiliary interviews. Other actors de facto recognized that these two events, Floriade and the policy ambition, are representative moments which can contribute to changes in the domain of Almere's food system. During the interview with the owner of Stadsboerderij it was remarked that the policy ambition, from a producer's side, is seen as an opportunity for farmers to get new subsidies (producer interview n. 1). Kersenboertje on the other hand explained that Floriade is a big national attraction, and an opportunity for promotion of local products and businesses (producer interview n. 2). Almere's Municipality is also very active at the moment on these themes according to both Agrofoodcluster and Floriade. They argued that this governmental actor is working towards the event and they are responsible for the spatial planning which will be crucial also for the future since an entire new area of the city will be developed in order to host the event and it will be an example of green neighborhood with housings and innovative infrastructures (expert interviews n. 1 and 5).

For the reasons explained above, 2022 can be seen as a date which creates interconnected windows of opportunities for policymakers, Flevofood association, producers, public awareness and local food culture. Therefore, we see many links between this date and the creation of niches which in the next future might have the possibility to upscale and re-shape some aspects of the considered regime. However, even if it is true that some of the regime's actors are trying to re-direct the trajectories of the regime consequently to several landscape changes such as urbanization and the sustainability discourses that will be carried out by Floriade in 2022, the Transition theory itself cannot explain how other crucial regime actors such as retailers are reacting to these forces. From this theory and from what it could be observed it seems that they are somehow embracing changes. For example, by participating in the speeches and conferences of Flevofood network, retailers might recognize the urgency to change some behaviors accordingly. Yet, it is still unclear how big the pressures to these regime businesses are and how these actors will respond to them. For a better understanding about how a transition inside of the conventional food chain regime of Almere happens, an analysis of these pressures is needed. For this reason, in the next chapter the institutional theory will be applied to the case looking in specific for the main institutional pressures that are supposed to push firms and businesses to adopt greener behaviors.

#### **4.8. INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES**

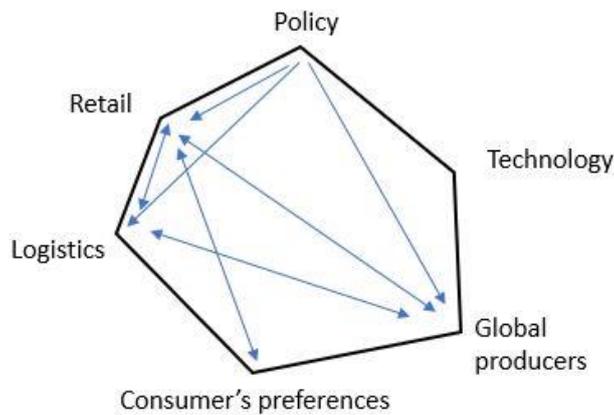
As Glover claims, Institutional Theory is "traditionally concerned with how groups and organizations better secure their positions and legitimacy by conforming to the rules (...) and norms of the institutional environment" (Glover, Champion, Daniels, & Dainty, 2014, pp.104). This theory helps to understand why and

how in the context of Almere the decisions have been taken and how several institutional pressures will plausibly play a role in the next years in order to achieve greener behaviors for regime's actors.

The pressures considered (mimetic, normative and coercive) have been identified during the interviews and they all seem to play a role to what concerns a transformative change.

The analyzed pressures are considered in this research as the endogenous factors leading to an adaptation of the regime actors to behavioral changes towards a more local system. Regime's actors in fact need to respond to the exogenous pressures described through the Transition theory in the chapter above. They are expected to be able to re-direct the trajectories and enable pressures which can contribute to resist to changes seeking for regime's stability or to adopt particular measures to move along with the changes contributing to a transition.

The figure below is constructed to visualize the complementarity of the institutional theory with the Transition theory. The majority of the institutional pressures which are represented by the exemplifying arrows happens at the socio-technical regime's level (figure 11).



**Figure 11: Institutional pressures at the regime's level**

In the following sections these pressures will be further analyzed to investigate what has already been put into practice and what are the possibilities for the future. Hence, the findings can be seen as an answer to the research question n.4.

---

#### 4.8.1. COERCIVE PRESSURES

This kind of pressures occur because of the influence exerted by power actors such as local governmental agencies. Even if they can play a crucial role in order to drive environmental management and sustainability, urban food policies can be considered only one of the factors able to change the food system (IPES-Food, 2017). In fact, local policymakers are only a part of a wider multi-level governance spectrum in which local policies are only partially influencing the system because they overlap or conflict with other policies at a local, regional, national and global level. Moreover, other factors such as economic, trading, agriculture and health policies can't be addressed at a city level (IPES-Food, 2017).

The strengths and the limits of the local policymakers were highlighted during the interview with Mr. Koning. He remarked that they have no power in setting standards and regulate the businesses to make them produce or sell more local products. Also concerning logistics, the power of the Province is limited, and it is businesses' responsibility to arrange it in a way that is more regional. Moreover, retailers need to deal with quality standards set at a higher institutional level, in this case the EU, and for this reason is not always easy for them to get local products in the shop (expert interview n.2).

However, Almere's municipality and the Flevoland province do play a role in the transition by exerting coercive pressures and the funds to new projects such as Flevofood confirm their intentions. Moreover, they are also creating educational networks of universities for diverse sustainability related issues including sustainable food practices (expert interview n. 2). This shows a clear intention for the long-term and can be considered as a coercive pressure since it is an influence starting from governmental actors steering the interests according to their policy agenda. According to Di Maggio and Powell organizations such as Flevofood are most likely to be dependent on the government support because they need to conform to the coercive pressures coming from governmental agencies in order to receive the funds needed to survive (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983). This is demonstrated by the fact that only initial subsidy has been given to Flevofood, which needs to show to the Province to have a good business plan and be organized by 2022 in order to get new funds.

Another influence exerted by the local Government is represented by the concession of land given to Stadsboerderij for production purposes. Stadsboerderij is in fact allowed to produce thanks to this permission, and since it is a public space, it is open for visit by citizens (expert interview n. 4; retailer interview n. 1; producer interview n. 1). The free access of public in Stadsboerderij serves to promote local production and it empowers consumer's trust in food products thanks to the high transparency that connects citizens and producers.

According to the interviews with producers and retailers, the local Governmental agencies have the possibility to contribute to the transition and exert the coercive pressures even more. For example, offering subsidizes to local producers or reducing the fares when a retailer buys local products. These two solutions would facilitate the transition, enforce the local economy and stimulate innovations, are indeed matching the Province interests, but the economic efforts might be too high, and the decisions would need the support of Governmental agencies at a higher level. Therefore, we can notice that the coercive pressures are playing a big role in the case study to what concerns funding and stimulating networks, however, there are limits that are hard to overcome from a policy perspective especially when it comes to the private business sphere. For this reason, there is the need to explain the dynamics of the mimetic pressures, which are considered to be even more efficient concerning businesses since they are market oriented.

---

#### **4.8.2. MIMETIC PRESSURES**

Mimetic pressures occur when a firm tries to emulate the patterns of action of other successful competitors. The rationale behind this is that if you follow the example of other successful firms you will be consequently successful. In the case study of the research various mimetic pressures which are potentially influencing the behaviors of firms such as retailers and producers could be identified.

