



(Artwork by Molly Costello)

*ASSEMBLING POLICY:*  
PUBLIC FOOD  
PROCUREMENT  
FAVOURING  
AGROECOLOGY IN  
ARGENTINIAN  
MUNICIPALITIES

MSC THESIS RURAL SOCIOLOGY GROUP  
Fara Lledó San Mauro  
1049551  
Supervised by Jessica Duncan  
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## Abstract

A wide array of policy-driven solutions to address the challenges associated with our current food systems are being deliberated. In this context, there is increasing attention being paid to the implementation of policies advancing agroecology and the setup of PFP initiatives. Moreover, these two approaches have the potential to be combined, by redirecting governments' purchasing power and regular demand for food towards agroecological products. Nevertheless, research on policies combining PFP and agroecology falls short in addressing the relations and ways by which they come together; and many studies have concentrated on policies at the national level, overlooking the expanding role of municipal policy. In this regard, this thesis has strived to understand how municipal PFP policies that take agroecology into account are being brought together by drawing on three case studies in Argentinian municipalities. To do so, an assemblage lens was employed, more precisely, the analytical framework was that of policy assemblages, used in policy studies to explore the constellation of actors, practices, processes that enhance the mobilization of specific policy ideas. Hence, the development of PFP favoring agroecological products in Argentina were conceptualized as policy assemblages; that is why the empirical results describe their expressive and material elements, the dynamics in place within the assemblages and the most influential flows of policies, ideas, and practices. The report further presents the main findings, namely: municipal PFP policies in Argentina are made to cohere; the policy assemblages formed are an artefact of the present; holding together temporarily but subject to pressures and contestations that can change them, disrupt them, or even make them disappear; PFP policies emerge as a result of different actors creating certain conditions of possibility, while obscuring others; different forms of power and resistance are integrated into the policy development process, thus, municipal governments are catalysts of power; policies do not happen in a vacuum, but are deeply influenced by national and transnational policies, ideas, and practices; and, the assemblage of policy components is profoundly shaped by context-dependent factors (i.e., specific conditions of possibility). Overall, by underlining the mobility of policies and identifying the role of certain actors in doing so for particular purposes, spaces of potentiality and change have been unveiled. Moreover, this thesis has highlighted the context dependency of policies, pointing to the need to adapt PFP policies rather than copy-pasting them.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Problem statement

There is widespread consensus on the problems associated with our current food system. Guaranteed access to safe and healthy food for everyone is far from reality; instead, increasing amounts of inequality, malnutrition, or environmental degradation are arising (Duncan et al., 2020). Over the past years, several reports from the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food 2015, 2016, 2017) and the EAT-Lancet Commission (Willett et al., 2019), have highlighted the dangers of ongoing food system trends that prioritize economic goals over social and ecological ones (Levkoe et al., 2020).

Consequently, the political and scientific communities have mobilized to find novel ways of addressing these challenges (IPES-Food, 2015). As such, two solutions are receiving increasing attention, namely agroecology and Public Food Procurement (PFP). On the one hand, agroecology is believed to have the potential to feed the world while preserving natural resources and providing sustainable livelihoods for producers and consumers (Gliessman, 2020). On the other hand, policy interventions have been identified as crucial contributions to food system transformations, one of these promising policies being PFP (IPES-Food, 2015). PFP initiatives make use of government purchasing power and regular demand for food as a policy instrument to support sustainable development (Swensson et al., 2021).

Altogether, these two solutions might be combined by connecting the specific needs of the institutional demand and those of agroecological farmers supply (Wittman & Blesh, 2017). Thus, institutionalizing the interconnectedness between PFP and agroecology, which is essential to achieve their expected social, economic, and environmental outcomes and eventually transform the food system for the better. In this sense, it is relevant to pay attention to the policy interplays between PFP and agroecology, where PFP could potentially support the advancement of agroecology and local agroecological networks could assist the implementation of PFP initiatives.

Moreover, there is growing recognition about the role of local governments and their policies for achieving sustainability goals and enhancing food system transformation (Vicovaro et al., 2021, Burlandy et al., 2022). Particularly in a context of expanding urbanization where cities (municipalities) have become crucial spaces where physical and socio-ecological changes of nature are most encountered (Moragues-Faus & Battersby, 2021).

Accordingly, acknowledging the increasingly recognized relevance of agroecological approaches to steer food system transformations in Argentina as a response to intensive large-scale soy production (Hammelman et al., 2022); and given that this study constitutes one of the activity of a broader project whose aim is to introduce or reinforce the development of PFP policies on municipal agendas as an opportunity to promote local agroecological producers. This thesis studied municipal policy interplays and interactions between different elements that give rise to PFP initiatives targeting agroecological products, by drawing on three case studies in Argentinian municipalities. To do so, *assemblage thinking* was considered an appropriate lens to explore how heterogeneous elements such as bodies, materialities, discourses or feelings interact in the policy development occurring. Precisely, this thesis made use of *policy assemblages* as an analytical tool.

Besides, as mentioned above, this research takes part in the EU-funded project “Local Green Jobs”, leaded by a local NGO called the Argentinian Network of Municipalities facing Climate Change (RAMCC) in collaboration with two other Argentinean partners and Wageningen University & Research. Hence, this study was conducted during my internship at the RAMCC, the preliminary findings constituting the deliverable for the organization.

