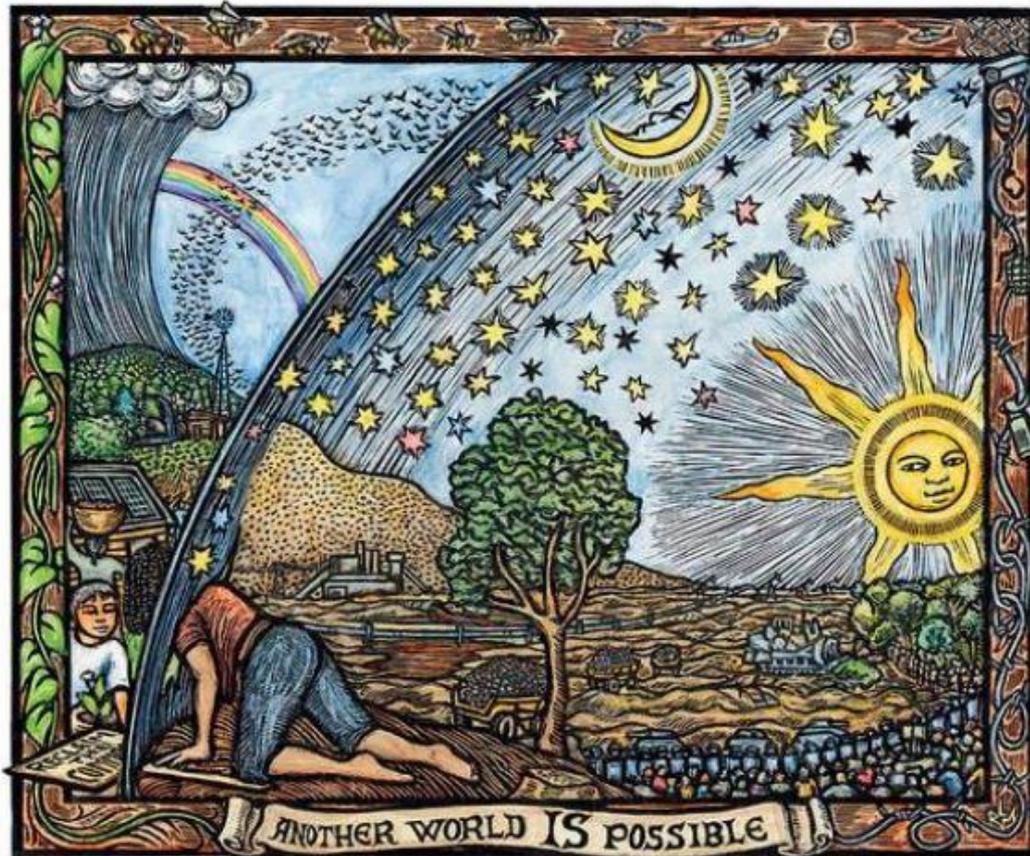On the move to other food - The real utopian context of alternative food:

An multi-case study on alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam

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Abstract

The need to reform conventional, modern food systems is widely acknowledged among scholars, farmers, activists and consumers. However, it seems "easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism." Is this claim as robust as scholars think it is? Alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam have been challenging our day-to-day ways of growing, eating and treating food. Scholars have called for research to dive deeper into the diversity of economic practices, principles, and struggles of AFIs. This thesis seeks to explore AFIs through real utopias and diverse economies as a response to these calls, by performing a multi-case study on three AFIs in Amsterdam. This research presents an in-depth understandings of AFI as real utopian projects, by providing first-hand, unique insights into the visions, experiences and struggles of AFI actors. The findings indicate that AFIs embody a myriad of alternative and non-capitalist economic practices, which center around concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food, networks of local food, knowledge and learning processes and policy, politics and public funding. The real utopias approach has helped in numerous ways: to decenter from 'the' conventional narratives around food and economies, towards encouragement of and reporting on experiments where food is done alternatively, and to uncover that the practices of doing food alternatively are often complex and always an unfixed process. The discussion provides the groundwork to better understand potential pathways of larger-scale transformation towards alternative food. As such, AFIs as real utopias has demonstrated that elements of sustainable and just food may be found in the present, despite cynicism about whether 'another world is possible'.

Key words: Alternative food initiatives, Real utopias, Diverse economies.

Acknowledgements

Outline

1. Introduction

Welcome to the Land of Plenty

"Roasted pigs wander around with knives in their backs to make carving easy, where grilled geese fly directly into one's mouth, where cooked fish jump out of the water and land on one's feet," is how the Land of Plenty 'Cockaigne' was described in medieval Irish myths and poems around the year 1300. There is a saying that goes: be careful what you wish for, because you might get it. To the medieval mind, contemporary Western Europe might come pretty close to the land of Cockaigne: we currently have ready-to-be-eaten food available to almost all for almost nothing. But, we are paying a dear price for this way of organizing food in terms of the (hidden) social injustices and environmental problems that are associated with it.

The sustainability of current food systems is widely disputed. Some of the key issues in the debate are environmental degradation and biodiversity loss associated with agriculture, water scarcity, social inequalities, limited animal welfare, climate change, inadequate diets and food-related health problems (Tilman *et al.*, 2017; Steffen *et al.*, 2018; El Bilali *et al.*, 2019 a; Willet *et al.*, 2019; Rockström *et al.*, 2020). The ways most food systems are organized are said to have been of such influence on ecosystems around the world, that they threaten the ability of Earth to provide for living-conditions for ecosystems to thrive (Steffen *et al.*, 2018). The need to reform food systems is, hence, now widely acknowledged by scientists, policymakers, activists, farmers and food consumers (Lang, 2010). Scholars have argued the need for new, regenerative and hopeful stories for food (Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015, p. 24). However, it seems "easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (Latour, 2014). Is this claim as robust as scholars think it is (Emel and Hawkins, 2010; Sklair, 2016)?

Scholar Eric Olin Wright focused on the analysis and development of alternatives in the context of grand sustainability challenges (Wright, 2006). He proposes three tasks: firstly, analyzing and critiquing the current state of affairs in terms of how it (unintendedly) harms (non-) human

wellbeing. Secondly, elaborating and analyzing alternatives in terms of desirability, viability and achievability. And thirdly, developing potential pathways to get to the viable alternatives. Wright's book *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010) demonstrates that through this approach, elements of solutions to current problems can be found in the real world around us, despite pervasive cynicism about the possibility for social change. Can components of a more socially just and sustainable food system can be found in the present?

Alternative food initiatives (AFIs) can be seen as projects that challenge our day-to-day ways of growing, buying, eating and treating food as business as usual. They are usually organized around a critique to conventional, industrial, modern food (Venn *et al.*, 2006), and experimenting with various new and alternative ways of food production, consumption and ways of thinking about food (Renting, Marsden and Banks, 2003). In literature, AFIs are often understood as having the aim to re-organize food systems in a way that more fully realizes environmental sustainability and social justice, than conventional food systems do (*ibid.*). While scholars have devoted much scholarly attention to the power of utopian thought in social change processes, also in specific with regard to food (e.g. Cucco and Fonte, 2015; Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015; Isgren, 2018; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021), a perspective that has had little attention is analyzing AFIs through the eyes of real utopias. AFIs have been studied in many ways, but we do not yet understand what is gained and what is lost if we try to understand these initiatives through the lens of real utopias.

AFIs have been around in Amsterdam for decades, but little research is available on the alternatives, the actors involved, their visions, practices and struggles. Insight into how differing AFIs may represent a critique to conventional food and the ways they are visioning and practicing desirable food alternatives, or struggling to do so, is required to understand potential pathways of how food can be made more sustainable and more just. Researching AFIs and the visions, experiences and struggles of AFI actors may contribute to further visions and enactments of more sustainable and just food systems, in Amsterdam and the world beyond. This highlights the great academic and societal relevance of research into AFIs and locates a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. This thesis will address the research gap in the context AFIs as real utopian projects.

This thesis seeks not only to extent utopian thinking to the domain of food in the Western world, but to problematize current understandings of AFIs, by exploring them as real utopian projects. With this approach, the thesis will give voices to people who devote their time and effort to the cause of sustainable and just food. Lastly and importantly, studying AFIs as real utopian projects demonstrates that elements of sustainable and just food may be found in the present, despite cynicism about whether 'another world is possible'. Against this problem, the thesis will answer the following main research question:

In what ways do alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam represent a critique to conventional food and in what ways do they embody desirable, viable and achievable alternatives?

The thesis will proceed as following: firstly, chapter 2 will discuss the relevant literature and concepts of this study. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology, the research foundations, the theory and the methods of this study. In chapter 4 the findings will be presented, by firstly introducing the three cases and secondly analyzing the ways they represent a critique and alternative to conventional food. Also, the main facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of alternative food initiatives will be discussed. In chapter 5, the findings will be discussed and reflected upon, and recommendations for further research will be outlined.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, the relevant concepts of this study will be reviewed. The chapter proceeds as following: firstly, the debate on conventional food systems will be discussed, by outlining the promises and limitations of the model of modern food, in order to provide an internal critique that shows the need for re-thinking the model as a whole, and to offer a credible argument to search for alternatives. Then, the literature on alternative food will be introduced, and the key issues in the scholarly field are highlighted, aiming to highlight a gap in the literature and to show the relevance of diverse economies and real utopias as frameworks to study AFIs. Thereafter, the diverse economies

and the real utopias frameworks will be discussed. Finally, the research questions will be drafted from the gap in the literature.

2.1. Conventional food: promises and limitations

The starting point for a real utopias project is to demonstrate that, in addition to asserting the existence of suffering and struggling in the world, that the explanations for these lay in the nature of dominant social institutions and structures, and to identify the respects in which they cause systemic struggles to people and ecosystems (Wright, 2012; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021). Modernization of agriculture is a predominant discourse around problems linked to food sustainability and food justice in Western countries today (Horrigan, Lawrence and Walker, 2002; Frison, 2016; Houser *et al.*, 2020), including the Netherlands (Boers, 1995; Bos, Smit and Schröder, 2013). Proponents of modern food systems could argue that the problems associated with modern food in contemporary context can be addressed sufficiently by improving practices within the model, denying a need for radical alternatives. Hence, demonstrating the necessity of developing alternatives, requires to start with a definition of what modernization of food systems *is* and what its promises and limitations are. In this subchapter, I will provide a rather concise, but credible, internal critique to the model of modern food. This section revolves around the following question: what is contemporary modern food and what are its inherent limitations in terms of posing threats to environmental sustainability and social justice?

2.1.1. Modern food, definition and promises

What does it mean for food to be modern? On the farm level, modernization of food systems is the process of raising agricultural productivity per unit of land or labor or both, through four interacting trends of intensification, specialization, mechanization and scale expansion (Bernstein, 2001; Hardeman and Jochemsen, 2012). This results in more agricultural output and generally lower production costs per unit of output (as long as farmers have access to markets under good enough conditions). A crucial aspect of the process is a shift in focus on producing subsistence-produce to producing marketable surpluses, which is referred to as 'commodification' (Hardeman and

Jochemsen, 2012). From a societal point of view, these surpluses may support a relative big non-farming part of a population with food. From an economic point of view, these surpluses may generate economic growth and income. This suggests a key role for policymakers, and indeed, history confirms the role of the state of the Netherlands has been crucial in the process of modernization of food, in the shape of subsidies, price or wage controlling policies, land reforms and more (Spaargaren et al., 2015).

The supposed benefits of modern food is that it is believed to have positive effects on economic growth and poverty alleviation, in contrast to *pre*-modern food (Oman and Wignaraja, 1991). Bezemer and Headey summarize the argument as: *"There is overwhelming evidence from theory, history and contemporary analysis that agricultural growth is a precondition for broader growth. A further important point is that agricultural growth is quintessentially pro-poor growth. The reasons are now well-known: agriculture is generally labor intensive and skill-extensive, so that agricultural growth creates additional employment with low entry barriers. Increased agricultural productivity also lowers food prices for both the rural and the urban poor, who typically spend most of their household budgets on food."* (Bezemer and Headey, 2008, p. 1345). Next to that, the idea that modern food systems are crucial for minimizing hunger has been and remains to be fundamental in food modernization theory and practice (Pinstrup-Andersen, 2009; Premanandh, 2011). In the light of population growth and climate change, the argument for the modern food has gained popularity, suggesting that threatened food security can be remedied with it (Von Witzke & Noleppa, 2016). In sum, we have identified three central promises of modern food: contributing to economic growth, alleviating poverty, and enlarging food security.

2.1.2. Main limitations of modern food

Similar to scholars claiming benefits of modern food, there is no shortage of academics claiming adverse effects of modern food systems. The aim of the following section is not to provide a complete overview of these arguments, but to demonstrate some serious flaws in the model which are inherent and systemic, as this will assure the necessity of developing alternatives.

A first inherent limitation of modern food production is frequent pesticide and chemical fertilizer use. Life in the soil, which plant growth is dependent on, is being destroyed by frequent use of pesticides and herbicides (Tabashnik *et al.*, 2009) and chemical fertilizers (Goewie, 2002). Pesticides and herbicides are generally toxic to multiple species and have strong adverse effects on biodiversity (Goewie, 2002; Mäder *et al.*, 2002; Dutcher, 2007). This has been known for decades, as Magdoff, Lanyon and Liebhardt (1997) have argued it is crucial to re-think pesticide and fertilizer practices thoroughly.

Another persistent problem is that modern food systems are not energy efficient. Multiple studies have calculated the amount of (direct and indirect) energy input and output of modern food systems, and conclude that they require more energy than they produce (Pimentel *et al.*, 1973; Martinez-Alier, 2011). Also, modern food's dependency on energy is increasingly problematic in an era where the effects of fossil energy on climate change are well-established facts. Currently, the way agriculture is organized contributes (directly and indirectly) to 26% (!) of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Poore and Nemecek, 2018), thereby significantly contributing to anthropogenic climate change. These issues pose a serious flaw to the environmental sustainability of modern food.