To better understand how the mimetic pressures between producers take shape it is useful to look at the information flows described in chapter 4.2.3 (figure 7). The main sources of mimetic pressures between producers are identifiable in the communication flows connecting them with Flevofood and Agrofoodcluster. These actors provide producers with platforms, spaces and networking events in which mutual mimetic influences occur. In these ways the producers can meet and take inspiration by looking at successful competitors. For example, Agrofoodcluster is an open foundation in which competitors can be together part of the cluster. Moreover, producers collaborated on several themes in order to get the right personnel and education (expert interview n. 1). Flevofood also provides producers with the opportunity to communicate thanks to informative events. Networking and a widespread flow of communication and knowledge of what is happening around also concerning the policy ambition is pushing them to emulate successful examples and can establish and enforce new channels (expert interview n. 3). An example of readjustment to be legitimized in the market has been given by the interview with Agrofoodcluster. It seems in fact that the trend of biologic production has pushed also conventional producers to use less or no pesticides (expert interview n. 1). This demonstrates that mutual learning about the benefits of more “legit” products is happening concerning several issue areas in the food chain. Therefore, most likely the local discourse is going to influence the ways of action of producers in the next future considering the pressures coming from the niches, the landscape and the ones occurring between regime’s actors.

To what concerns retailers, mimetic dynamics are considered in this research an important mechanism to be developed. In fact, in the past years the mimetic pressures between retailers were not focusing on the theme of local food. However, in the current situation it's possible to notice that a different scenario might occur. The interest of most of the retailers concerning local food is in fact expected to grow in the next years if several key retailers would start the trend. As said in chapter 4.3.1 and as visualized in figure 8 about the retailer's influence and interest we can notice that Albert Heijn at the moment is potentially interested in enhancing the local trend and in the case that this would happen, other retailers will move towards a more local focus as well. As it happened in recent times with the increase of biologic and vegetarian products in all retailers in the Netherlands due to pressures from society and consequent emulation dynamics between retail chains it is possible that this phenomenon would repeat to what concerns locally grown food products (retailer interviews n. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Most of the retail managers interviewed argued that at the moment there is no regional focus in their shops, but they recognized that a change would be needed in order to support local economy. Moreover, smaller scale retailer's chains such as Vomar, Deen and Natuurwinkel argued that the first step for an effective transition in the food system needs to be done by major retailers, and the rest would follow their example (retailer interviews n. 1, 3, 4). It is clear that the emulation of green strategies is an important step to enforce the legitimation of a business in the market, and it often starts from business which have an economic status which allow them to invest in solutions and have the possibility to be innovative. Therefore, in the opinion of the interviewees, Albert Heijn would have a big role in enhancing mimetic pressures if they would take steps towards a more regional food system.

Since Albert Heijn has been identified as the potential facilitator for an increment of mimetic pressures and therefore as a gamechanger it is interesting to notice its position on the retailer's influence and interest map (figure 9, chapter 4.3.1). Its position concerning influence is the highest in the distribution for the reasons explained above. Moreover, its interest is higher than most of the retailers considered in the case study if we exclude Natuurwinkel which is a specialized shop selling biologic products and already shows a regional focus by promoting local products in-store. Its interest is considered higher than most of the retailers in the case study because in recent times, according to the interviews with Stadsboerderij and Flevofood, important exponents of Albert Heijn are participating in the meetings organized by Flevofood (expert interview n. 3; producer interview n. 1). In these meetings the participants have the opportunity to connect and discuss about problems and plans and according to Stadsboerderij the dialogues with Albert Heijn were productive (producer interview n. 1). On the one hand they showed interest by participating and discussing possible options with local producers and on the other hand they could understand several problems of local producers related with promotion of local products. In fact, when local products are delivered to retailers they usually become anonym meaning that no promotion of local production is pursued in-store. However, the interviewee of Stadsboerderij argued that these for the moment are only talks and think-thank and

overcoming the internal policies barriers might be difficult and there is need for more collaboration (producer interview n. 1). Also, the interviewee of Albert Heijn pointed out the difficulties related with internal policies. In fact, for bureaucratic reasons the setup of the contracts with local producers take long and it might be that only after one or two years it would be possible to start selling the local products in the supermarket (retailer interview n. 5). It's clear that Albert Heijn is only at an early stage in enforcing its regional focus, but some efforts can be seen, and this process has the potential to enforce the local food system by initiating dynamics of adjustment of retailer's behaviors for a better legitimation in the market as well as greener practices positively impacting the environment.

---

### **4.8.3. NORMATIVE PRESSURES**

As mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter, the normative pressures occur when organizations understand that adopting some changes would lead to an increased legitimacy due to norms and values. (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983).

According to Buhrman the normative pillar refers to the sets of values and norms that introduce a "prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimension into social life" (Bührman, 2011, pp. 19). In the case of this research values are principles or standards of behaviors which a business thinks it's preferable according to the ones coming from the society. Norms, as Buhrman argues, specify how things should be done: they define legitimate means to pursue the values. Therefore, normative rules can be described as social behaviors, which potentially empower even more social action. If businesses such as retailers adopt behaviors which correspond to the ones of the society they gain legitimacy. Normative pressures act in a different way compared with coercive pressures because usually adopting the sets of normative rules derives from moral feelings and not from obligations related to legislative changes and regulations (Bührman, 2011, pp. 19).

To what concerns the local food system the pressures coming from the norms and values of the society should play a primary role and push organizations and businesses to adapt accordingly. On the importance of these societal norms and values, in the case of Almere, Mr. Koning argued that "consumers are very important. If they keep buying very cheap products the market keeps doing its course but if they refuse to buy chickens for dumb prices which have lived a bad life in a cage, supermarkets have to change their behavior accordingly changing products and labelling their quality. Consumer's awareness is even more important than the government also because at a local level we can't regulate these aspects" (expert interview n. 2).

From the interviews it emerged that consumer's awareness concerning food is not high and that, in most of the cases, locality is not the first interest. Generally, retailers and producers agreed that the first interest of consumers is linked with money and that food quality is only partially influencing their choices. As an example, about food culture and diverging interests between different ethnic groups here I report the words of the interviewee of Kersenboertje: "For the Dutch people including myself, the only thing that matters when we walk in a supermarket is that we need food for eating, not because we want something special. The consumers coming here for example are people from Surinam because food is their life and I believe that for Dutch people it's not that important, we have other priorities such as vacations. Food is not the first priority. Maybe only for the 10% of the population" (producer interview n. 2). Of course, these few sentences cannot be generalized, however if combined with the trends reported by the retailer's interviews make us think that normative pressures in the context of Almere are currently playing a marginal role to what concerns advocating for more local products in the retail sector. To understand why, a contextual analysis is needed. The lack of normative pressures can be identified from different issues related with both the lack of organized pressure groups asking for more local food and the historical background of the city of Almere and its local food culture; First of all, Almere was founded in the 70's, and it is quickly growing, in fact by 2030 its population is expected to double (Renting et al., 2016). On the one hand this makes Almere an interesting case of a city which opened to the idea of becoming a living lab and it is flexible in planning and implementing new policy decisions as demonstrated by the policy ambition of the local government and the new area of the city that will be built for Floriade. On the other hand, it is clear that its history is very recent and not many generations have lived in the area yet. For this reason, the local food culture is still not rooted in the population of Almere, and even if the quality of the food production in Flevoland is high, a great part of the civil society does not recognize its intrinsic value. Moreover, there are no typical regional products, and this has significant implication when considering retailer's choices (retailer interview n. 5). The impact on the retail sector of not having any typical food and recipes from the region can be explained by comparing the example of Almere with another region of the Netherlands, Friesland, in which the local food culture is more rooted. During the data collection phase I had the opportunity to contact a retail manager of Albert Heijn in Groningen which explained that when he opened the franchise shop the consumers were complaining that the Droge Worst (a typical kind of sausage produced in Gronigen) was not offered. He needed to provide the possibility for consumers to buy that product, so he connected very soon with a local producer (retailer interview n. 6). Since in Almere there are no such products, and the history of the region is very recent, the pressures from the society are lacking and retailers don't feel the need of providing local food choices to consumers because the issue is marginal in the spectrum of norms and values which would enforce the business and its legitimacy in the market. We can therefore state that through the lens of institutional theory, the normative pressures are still poor for cultural reasons, and efforts need to be done in order to increase