Next to these, modern food suffers from various social issues. In 1995, a study on problems of food systems in the Netherlands reported the following perspective, commonly held by modern food farmers: *"The government stimulated us to increase production per hectare and strongly advised us to do this by using high-yielding varieties, more chemical fertilizer and more pesticides. This resulted in overproduction, leading to lower prices and to a lower income for the farmer. Furthermore, it resulted in what is now considered to be unacceptable environmental pollution. Public opinion is turning against us and all of a sudden the government considers environmental pollution and overproduction to be our fault, our problem and our responsibility. This is unfair, as it is in fact the government who has created these problems by stimulating us to increase production in the way we did"* (Wiskerke, 1995, p. 234) In other words, the process of modernization has come at the expense of farmers' income, public opinion on farmers' practices and farmers' satisfaction with governmental policies. The latter is ever more significant in the light of recent years Dutch farmer protests.

Furthermore, the literature has shed light on the negative effects of global developments on regional food security, especially harming the poor (Laborde *et al.*, 2020). For example, studies have shown that the COVID-19 crisis, instable energy prices and the Ukrainian war, influence food prices and cause disruptions in the global food chain (Béné, 2020; Laborde *et al.*, 2020; Pörtner *et al.*, 2022). Processes that play into the problem are higher prices for pesticides and fertilizers, and increased costs for energy and transportation (Osendarp *et al.*, 2022).

Lastly, the spatial distance between food production and consumption are typically tremendous in the modern food systems paradigm. While this entails environmental costs, it also entails a psychological alienation between humans and food (Kushnir, 2020). This means that people in urbanized and most rural places are increasingly lacking knowledge on where food comes from and how it is being grown, processed and transported (Oglethorpe, 2009). Kushnir concludes that: *"social injustices have been institutionalized into the expectations of the modern consumer"* (Kushnir, 2020, p.49). It affects the ways people tend to think about, consume, and buy food, not taking into account the labor, energy and other resources that go into food.

2.1.3. Conclusion

In the previous, I have briefly discussed the ongoing debate on conventional, modern food systems, by outlining the promises and limitations. I have discussed that the model is featuring two types of limitations that can be seen as inherent. For one, conventional modern farming systems tend to impair their own conditions necessary for farming over time, with problems being especially seen in soil health, pest and plague outbreaks, energy efficiency and its impact on climate change. Secondly, I have highlighted important social implications, including for farmers (incomes, public opinion, and dissatisfaction with policies), regional food security and alienation of human-food relationship. This internal critique, although far for complete, shows the need for re-thinking the model as a whole, and offers a credible argument to search for alternatives.

2.2. Alternative food: networks and initiatives

In response to the problems of conventional food, groups have been organizing themselves throughout the world, arguing for and practicing radical alternatives. Also in the context of Europe, scholars point to the emergence of alternative food networks (AFNs) (Venn *et al.*, 2006). In spite of an extensive body of literature on the topic, there is no agreed upon definition, partly because AFNs center around different phenomena and use different criteria for 'alternative' food (Corsi *et al.*, 2018). Venn and colleagues (2006) suggest that most scholars see them as a response to industrialized, corporately controlled food chains, which, as they put it, distance and alienate urban and most rural people from food production.

It is often said that the concept of AFNs is somewhat misguiding, as the networks constitute a broad diversity of initiatives. Ultimately, these initiatives share the aim of re-organizing food systems in a way that more fully realizes environmental sustainability and social justice, than the modern food system does, however, they vary in their approaches. In AFN literature, the terms alternative food initiative (AFI) and alternative food organization are used inter-exchangeably, and are defined as the individual initiatives/organizations that affiliate themselves with the social movements of alternative food (Sharp, Friesen and Lewis, 2015). In this study the term AFI is used, because this includes more informally organized initiatives as well. Examples of AFIs are non-profit grocery stores, local food markets, organic food cooperatives, community kitchens, neighborhood centers, CSA's and food, nature and environment related projects and organizations (Venn *et al.*, 2006; Sharp, Friesen and Lewis, 2015). The concept of AFN allows the researcher to study the links, commonalities and differences between distinct initiatives (Corsi *et al.*, 2018), and this thesis recognizes the links between AFIs.

2.2.1. AFN literature: why principles and practices matter

Considering the relevance of understanding potential alternative food futures, one might expect a consolidated body of literature that gives in-depth insight into these AFNs. However, previous studies have often relied on dichotomies in order to gain deeper understanding of AFNs. For

example, Martindale, Matacena and Beacham (2018) differentiate AFNs in terms of localism of the food, Eden et al. (2008) differentiate AFIs in their different focus on either production or consumption, and Werkheiser and Noll (2014) employ a lens that differentiates AFNs on their scale of focus, i.e. individuals, community, and systems.

Recent studies, however, have uncovered that many AFIs oftentimes include considerations of multiple of these foci. For example, Veen and Derkzen (2012) found that in their two cases of Dutch AFNs, participants were neither only producers nor only consumers but both, since consumers were required to be actively involved in the production of their food. Hence, this thesis supports their argument that AFNs can be more adequately understood in terms of *how* and *for whom* they advocate food systems should be transformed (Veen and Derkzen, 2012).

Another interesting approach to study AFNs is that the principles on which AFNs are organized are relevant, because they give insight into the goals and the kinds of futures that initiatives are aiming to work towards (Poças Ribeiro *et al.*, 2021). Poças Ribeiro and colleagues explain that studying AFNs with respect to the confrontation between principles and practices can help deepen our understanding of AFNs and their conceptualization of desirable food environments, as well as where they face obstacles. They argue that, precisely the confrontation between principles and practices uncovers where obstacles to furthering the development of alternative food lie (*ibid.*). Principles refer to the fundamental aspirations that structure the foundation of AFNs. For example, AFNs are said to function on the basis of non-commercialized principles, like trust, community and place-based meaning (Venn *et al.*, 2006). In that way, AFNs feature "post-capitalist" principles, which aim to move beyond capitalist ways of organizing.

However, scholars have argued that most AFNs are not quite 'alternative' in terms of their economic practices (Martindale, Matacena and Beacham, 2018; Rosol, 2020) (e.g. Rosol, 2021). For example, local food markets may not contest the capitalist notion of commodification of food, as these are still treating food as a commodity by selling it. Also, AFNs can rely on private property and classic financing methods (as shown by (Watts, Little and Ilbery, 2018). In other words, AFN

practices may still be embedded within capitalist social structures and institutions, therefore can never fully feature post-capitalistic characteristics (e.g. Dermody *et al.*, 2021).

The representation of AFN practices as marginal experiments embedded in 'the' capitalist system, can however, strengthen the dominance of 'the' capitalist economy and its practices. In contrast, by making alternative economic principles and practices the center of research, it allows them to become more present, more credible, more viable and more real (Gritzas and Kavoulakos, 2016). This means that instead of judging alternative economic experiments as 'capitalism in another guise' (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 8), they are appreciated in their diversity, complexity and incoherence. Hence, the framework of diverse economies allows to see a wide variety of principles and practices to be relevant to economic realities, *"including to name just some, trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, [...] solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, and environmental and social justice"* (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 151).

In sum, AFN scholars have called for further research to dive deeper into the diversity of economic practices, the principles, and the confrontation between principles and practices. My proposal for understanding AFNs through real utopias and diverse economies represents a response to these calls. In consequence, this thesis will employ the lens of diverse economies and real utopias to explore the principles and practices of AFN initiatives, which will be introduced below and further explained in the methodology.

2.3. Real Utopias: introducing the project

The real utopias project by Eric Olin Wright is dealing with the study of <u>visions</u> and <u>practices</u> that aim at devising alternatives that would minimize social injustice and maximize environmental sustainability (Wright, 2010, 2012). In his book *Envisioning Real Utopias* (2010), number of proposals and projects that feature post-capitalist characteristics are examined. Two examples are Wikipedia, which already had large-scale social impact at the time of study, and the universal basic income, which is a not-implemented proposal. Wright has emphasized the relevance of studying local, specific initiatives, because despite lacking large-scale social impact, these initiatives are opposed to

conventional structures and institutions, and therefore provide insight into the elements that a socially just transformation may have (Wright, 2012).

Emphasizing this, Wright (2010) proposes a framework to study alternatives around three themes: 1) analysis and critique of current situation; 2) examining desirability, viability and achievability of alternatives, and; 3) theorizing pathways for transformations. The question of desirability relates how an alternative is organized to counter the problems of 'business as usual' (Wright, 2010, p. 14). Answering the question would emphasize the abstract moral principles that underlie the alternative's practices (Wright, 2012). The exploration of viability asks of desirable initiatives whether the principles would actually generate their supposed benefits in an enduring manner. It deals the confrontation between principles and practices, and with internal limitations and challenges of the alternative. Whether an alternative is viable may depend heavily on geographical and historical context. Thirdly, the exploration of achievability is concerned with the question whether and how the alternative is achievable, and regards the facilitating and obstructing conditions that made the development of the alternative possible. Despite the uncertainty of what is achievable in the future, the exploration of achievability is important, because it may help to develop strategies of *how* alternatives can be made more achievable. In short, the real utopias framework provides three tasks to analyze and elaborate alternatives to problematic structures and institutions. The idea of three criteria for analyzing alternatives helps the researcher to formulate relevant and researchable questions around alternatives.

2.4. Gap in the literature & research questions

The unsustainable character of modern food systems requires people in the West to develop more sustainable practices around food. In response to this need, Europe has seen the rise of a collection of AFNs, which typically counter 'business as usual' food and advocate for and experiment with various kinds of alternative food practices. Although AFNs have been studied in many ways, AFN scholars have called for further research to dive deeper into the question of what AFNs argue for in terms of for whom and how the food system should be transformed, as well as to explore the confrontation

between principles and practices to give insight into potential developments and obstacles. My proposal of employing the real utopias framework combined with diverse economies framework represents a response to these calls.

While scholars have devoted much attention to the power of utopias in social change processes, also in specific with regard to food (e.g. Cucco and Fonte, 2015; Stock, Carolan and Rosin, 2015; Isgren, 2018; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021) a study that examines AFIs through the lens of real utopias has not been conducted yet. We do not yet understand what is gained and what is lost if we try to understand AFIs as real utopian projects. Furthermore, AFN scholars have argued for the relevance of case based approaches, which allows for more context-sensitivity (Harnesk and Isgren, 2021), but a context-sensitive exploration of Amsterdam's AFIs has not been conducted yet.

This highlights the great academic and societal relevance of research into these initiatives and locates a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed. Insight into how these AFI are visioning desirable food and how they are working towards their vision, and struggling to do so, is required to understand potential pathways of how food systems can be made more sustainable and more just. This thesis aims to add to the literature by analyzing the AFIs in Amsterdam as real utopian projects. As such, this research will contribute to the body of AFN literature by deepening our understanding of AFIs through the framework of real utopias and diverse economies, and it will add to the real utopias literature by providing more context-sensitive insights regarding the critiques, visions, practices and struggles of actors in alternatives. The gap in the literature gave rise to the following research question:

"In what ways do alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam represent a critique to conventional food and in what ways do they embody desirable, viable and achievable alternatives?"

In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions have been defined:

1. *In what ways do AFIs in Amsterdam represent a critique and alternative to conventional, modern food?*
2. *In what ways are AFIs organized in principle and in practice?*
3. *What are the main facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs?*

Table 1 shows the sub-questions relative to the research objectives.

Table 1: the sub-questions, their objectives

Sub-question	Research objectives
1) *In what ways do alternative AFIs represent a critique and alternative to conventional, modern food?*	To explore the ways AFIs pose a critique to the conventional state of affairs of modern food in Amsterdam, and to understand the ways AFIs represent desirable alternatives.
2) *In what ways are AFIs organized in principle and in practice?*	To explore the viability of AFIs in Amsterdam.
3) *What are the main facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs?*	To explore the achievability of AFIs in Amsterdam and to base an understanding of potential pathways for enlarging social impact on AFI actors' experience.

3. Methodology

As explained in the literature review, AFN scholars have called for further research to be organized around the confrontation between principles and practices. This would give insight into the goals that AFNs have, the kinds of alternatives food environment they are trying to move toward, as well as the obstacles in moving towards that alternative. My proposal for understanding AFNs through real utopias and diverse economies represents a response to these calls. However, as I translate the real utopias approach to the context of AFN research, I propose for some important adaptations.

This chapter will begin by discussing the foundations and logic of this study, and then it will describe in greater detail how we understand the tasks of real utopias as well as the diverse economies framework in this research. Lastly, the methods will discuss the case study selection, the methods for data collection and the ethical considerations.

3.1. Foundations of this thesis

The quality of a study benefits from being explicit about the foundations of research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), therefore these will be shortly explained. In agreement with the approach that Wright uses, this thesis stems from two basic foundational propositions: 1) that many causes of human and ecosystem suffering, including social and environmental problems of modern food systems, arise from the ways social structures and institutions are organized, and 2) that, however robust, these social structures and institutions are flexible, they are created through human agency and hence can be transformed through human agency. It is the general aspiration of this study approach to create knowledge that can contribute to transforming existing, problematic social structures and institutions, in line with any real utopias project (Wright, 2010).

The subjects under research and me, in my role as a researcher, are reciprocally linked. My interests, experiences and identity have led me to come up with the research design as I did. This also means that the data and the findings are value-mediated, by both the participants and by me. The

nature of inquiry is dialogic between the researcher and the researched and aims to explore those forms of structures that point to experiences of suffering, conflict and collective struggle, and understand how these might be changed. Also, this entails that, what can be known about their principles and practices, experiences and struggles, is affected by me and my personal values and experiences. Many times in the process of thesis designing, I have wondered: can my research contribute to the struggles of participants in this research? Do I uncover things that should remain hidden, because they would de-credibilise the AFIs? These reflections made it more clear that I want to explore AFIs whilst giving agency to their actors.

Furthermore, we emphasize that created knowledge about the world around, in turn has an effect on this world. This foundation is derived from diverse economies, that says that to alter our understanding of the world, is to alter the world (Gibson-Graham, 2008; Miller, 2011; Burke and Shear, 2014). By being aware of the performative power of knowledge, this thesis will explore the practices and principles of alternative food initiatives, aiming to shed light on the diversity and complexity of visions and practices, which helps to uncover and hopefully strengthen various pathways of social change.