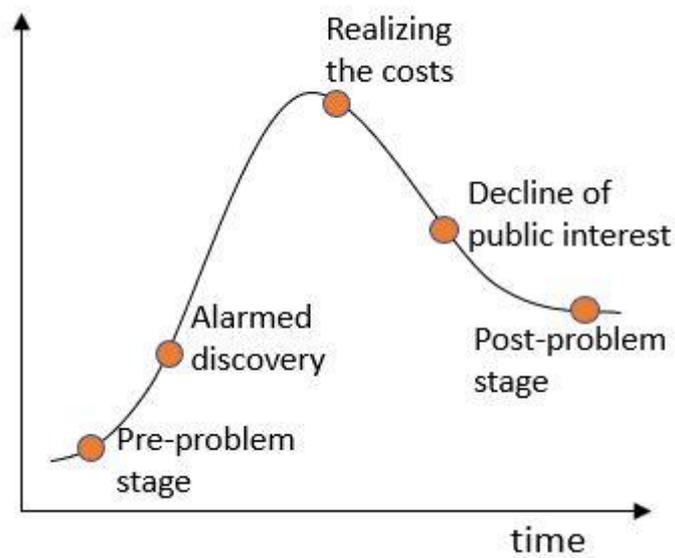
the level of awareness of citizens concerning the topic of local food and the connections between citizens and local producers need to be empowered.

#### 4.9. A THREAT FOR THE POLICY AMBITION: DISCREPANCY IN THE ISSUE ATTENTION CYCLE

The lack of normative pressures and the poor attention of the public on the topic mentioned in the above chapter can represent a problem when we look at the possibilities of success of the policy ambition. In the policy process the social component should in fact play a fundamental role. Peters and Hogwood argues that relations can be found between the attention of the public on a determined issue and the response of policymakers, that need to deal with a recognized problem (Peters, & Hogwood, 2011, pp. 250-251). Downs argues that a systematic issue attention cycle strongly “influence the public attitude and behavior concerning most key domestic problems” (Downs, 1972, pp.38). In the theme of local food, the citizens of Almere are not active participants, therefore an issue attention cycle is not initiated. The issue attention cycle drawn by Downs consists in 5 stages, which have been adapted by Carter according to the response of policymakers to Environmental problems (Carter, 2012, pp. 191):

1. **Pre- problem stage:** “Knowledge exists about a problem, experts and interest groups may be worried, but public interest is negligible”
2. **Alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm:** “A dramatic event or discovery makes the public aware of and alarmed by the problem. People demand action and the government promises solutions”.
3. **Counting the costs of the progress:** “Both politicians and the public become aware of what ‘solving’ the problem will cost in terms of financial costs and personal sacrifices”
4. **Gradual decline of intense public interest:** “People have second thoughts. Attention is distracted by new issues”.
5. **Post-problem:** “Public interest wanes but the institutions, policies and programs set up to solve the problem remain in place”.

The figure below (figure 12) helps in visualizing the process that constructs the issue attention cycle:



**Figure 12: issue attention cycle adapted from Carter 2012**

Looking at the issue attention cycle and combining it to the figure that describes the influence and interest of the stakeholders in Almere (figure 8) it is possible to highlight one fundamental discrepancy in the context of the research. In fact, the interest of consumers to what concerns local food is low, and this might lead us to think that Almere is currently in the pre-problem phase in which consumers still need to recognize that there is an urge to solve a determined environmental problem related with urbanization and global urgencies. However, policymakers in Almere are already active and the enforcement of the local food system is already a point of the policy agenda due to policy decisions such as hosting the Floriade event in 2022 and setting new policy ambitions.

Since consumers are identified to be highly influential on retailer's choices their attention and level of interest on the theme needs to increase in order to exert societal pressures in an efficient way. The risk is that if no awareness on consumers will be pursued in the next years they will never acknowledge the value and benefits of the local production and the problems related to the conventional food system. If consumers pressures will not be carried out the retail sector wouldn't feel that a transition towards a more regional focus is a necessity since their legitimacy in the market and society would be optimal even without implementing structural changes.

Thus, it can be argued that the lack of societal pressures would imply less attention of major retailers in enhancing the mechanisms behind the mimetic pressures and that the role of coercive pressures would need to go far beyond the limits imposed by the multi-level governance characteristics of the case study.

In the following chapter some recommendations are presented in order to mitigate or try to solve several major challenges identified from the interviews and from the analysis of the case pursued through the lens of the theoretical framework of the research.

## **5. SOLUTIONS**

The following chapter suggests two viable solutions in order to achieve important results in the next years to what concerns the policy ambition. The solutions proposed have been drawn by following the logic of the previous chapters, the data gathered and analyzed during the research and the level of acceptance of the interviewees for the proposed ideas. Therefore, the solutions identified are: improving social inclusion and shortening the food chain by developing new processing and distribution centers in the Flevoland.

### **5.1. IMPROVING SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The first solution to the challenges coming out from the case study of this research is the need to focus on improvements of social inclusion regarding the theme of local food. Social inclusion is a very important component which can potentially lead to considerable results concerning the policy ambition goals. Even if the social factor is currently not playing a big role in exerting pressures, to make a big step forward in the transition process there are some elements which suggest some opportunities for the future. But, how to make the citizens interest higher? It is possible to highlight three events that are pushing from both the landscape and niche levels in this moment and in the next future in order to increase the awareness between citizens of Almere. The first is Floriade, in fact during the interview with Mr. Koning it was remarked that in Flevoland “we are just starting this process of recognition of our own food and I think Floriade will be the best opportunity to show the value of the food produced in our own area” and even if it will be a celebration of local food from cities all around the world, it can turn the attention of the public towards local food, and promote producers in the region (expert interview n. 2). In the interview with Floriade it was also claimed that “the event might indeed influence the mind of costumers but also decision makers” and that in the case that “the municipality, the province and producers organize themselves in a way that they gain knowledge and competence to stand out Floriade can be function as a good platform to transfer this knowledge to the visitors” (expert interview n. 5). The citizens need to be involved in the discussions because only by acknowledging that there is a problem or finding out that around them there are many good products their interest can grow and therefore exert pressures as it happens for other issues related with food. It is in fact

true, according to the interviews with the retail managers that some trends occurring nowadays such as vegetarianism and an increase in the offer of biologic and organic products in supermarkets are initiated by consumers which ask for these kinds of products as individuals or organized groups (retailer interviews 2 and 3). This is due to processes starting from several landscape changes which affect media and public attention. The same process can be initiated by Floriade. However, Floriade alone supposedly is not sufficient and for this reason it is interesting to see which dynamics with a niche nature have the power to move the attention of the public. One example is Stadsboerderij, which is open for visits to make citizens more engaged with urban agriculture and created a local brand with the purpose of connecting local production and citizens of Almere (Almerse Weelde). Moreover, Stadsboerderij is producing in a bio-dynamic way. The methods of production of this local niche might be a powerful motivation for citizens to consider local food as extremely valuable since trends such as biologic and organic farming already captured consumers attention. According to the interview with the owner of this local business it is mostly for the sake of social inclusion dynamics that several activities such as school's excursions are organized. Moreover, a farmer's market is organized and hosted every Saturday in Stadsboerderij. Speaking of the farmer's market, the owner of Stadsboerderij said: "when we started the boermarkt 15 years ago it was very small but now it is very popular" (producer interview n. 1). This implies a growing interest of consumers in local production. It is a positive trend which is contributing positively in terms of consumer's awareness. However, it needs to be recognized that it is still a niche channel and the consumer's preference is to opt for the supermarkets for daily or weekly grocery shopping (SITE 1). Unfortunately, big retailer's chains are still not a good vehicle for promotion of local products and local brands such as Almerse Weelde since a regional focus is still missing.