3.2. Real utopias framework: tasks, criteria and methodological implications

Having been clear about these foundations, the next section will present my adaptation of Wright's framework, in specific the three tasks and the three criteria, to the context of this research.

3.2.1. Real and utopia?

The Greek word utopia means both 'a good place' and 'nowhere', and refers to a perfect imaginary world. At first, it may seem contradictory to combine the terms real and utopia, for utopia refers to an imaginary place, so why should that be linked to reality? The first combination of real and utopia can be traced back to the work of Giddens (1990). Giddens (1990, p. 155) argues that 'utopian realist' thinking can offer a platform for the creation of alternative realities. He wrote: "Possible futures are constantly not just balanced against the present but actively help constitute it" (Giddens,

1994, p. 250). What currently seems utopian may become reality. Consequently, he argues that it is neither essential nor appropriate to make a distinction between 'realistic' and 'utopian' possible futures. Utopia in Wright's context stands for alternatives that feature deep aspirations for a just and good world, more so than the currently dominant, problematic social structures and institutions do. Real in Wright's context examines these utopian alternatives in terms of what it takes to bring those deep aspirations to the real world.

3.2.2. Tasks and criteria of real utopias projects

The first task of a real utopias project is to analyze the ways in which structural processes generate suffering to humans and ecosystems (Wright, 2010; Wright, 2019; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021). The starting point here is to not only demonstrate that there is suffering, but to show that the explanations for this suffering lies in the ways social structures and institutions are organized. For this reason, we have started the literature review of this thesis with an elaboration of the structural problems of conventional, modern food systems.

The second task is to analyze the desirability, viability and achievability of alternatives. Therefore, we want to explore the ways in which the AFIs are organized around a critique to modern food, and how they embody an alternative to that critique. In other words, we have to gain insight into how *they* understand the problems of conventional food. It is for this reason that AFI actors are given agency to define the ways that AFI are countering the problems of conventional food, rather than solely conducting a literature review on the problems of modern food. For an alternative to meet the criteria of desirability, it must in principle help remedy the problems under the critique, and should incorporate the interests of the various groups affected (Wright, 2010). In the context of this study, it means that for an AFI to be desirable, it must counter the environmental and social problems associated with modern food systems, whilst incorporating the interests of farmers and consumers in Amsterdam.

Analyzing the alternatives in terms of viability is part of the second task. Here we aim to explore how, both in principle and in practice, AFIs are organized to help remedy the problems under

the critique. Principles can be distilled from the goals around which initiatives are organized, as well as from their practices and from their 'failing' practices (Wright, 2010; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021). Hence, the exploration of viability asks if, upon implementation, the principles of an alternative deliver the proposed outcomes in an enduring manner (Wright, 2010). More concretely, a viable AFI must for example have the capacity to maintain a certain level of productivity of food in order to provides food for Amsterdam locals, while generating a desirable socio-economic outcome for the farmers and consumers included in the alternative. The mismatch or confrontation between principles and practices gives insight into where obstacles lie in fulfilling its goals. As pointed out by Wright, analyzing an alternative's viability can be a challenge due to the uncertainties and contingencies that surround them, and may require further research and more experimentation with the alternative (Wright, 2010; Harnesk and Isgren, 2021).

The exploration of the achievability of alternatives is the final criteria under the second task. The operationalization of studying this criteria is dependent on whether existing alternative can be studied - as opposed to *proposed* alternatives (Harnesk and Isgren, 2021). In this research existing alternatives can be studied, therefore the inquiry can be centered around the conditions that have facilitated and obstructed the development of alternatives (*ibid.*). Achievability is dependent in part on future contingencies, hence its analysis is best thought of as a question about which social factors play into the process of making change towards a certain alternative possible (Wright, 2010). More concretely to the context of this study, here we need to locate which facilitating conditions allowed for the initiative to develop, and which factors have been obstructing the development. It should be noted that, as Wright (Wright, 2010, p. 22) points out, achievability is partly relying on whether enough social forces can be mobilized to make a case possible. Clear understandings of desirable alternatives can in themselves contribute to the achievability of the case. The third task of developing a comprehensive theory of social change, however, beyond the scope of this thesis. From the exploration of achievability can be drawn what is necessary to obtain a larger-scale realization of viable alternatives, which relates to the third task. This will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

In sum, the three tasks of real utopias as adapted to this study are: 1) understanding the ways AFI are organized around a critique on modern food, i.e. to what are they an alternative, 2) exploring the ways that AFIs are organized, in principle and in practice, to counter the problems under the critique, and 3) understanding the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs.

3.2.3. Methodological insights from other real utopias studies

Some authors in other scholarly fields have taken Eric Olin Wright's real utopias approach to their academic domains. For example, Ruth Wright (Wright, 2019) studied real utopian music education in the Western world. In this section I will shortly explain her study approach, for it contains methodological lessons for the design of this thesis. Ruth Wright (2019) started her search for real utopias in higher music education by providing a critique to current higher music education in Canada, identifying how she regards it as 'a systemic cause of harm to music students'. She continues with elaborating the moral values and principles that music education *should* have, based on scholarly literature in the field of progressive education designs and utopian thought. Then, she introduces one case study and argues it embodies desirable moral values and principles. Namely, the case constitutes a community space where music is played, taught and learned non-hierarchically, and in a non-culturally hegemonic setting. Lastly, she studied the barriers to the development of the case and argues how more large-scale implementation of the case could be brought about. The latter is based on scholarly literature on "mainstream, neoliberal music education" in England, and on scholarly literature on progressive music education designs.

A critique on her work that I think of, is the paradox of basing a proposal of alternative, non-hierarchical, culturally inclusive music education, solely on academic literature written by (mostly Western) scholars. While I was impressed by her work for her extensive argument on the current problems of music education in Canada and on the alternative principles that could help remedy these problems, I have learned from her approach that I prefer to base this thesis on a case based approach. This will help to have a more 'bottom-up' approach, taking the visions, experiences and struggles of

the actors in AFIs as main source for examining alternatives. I will further explain the case study approach of this thesis in the methods below.

3.3. Diverse economies framework to analyze AFI practices

The second lens through which this thesis will analyze AFI is diverse economies, discussed here.

3.3.1 Beyond 'the' capitalist economy towards diverse economies

In order to explore practices of AFI in their complete complexity, the diverse economies framework can provide a theoretical basis as it allows to recognize new, alternative practices in the initiatives. This frame allows to see "a wide range of social relations [to] bear on economic practices, including to name just some, trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, […] solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, and environmental and social justice" (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p.151). Diverse economies theory emphasizes the performativity of knowledge, as altering our understanding of the world is to alter the world (Burke and Shear, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Miller, 2011). The common representation of alternative economic activities as marginal and unconvincing, in effect strengthens the dominance of 'the' capitalist economy and its practices. In contrast, in the diverse economies framework alternative economic activities are appreciated in their diversity, complexity and incoherence (Gibson-Graham, 2008). By making alternative economic practices the center of research, it allows them to become more present, more credible, more viable and more real (ibid.). This means that instead of judging alternative economic practices as 'capitalism in another guise' (Gibson-Graham, 2008, p. 8), they are approached and explored through the use of weak theory and thick description.

3.3.2. Weak theory and thick description

At present, academics are trained to have the stance of using and developing 'strong theory', borrowed from Sedgwick and Frank (2003), that inclines them to paranoically put phenomena in an order, and to minimize surprise and uncertainty. Strong theory resorts to understanding phenomena under one single, usually large and threatening concept, like capitalism or neoliberalism (Gibson-

Graham, 2008). This entails that academics typically judge and dismiss experiments of building alternatives as 'capitalism in another guise or as always already coopted', assessing their potential as inadequate before exploring them in-depth. For example, AFIs operate within and according to capitalist structures and can therefore never fully represent post-capitalist economic practices, as explained in the literature review.

The main critique of diverse economies framework is that a variety of 'other' alternative economic forms are rendered invisible by the use of strong theory, treating them are marginal and as sub-systems within the capitalist system. By moving away from 'strong theory' to 'weak theory', academics can grant legitimacy to economic practices that transcend and include what is seen as dominant. Weak theory goes hand in hand with thick description as a method, borrowed from Geertz (1973), that directs focus beyond material practices to the nuances, motivations, silences and so on, that come along with the practices. By being aware of the performative power of knowledge, this thesis will explore the practices and principles of alternative food initiatives, without resorting to strong theory through predetermined concepts and categories, but by weak theory and thick description on the practices, which helps to uncover pathways that would otherwise remain hidden.

3.3.3. Diverse economic practices

In order to regard the diversity of economic practices, Gibson-Graham (2014) theorize economies as heterogenous practices composed of multiple forms of enterprises, labor, transactions, finance and property. The types of economic relations that stem from these economic forms are categorized as capitalist, alternative capitalist and non-capitalist. The diverse economies framework (DEF) is outlined in table 2. The categories are adaptable to the subjects under research, and this study will use the typology as a basis for exploring practices of AFIs. The top row represents practices that are recognized in mainstream economic theory. The middle row are practices that are commonly not recognized by mainstream economic theory and ignored in mainstream representations of functioning economies. The lower row incorporates those practices that scholars in feminism, anthropology, sociology recognize to contribute to functioning economies. Non-capitalist economic practices refer

to a myriad of contributors to 'material well-being', that are recognized as producing goods, services, values, and care, but that cannot be confined to alternative capitalist practices. For example, enterprises can extend beyond the capitalist understanding of seeking to create value for shareholders, but for society or the environment in the cases of alternative capitalist understanding, or can be cooperatives and community initiatives in the cases of non-capitalist understandings. By framing economic practices in these categories, we attempt to highlight their heterogeneity and give legitimacy to those practices that are beyond the capitalist.

Table 2 Categories of diverse economies

Enterprise	Transactions	Labor	Property	Finance
Capitalist	Market	Wage	Private	Mainstream market
Alternative capitalist	Alternative market	Alternative paid	Alternative private	Alternative market
Non-capitalist	Non-market	Unpaid	Open access	Non-market

In this thesis, the performativity of knowledge is crucial to be aware of, since we frame AFIs as 'alternative', but do not aim to de-legitimize their potential with this frame. By being aware and critical towards performative power of (strong) theory, this thesis will explore the AFIs in Amsterdam, without turning to strong theoretical concepts through predetermined conceptualizations of their relation to capitalist economic practices. In contrast, this thesis will use weak theory as a tool to open up to the myriad of other forces that can work towards altering food environments. Weak theory as a means of helping the researcher to see possibility and openings, so as to leave open space for novelty and uncertainty, and thus to be open for challenges, limitations and problems in the development of alternative economic configurations, rather than confirming pre-established ideas.

3.4. Methods

Varying methods have been used to operationalize the exploration of viability within other real utopian literature (Harnesk and Isgren, 2021), such as immanent criticism (e.g. Boda and Faran,

2018), and case based approaches (e.g. Isgren, 2018). The latter method - case based approach - bases its exploration of viability on the experiences and struggles of people who have been working in or with alternatives. In their reflection, Harnesk and Isgren (2021) say that case based methods are crucial, as these allow for a context sensitive exploration. Therefore, in the context of this study, the case study approach is deemed suitable.

3.4.1. Case study

This thesis aims to explore the principles and practices of alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam. Three cases have been selected as units of analysis. Using a design of multiple case studies has benefits over a single case study design. Firstly, it is argued that a multiple case studies design is suitable for gathering data in order to develop a theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Secondly, using multiple cases for analysis enhances the reliability of the findings (Hafiz, Baxter and Jack, 2008). Although it is not the aim of this study to contrast and compare between multiple cases, still the before mentioned benefits make a multiple case study design suitable.

Case study selection

In many papers in AFN literature, the selection of cases is up to the reader to the assume, as authors are not specific about how the sampling had taken place (Venn *et al.*, 2006). In an attempt to reflect on the method of sampling, the cases were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that the eligibility criteria used for sampling of cases in this study was predetermined to ensure that cases have similar yet diverse characteristics (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). The criteria were constructed from the academic conceptualization of AFN initiatives and organizations in existing literature.

As such, at least one of the criteria had to be met by each case to be included in this study:

- it is affiliated with an AFN is any way;

- it attempts to be detached from conventional modern food systems, which may be in terms of non-conventional production, supply channels, consumption or food related projects;

-it is based in Amsterdam.

The start of sampling of AFIs was a combination of searching the internet with keywords like 'sustainable food AND Amsterdam' (or in Dutch). Also, personal conversations with friends and housemates have led to finding a list of initiatives in the domain of alternative food in Amsterdam, called 'the promotion of grassroot organizations', published on the website of ASEED. I had assembled a list of all the initiatives that I had found, which were 28 in number. The final cases have been selected from this longer list, and this selection was based on their varying natures, foci and scales. I strived to include a variety of cases in terms of their nature, their foci and their scales. The foci are on production, on consumption and on changing the food system at large and the scales are initiative scale, city scale, and system scale. It lead to the selection of three case studies, which can be viewed in table 3 below, along with their nature, foci and scales.

Table 3: Case studies of AFIs in Amsterdam

Initiative	Nature	Main focus	Scale
The Fruittuin	Biodynamic food producing company	Production	Initiative scale
ASEED	International campaigning organization by youth	System change; Consumption	System scale; City scale
Cityplot	Collective of food producers, educators and designers	Production; System change	City Scale; System scale

Participants selection

The selection of participants for semi-structured interviews within each case was initially aiming to create a group of people that is:

- diverse in terms of geographical background (they come from or live in varied geographical places);

- gender balanced;

- representing multiple knowledge systems.

Finally, the selection of interviewees turned out to be largely dependent on availability of participants. I have send out 33 invitations for interviews to a gender-balanced group of people, with diverse geographical and educational backgrounds. I have received eleven responses with positive answers, and eighteen responses that did not have time for an interview, and five invitations were left unanswered. The final pool of interviewees consisted out of six Dutch, three non-Dutch Western European and two non-Western European people. Furthermore, eight interviewees were female and nine interviewees were graduated in higher-education. It turned out, nevertheless, that the overrepresentation of women, higher educated and Western people was an adequate representation of the participants in the three case studies. One interview was, not purposefully, not recorded by me and hence cleared from the list. So, finally ten interviews encompass the data.