Since in Flevoland these kinds of biologic production already exist, the consumer's interest on this issue is high and also bigger producer's companies are switching to these sustainable methods through mimetic dynamics as described in chapter 4.8.2 and increasing the knowledge about these aspects of local production becomes fundamental. The campaigns linking biologic products and local production can be carried out by local governmental agencies and/or other external organizations such as Flevofood as well as other NGOs. By making the level of attention of citizens higher on this topic, the social inclusion linking consumption and production would benefit, and might be a trigger to organize society in small groups trying to push for more normative pressures to affect internal policies of retailers and their choices.

Furthermore, Flevofood in the next years might indeed play a very important role to improve social inclusion and to promote local production as well as the wide range of organic and biologic products of the region. It can be an appropriate means also to influence directly retailer's choices which according to the interview with Flevofood are already interested in the products offered by the association. The interviewee on this purpose argued that retailers are acknowledging that "local food is becoming a trend and Flevofood includes

a very wide range of products and retailers are already showing interest. If more consumers demand for local food, they will start to sell it” (expert interview n.3).

However, from both the producer’s interviews with Stadsboerderij and Kersenboertje it has been mentioned that they are worried about some ideological incongruences with Flevofood. The focus of Flevofood is in fact related with locality more than with the methods of production. Furthermore, they were not sure about several issues related with the type of logo that Flevofood aims to create. These perplexities are due to the fact that the Flevofood network is a newborn association and a clear plan for the future is not set yet (producers interviews n. 1 and 2). However, discussions around these themes are currently happening and good agreements can be found. My personal recommendation is that Flevofood needs to play a role in promoting on the one hand locality as a principle and on the other hand local producers as individual entities by adding the logo of the producer and a description of their activity. In this way it would be a win-win situation because the producers would be promoted and there would not be any anonymity problem which therefore means a substantial improvement for social inclusion by creating a connection between the consumers and the local producers.

## **5.2. PROCESSING IN REGION AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION CENTER**

One of the main issues recognized to be limiting a regional food system linking producers and retailers in a shorter food supply chain are internal policies of supermarkets which always seek for the most efficient system to reduce costs and optimize time. In fact, retailers have been identified to be the regime’s actor group that is resisting the most to the exogenous pressures coming from the landscape and the niches level. This is due to the fact that they don’t feel the urgency to re-direct their trajectories since their legitimation in the market is still not threatened according to the poor level of attention of consumers on the topic. Moreover, the current system is characterized by very efficient mechanisms and logistic dynamics that make it possible to deliver to consumers global products in the shortest time as possible at affordable prices. It is for efficiency reasons that the organizational structure of the actors involved in the food chain happens in a national or international way and logistics are usually centralized leading to a long and unsustainable food chain. These, of course, places challenges to the regional food system as it is nowadays in Flevoland which is still fragmented, and it is not advocated to be the most convenient kind of system especially concerning ordering products from producers and transportation. The retailers interviewed agreed that the current food system is very efficient, this was possible to notice during the interviews from sentences like “the world is globalized, and it is easy to get stuff from other countries” or “if it’s more convenient to import we choose that”, “If the products from New Zealand for example are cheaper it is normal dynamic to sell those” (retailer interview n. 2). On the other hand, they provided me with examples showing some difficulties of the current regional

dynamics; For instance, about the baklavas (typical Turkish dessert) which were sold in Deen the retail manager argued that “Where we order usually for example we can order tonight, and we have it tomorrow at 1:00pm. But the baklava was ordered on Monday and brought on Thursday” (retail interview n.3).

In this sense what we can understand is that the conventional food system is indeed preferred for its efficiency and reduced costs by the retail sector. However, a shorter chain is needed for sustainability reasons and simultaneously it can potentially enforce the overall local food economy.

For the latter reasons, the second solution proposed is to tackle this challenge by trying to design a more efficient local food system. Therefore, during the interviews it was investigated which are the viable options in order to make the food chain shorter and more efficient.

Firstly, it is interesting to highlight that some efforts are already planned for the future. In Flevoland at the moment there is a scarcity of processing companies which means that the products need to be transported to other regions or other countries (expert interview n. 1 and 2). Processing products means adding value to them and starting to do it regionally can represent a good step forward on the one hand to cut transportation costs and therefore environmental impacts, and on the other hand it is a stimulus for local economy. Important stakeholders such as the Province and Agrofoodcluster recognized this issue already. On this topic in fact, the interviewee of Agrofoodcluster remarked that “The plan for the future is to establish more processing companies so it would add value instead of bringing the product somewhere else far from the production. I think that here we know how to produce, and the numbers (about onions and potatoes production) are evidences that we can do that, but can we do something smarter with this then just exporting? I believe that processing is something innovative” (expert interview n. 1). Innovation is an extremely important theme also for the Province, which believes that through innovation it is possible to enhance valuable economic flows and would enrich Flevoland region greatly. The link between innovation, economy and processing was really clear during the interview with Mr. Koning. For example, he said that “at the moment the farmers sell potatoes to someone else that process them and make the most of the profits. We are investigating the opportunities for farmers to add value to their products themselves” (expert interview n. 2). From these interviews it was clear that this process is at an initial phase, but also that it is a clear goal shared between different stakeholders, from governmental actors to businesses.

However, this can be considered only partially as a solution. It is indeed true that adding value to products in the region would mean a good source of revenue for local food businesses and it would cut part of the transportation. However, just by processing products in the region the problem related with increasing local food availability for consumers in Almere wouldn't be solved. To do so, additional steps need to be taken. In fact, the main challenge to achieve valuable results in this direction is linked with building a good system which would be able to efficiently collect, process and distribute local products. Doing so, the problems

related with inefficient regional logistics evidenced by both the retailers and producer's interviews could be solved.

With this idea in mind the level of acceptance of the stakeholders for this solution and its feasibility has been investigated during the interviews. A high level of acceptance concerning this solution has been found, in fact, retailers, producers and the majority of the experts think that the problem of logistic needs to be tackled in order to improve the efficiency of local food flows from the fields to the consumer's tables. Below, some examples of the interviewee's thoughts and opinions about the solution above mentioned can be reported:

- Natuurwinkel: *"The biggest problem in Flevoland is logistics. Last week we had a meeting with all kinds of parties who are interested to make local and organic big in Almere and one of the major issues was logistics. It's the major problem. There need to be a central point in Flevoland where all the food goes and we as a shop can go there or someone else that can get the food to our shop. And Flevoland is way too big to go to each place to collect the food making it too expensive and time consuming for me"*. (retailer interview n. 1)
- Agrofoodcluster: *"There is a lot of trade, cutting out the traders would shorten the food chain. When a product is produced in a farm, it is bought by trading companies maybe two or three times before it goes to a processing plant, and then it will be also traded 2-3 times. When the amount of products will be higher and bigger you will need a distribution center close to the city"*. (expert interview n. 1)
- LTO Noord: *"The farmers need to know what retailers want, then they can work together to go to one company that needs to collect, process and deliver products to supermarkets. There is no such a collector of local food products and there are no connections with different supermarkets (...) it is possible to make the food chain shorter if you have only 3 actors: producers, distributors and retailers. The costs of transportation would be equally divided, part for the retail and part for producer. The cost in this way is the lowest because they would be working together (...) the distribution center should be able also to process products, but it's not needed something very big because you need to work mostly with fresh products"* (expert interview n. 3)
- Province: *"I am not sure if the government or the EU could be able to make a legislation about that. About the quality of food yes but logistics is more difficult. (...) However, an interesting example is Fresh Care Convenience in Dronten. Until this year they had 23 trucks of salad who were driving from Spain to Dronten to be redistributed to supermarkets such as Aldi in Germany. But Aldi asked them if they were able to check the quality of it and as a response they started to do the production and processing side themselves building big greenhouses to do that. Now they produce 40 tons of salad every day and occupy half of German's market. It cuts transportation and it is safe food because they can monitor every step"* (expert interview n. 2)

- Kersenboertje: *“I think for producers is needed to have a platform where you can say that we have 1000 kg of potatoes or cherries, where consumers can see, and distributors can collect. But at the moment there is no such regional distribution center”*. (producer interview n. 2)
- Deen: *“It is a good possibility and I don’t see it too difficult”* (retailer interview n. 3)

The only interviewee who argued that new built infrastructures might not be needed was Floriade. The interviewee claimed that in the future, food, as it happens with other kinds of goods, should be seen as a commodity service. On this he argued that *“if you start seeing things as a service it also means that in the future food can be seen as a service like uber. At some point the world will become so smart that when you drive home probably the car is not yours anymore and the car has been somewhere, and you go to take it in a point in which you can also pick up your local food. So basically, why don’t we use gas stations as food pick-up places?! And if your car can be used in this way why not looking at food as a service?! We have to act in a smarter way and use the infrastructure we already have more effectively without building other”* (expert interview n. 5).

The opinion cited in the above interview, is appealing and indeed innovative. However, the solution proposed by the interviewee of Floriade has not been investigated in-depth in this research. Going back to the solution for the logistic problems concerning the local food system in Flevoland and limiting the availability of local food in Almere’s retail sector we can state that from the interview the level of acceptance is high. Therefore, my recommendation is to start thinking to direct economic and political efforts towards this solution. Its implementation might be very ambitious, but it can bring to good results to what concerns the policy goals in the long run also because it might influence the retailer’s internal policies by re-directing their focus towards a more regional one. Moreover, its implementation would be facilitated by the good level of acceptance of the actors considered in this case study.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The following chapter stands as an inclusive reflection about the results of the research and how they can contribute to solve the problem statement of the investigated case study. Moreover, the theoretical framework used in the research is here discussed and suggestions for its wider application are given. Thereafter, the findings, which are highly embedded in the theoretical framework, provide food for thoughts in the context of the theoretical discourse around local food systems, transitions and institutionalization processes towards sustainable practices. Finally, the bigger spectrum of implications of the research, its limitations and several recommendations for future research are presented.

### 6.1. REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS AND THE THEORETICAL APPROACH

The research contributed in finding solutions for the general problem related with the policy ambition launched by the Province which aims to enhance a regional food system to feed the citizens of Almere with local food products. Little was known about the main actors in the playing field and which pressures or incentives would act as drivers for such a change. The research highlighted the main actors, their interest and influence in steering the system and the main constraints to overcome to achieve these goals. Furthermore, it explored the main pressures to enable a transition towards a more local food system through the lens of a purposely constructed theoretical framework.

To sum up, it is possible to list the main findings concerning the constraints and opportunities for the success of the policy ambition. The main challenges are represented by the fact that the amount of food products in supermarkets is far from the policy ambition, consumer's awareness is still low due to several cultural aspects, retailer's internal policies function as barriers limiting a short food chain and that the government action is limited because of the multi-level governance dynamics ruling the food system. However, the research evidences that there are several opportunities for an incremental integration of local food products in the current food system of Almere; The policy ambition is contributing for new research, innovation and awareness on the theme of food and sustainability. A high interest of policymakers can be highlighted, since several niches are developing thanks to the financial help of the local governmental agencies. From the results of the research we can expect the niches will scale up in the next years creating new channels for local food products and economic flows for local food chain actors. In this way, also the food culture of the city is projected to grow leading to benefits for the policy ambition, since consumers need to be considered as central for an institutional change.

The findings of this research are likely to contribute for further policy developments since they provide insights on the main problems that the policy might face in the next future and the opportunities that need

to be taken for its success. For example, it is important to let citizens know the value of the food that is growing around them. In this way the normative pressures would be empowered and the emulation dynamics between retailers would simultaneously grow.

The approach applied in this thesis contributes to the overall theoretical discussion on the themes of system's transitions, alternative food chains and the process of institutionalization of novelties carrying an alternative message compared to the dominant one of the conventional food systems. The theoretical framework applied in this research allows researchers to better understand an investigated food system and to uncover the main actors and factors influencing it. The theoretical approach integrates two theories: The Multi-Level Perspective on socio-technical transitions and the institutional theory. The two theories have been considered as complementary and strictly connected. This helped in exploring the different kinds of dynamics between actors and different types of pressures and mechanisms leading to a change in the current food system. Merging two theories together contributed not only to the originality of the findings, but also allows to better interpret a very complex system. This approach can be applied to investigate other cases of transitioning food systems as well as systems that pertain to different issue areas which involve regime's actors, changes in the landscape and novelties trying to readjust the trajectories of the dominant regime. Thus, the combination of transition's theory and institutional pressures can be applied to identify the challenges that some niches are facing when they try to find a spot in the market and society even if they carry a "better" message and ideals than the dominant ones. Moreover, the theoretical approach of this research suggests the importance of investigating the windows of opportunity of the specific cases, because, thanks to particular moments, events and characteristics of a given context transition can succeed or fail. After understanding this, the identification and analysis of the institutional pressures shows the path to follow to increase the success rate of the desired transition.

Integrating two or more theories might be indeed a difficult task. In this case, however, it enabled me to analyze the challenges and opportunities of the Almere's food chain in a deeper way since it involves a great number of different actors and forces hardly identifiable through a single theory. Also, Geels pointed out that the integration of another theory might help in exploring the weaknesses of the Transition theory (Geels, 2010). On this concern he argues that "MLP need not be the 'only model in town'. Transitions to sustainability form a rich and challenging topic that will not only remain socially relevant for decades to come but may also benefit from dialogues between various approaches" and also that "other permutations and crossovers between social theories can probably generate relevant perspectives" (Geels, 2010, pp.508). Therefore, the approach used in this research not only finds justifications in the theory, but it also offers a new relevant perspective in analyzing the chosen case study from a social science point of view. Transition theory considers the potential pressures deriving from the exogenous factors coming from the landscape and niches developments. The endogenous factors, or in other words, the mechanisms ruling the adaptive changes

between the regime's actors involved in the case study, were investigated through the lens of Institutional theory. The latter considers several pressures as major contributions in order to institutionalize the transition process towards sustainability.