3.4.2. Methods for data collection

Using a case study design in qualitative research allows the researcher to combine multiple methods for each case study (Devers and Frankel, 2000). The benefit of using multiple methods is that the researcher can obtain more comprehensive insight into the phenomena under inquiry (Hafiz, Baxter and Jack, 2008). This is why this study has combined multiple methods of literature review, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, as outlined below.

Literature review in advance of fieldwork

Prior to the fieldwork, existing concepts, studies and arguments were reviewed. My initial examinations of the literature helped me to develop the research questions, and aims for the research, and also, it gave me insight into how AFIs can best be studied according to the latest literature, in terms of which methods, what kind of data to generate and what to look for within the data. The literature review had the function of both providing context to the research data, and to make myself more familiar with the cases. With help from the literature review, an initial main research question and a set of sub-questions were drawn, based on the themes that emerged to be relevant from the literature. Importantly, an insight from the literature has been the relevance of being context sensitive and of including the experiences of relevant actors in the study, including their visions and struggles. This has led me to develop the fieldwork methods as follows.

Participant observation and informal speaking

The first task or real utopias entailed a search for AFI actors' understandings of problems of conventional food and how they represent alternatives. The second task entailed an exploration of the ways AFIs are organized, in principle and in practice, to help remedy the problems identified under the critique, as well as gaining an understanding of the confrontation between the principles and the practices, and the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs. For these tasks, I firstly got to know the AFI actors and the AFIs, by participating in the AFIs and by informally speaking to the actors.

With ASEED I have participated in three events from November to January, sharing meals, helping to cook and speaking informally with event organizers and event attendees. With the Fruittuin van West I have worked two days in the CSA with planting, weeding, cleaning and harvesting between October and November, speaking informally with two employed farmers and twelve volunteering community members. With Cityplot I have attended one workshop, speaking with two hosts and twelve attendees.

The guiding questions for this method were:

- *how is the initiative organized, in terms of labor, ownership and transactions?*

- *who is involved in the organization and what are their roles?*

- *what are the main issues that the initiative is addressing?*

- *what are the main problems the initiative is running into?*

The data obtained in this phase was written down in a notebook, both on location and at home, but always on the day of data collection. The exploratory mode of this method allowed the development and modification of the interview questions over the course of data collection, according to what has emerged as relevant themes in the perception of the actors. After several modifications, the following method of semi-structured interviews was developed.

Semi-structured interviews

For the second method I have conducted eleven semi-structured interviews, which took approximately two hours each. The interviews were semi-structured, because I asked few guiding questions and we went more in-depth when an interesting topic came about. In the beginning of each interview, I emphasized that the aim of the interview was to get an understanding of the interviewee's visions, experiences and struggles, and therefore, that the interviewee was in control of what they wanted to speak about. They were told that they could interfere with the interview at any time and had the freedom to determine the direction of the interview. Many times, they did make use of their agency, hence each interview was very different from another. Some complemented their interview with a drawing or a word-web, to make their perspective more visual.

Through the interviews, I wanted to obtain more in-depth insight into:

- what actors identify as the main problems of conventional food,

- the ways actors regard AFI principles are addressing these problems,

- the ways that AFI is, in practice, delivering its proposed benefits, and

- what has facilitated and obstructed the development of the initiative.

In general, the semi-structured interviews included the following aspects:

- *What does your perfect imaginary food environment look like?*

- *How is the current way food is organized in the Netherlands different from your ideal?*

- *What are the reasons for you being active in this AFI?*

- *Can you tell me a bit about yourself and (your role in) the AFI?*

- *Do you feel your work is contributing to your ideal food environment?*

- *What are some troubles you encounter in working towards your ideal food environment?*

- *What could you and the initiative do better or more?*

- *What could other actors outside the initiative do better or more?*

- *Which factors have been of help in the development of the initiative?*

- *Which factors are obstructing?*

- *What are current shortcomings of the AFI, what is needed to address them?*

The data from the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted from the start of November 2021 to the end of May 2022, were recorded and transcribed. Notably, one of the interviews was by accident not recorded and was hence withheld from the data interpretation and from contributing to the results.

Data interpretation and analysis

"The best preparation for conducting case study analysis is to have a general analytic strategy," (Yin, 2003, p. 115). In this study, the data was collected and analysed in an iterative manner. To achieve this, I have reported on the conducted participant observation, from which I subsequently have generated some initially relevant themes. The data was coded before more data was

generated from the remaining of the participant observation and the semi-structured interviews, after which the process of coding was repeated.

The effort of coding went out to identifying the following:

1) main critique to conventional food according to AFI actors,

2) the ways AFIs are practicing or trying to practice alternatives,

3) the principles that underlie these practices,

4) the confrontations between practices and principles,

5) the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs.

The data was first coded in verbatim and conceptually, by coding each line of written data . In verbatim coding means that the voices and expressions of actors were preserved within the coding process, where conceptual coding allows the researcher to draw on concepts (Hoddy, 2019). For example, where verbatim codes would say 'politicians are ignorant' or 'farm interns are working for nothing', the conceptual would say 'rising energy costs'. Codes were written down in a notebook, from which initial categories were created. Less relevant codes, codes that came up infrequently, were removed from the list. What remained was a final list of codes that appeared relevant to cover the data significantly. Data from diverse actors within one initiative were compared to identify similarities and differences between them, which gave an understanding of the coherence of perspectives within each case. Also, the data was compared between the cases to identify similarities and differences, which gave insight into the varying goals and practices that varying AFIs have.

The decision to avoid codes drawn from the literature was intended to allow consideration of actors' perspectives without steering by the researcher. The strategy entailed that codes were drawn for which I had to turn to the literature for interpretation and context, which I was able to find in many cases. However, also some nuances and ideas were found in the data that were difficult to find in the literature. These instances would lead me back to the actors to verify my interpretation and connection between concepts. This would lead me to find that methods served its purpose of giving agency to the actors in defining their visions, practices and struggles.

Ethical considerations

Participation in this study has happened voluntarily. Every participant was informed on aim of the study and each one gave permission to record, write down and use their data. Some interviewees asked if their answers could be included anonymously, since they shared sensitive information on internal dynamics of the initiative or enabling or obstructing factors. Therefore, I have chosen to refer to *all* interviewees by means of calling them Interviewee 1; Interviewee 2 and so on.

4. Findings

In the following chapter, the findings of the case study analysis will be presented. The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, an introduction of the case studies and *the ways they are organized as a response and alternative to conventional food* (sub-question 1) will be outlined. Secondly, four main themes were identified from the data that structure the principles, practices of and the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the cases. Therefore, these four themes structure the answers to the second *(in what ways are AFIs organized in principle and in practice)* and third *(what are the main facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs)* question. Finally, the chapter will present a brief overview of the findings.

4.1. Introducing the cases as alternatives

In this section, each case is introduced with a description of the initiative, its aims and activities. Each introduction revolves around the questions:

    - In what ways can the cases be understood as a response and critique to modern food systems?

    - In what ways do the cases represent alternatives?

4.1.1. The Fruittuin

The space of the Fruittuin van West (**Fruittuin**) is located at the outskirts of Amsterdam West and incorporates various things: self-picking orchard, self-picking CSA, chicory tower and mushroom

cave, farm animals, café, events building and farm shop. Through the diverse economies framework, the diversity of practices of the Fruittuin can be seen (table 4).

The food production is biodynamic and carries the Demeter-label, meaning that the food meets certain standards in terms of soil health, animal welfare and more. The organization is registered as a *maatschap*, a legal partnership between the two initiators Wil and Lisan, who lease the land since 2013 from the municipality of Amsterdam. Next to the owners, the organization is comprised out of four paid farmers - two in the orchard and two in the vegetable garden –, a group of varying unpaid interns and about one hundred frequent and occasional volunteers. The land is open access in between visiting hours (Tu-Su from 10.30–18h). The CSA is for members only, who pay once a year approximately 326 EURO. The pricing system runs as a sliding scale to be decided by members, aiming to enlarge access to less wealthy members. The orchard is open to all, and visitors pay according to the quantity they pick. The farm-shop is run by interns and volunteers. The café's is run by paid workers. Events are hosted on the place almost every day, both by workers of the Fruittuin as by visitors renting a space. Examples include scavengers hunts for children and education on specific subjects.

From the data emerged that food production at the Fruittuin is aimed at providing substantial amounts of healthy and sustainably produced food to locals. This is valuable *"for people's health and ecosystems health in terms of soil, air, water" (Interviewee 6). "Everyone knows where their food has come from, with as little transport as possible, using as little as energy as possible to get food to its consumers" (Interviewee 4).* The spatial distance between production and consumption, and the visibility that comes along, are mentioned by three actors to contribute to a more sustainable attitude of *"people [to] treat food with more awareness" (Interviewee 4), "because I think they will handle food with more care if they know where it comes from" (Interviewee 1).* A significant feature of the Fruittuin is the involvement of community in food production. *"We make people aware of food, let them make contact, they experience good food, and learn what it takes to produce it" (Interviewee 1).* The impact of community oriented food goes beyond the initiative as well, *"It brings a*

political message to the people that visit the farm. They realize that food can be organized

differently from mainstream supermarket chains. […] and they take this experience with them

in their lives." (Interviewee 6).

As such, the Fruittuin is organized to contribute to local food production and education on food and farming in a localized setting, in response to the spatial dimension of conventional food systems.

Table 4: Diverse economies of the Fruittuin

DEF category	Diverse economy of Fruittuin	Explanation
Enterprise	Alternative capitalist	*Maatschap* with environmental and social goals, non-profit
Labor	Wage	Farmers at the orchard; Employees at the café
	Alternative wage	Self-employed farmers at the CSA
	Unpaid	Interns; volunteers
Property	Open access	Publicly accessible land and spaces like events space
	Alternative private	Land is state owned
	Private	The organization is individually owned by two initiators
Transactions	Alternative market	Community supported agriculture; Direct food trade; Fair prices and sliding scale
Finance	Alternative market	Subsidies from municipality, payments from visitors, and donations
	Non-market	Community supported agriculture

4.1.2. ASEED

Action for Solidarity, Equality, Environment and Diversity Europe (**ASEED**) is a foundation that organizes campaigns against industrial agriculture and supports alternative, aiming to change structures which generate and perpetuate injustices with regard to food and farming. ASEED International was founded in 1991 in Rio de Janeiro to promote worldwide cooperation of youth to battle environmental and social injustice. In 1992 ASEED International organizationally decentralized and henceforth regional initiatives set own goals and started organizing regional activities. The space of ASEED Europe is located in building Plantage Dok in the center of Amsterdam, once squatted and now hosting varying collectives. The local foundation is comprised out of a three-headed board (voluntary work), and ten employees (paid minimum loan) and two interns (paid but very little), and a greater number of varying volunteers.

Activities include: research and publication on social and environmental justice of food and agriculture; organizing campaigns and direct actions; supporting local and regional food alternatives. Actions and campaigns are organized on the basis of solidarity, trust, 'flat organizational' structures, voluntary action, and local, decentralized decision making. Through diverse economies lens, a myriad of practices emerged from the data (table 5). Research is one crucial activity within ASEED to get an understanding of *"what makes our current food systems unsustainable and toxic" (Interviewee 9).* The next process is of making the information from this research publicly available, also for people *"who potentially have no clue or maybe have no interest" (Interviewee 6).* This is done via online publications, paper pamphlets and events. As such, ASEED is organized around critiquing modern food systems. Furthermore, the interviews suggest that ASEED hosts events with generally three aims. The first type is about "*making more people aware of it [problems with current food systems]*" *(Interviewee 6),* aimed to reach visitors relatively new to the topic of sustainable food and farming. As such, ASEED is broadening the network of people interested in alternative food. The second type are events that *"strengthen the existing alternatives" (Interviewee 6)*, inviting those who are already involved in food and farming to come together and exchange ideas and strategies. This way, ASEED *"strengthen[s] the network of initiatives who are trying to fight injustices, resisting the industrial food*

systems" (Interviewee 6). The third type are food provision events for visitors, free of cost. It uses donated food waste, to give away or to cook dinners from in community kitchens or restaurants. Food in this context is a means to get together with people from varying socio-economic backgrounds, to open up conversations *"about food and about many other things" (Interviewee 6),* and to rescue food from being wasted. As such, ASEED treats food as a means of connection and exchange.

Table 5: Diverse economies of ASEED

DEF category	Diverse economy of Fruittuin	Explanation
Enterprise	Non-capitalist	Foundation with only environmental and social goals, non-profit.
Labor	Wage	Employees with minimum wage; Internship compensation
	Unpaid	Volunteers; Board
Property	Open access	Publicly accessible events and (parts of) building
	Alternative private	Building is owned by state and ten individuals together; Owns, shares and borrows materials for campaigns and events
Transactions	Non- market	Food donations; Food and events for free; Donation based dinners
	Alternative market	Dinners at low prices and further reduced prices for people with low income
	Capitalist market	Travel and material costs
Finance	Alternative market	Payments from visitors, and donations
	Non-market	Gifts and donations, grants, funds

4.1.3. Cityplot

Cityplot Collective Amsterdam (**Cityplot**) is a collective of professional urban food producers, educators, and designers of permaculture gardens in Amsterdam. Cityplot does a variety of things: designing, implementing and maintaining (edible) gardens in Amsterdam (1); hosting workshops on various topics in urban farming (2); organizing food project for and with schoolchildren in Amsterdam (3); organizing tours to urban farming initiatives (4), and; consultation on urban farming (5). The common goals of these five domains are to show urban dwellers that urban farming is possible and attractive, and providing practical tools of doing so.

The initiative is organized as a cooperative - professionals are members of Cityplot. The workload is shared between members. The cooperative was established in 2008 by Leonie, who later transformed it into an international organization in Amsterdam, Berlin and Barcelona. The local teams have monthly 'collective meetings', and the heads of each team have monthly 'international meetings'. The Amsterdam team consists of twelve members (eleven female, one male), who are active in other Amsterdam based food initiatives too. Members pay a yearly membership fee of 200 EURO, covering the costs of the web domain and promotion material. If the fees are not spent by the end of the years, workshops are organized and paid with the remaining money. New members are included in two ways: current members propose new members or new members seek contact themselves. The clients of Cityplot are the municipality of Amsterdam, private garden-owners, companies with green spaces, including banks, and schools.

Through the diverse economies lens, we found a broad set of economic practices that represent Cityplot (table 6). One of five main activities is the development of (edible) gardens in Amsterdam, which vary in design according to the wishes of commissioners, *"but slowly we get more and more freedom to change the design […] towards more sustainable agriculture" (Interviewee 3).* For example, *"sometimes [the commissioner] asks for a 'green garden' and we give our advice that edible green gardens would be even more cool, and perennial gardens have even more benefits, and permaculture principles are like the best thing you can provide citizens with. […] The municipality [commissioner] luckily trusts our expertise and they give us many green lights, haha" (Interviewee*

3). The gardens aim to bring nature back into the city, and the edible gardens contribute to *"food security, meaning there is plenty of healthy and sustainably sourced food available" (Interviewee 3).*

Another pillar of ASEED is education of urban people on gardening and farming, because *"knowledge [...] is currently being lost all over the world because of the trend of few food producers supporting a large part of the population who do not produce food" (Interviewee 3).* Education includes school projects, with which they aim to address the current lack of agricultural and nature education.

Some activities specifically aim to include certain social groups, in response to the notion that these people commonly lack easy access to land and farming opportunities. For example, Bloei en Groei project invites women with non-Western backgrounds who are *"generally occupied with the care for others"* to join farming and gardening sessions, in order to have *"[...] time for themselves in nature and gardens where they can discharge and regenerate" (Interviewee 1).* As such, the healing aspect of gardens is emphasized. Participation fees for some projects are symbolic and participants with low financial means get an added discount. Other projects include people *"who some might consider mainstream. [...] whose eyes are opened by our practices" (Interviewee 3),* like government officials and employees of companies and banks.

For interviewee 3 the value of urban agriculture is explained as follows: "*For most people it starts not with some theory that is learned, not with some conference, not even with a conversation. It starts with experiencing sustainable agriculture. [...] I hear, and I have witnessed myself, that the real eye-opener is just doing it, working with the hands in the soil, planting a seed, seeing it grow, the wonder of nature and food. After the first seed, people get impressed, inspired and eventually addicted to it. Then, some of us do not want anything else.*" As such, Cityplot's projects are a meant as both a way of providing food to locals, and of fostering people's interest in urban farming and nature.

Table 6: Diverse economies of Cityplot

DEF category	Diverse economy of Fruittuin	Explanation
Enterprise	Alternative-capitalist	Cooperative with environmental and social goals
Labor	Alternative wage	Self-employed members get paid for the work they fulfill
Property	Private	Gardens are privately owned; Cityplot owns materials to work in the gardens
	Alternative private	Gardens are owned by state
Transactions	Alternative market	Fair incomes for hosts; Some events are low cost with further reduced prices for people with low income;
	Capitalist market	Material costs
Finance	Alternative market	Financial streams include payments from attendees
	Capitalist market	Private banks and companies commission projects
	Non-market	Gifts and donations, grants, subsidies and funds

Conclusion

To sum up the results:

- AFIs embody a myriad of economic practices, many of which are alternative or non-capitalist in the light of diverse economies.

- AFIs are largely organized in direct response to problems of conventional, modern food, but rather than aiming for a standardized method, AFIs are very diverse in focus and approach.

- The Fruittuin is active in local and biodynamic food production whilst including their community, aiming to lower the spatial and psychological distance between people and food.

Their activities mainly include various alternative market practices, such as selling food directly for fair prices.

- ASEED represents a direct critique and response to modern food systems as their main activities are centered around research on industrial food and farming, and promoting local alternatives. The organization is embodying multiple and various non-capitalist and alternative economic practices, which are organized around principles of, among others, solidarity.

- Cityplot's main focus is on building more green spaces inside the city and teaching and concerning various social groups in that process. The activities represent alternative market practices, together with few capitalist practices.

4.2. Principles, practices, facilitations and challenges

For the next section, it emerged from the data that across the cases themes appear to represent the practices and principles of, and the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the cases, to varying extents per case. The themes can be clustered into four <u>main</u> themes: 1) concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food; 2) networks of local food; 3) knowledge and learning; and, finally, 4) governance, policy and public funding. The main themes will serve as a structure to present the findings on sub-question two *(in what ways are AFIs organized in principle and in practice)* and three *(what are the main facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of AFIs)*.

At the end of each main theme, a table will present an overview of the findings, including the themes, practices, principles, and points to consider. Each column was complemented with points to consider, both negative and positive, which appeared from the data analysis. The aim of these points is twofold: to avoid propagandistic cheerleading from my side, but rather to provide an honest account of the complexities of the themes and its relative practices and principles, and also as a ground for reflection in the discussion.

4.2.1. Concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food

In order to counter some adverse effects of conventional food systems, the cases are responding with concrete approaches to improve environmental impacts of food. These can be clustered into two foci: 1) farming practices, 2) waste reduction practices. Cityplot is focusing on environmentally friendly practices around food production, while ASEED is concerned solely with activities around waste reduction, and the Fruittuin is focusing on both.

Within this theme, confrontation between principles and practices remains generally low across the cases, meaning that they succeed in putting their aims into practice. Although different reasons could be the cause of this, one that seems crucial is that concrete, initiative-specific approaches are relatively easy to implement, because they 'only' require implementation within the initiative, as opposed to implementation in a larger level that would require cooperation between multiple (f)actors.

The main facilitating condition that emerged from the data is the knowledge on environmental problems of modern food systems, and the knowledge and experiences necessary to counter these problems. For example, the Fruittuin is practicing concrete approaches to improve soil health, local nutrient cycling, and animal welfare, as a result of the farmers' knowledge on environmental problems of modern farming practices. The use of zero pesticides is because *"we had to know and show that we can still produce enough food without using the toxics that they use in [conventional] farming" (Interviewee 5).* Although the actors' focus on varying themes, a pattern across the cases is that motivations for focusing on any of these themes are similar: providing a counterresponse based on their knowledge about environmental problems of modern food systems. Knowledge and experimentation is necessary to counter these problems in a relevant way.

For the Fruittuin, the main obstructing condition to this theme is price competition with conventional food suppliers. *"Our challenge is not using pesticides [...] and then keeping the price competitive with large-scale industrial agriculture, that is almost impossible. I dream about no competition with industrial agriculture" (Interviewee 5).*

Furthermore, food waste reduction practices (pick-ups at restaurants, food give-aways and cooking dinners) at ASEED are challenged by the feeling of actors' *"hopelessness" (Interviewee 9)* because they witness how much food is thrown away and how little they are able to redistribute and repurpose. In contrast, the waste reduction practices at the Fruittuin generate feelings of *"usefulness" (Interviewee 6)* and *"pride" (Interviewee 4)*, for being able to turn waste into animal feed, compost and heating energy.

Table 7 gives an overview of the findings on Concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food.

Table 7: Overview on the findings on 'Concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food', for each case of the Fruittuin, ASEED and Cityplot.

Theme	Practice	Principle	Points to consider	Case
<u>Farming practices</u>	Practices focus on restoration of soil health, no use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, intercropping and local nutrient cycling.	Soil health	- Ecosystem health in terms of air, water and soil. - Sometimes parts of harvest is lost by fungi as result of no pesticides. Still "enough harvest" (Interviewee 5) but challenge is keeping prices compatible. - High yields because of optimal use of space and plants. - Capital extensive form of agriculture. - Knowledge intensive form of agriculture.	Fruittuin
<u>Waste reduction practices</u>	Amount of animals held that can be fed with local waste streams and that all manure can be used on the land. Animals roam freely through gardens, thereby fertilizing soils.	Farm animals wellbeing; Local nutrient cycling	- Animal production is seen in support of plant production, and not as objective on itself. - High animal welfare. - High compost quality and henceforth high soil quality. - Substantially fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to chemical fertilizer production and transport. -Roaming chickens also contribute to "minimizing insects/fungus plagues" (Interviewee 5).	Fruittuin
<u>Waste reduction practices</u>	Organic waste from farm and cafe goes into biomeiler, providing compost and heating inside areas. Locals also supply organic waste.	Local nutrient cycling; Sustainable energy	- Relatively low GHG emitting source of energy. - Includes the community, educates simultaneously. - Installing biomeiler costs between 2000 and 5000 Euro.	Fruittuin

Farming practices	Design, implement and maintain edible gardens on commission, from annual crops to permaculture design, in urban areas.	Urban (edible) green	- Commissioner gets to decide the design. - Cityplot tries to steer design towards more sustainable designs - Some projects are not participatory, hence missing the educational aspect	Cityplot
Waste reduction	Volunteers collect food waste from stores and restaurants, store it and can be picked up for free by anyone.	Repurposing food waste	- Takes time and effort to coordinate team of volunteers - Volunteers mention a feeling of hopelessness because they see how much food is usually thrown away. - Includes aspect of education for all participants in this process: volunteers, food wasters and food pick-up people.	ASEED

4.2.2. Networks of local food

The second main theme that emerged from the data is that the cases are organized around a notion of local food networks. The practices are centered on foci: 1) community inclusive food; 2) local food supply; and, 3) movement building.

Across the cases, the practices around local food networks entails that the relationship between humans and food is being influenced, as the community becomes more involved in food production and consumption, and as food is locally supplied. Community inclusion is mentioned to result in a more conscious community, that knows where food comes from and treats it with respect. Also, a feeling of shared responsibility over food arises, among others because the community is given a say about the kinds of food that are being produced and how (in ASEED and the Fruittuin). Especially, the CSA of the Fruittuin displays a shared burden of food production between community and farmers. If harvests would fail, the financial risk is for the community as a whole and not for the farmer as an individual, since the community pays once a year with membership fees. Also, local food implies a strengthened economic position for the food producers, as they have more influence over prices compared to supplying food to conventional markets. Building the movement represents the activities that initiatives are involved in to broaden and strengthen the movement, so as to aim for larger impact than one initiative can bring about individually. The activities that revolve around movement building are, again, very diverse within and across cases.

The main confrontation between principles and practices emerged to be similar across the cases, as they face the challenge of being inclusive to various social groups, despite explicitly focusing on inclusivity. Across the cases, the principle generally goes out to being inclusive to social groups with lower economic means (Interviewee 6, Interviewee 9, Interviewee 1), other than Dutch and European ethnic groups (Interviewee 9, Interviewee 1), and women (Interviewee 1). The efforts that are being practiced include: designing activities specifically for marginalized people, free events, goods and activities for social prices, sliding scale pricing systems, and consulting a diversity expert.

Despite these efforts across the cases, the AFIs in this research and their community are both still mainly white, relatively wealthy and high-educated.

The efforts of the Fruittuin to include less wealthy and non-Dutch people are not fulfilling its objectives. *"We are having a white people dominated farm, in a neighborhood which is in the west of Amsterdam, which is mainly Turkish and Moroccan people" (Interviewee 6).* The reasons behind this issue that appeared from the data include that *"[...]many people are scared off because of our prices, since there is competition with the big supermarkets in the city center" (Interviewee 4).* For this reason, the Fruittuin employs a sliding scale pricing system, but in practice, still many consumers choose to pay towards the higher end of the sliding scale. Interviewee 6 puts the problem in context: *"If we want to be more complete in the social aspect of the project, we have to pay more effort in this [inclusiveness]. This corresponds to a bigger problem of the system: why do white, wealthy people consume so much more organic, healthy food, or even have time to come to the farm and self-harvest themselves?"*

An interesting finding came from Cityplot that conducts two approaches to address inclusivity, one that appeared more successful than the other. The first is organizing projects *especially* for marginalized groups and the second is to organize certain workshops and events with a sliding scale pricing system. When a sliding scale possibility exists, attendees still tend to pay at the higher end of the scale (Interviewee 1), similar to the Fruittuin. The sliding scale system did not seem to reach less wealthy people. In contrast, Cityplot's events that are specifically designed for less wealthy (and in this case non-Western) people, appeared to be successful in that respect. This is also found in the projects of ASEED that are inviting diverse social-economic groups by hanging invitations in public and community buildings, and that are for free. Here, too, less wealthy and non-Western people did participate. In sum, it appeared from the data that projects that are specifically designed at inclusivity through low prices and efforts to reach certain social groups are more successful in their aim of including less wealthy and non-Dutch people.

A point of reflection is that in events that are successfully including less-wealthy people, extra efforts had to go out to cover the remaining costs, for example through fundraising (Cityplot).

Another strategy was to coordinate low-cost events through extra volunteers and food waste pickups (ASEED).

Another point of reflection is that the events that did not successfully include less wealthy people, it was mentioned that the prices were high enough to ensure fair incomes for the organizers (Cityplot).

Another point of reflection is that there was generally not much inter-group contact between varying social backgrounds. The projects that did include less wealthy and non-Dutch people, tended to include solely these social groups, and vice versa. The one exception to this finding are the events by ASEED that are specifically organized to enlarge inter-group contact between varying social groups. The strategy that made this principle succeed was to made such events free of entry costs, and to distribute invitations via multiple ways: hanging paper print invitations in public libraries, at university buildings, in companies, sending out emails, hanging posters in the streets, etc., in order to reach out to a diversity of social groups. These costs for these events are usually covered by donations from attendees and fundraising. Interviewee 9 mentions these are her favorite events because they *"open up social borders and highlights the inequalities that they are trying to resist"*.

The main facilitating condition to the cases is the supporting community and the vast amount of volunteers that support the initiatives, in terms of working on the land, organizing events, buying food and more. For example, the community plays a crucial role in the development of the Fruittuin, by among other things, working on the land and by buying food produce. The low labor costs related to food production, combined with the design of self-picking gardens (as opposed to hiring people for picking) allows the Fruittuin to work with few paid employees, keeping the prices of its food relatively low. Also for ASEED, volunteers are crucial to the development and execution of events, which is largely done by volunteers. As an exemption, Cityplot is found to rely on the support of volunteers much less, as they work with paid self-employed members only. In reflection upon this, interviewee 6 explains that she feels happy to be able to pay people for their work, even though it means extra effort to fundraising processes. On the other hand, the data suggested an added value in

community inclusive, participatory projects, because those allow for mutual learning experiences, which are explained in the next sub-chapter.