Furthermore, the approach undertaken fits in the debate proposed by Geels mentioned in the theoretical framework chapter in which he claims that public authorities and civil society are crucial drivers for sustainability transitions. If on the one hand Transition theory alone evidenced in the given case study the importance of these two stakeholders, it could not be used to explore how they contributed so far and which pressures are currently carried out by them as well as the ones need to be strengthened in the future. Moreover, he argues that "private actors have no immediate incentive to address sustainability problems" (Geels, 2010, pp. 508). In this case the research highlighted that it is true that private actors, in the case study (retailers), do not have immediate incentives to address these problems. However, if the case study wouldn't have been looked through the lens of Institutional theory, an explanation to this trait would be lacking. The research shows that the poor incentives of private actors such as retailers in addressing sustainable problems needs to be advocated to the fact that the local government cannot easily intervene by financing retailers due to the multi-level structure in which it is embedded. Moreover, a limit is represented by the poor normative pressures due to the lack food culture in Flevoland region. In addition, the results of the research showed that private actors can stimulate each other through mimetic dynamics. Currently the mimetic pressures are playing a big role in many different fields between retailers, such as bio and vegetarian trends, and to what concerns local food it can be predicted that they will quickly proliferate if they will notice that the lack of local food products they offer will represent a threat to their legitimacy in the market. It could be observed that Albert Heijn is the key actor in terms of exerting mimetic pressures, and since they are cooperating with Flevofood they are acknowledging the problems of local producers. Through this process of information flows the retail practices of key retailers might change and align with the needs of local stakeholders and enhance several emulation patterns between retailers. I expect that these dynamics will be acting as internal incentives carried out by the retailers themselves and that they will grow in the next years leading to great results for the policy ambitions.

Transition theory helped identifying the major landscape's changes as well as the actors operating at the regime and niche's levels. The case of Almere showed some interesting insights. The identified regimes actors are policymakers, major retailers, global producers and consumers. Examples of niches are Natuurwinkel and Stadsboerderij which together with other niches and food chain actors are unified and aligned in the niche represented by Flevofood. Urbanization can be seen as the major change in the landscape which brought the policymakers to the decision of hosting Floriade. Therefore, Floriade can be seen as an event due to the recent landscape changes, and in particular urbanization, which is a topic that the city of Almere needs to face in the upcoming years. What is interesting to notice in this case study is that it is thanks to a regime's

actor's group, policymakers, that niches started and gained the power to potentially upscale. The regime is usually resistant to changes and seeks equilibrium by refusing novelties that are seen as a threat for the regime itself. From an ontological point of view, it is possible to notice that the case study shows evidence of several traits that pertain in the domain of functionalism. Geels argues that *"in structural-functionalism, change is caused by external disturbances that disrupt equilibriums, create tensions, and change system needs. The system then adjusts through changes in the Goal attainment and adaptation-functions and settles down in a new equilibrium (...) Functionalism thus tends to assume a top-down 'cockpit' view with benevolent leaders and experts adjusting systems in appropriate directions (technocracy)."* (Geels, 2010, pp. 500). We can therefore state that the creation of Flevofood is linked with governmental decisions, and even if it represents a niche, it is purposively created to readjust the regime's trajectories to return to an equilibrium. Hence, the changes most likely will not be radical, and the niches will not have the power to substitute the regime, but they will upscale and affirm in the market.

Other aspects brought to attention by other authors find a response by giving an interpretation of the theoretical framework applied in the research. For instance, Genus argues that further research using MLP should consider more how and to which extent some organizations and other stakeholders affect and influence the upscaling of novelties in society. On this concern the author also adds that *"An additional concern could be to identify networks and interactions said by research participants to be facilitative of, or obstructive, to transition"*(Genus & Coles, 2008, pp. 1444). The integration of the stakeholder analysis and the concepts of institutional pressures has been an efficient process to analyze these issues. On the one hand the stakeholder analysis pointed out which are the actors and interactions between them to be considered as changemakers in the transition towards a more local food system. In the given case retailers, policymakers, consumers and niches actors such as Flevofood can facilitate this process. The institutional pressures on the other hand showed how and to which extent the identified stakeholders can steer the transition process by enacting pressures. The pressures are dependent to the legitimacy that an agency, or a stakeholder group has in a specific moment. The instability of legitimacy is due to different factors such as landscape changes or novelties. New windows of opportunity leading to a change are opened in this way. Therefore, from the case study of this research, we learn that in order to make a transition effective the windows of opportunity must be taken in time. If they are taken at an opportune moment, the pressures can be enabled, and the majority of the actors involved would be able to make a change.

## **6.2. LIMITS AND STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH**

Several limitations of the research can be identified. The first limitation that I had to considered was time. This in fact entails other limitations and aspects that needed to be taken off from the burdens of the research.

Firstly, due to the limited time the research considered only fruits and vegetables products. This burden has been preventively set because in this way it was possible to interview producers working on the same food product and the analysis could be carried out on a specific issue area providing more reliability and consistency of data. The second aspect related to time limits is the choice of including only a limited number of retailers and producers in the research. In this way the data gathered could show only several comparative aspects between their typologies. The comparison would be valuable to understand the differing opportunities between retailers (for instance small shops, supermarkets and open markets) but the time for data collection would have been too limited and the conclusions that could have been drawn from such a research would have been supposedly too general. Moreover, supermarkets are recognized to be the preferred place for citizens in terms of grocery shopping (SITE 6). For this reason, socio-technical improvements at this level seem to be important in order to achieve the local policy ambitions. However, this is surely not the only way that would contribute to an increase of regional food consumption. More research on alternative ways of shopping is therefore suggested.

To what concerns the methods applied in the research both limits and strengths can be identified. The main problem I faced was that it has been impossible to give a precise estimation about the amount of regional food available in supermarkets only by interviewing retail managers and observing the shelves of the shops. I expected that the triangulation of these methods could provide me with more results. However only a rough estimation could be performed from the data collected. The lack of regional focus of supermarkets and the poor transparency of the food products in fact make it difficult for an observer to understand the origins of the food sold by retailers. It is possible that by contacting the head offices or selecting different interviewees working in the retail sector more precise data could be gathered.

The systematic process used to analyze the data collected during the field work period showed several strengths. In fact, it was performed by applying reliable methods that brought me to identify codes and themes which helped me in finding the results avoiding bias, that is always a risk when working with interviews and pure qualitative data. Moreover, charting the data under the main themes of the research as described in the data analysis section gave me the possibility to investigate the aspects related with the stakeholders in a detailed way. From the qualitative data in fact, it was possible to extrapolate information in a way that numerical values could be attributed to them to calculate empirically the influence and interest of the actors involved in Almere's food system. The methods used for the stakeholder analysis captured the current situation and highlighted several challenges. On the one hand this process can find wider applications for policymakers interested in the case study to see which stakeholders are the most important involved in the given case study and therefore acknowledging which directions they need to take in the future. On the other hand, it is a process that can be replicated in other issue-areas in which a stakeholder analysis is

needed, since it is comprehensive, and it can describe complex systems, dynamics, interactions and power relations and imbalances between actors.