A second facilitating condition is the support from other AFIs, or collaborations within the movement. A significant finding that appeared across the cases, was the support that AFIs receive from *"the movement" (Interviewee 3)*, i.e. from other AFIs, in terms of sharing knowledge (Interviewee 9; Interviewee 6, Interviewee 10, Interviewee 1), resources (Interviewee 10; Interviewee 6; Interviewee 3) and in establishing new projects (Interviewee 10, Interviewee 5). For example, the CSA of the Fruittuin was initiated as a result of collaboration between actors from Cityplot and the Fruittuin. Also Cityplot often collaborates with other AFIs, which, as interviewee 3 puts it, strengthens both the *"content of projects"* as well as the *"picture"* that outsiders see when they look at AFI projects. For ASEED and Cityplot, the collaboration also includes collaboration with international partners.

Practices go out to broadening the movement and strengthening the movement. The former refers to generating interest from 'new' people, while the latter refers to strengthening the ties between people and initiatives that are already familiar with alternative food. Also, actors in AFIs were often found to be active in more than one initiative, making interaction between initiatives likely. The effect of collaborations is a strengthened feeling of unity within and also beyond the collaboration. *"For me it feels very united. Even though approaches can differ, in the end they are interconnected parts of a potential solution" (Interviewee 1).* Consequently, the collaboration between initiatives is found to be a facilitating condition to the development of alternative food initiatives.

A challenge that appeared from the data is that, while there are many benefit to the great numbers of volunteers active in initiatives (e.g. closer human-food relationship, low harvesting costs), it simultaneously represents a limitation to the Fruittuin and ASEED. Several interviewees mentioned the wish to be able to actually pay more people for the work they do. *"I would like to see farming as a real job again,"* said Interviewee 10, *"as it would attract more people who want to work as a farmer."* Interviewee 6, who is a paid farmer, explains the problem as follows: *"We need more paid farmers. [...] We have been having this discussion on free labor, [...] I don't want to see this sector*

always to be depending on free labor. We are doing a research […] about the question how can we prevent free labor, because free labor happens everywhere, it happens of course in Southern European countries with exploitation of migrant workers, which is terrible, but it happens in the Netherlands and in my farm. I have interns who are not being paid. I morally don't think it should be like that. For ASEED, a challenge is that free labor requires time and effort to be put in by coordinators, in terms of getting volunteers in the right place on the right time and maintaining contact. Furthermore, the pool of volunteers is changing rapidly, making it extra hard to coordinate. *"It costs so much energy and time, there is less time to actually put into the a project itself," (Interviewee 9).* What is more, is that the work of the volunteers allow for the very existence of the Fruittuin and ASEED, which the actors have mentioned to be a problem. *"It would be great if the community helps growing food, but not necessary for the initiative to survive." (Interviewee 6).*

Table 8 gives an overview of the findings within the theme of networks of local food.

Table 8: Overview of the findings on 'Networks of local food, for each case of the Fruittuin, ASEED and Cityplot.

Theme	Practice	Principle	Points to consider	Case
Community inclusive food	Community and visitors help with food production and members can influence the decisions on which crops are produced at PLUK! in the annual meeting.	Community oriented food production	- Community and by-passers experience food and farming. - Agency of community to decide what food is grown. - Shared responsibility and burden for food production. - Indirect impact: people learn and experience food and farming, taking this along in their lives. - Involving community in production (i.e. free labor) lowers food prices. - Also creates dependency on free labor.	Fruittuin
Community inclusive food	Try to be inclusive to less wealthy and people with non-Dutch ethnicity, by using a sliding scale pricing system, and consulting diversity expert.	Inclusivity	- Sliding scale pricing systems does not really reach poorer groups of people. - Community is largely white. - Interviewee says more effort is needed to include non-Dutch and specifically non-Western people.	Fruittuin
Community inclusive food	Food sharing events on donation or for free, typically from food waste, aiming to bring together social groups.	Inclusivity	- Events typically succeed in their aim: people from varying socio-economic backgrounds eat together. - Low prices made possible through volunteering work and through food waste pickups. - Organization of events costs a lot of coordination effort.	ASEED
Community inclusive food	Some projects have symbolic participation fees and added discount for less wealthy	Inclusivity	- Projects with symbolic fees are successful in including less wealthy people. - Symbolic fees require that remaining costs are covered by fundraising, which is effort intensive.	Cityplot

	people. Most other projects have sliding scale pricing system, aiming to be inclusive to less wealthy people.		(e.g. Bloei and Groei costs 50EU/y/pp and 25EU/y/pp with discount, and 950EU/y/pp is fundraised). - Projects with sliding scale prices are generally not successful in reaching less wealthy people. - Participants tend to pay towards higher end of sliding scale.	
Local food supply	Supply significant amounts of healthy and sustainable food for local people. Food sold in shop and cafe is almost all locally sourced.	Local food production	- Substantial amounts of food is produced, feeding local people. - Availability and prices less dependent on global developments, compared to modern food. - Local food entail less transportation, fewer packaging for food. - Farmers' market position is strengthened, they can decide prices. - Local food availability contributes to food security of region. - Strengthening economic viability of other local farmers. - Does not go beyond commodification of food, as food is sold.	Fruittuin
Local food supply	Design and implementation of edible gardens, which supply food to local people.	Local food production	- Some gardens supply food for their community year round. - Other garden projects produce food for families or company employees.	Cityplot
Local food supply	Supply food to people, derived from food waste pickups at restaurants and stores.	Redistribution of food	- Coordination of food pickups is effort intensive. - Most rescued food is from modern agriculture, hence produced with pesticides. - Relies on overabundance of food from the modern food systems. - Entails educational aspect about food waste to the people involved.	ASEED
Building the	Hosts on-farm events aiming to share and strengthen visions of	Strengthening	- Events typically include both 'new' people as well as people active in alternative food	Fruittuin

movement	people on sustainable food.	the movement; Broadening the movement	already. - Face-to-face contact was mentioned as a great benefit of such events.	
Building the movement	Hosts events aimed to create unity amongst various food related groups, strengthen arguments, and share knowledge and strategies. Supports food related initiatives with knowledge, resources and strategies. Shares information through publications and pamphlets, aiming feed the interest in sustainable food.	Strengthening the movement; Broadening the movement	- Events are attended by people both new and familiar to the movement. - Information spreading is targeted at groups non-familiar to alternative food, e.g. by hanging pamphlets in public places.	ASEED
Building the movement	Hosts activities, aiming to generate curiosity in alternative food, specifically targeted at people new to sustainable food, aiming feed into their interest.	Broadening the movement	- Successful in their aim to enlarge interest of 'new' people in alternative food, as they reach back to Cityplot for more information and activities.	Cityplot

4.2.3. Knowledge and Learning

A third main theme that emerged from the data is that AFIs are centered around knowledge and learning. The practices can be structured into experiencing and learning processes, and knowledge. It appeared from the data that there is not much confrontation between practices and practices, meaning that the cases successfully practice their principles. Knowledge refers to the practices that actors conduct in order to gain knowledge that sustains the AFIs, and include formal education, trial and error experiments and research. Experiencing and learning refer to two kinds of processes, which are discernable in motivation and impact, though not completely separate. In the first category, learning processes are aimed to make practices around food more sustainable. Experiences and experimentation contribute to these learning processes about sustainable food practices, which allows for knowledge to be developed and adapted into the local contexts by co-creating knowledge through trial and error. The second category are those experiencing and learning processes that address the participants' relationship between humans and food. The participants involved in these experiencing and learning processes, learn about food and farming and this tends to contribute to a *"change of mindset"*, that *"food is an essential part of existence, and this mindset change is induced by education and experimentation" (Interviewee 6).*

Many actors have pointed to the great importance of both kinds of experiencing and learning processes. The impact can go beyond specific projects, as *"[p]eople learn how to harvest, learn about farming life and they take this experience with them in their lives" (Interviewee 6).* Also, Interviewee 1 says: *"A lot of interns that come here, experience here, [...] and they take these experiences with them into the world. [...] I know of one person who was educated at PLUK! and they will create a similar farm in another part of the Netherlands."* As such, experiencing and learning processes constitute a crucial part of how AFIs may contribute to a sustainable food beyond the cases.

The main facilitating condition that appeared within this theme, is that across the cases actors have mentioned a momentum of awareness, which entails that large numbers of consumers, restaurants and retailers are currently asking for the kind of food that AFIs provide. For example,

"[…] alternative food producers are advancing in rapid pace, and children are asking their schools for farm education" (Interviewee 8). What has contributed to the momentum? It appeared from the data that the process of information becoming publicly available on the problems of modern food systems, has inspired many to actively look for an alternative. *"The momentum is there,"* said interviewee 6, *"people are starting to become aware of the relation between worldwide inequalities, the whole climate crisis and food, that it is all the same problem in the end, [which is] how the system is organized." "The awareness trend is broad,"* according to interviewee 7. *"From feminist book clubs to CSA memberships, which all contributes to the momentum for change" (Interviewee 7).* Some twenty years ago, the AFIs would have had more trouble with sustaining themselves, said Interviewee 7, but currently there is enough demand for such initiatives to exist and the demand is said to be growing still. In sum, the current momentum has been the main facilitating condition to the development of AFIs in Amsterdam, which was fostered by available information on the need to make varying sectors, including food, more sustainable. This entailed that the *"bubble of sustainable agriculture"* was *"broadened"* by the interest of new people who feel the need to participate *(Interviewee 6).*

Another facilitating condition is knowledge and experience. From the data, it emerged that AFIs are 'knowledge intensive', meaning that extensive knowledge and experience are required for the practices to be developed and implemented. Knowledge on ecosystem functioning, plant interactions and soil health are found to be the specifically important for the Fruittuin. But also, knowledge on policies, local contexts and other social factors appeared to be crucial across the cases. This finding was supported by the fact that many actors in the cases are high-educated or otherwise have a lot of experience in sustainable food and farming processes. Knowledge and experience in the field of sustainable food and farming are, therefore, deemed as a facilitating condition to the development of the cases.

Whilst knowledge appeared as a facilitating condition, it simultaneously represents an obstruction in some instances. Sustainable farming practices were often mentioned to be particularly 'knowledge intensive'. Most farmers and other actors in the cases have obtained diplomas from

educational institutes. Interviewee 1 explains that *"translating what we have learned into practices requires place-based understanding of complex agroecosystem processes and interactions."* Furthermore, farmers and other actors generally have to keep up with new insights from the field of sustainable food and farming by attending courses and classes. Therefore, knowledge can be seen as a challenge to the development of AFIs. However, the data suggests that the knowledge required is generally not experienced as a burden but as a pleasant opportunity. Still, the sustainable food and farming practices call for educational, experimental and participatory forms of knowledge generation.

In Table 9 an overview of the findings within the theme of Knowledge and learning processes is given.

Table 9: Overview of the findings on 'Knowledge and learning processes', for each case of the Fruittuin, ASEED and Cityplot.

Theme	Practice	Principle	Points to consider	Case
<u>Learning and experiencing processes</u>	Community and visitors learn about food and framing through experiencing; Educational events; Schoolchildren visit for educational purposes.	Education; Experiencing	- Actors say experiencing has direct and indirect impact on actors, community and visitors, as they take experience along in lives. - Demonstrates that food can be organized differently than in modern food systems. - Municipal subsidy for farm education	Fruittuin
<u>Learning and experiencing processes</u>	Educational events about urban green and urban farming to individuals, groups, public actors and school children. Organizes trips to AFIs for company employees and private groups.	Education; Experiencing	- Cityplot's interest includes specifically educating 'mainstream' people and institutions. - Learning 'gain' is considered relatively high, as main purpose of educational events and trips is to generate curiosity amongst people new to urban agriculture.	Cityplot

Learning and experiencing processes	Hosts educational and experiencing events. Volunteers, attendees and 'food wasters' experience and learn on problems of food waste and modern food systems.	Education; Experiencing	- Learning component for volunteers, organizers and attendees.	ASEED
Knowledge	Education and courses by actors facilitate sustainable farming practices. Experimenting with community co-creates new knowledge via trial and error.	Knowledge via education; Co-created knowledge	- Farmers and community are involved in developing accurate farm practices. - Relates to inclusiveness of knowledge systems. - Farming practices rely on educational background of farmers	Fruittuin
Knowledge	Research to foster knowledge about modern food systems and alternative food.	Knowledge via research		ASEED

4.2.4. Policy, politics and public funding

A fourth and final theme which emerged from the data is related to the influence that AFIs (aim to) have on policies, politics and public funding, and vice versa. Although not anticipated in the outset of the analysis, it emerged that across the cases there are varying ways that the AFIs try to exert influence over 'the system' of policies, government officials and public funding programs. A prominent strategy is communication with policymakers to motivate the need for sustainable food and to explain the problems that actors are running into. A commonly mentioned motivation is that policymakers seem to *"lack information on ways to foster sustainable food and farming" (Interviewee 1)*, which the communication efforts aim to address. A finding that was specific to ASEED was the strategy of mobilizing people for protest and direct action purposes, which would be aimed to show politicians *"our resistance against industrial modern food systems" (Interviewee 6).* A finding that was specific to Cityplot and the Fruittuin was the activity to try to exert influence over the public funding agenda of the municipality, in the form of letter writing to the municipality. The subsidies that alternative food initiatives can receive are *"only for farm education*, *greenhouse gas emissions reduction and purchasing water saving innovations" (Interviewee 5).* The efforts go out to letting the municipality know that specific subsidies for sustainable food production would foster a transition towards sustainable food.

There appeared large confrontations between the goals of the practices and the impact they are typically generating. Across the cases it was argued that policymakers prioritize modern food systems and actors in their policies. For example, *"Something has to change in Dutch agricultural policy. The way actors from conventional agriculture are constantly prioritized and supported and actively asked to participate in policymaking processes, that has to change," (Interviewee 3)*. Across the cases, actors expressed their disappointment with respect to the actual influence they have on policies and public funding agendas of the municipality and the national government.