## CONCLUSION

The problems emerging from the case study and analyzed in the research were concerned about how the city of Almere aims to achieve the policy ambition's goals in order to enhance a more regional food system. However, research on the current local food availability for Almere's citizens and about which actors can potentially enhance this *transition* still needed to be deepened in order to answer the main research question: "What are the constraints and opportunities in enhancing a more local food system in a context dominated by the conventional food chain?". Moreover, some *pressures* needed to be investigated to bridge the gap between the policy goals and the individual actor's interests.

In general words it is possible to say that the research evidenced that the main challenges and opportunities in order to enhance a more local type of food system are strictly connected with the actors playing a role in the in the food chain and the windows of opportunity that are open in a given context. From the chosen case study of the research it can be argued that the stakeholders playing a role in the conventional food chain act in different ways to enable or resist to changes. Internal policies of retailers, lack of regional structure for local food provision, low interest of consumers and problems related with multi-level governance represent the biggest limits in terms of the transition process from a globalized to a local food system. The findings highlight that a radical substitution of the current food regime in modernized cities is almost impossible. However, the research showed that the involvement of key actors, such as policymakers and the introduction of some novelties which have the power to create new channels for local food and rising awareness among citizens can lead to positive results and local food can incrementally find a bigger spot in the market.

The analysis of the interviews and observations showed that the current local food availability in the retail sector of Almere is not even close to the policy ambition. From a rough estimation it resulted that the availability of local food is around the 1% of the total amount of food sold in the retail sector. However, this estimation is not a precise answer to the specific research question number 1 because of some limits mentioned in the discussion section.

The findings highlighted by the stakeholder analysis greatly contributed in answering the rest of the specific research questions. In fact, it helped in identifying the main actors playing a role in the food system of Almere, as well as the exogenous factors pushing for a regime transition and the endogenous dynamics represented by the pressures between regime's actors.

Therefore, an answer to the specific research question n.2 can be given. The identified actors are: retailers, consumers, producers and policymakers. Moreover, new actors such as Floriade and Flevofood are gaining importance and in next years are expected to play a crucial role to what concerns the analyzed transition. The research evidences that Flevofood and Floriade, can potentially initiate new information flows and new channels that would increase local food availability in Almere. Additionally, they contribute in upscaling the attention of the local food system's discourse and consequently generate awareness between consumers. The most influential stakeholder group is represented by retailers, but their interest is low. Instead, the interest of governmental actors to what concerns the creation of a local food system is high. They launched the policy ambition and they are financing Flevofood, which is trying to pursue the policy ambition goals by connecting local producers and other actors involved in the food chain to create new channels for local food products.

From a Transition theory point of view the niches developments and changes in the landscape could be identified. Therefore, the research question n.3 "Which are the main changes in the landscape and niches developments acting as stimuli in moving towards a more sustainable and regional alternative food system?" could be answered. My expectation was that these changes would have had an influence on the food regime. It is indeed true that some changes in the landscape such as urbanization increased the attention that policymakers have now on the topic. However, Flevofood, which is the niche that I identified as the keenest to succeed in influencing the regime's level, as mentioned above, has been funded by the province. Thus, not only exogenous forces are contributing to enhance a regime's transition, but also part of the regime's actors are opening windows of opportunities for a shift. Nevertheless, other regime actors, such as retailers, are obstructing the transition because of internal policies and structural problems such as poor efficiency of the local food system concerning logistics. However, the identified niches can raise the awareness of consumers and consequently enhance the interest of the retail sector towards local food products. Thus, we see that exogenous forces are playing a fundamental role and they are expected to enable the transition more and more in the next years.

With the research question n.4 my expectation was to highlight the pressures occurring inside the regime level leading to a more local food system. In the case study of Almere, it is clear that policymakers are carrying out coercive pressures by setting the policy ambition higher in the agenda and by subsidizing niches actors and researchers. Mimetic pressures are mechanisms which still need to be improved by retailers in

order for the local food system to be upscaled, and this would be possible if some key retailers such as Albert Heijn would take the lead, as it seems to be happening, or by an empowerment of normative pressures, pushing retailers to offer more local food products. The problem is that, currently, the society, for cultural related reasons, is not pushing for a transition from a conventional type of chain towards a more local one. However, how demonstrated by the findings of the stakeholder analysis some actors and events which creates windows of opportunity can potentially increase the level of awareness and enable more pressures from societal actors that would highly contribute for the sustainable transition researched.

Some recommendations for further research can be given: firstly, it would be interesting to perform longitudinal research over time about the availability of local food products, using methods able to tackle the lack of transparency of the conventional food chain to what concerns the origins of the food we eat. Secondly, the development of Flevofood and its impact on the food chain of Almere needs to be tracked in the next years, since it has been identified as the niche most likely to upscale and influence the regime's level. Thirdly, also the consumer's interest towards local food need to be investigated in the next years because it can carry out normative pressures influencing retailer's behaviors. Fourthly, I suggest further research to implement the solutions proposed in chapter 5 because the social inclusion of citizens in local food production and improving the efficiency of logistics of the current local food system are two crucial elements which would make the transition process faster and more appealing for the all the actors involved in the food chain. Finally, I recommend conducting more research adopting the theoretical framework of this research in both similar case studies of local food systems, for comparative reasons, and in different issue-areas since it contributed greatly in investigating a complex phenomenon. I firmly believe it can be used to analyze different topics involving a variety of actors and innovations trying to find a spot in the market not only concerning food, but in all the areas that look at sustainability transitions.

## REFERENCES

- Alasuutari, P. (2010). The rise and relevance of qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(2), 139–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570902966056>
- Almirall, E., & Wareham, J. (2011). Living Labs: Arbiters of midand ground-level innovation. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, 23(1), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09537325.2011.537110>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology : Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers Qualitative Case Study Methodology : Study Design and Implementation, 13(4), 544–559.
- Born, B., & Purcell, M. (2006). Avoiding the Local Trap. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 26(2), 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X06291389>
- Bristow, G. (2016). “ Food Supply Chain Approaches : Exploring Their Role in Rural Development .” Exploring their Role in Rural Development Food Supply Chain Approaches :, 40(January). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9523.00158>
- Brugha, R. (2000). Stakeholder analysis: a review. *Health Policy and Planning*, 15(3), 239–246. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/15.3.239>
- Brundtland, G. H. (1987). *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. United Nations Commission* (Vol. 4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/07488008808408783>
- Brunori, G., Rossi, A., & Malandrini, V. (2010). Co-producing Transition: Innovation Processes in Farms Adhering to Solidarity-based Purchase Groups (GAS) in Tuscany, Italy. *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 18(1), 28–53.
- Bührman, G. (2011). Institutional Pressures and Strategic Responses : The Case of the BP Oil Spill, 117.
- Carter, N. (2012). *The Politics of the Environment. Uma ética para quantos?* (Vol. XXXIII). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>
- Crivits, M., Prové, C., Block, T., & Dessein, J. (2016). Four perspectives of sustainability applied to the local food strategy of Ghent (Belgium): Need for a cycle of democratic participation? *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 8(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8010055>
- Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*: Amazon.co.uk: Norman K.

Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln: 9780761927570: Books. *Sage*, (January 2007), 139–145.

DiMaggio and Powell. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited : Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields Author ( s): Paul J . DiMaggio and Walter W . Powell Source : *American Sociological Review* , Vol . 48 , No . 2 ( Apr . , 1983 ), pp . 147-160 Published. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160.