A facilitating condition that emerged from the data is that some AFIs receive funding and subsidies from the municipality. Cityplot and the Fruittuin receive financial support for farm

education and other activities. The income of public funding is crucial to some initiatives, which are still *"struggling to become economically viable" (Interviewee 1).* However, the actors emphasized multiple times that other subsidies, directly for sustainable farming practices, would help the AFIs at least on the short term. In the case of Cityplot, the municipality also contributes to the initiative by commissioning projects.

Despite the subsidies, actors have mentioned the municipality and national government as obstructing to the development of the AFIs. An example includes that land use legislation poses the challenge to sustainable land use development, because crops are not allowed to grow taller than one meter, preventing AFIs to work with perennial trees and shrubs. A commonly shared perception that feeds into the negative feelings, is that government officials give priority to economic activities over sustainable activities. *"In the short term, the municipality can give certain plots of land to us and express their wishes for added social value that our projects bring in. [...] But on the long run the policymakers prioritize Albert Heijn distribution centers over an organic farm in Amsterdam, just to name the example of the Lutkemeerpolder"* (Interviewee 2). Another perception that feeds into the problem is a perceived lack of knowledge on sustainable food. Interviewee 1: *"[...] policymakers, I know these people are trying their best, they probably want good things for the world like we do, but there is a strong lack of knowledge. Actually all policymakers and politicians that I have met seem to have no knowledge about sustainable farming. I think it's very important that people in the government receive proper education about how it is working - food production."*

Furthermore, it appeared that the public funding of the municipality also structures, to some extent, the activities of the AFIs. Also, since access to land was found to be a challenge to the development of AFIs (*"Where does one find any land to produce food on in the Netherlands?" (Interviewee 1)*), a strategy to overcome that challenge is to collaborate with institutions that could grand access to land. For example, Cityplot does not own any land, hence their access to land is facilitated by the support of the municipality and private actors. Also the Fruittuin is dependent on the lease contract from the municipality for access to land. The cases may organize their activities to ensure they will receive the funding or access to land.

Reflecting upon the collaboration with the municipality, the data showed that this can influence the choice of practices and strategies that the AFIs employ. For example, Cityplot members may want to share information about the significant roles of women in sustainable agriculture, but choose not to do so out of concern to *"discourage"* the collaboration with the municipality for being *"too alternative"* for them *(Interviewee 6)*. On the other hand, collaboration with the municipality can also entail that mindsets within the municipality are being changed. This seems to be especially the case in longer-term collaborations. For example, *"slowly we get more and more freedom to change the design [...] towards more sustainable agriculture"* and *"[after years] the municipality luckily trusts our expertise and they give us many green lights" (Interviewee 3).* In sum, an effect about collaboration with the municipality can be that AFIs deviate from their goals to some extent, while the gain of such collaborations is significant too.

Table 10 gives an overview of the practices and principles on the theme policy, politics and public funding.

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Table 10: Overview of the findings on 'Policy, politics and public funding', for each case of the Fruittuin, ASEED and Cityplot

Theme	Practice	Principle	Points to consider	Case
Policies	Invite policymakers from municipality over to farm, aimed to explain policy related problems. Write letters to municipality about need for adequate subsidies	Communication with policymakers	- The effort of communication has little effect, as policies and subsidy programs are not being changed (Interviewee 7). - The initiative chooses in some instances to not comply with the policy rules.	Fruittuin
Policies	Events for municipality employees on urban farming. And common green spaces in/around municipality buildings are developed by Cityplot.	Communication with policymakers	- Dependent on municipality as client, influences way they deal with municipality, i.e. choose for "work with the state" strategy. - May have indirect effect on government officials through experiencing, which they take along beyond Cityplot activities.	Cityplot
Politics	Hosting direct action events and protests, aiming to foster systemic change.	Mobilization for protest and direct action	- Relates to concept of social power by Wright (2010).	ASEED
Public funding	Receives subsidies for farm education, GHG emission reduction and water reduction innovations. Writes letters to municipality about need to change public funding agenda.	Receives subsidy Communication with policymakers	- Frustration lies in the topics that they receive subsidy for, because they would "allow big, pollutive food companies to receive more subsidy" than the small-scale initiatives. - Fruittuin organizes their activities in order to receive funding.	Fruittuin
Public funding	Receives subsidy for farm education to school children.	Receives subsidy	- Cityplot organizes their activities in order to receive funding. - External funding is necessary Cityplot to be economically viable.	Cityplot

Conclusion

It became evident from the data that AFIs in Amsterdam are centered around four themes.

Firstly, the data demonstrated that AFIs conduct 'concrete approaches to improve environmental impact of food'. The practices can be clustered into farming practices, and waste reduction practices. The principles include: soil health, farm animal wellbeing, local nutrient cycling, sustainable energy, urban (edible) green, and repurposing food waste. Principles and practices within this theme were largely aligned, which implies that AFI goals in this respect are relatively easy to put into practice. The main facilitating condition to these practices is the knowledge and experiences of AFI actors, both on problems of modern food systems and on concrete approaches to counter these problems. The main obstructing condition to farming practices is the price competition with conventional food suppliers. The main challenge that actors at ASEED mention is a feeling of hopelessness about the amounts of food being wasted.

Secondly, the data demonstrates that AFI are centered around networks of local food. The practices can be clustered into their foci on community inclusive food, local food supply and movement building. The principles include: community oriented food production, inclusivity, local food production, redistribution of food, strengthening the movement and broadening the movement. The confrontation between principles and practices was relatively large within this theme. The main was inclusivity, especially of less wealthy and non-Dutch social groups. The most successful strategy to counter this challenge is organizing events for low prices or for free, which do need extra effort in fundraising or volunteering to cover remaining costs or work. Also, inviting people through adequate channels appeared to be important. The main facilitating conditions to the development of the cases are the support of the community, in terms of physically working and financially contributing and more, and the cooperation between AFIs, or what I termed the support of the social movement. The vast amount of volunteers, however, also poses a limitation to the design of two cases. Actors expressed their worries about the AFI being dependent on free labor, about coordination efforts and about their wishes to pay for work done.

Thirdly, the data demonstrates that a significant theme within the practices and principles of AFIs is knowledge and learning processes. Knowledge refers to the practices that actors conduct in order to generate knowledge to sustain the AFIs, via education, co-creation and research. Experiencing and learning processes contribute to the development and adaptation of sustainable food practices in local contexts and to the mindsets of the actors involved. Impact of these practices may go much beyond the specific projects and AFIs. The main facilitating condition to the cases is the momentum of awareness, which entails that many people are actively looking for AFIs, as a result of more awareness on the problems of modern food systems and the need to transform the sector of food. Also, availability of knowledge and experience is a second main facilitating condition, as these have contributed to the practices within the cases. As farmers and other actors generally have to keep up with new insights from the field of sustainable food and farming by attending courses and classes, knowledge is simultaneously regarded as a challenge to the development of the cases.

Finally, a fourth theme that emerged from the data is policy, politics and public funding. This refers to the influence that AFIs (aim to) have on policies, politics and public funding, and vice versa, through communication with policymakers, mobilization for protest and direct action, and receiving subsidies. The impact of such practices appeared to be generally low. Financial support from the municipality emerged as a facilitating condition. However, subsidies from and collaborations with the municipality may also entail the cases to deviate from their goals to some extent, in order to maintain good relations.

5. Discussion

The following section will discuss the findings with the aim of answering the main research question of this thesis: *In what ways do alternative food initiatives in Amsterdam represent a critique to conventional food and in what ways do they embody desirable, viable and achievable alternatives?* The findings will be interpreted in the context what is gained and what is lost with understanding AFIs through the lens of diverse economies and real utopias. The structure is as follows. Firstly, contributions to the literature will be discussed in the light of the three tasks of real utopias. The exploratory nature of this thesis entails that, as will be shown, many generated insights from this study will mostly highlight the need for more research into the finding, as opposed to proposing definite answers. Then, the limitations of this study will be discussed. Lastly, a reflection upon real utopias as a framework will be discussed.

5.1. Contribution to the theory

Overall, this thesis project aimed to explore what is gained by understanding AFIs through the framework of real utopias by Eric Olin Wright (2010). In process of analyzing the data through this framework, it appeared that the variety of practices and principles within these themes showcases that AFIs are complex social experiments that appear to be developed by a combination of actors, communities, principles and social structures. Manifestations of the AFIs constitute the daily life experiences of the actors involved, which emerges from years of learning, experiencing, experimenting and self-organizing. They concretize in practices and events, such as for free food provision, community financed food production, and on-farm educational events. These practices come along with their struggles and limitations, and are an expression of a conglomeration of desires and principles, experiences and a mode of self-organization of the people involved. AFIs are being developed in a long process of gradual steps of modification, as AFI actors and participants adjust social rules and practices to better fit their desires. The process is conducted by trial and error as much as by conscious design.

The first task

As the first task, the results firstly discussed the ways in which AFIs are organized around a critique to modern food systems, and the ways in which they embody alternative economic practices through the lens of diverse economies. Not surprisingly, we found that AFIs are organized around environmental and social goals that counter the problems of modern food systems. The cases in this study attempt to respect and foster environmental conditions necessary for farming over time, with focus being paid especially to soil health, local nutrient cycling, animal welfare and lower GHG emissions. Also, the cases center around activities of community oriented food, local food supply, strengthened economic positions for farmers as well as access to healthy and sustainable food for less wealthy and non-Dutch people. AFIs practices address the relationship between humans and food, both spatially through the physical localness of food and psychologically, through the inclusion of the community in many aspects of food. The cases showed multiple ways of including the community in various phases of the food chain. This finding confirms the AFI concept in the literature, for example by Venn et al. (2006), which says that they share the common focus on sustainable food practices and on 're-socializing' food.

The analysis of AFI practices through the frame of diverse economies certainly offers a hopeful and, in my eyes much needed, insight and refreshing perspectives on the diversity and complexity of economic relations that can be based on non-market practices and principles. The performativity of knowledge means that our understanding of the world is already constituting the world. The essence of diverse economies by Gibson-Graham's (2008) is that the diversity of economic realities, transcending and including capitalism, must be rendered visible. Through the lens of diverse economies a diverse myriad of economic practices became apparent, where capitalism did not make up for the majority of economic relations. By seeing capitalism as not totally powerful, we allowed ourselves to explore in-depth the practices and socio-economic realities that constitute alternative food initiatives. Some studies, however, have represented AFI practices as not quite alternate, rendering their economic activities as too embedded within capitalist economic structures to

feature post-capitalist characteristics (Rosol, 2020). Borrowed from Gibson-Graham (2008), the performativity of this frame can strengthen the perceived dominance of capitalist economic structures.

Although the data found that indeed certain AFI economic practices are capitalist, it is as if judging the practices as marginal within capitalist structures, would make my participatory form of research 'extractive' and 'objective' (see Pain, 2003; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). In contrast, by employing the diverse economies lens to approach the economic practices of AFI, I was able to represent them as diverse and as complex as they come. The frame also allowed me to go in-depth into the principles that underlie the economic practices, and consequently, was able to shed light on the significance of solidarity, trust, place-based meanings, and other values that structure the economic practices of AFI. This adds to the AFI literature that theorizing AFI practices in diverse economic concepts allows to see the myriad of alternative and non-capitalist economic practices and underlying principles. Such practices, I showed, face challenges and limitations. This stressed the need for more research to go out to in-depth understanding the diverse economic practices, the motivations behind and the challenges that come along.

The second task

As the second task, this thesis dove deeper into an exploration of desirability, viability and achievability of AFIs in Amsterdam, by examining the (confrontation between) principles and practices, as well as the facilitating and obstructing conditions to the development of the AFIs.

An addition that this thesis provides to the AFI literature, is that initiatives tend to facilitate and benefit from processes of learning and experiencing, thereby going beyond a focus on environmentally friendly and socially just food production and consumption. Opitz and colleagues (2017) have researched the effects of varying interactions within AFNs on consumers' learning about and appreciation of agriculture. This thesis adds to their study, by finding that the learning processes within AFNs happen reciprocally and go beyond consumers' learning. In this study, the involved actors around AFIs include volunteers, frequent and infrequent visitors / attendees and AFI actors, and these networks do not only help to sustain the viability of individual initiatives, but they contribute to

learning and experiencing processes that impact much beyond individual encounters, projects or initiatives. This is seen as a great benefit *of* and *for* the AFIs. The most frequently mentioned facilitating condition to AFIs is the 'momentum of awareness'. It refers to that more and more people are looking for alternative food models. This is closely linked to the learning processes and to the involvement and support of a vibrant community, which appeared as other significant facilitating conditions. These three facilitating conditions seem to reinforce each other, which goes about as follows: many people in Amsterdam have gained awareness on problems of modern food systems, as a result of more knowledge that was available. Now, they are actively looking for alternatives. Their search fosters the community support to the AFIs, in terms of volunteering, financially contributing, and attending events and workshops. In this process of actively participating in AFIs, both the community and the AFIs are experiencing and learning more about sustainable food, which has positive impact on the AFIs (that benefit from the interest and that learn more about sustainable food), on the community (whose search is being satisfied and who may further interest themselves in alternative food) and on the momentum (which is strengthened by the interest and by the knowledge gained through learning and experiencing).

The participants and their spouse were reported to become more knowledgeable and aware of the effort going into food production and its links to the environment. As such, the community gained a mindset shift towards their relationship to food and the environment. Moreover, as the participants and the farmer co-create knowledge about ways to develop sustainable food practices and adapt to local contexts, certainly all actors involved benefit from these learning processes. This finding plays into the concept of 'mutually beneficial arrangements' of CSAs by Cooley and Lass (1998), who understand the advantages of the CSA as working for both the farmers and the consumers. Further research can go out to nuancing the relations of learning within AFNs, and the effects. Surprisingly, to my best knowledge, such activities as not much represented in previous AFN literature.

What is more, is that participants gain some sort of agency and control over the food production process and over the development of the initiatives in general. This relates to the concept of constructing food sovereignty through AFNs, by Nigh et al. (2015), who conceptualize AFNs as

spaces where "farmers and consumers are redefining the values of agro-food systems" (p.317). Since this thesis has presented the visions and experiences of actors in AFIs, and not the community, volunteers, consumers, participants, however we may call them, little attention has gone out to the extent and shape of their agency that is gained through AFIs. A new avenue for further research is, therefore, to gain more understanding of the agency that the community gains in AFIs. Venn et al. (2006, pp. 254–255) point to a similar notion, saying that *"it is still unclear as to whether consumer participation denotes an increase in consumer activism as consumers source schemes that satisfy personal ethical frameworks or whether participation is purely driven by schemes being in existence and offering innovative and attractive alternatives to the mundane conventional offerings,"*. In other words, the roles of participating consumers and volunteers in the development of initiatives remains unclear. Le Velly (2019) suggests that the notion of 'projective' agency is adequate for examining the roles of consumers in AFNs into the construction of new food realities. Projective agency is borrowed from the work of Hans Joas (1996) to refer to *"human beings' creativity in their abilities to imagine new states of the world and to launch their development"* (Le Velly, 2019, p.11). The finding of this thesis that certain projects of AFIs are initiated, developed and executed by the community of volunteers, implies that projective agency of AFN participants can indeed provide an interesting avenue for further research.

In addition to that, the findings of this thesis suggest that the boundary in this study between AFI actors and community is not always appropriate. Where I have framed this study as a research on the 'actors' in AFIs, understood as the workers in (projects of) the initiatives, this frame does not seem to be accurate, as the actors who develop projects are not so clear-cut worker *or* community-member. For example, in ASEED the projects are usually initiated by actors, but developed and executed by a pool of volunteers, who in turn gain the agency to shape the events according to their insight. This also suggests that dichotomies (e.g. between producers and consumers) that are often employed in AFN literature, are not helping to understand the complexity of AFI practices and principles. It was already highlighted in 2012 by the article of Veen and Derkzen (2012) to move beyond a producer-consumer dichotomy, but many AFN studies still uphold this concept. I suggest

that in further research, the roles of and relations between actors and community-members in AFNs can be studied more thoroughly.

Another contribution to the literature is that AFIs are typically organized to attempt for more large-scale or systemic change, for example through spreading political information, through social movement building, and through communication with policymakers. This finding is not entirely new, since there is literature on specific campaigning organizations for alternative food, such as Slow Food, Food Links, whose role in shaping the alternative food sector is recognized to be important (Venn *et al.*, 2006). But, most literature on AFN does not reflect the understanding of AFIs as focusing on support of other initiatives, training and funding, as well as the finding that food-producing initiatives are also active in these non-food producing activities. AFIs are sometimes *"faulted for their localism and lack of wider political perspective in their movements"* (Nigh and González Cabañas, 2015, p. 337). But, the literature generally understands AFI activities in terms of how 'actual' food production, retail and consumption is taking shape (Venn *et al.*, 2006). The data suggested that AFIs embody elements that are not, in the main, centered around actual food production, but that nevertheless deserve acknowledgement, as the value of such non-actual food producing and consuming activities is significant to the development of alternative food. The benefit of including ASEED as a case study has been that these non-food producing practices appeared as significant, which also opened up insight into similar activities in food producing cases. If more research would go out to these activities of AFIs, scholars may be drawn into the direction of interesting cases and emerging configurations of alternative food spaces. Hence, further research can go out to the practices that do not, in the main, center around food production and consumption, but still contribute to the growing interest in non-conventional food.

Another significant finding was the challenge of AFIs to deliver upon their own goals of inclusivity. The actors and community are reported to be mostly white, high-educated and prosperous. Varying efforts go out to being inclusive to varying social groups, specifically less wealthy, non-Dutch and women, and include social pricing, hanging invitations for events in places where certain social groups will find them, and consulting diversity experts. Notably, certain methods achieve better

results in terms of inclusiveness. Projects that have low or no economic barriers to participate tend to reach those people with lower economic means. In contrast, projects that work with sliding scale pricing, without actively reaching out to social groups with lower economic means, seem to not reach these people at all, and contrarily mainly attract people who are able to pay the higher end of the sliding scale - and actually tend to do so.

While participants of this study have asserted potential causes to be mainly the (higher) prices of AFI products or events, as well as the time that consumers have to invest in self-harvesting and attending, the literature points to another potential cause: a certain cultural identity being pursued by AFI participants. The findings of Alkon and McCullen (2021) suggest that the characteristics and skills that allow an individual to feel socially accepted and part of the AFN reflect a certain intersection of race, class and political orientation, causing the community to mainly reflect liberal, affluent and white identities and positionalities. In other words, added to the economic barriers that might impose a person from participating, a social or cultural barrier may exist as well. This insight opens up many new questions for research, for example: how does the prevalent higher socio-economic background of people in AFIs manifest itself, and how is it being perpetuated and contested?

This finding is in line with many other studies about white dominance in alternative food environments. For example, Elliott, Mulrennan and Cuerrier (2022) studied the inclusion of marginalized communities in the food sovereignty movement in Canada, and expressed that the lack of representation of indigenous peoples, black people and people of color in the movement resulted in the hampering of *"the emergence of a multiracial, class-inflected movement that can transform both food systems and broader socio-environmental inequalities,"* (Elliott, Mulrennan and Cuerrier, 2022, p. 7). Hence, the relevance of AFN literature to understand this problem deeper is clear.

Another finding was that AFIs reliance on free labor by volunteers is perceived as a limitation. To my best knowledge, I have not found any similar findings in the AFN literature, while free labor in AFNs has multiple implications. While involvement of volunteers is also understood as a facilitating factor, for example because it allows for lower prices for food, it is also said to become a

problem when the sector's viability becomes dependent on volunteers. Also, it can be theorized that reliance on volunteers normalizes the low prices for food in general, low prices that do not reflect the environmental and social costs related to production. Hence, reliance on volunteers directly entails that food is not 'true priced', which would include the value of the labor input. Hence, an avenue for further research is to examine AFI food production through the lens of 'true pricing', which may allow for insights in the ways more people can get paid for their work in agriculture. This has already been studied in the context of exploitation of (migrant) workers in agriculture, hence insights into how this can be studied can be obtained from this body of literature.

Another obstruction to the development that was suggested by the data is the knowledge intensiveness of alternative farming practices. Specifically agroecological and permaculture farming practices are known to be knowledge intensive. Alternative farming practices call for experimental and participatory forms of knowledge creation. Hence, a strategy to strengthen AFIs is through facilitation of experiments and participatory educational events, which were deemed important by actors in this research, and which has been affirmed by multiple scholars too (Miles, DeLonge and Carlisle, 2017; Wezel *et al.*, 2018).

Lastly, the findings demonstrate that one cannot speak of a coherent body of AFIs, as was already pointed out in the literature review of this thesis. The cases might counter the paradigm of modern food, but when it comes to, for instance, the dimension of social justice that is entrenched in their practices, some cases are more mainstream, and to some extent commodifying, or re-commodifying again food, and others are totally based on networks of solidarity, reciprocity and prioritizing people in need when redistributing food. Also the AFIs that apparently have more similar practices or principles tend to be very compartmentalized. Yet, on the other hand the actors mentioned to have a general feeling of contributing to the same goal of transitioning food systems towards more environmental sustainability and more social justice. As diverse as the elements of a food system are, even more diverse appear the desires to transform them.

The third task

The third task of real utopias is to develop a credible theory of social change, that would describe potential pathways for enlarging the social impact of the alternatives (Wright, 2010; 2012). Although this task is outside the scope of this thesis, the findings on facilitating and obstructing conditions that were examined in this study provide an important first step to theorizing potential pathways for social change.

From this study it emerged that the most significant strategy for enlarging the impact and success of alternative food, which was reflected across the cases, is creating more possibility for experiencing and learning. This includes participation of the community, schoolchildren, new 'mainstream' people and institutions, and policymakers. Forms that were given most credibility are on-farm experiences, educational workshops, and school projects, focusing on healthy and sustainable food. Interviewee 2 explained: *"For most people it starts not with some theory that is learned, not with some indoor conference, not even with a conversation. It starts with experiencing sustainable agriculture. For me as well. It got fostered with gaining more information about the problems of [conventional] agriculture that fed me up. Then I realized how weird the system in general is organized. And I thought 'he, I really liked the experience I had last year on this and that farm, maybe I should look into it more.' And this is a snowball effect that I witness in so many people who experience it, and come back for it. They take along the experience in their everyday lives."* Interviewee 4 goes on: *""Inspiration is the key. It attracts many people, who are coming back. And it has to start somewhere. [...] We give a nice impression on visitors. We do not only attract people who are already familiar, the visitors are a diverse public. Also the interns working here, are inspired and take the Fruittuin experience along in their lives. They are being educated here, and bring the experience into the world."*

Another potential pathway that was mentioned across all cases was, that furthering impact of the AFIs can best be done through implementing the design of the initiatives in other places, as opposed to upscaling the initiative. This approach is different from the strategies many policymakers and academics hold onto, which generally plead for up-scaling of innovations. In the view of many

actors in this study, the initiatives should <u>not</u> expand more. Interviewee 5 explains: *"I think we cannot do more than we are currently doing. Our strength is in our small-scaleness."* Also Interviewee 2 explains: *"We are already doing so many different things. [...] More impact is detached from the space of the Fruittuin. Expanding is not necessary. What is necessary is to have more initiatives like ours. It is precisely the size of our initiative that makes it work, people feel all our attention when they come. But I heard an intern is going to start a project like ours in another part of the Netherlands. I think that is very good."*

Another finding on the facilitating conditions was the support from 'mainstream' institutions, for example the municipality, which is financially supporting some AFIs through subsidies, funding, and commissioning paid projects. This finding provides insight with respect to developing pathways of social change. As Wright (Wright, 2010) suggests, a theory of social change can be based on varying processes, including the (gaps in) reproduction of hegemonic structures and institutions and the reaching out of actors from the mainstream paradigm to alternatives. As the data suggested, there is an implication to collaborating with the municipality and other 'mainstream' actors, which in some cases influence the strategies and practices of AFIs to ensure good relations. While it was beyond the scope of this research to examine the shape and depth of the influence of collaboration with mainstream actors on AFI practices, it does open up an avenue for further research. This notion can be approached through the work of Geels (2006), whose theory proposes that system change typically happens through the scale-enlargement of innovations or through attempts of actors within the hegemonic system to opt in the innovations.

5.2. Limitations of the study

The validity of this research can be discussed with concern to limitations regarding the methodology, the data collection, and the subsequent data analysis.

The methodology has argued for a multi-case study design to conduct this research, which entailed that the selection of cases was executed by the researcher. A significant limitation of this approach is that the selection of cases is subjective. Through purposive sampling the cases have been tried to fit

eligibility criteria that were predetermined to ensure that cases have similar yet diverse characteristics, as was outlined in the methodology. The cases that were finally selected are characterized by a set of criteria that fit this research well. However, another selection of final cases would potentially have led to other results.

Secondly, concerning the data collection, a limitation of this study may be that the participant observation and interviews entail subjective bias. I have tried to implement to counter this issue in two ways. One, by employing multiple methods of complementing participant observation with semi-structured interviews, this study has examined the AFIs and actors in multiple ways to seek for current interpretation of visions and practices. Second, the data includes expressions and descriptions in order to be explicit about subjectivities. For example, laughing sounds, smiles, frustrations and other expressions were noted down in the data collection process. A second limitation to the data collection is that certain interviews and informal speaking happened in English, while the AFI actors' mother language was not English. Although all actors expressed their comfortability with the English language, this issue may entail that certain nuances and expressions were not completely handed down.

Concerning the data analysis, a final limitation is that the coding of the data has been subject to my interpretation. I have implemented a measure to counter this limitation. In instances where I was in doubt about the correct interpretation of the data, I reached back to the actor to assure my interpretation. Also, especially the process of reiteratively coding, reviewing and collecting data, tried to assure a limited influence of subjectivity on the coding and to enlarge the robustness of the emerging findings.

5.3. Reflections on real utopian thinking

From my months of studying, observations and interviews, I have become aware of the complexity and variety of AFI practices. I can say that perspectives on what desirable food alternatives are, are as varied as the amount of people having perspectives, and probably as varied as the amount of times they are being asked about it. It a process. For me, then, real utopias on food

alternatives – as a framework - is a starting point to configure stories about desirable food and strategies to move towards that, often messy, but fruitful. In reflection on this research, thinking about alternative food projects as real utopian projects can do a number of things.

- To start with, real utopias tap into the power of stories and narrative to understand social change processes.

- It creates a space where people can think about their ideal food systems, without having to temper those visions by what is possible now. However, it proofs not easy at all to create that space. The interviews reflect the difficulty of not taking into account current obstacles and chances of possibility. For example, Interviewee 5 said right before starting to describe her utopian food environment: *"I never think about what can be possible on the long term. You have to start with thinking about what is possible now, what has to be done now."* Consequently, they defined their utopian food environment based on the problems of the current food environment, which brings us to the next point.

- From describing an ideal food environment, the problems of the current food environment become clearer. By mentally contrasting the two, one can put the finger on where it hurts.

- The contrast between utopian visions and societal reality fosters the motivation to experiment with alternatives, and lowers a tendency to justify the situation. As such, utopias can become a source of motivation, through the wish to change this discrepancy.

- The concurrent strength *and* weakness of using real utopias is that the data is buried in considerations of other issues. You will get descriptions of meals, but rarely is the point the food. The point will be about everything else, from the social structures of society, or the way labor is carried out, or how the food got to the table, or the roles of women in sustainable food, or the expectations on life, or the taste of yesterday's dinner. The weakness lies in coding that thick data to generate findings that are useful for theorizing, whilst preserving the voices in the data. The strength is that you will see the interrelatedness of things.

- Real utopias as an approach to understand AFIs is not prescriptive – meaning there is no all-encompassing way of "using" real utopias to get some understanding rather than another. It is

a tool of generating narratives and dialogue that acknowledges problems, but fosters hope, openness and possibility.

In sum, the real utopias approach in thesis has helped us to define AFIs as a critique and to decenter from 'the' conventional narrative around food and economies, towards encouragement of and reporting on experiments where food is done alternatively, and uncover that the practices of doing food alternatively are often complex and always an unfixed process.

6. References

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