Downs, Anthony, Up and Down with Ecology-the Issue-Attention Cycle , *Public Interest*, 28 (1972:Summer) p.38. (1972), 28.

Feagan, R. (2007). The place of food: mapping out the ‘local’ in local food systems. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132507073527>

Feenstra, G., & Campbell, D. (2014). Local and Regional Food Systems. *Humanecology.Ucdavis.Edu*, 1–13.

Geels, F. W. (2002). Technological transitions as evolutionary reconfiguration processes: a multi-level perspective and a case-study. *Research Policy*, 31(8–9), 1257–1274. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(02\)00062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(02)00062-8)

Geels, F. W. (2010). Ontologies, socio-technical transitions (to sustainability), and the multi-level perspective. *Research Policy*, 39(4), 495–510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2010.01.022>

Geels, F. W. (2011). The multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions: Responses to seven criticisms. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 1(1), 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2011.02.002>

Genus, A., & Coles, A. M. (2008). Rethinking the multi-level perspective of technological transitions. *Research Policy*, 37(9), 1436–1445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2008.05.006>

Gilbert, N. (2001). Researching Social Life. *Researching Social Life*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1318574>

Glover, J. L., Champion, D., Daniels, K. J., & Dainty, A. J. D. (2014). An Institutional Theory perspective on sustainable practices across the dairy supply chain. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 152, 102–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2013.12.027>

Harris, E. M. (2010). Eat Local? Constructions of place in alternative food politics. *Geography Compass*, 4(4), 355–369. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00298.x>

IPES-Food. (2017). What Makes Urban Food Policy Happen? Insights from Five Case Studies, 112.

Jansma, J. E., & Visser, a. J. (2011). Agromere: Integrating urban agriculture in the development of the city

of Almere. *Urban Agriculture Magazine*, (25), 28–31.

- Jurgilevich, A., Birge, T., Kentala-Lehtonen, J., Korhonen-Kurki, K., Pietikäinen, J., Saikku, L., & Schösler, H. (2016). Transition towards circular economy in the food system. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 8(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8010069>
- Kneafsey, M. (2010). The region in food - Important or irrelevant? *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3(2), 177–190. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq012>
- Lacey, A., & Luff, D. (2007). Qualitative data analysis. *Trowbridge, Wiltshire: The Cromwell ...*, 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.7903/cmr.14043>
- Lutz, J., & Schachinger, J. (2013). Do local food networks foster socio-ecological transitions towards food sovereignty? Learning from real place experiences. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 5(11), 4778–4796. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su5114778>
- Marsden, T. (2013). From post-productionism to reflexive governance: Contested transitions in securing more sustainable food futures. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 29(June 2008), 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2011.10.001>
- Mount, P. (2012). Growing local food: Scale and local food systems governance. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 29(1), 107–121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-011-9331-0>
- Peters, B. G., Hogwood, B. W., Peters, B. G., & Hogwood, B. W. (2011). In Search of the Issue-Attention Cycle, 47(1), 238–253.
- Ranjit, K. (2014). *Research methodology a step-by-step guide for beginners*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361315580442>
- Renting, H., Foundation, R., Network, I., Centres, R., Agriculture, U., Security, F., & View, M. (2016). FEEDing the City : Approaches to the Upscaling of Urban Agriculture in Almere , Toronto , Lima and Milan, (August).
- Rich, K., Perry, B., & Kaitibie, S. (2009). International Food and Agribusiness Management Review Executive Editor. *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*, 12(3), 1–22.
- Rip, A., & Kemp, R. (1998). Technological change. *Human Choice and Climate Change*, 2(Vol. 2: Resources and Technology), 327–399. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02887432>
- Rose, D. C., Mukherjee, N., Simmons, B. I., Tew, E. R., Robertson, R. J., Vadrot, A. B. M., ... Sutherland, W. J. (2017). Policy windows for the environment: Tips for improving the uptake of scientific knowledge.

*Environmental Science and Policy*, (July). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2017.07.013>

Rowley, T. J. (1997). Moving beyond Dyadic Ties : A Network Theory of Stakeholder Influences Author ( s ): Timothy J . Rowley Source : The Academy of Management Review , Vol . 22 , No . 4 ( Oct . , 1997 ), pp . 887-910 Published by : Academy of Management Stable URL : [http://www. The Academy of Management Review](http://www.TheAcademyofManagementReview), 22(4), 887–910.

Sonnino, R., & Marsden, T. (2006). Beyond the divide: Rethinking relationships between alternative and conventional food networks in Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 6(2), 181–199. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbi006>

Suren, A., & Elliot, S. (2004). Impacts of urbanisation on streams. *Freshwaters of New Zealand*, (February 2012), 35.1-35.18. <https://doi.org/2249-3905>

Tellis, W. M. (1997). Application of a Case Study Methodology Application of a Case Study Methodology, 3(3), 1–19.

Yin, R. K. (2012). Yin , Robert K .: Case Study Research . Design and Methods. *Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*, 26, 93–96.

Zhu, Q., & Sarkis, J. (2007). The moderating effects of institutional pressures on emergent green supply chain practices and performance. *International Journal of Production Research*, 45(18–19), 4333–4355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207540701440345>

## CITED WEBSITES

- SITE 1 - GROCERY TRENDS

<https://www.rabobankcijfersentrends.nl/index.cfm?action=branche&branche=supermarkten>

- SITE 2 – METHODOLOGY – SNOWBALL SAMPLING

<https://research-methodology.net/sampling-in-primary-data-collection/snowball-sampling/>

- SITE 3 – AGROFOODCLUSTER

<http://agrofoodcluster.com/who-we-are/?lang=en>

- SITE 4 - LTO NOORD

<https://www.ltonoord.nl/over-lto-noord>

- SITE 5 - LOKAALVOEDSEL

<http://www.lokaalvoedselflevoland.nl/>

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS

### EXPERTS INTERVIEWS

- 1- Agrofoodcluster Flevoland – Mr. Cor van Veldhuijsen
- 2- Flevoland Province – Mr. Hillebrand Koning
- 3- Flevofood – Mr. Arijan Dekking
- 4- LTO Noord – Mr. Jan Teunis Boon
- 5- Floriade – Anonymus

### RETAILERS INTERVIEWS

- 1- Natuurwinkel – Mr. Casper Kromkamp
- 2- Jumbo – Anonymous
- 3- Vomar – Anonymous
- 4- Deen – Mr. Martijn Deen
- 5- Albert Heijn (Almere) – Anonymous (personal communication)
- 6- Albert Heijn (Groningen) – Anonymous (phone call – personal communication)

### PRODUCERS INTERVIEWS

- 1- Stadsboerderij – Mrs. Tineke van den Berg
- 2- Kersenboertje – Mr. Patrik Herbert

**ANNEX 1: CHARTING – DATA ANALYSIS EXCEL SHEET TEMPLATE**

		RETAILERS				PRODUCERS		EXPERTS		
		interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	(...)	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 1	Interview 2	(...)
<b>Current situation</b>	<b>Variable 1</b>									
	<b>Variable 2</b>									
	<b>(...)</b>									
<b>Stakeholder's characteristics</b>	<b>Variable 1</b>									
	<b>Variable 2</b>									
	<b>(...)</b>									
<b>Theoretical concepts</b>	<b>Variable 1</b>									
	<b>Variable 2</b>									
	<b>(...)</b>									

**Table 6: Data charting, Excel sheet**