This thesis presents a literature review on PFP, in general and in relation to sustainable transitions, as well as on the conceptualization of agroecology. Then, after having determined the research objective and questions, it describes assemblage thinking and zooms into policy assemblages as an analytical framework. Next, it presents the methodology employed and the empirical results identified. Later in the discussion, the main findings are described by theoretically grounding the empirical results, and the contributions and limitations of the study are presented. Finally, some conclusions are suggested.

## 1.2 Literature review

### **Public Food Procurement**

PFP has been identified by many as a "win-win" solution that can bear both social and agricultural development benefits simultaneously (Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). PFP initiatives refer to programs whereby public authorities purchase food for schools, universities, hospitals, prisons, social programs, etc. Thus, PFP initiatives make use of the public purchasing power and a regular demand for food to enhance more sustainable food systems and healthier diets, contributing to sustainable food systems and sustainable development (Swensson et al., 2021; FAO, 2021).

Although some authors emphasize the value of policy "*patching*", where existing policy instruments could be readapted to accommodate the particularities of PFP initiatives, (Parsons & Barling, 2022), the importance of the regulatory framework in the setup of PFP initiatives has been underlined. That is because through PFP it is possible to determine "*what food will be purchased (such as local, diverse, nutritious and healthy); from whom (e.g. from local and/or family farming producers, small and medium food enterprises, women, youth and/or other vulnerable groups) and from which type of production (e.g. from agricultural production that ensures environmental sustainability as well as biodiversity)*" (Swensson & Tartanac, 2020).

Yet, it has been evidenced that PFP implementation is far from simple. For instance, it can increase the "bureaucratic burden" on local governments as a result of the accommodation of novel objectives into procurement processes; thus, eluding the traditional administrative culture of "*value for money*" and "*efficiency*" (Burlandy et al., 2022). Furthermore, PFP requires, among other things, the coordination of interventions on both supply and demand sides (Gaitán-Cremaschi et al., 2022). At the same time, the participation of different related stakeholders during policy development processes has been indicated as a contributor to effective PFP by multiple case studies (Parsons & Barling, 2022).

Besides, the Brazilian experience indicates that the construction of PFP initiatives requires new modalities of interaction among the municipal sectors involved in the policy; between suppliers (smallholder farmers) and local governments; as well as with the civil society (Burlandy et al., 2022). Altogether, there is a lack of systemic frameworks that consider PFP as a policy tool through which diverse actors operating in different parts of the food chain, sectors, or governance levels interact to develop related initiatives (Gaitán-Cremaschi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, in relation to the geographical locations where PFP has been studied, an extensive body of research documents PFP experiences in the Global North (Bizarro & Ferreiro, 2022; Pagliarino et al., 2021) and Africa (Mensah & Karriem, 2021; Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011). In contrast, research in Latin American countries remains incipient except for the paradigmatic Brazilian case (Guerra et al., 2017; Wittman & Blesh, 2017). As for the specific situation in Argentina, some PFP experiences have been documented, mainly related to Family Farming, although in many cases there is no systematic information available, and their scope is narrow (Correa, 2020).

### ***Public Food Provisioning for Transition***

As sketched above, PFP is also considered a tool for food system transition and thus, considerable literature addresses the interrelation between PFP and (sustainable) farming can be found. In this sense, PFP initiatives are believed to have the potential to enhance the development of small-scale family farmers by recognizing them as social actors that can participate in these processes (Santacoloma & Zarate, 2022). Moreover, PFP is considered to be a strategic policy instrument to “*create, stimulate, and support the transformative development of food supply chains and promote sustainable diets*” (Burlandy et al., 2022, p.239).

Additionally, following the example of Brazil, many studies have focused on the development of policies at the national level, especially in relation to school feeding programs (FAO, 2021). However, regarding municipal policy, PFP has been pointed out as an important policy instrument for municipalities to influence the local food system (Morley & Morgan, 2021), with the potential to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions, social, economic, and environmental (Vicovaro et al., 2021).

Besides, previous research on PFP has connected it to sustainable rural development (Mensah & Karriem, 2021; Sumberg & Sabates-Wheeler, 2011); or to Food sovereignty, by focusing on the motivations and barriers of farmers who participate in these initiatives (Wittman & Blesh, 2017). Also, some related literature has explored its potential to promote diversified farming systems (Valencia et al., 2019); or its capacity to mitigate the key constraints for agroecological transitions (Guerra et al., 2017). Finally, in the recent FAO publication “*Public food procurement for sustainable food systems and healthy diets*” considerable chapter discuss PFP initiatives that strive towards the promotion of change towards more sustainable food systems (FAO, 2021).

### ***Agroecology***

Regarding agroecology, it has been defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as a “transformative climate change adaptation approach for food system resilience” (IPES-Food, 2022). By bringing together environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability, it has been considered as a foundation from which to transform food systems (Gliessman, 2020). Its long history has also implied contestation and calls for a clear delimitation of the term. To that end, in an effort to introduce agroecology into mainstream policy, the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has come up with 13 operational principles to guide agroecological food system transformation that translate the ‘10 elements of agroecology’ outlined by FAO (IPES-Food, 2022).

Further, agroecology is often referred to as a combination of three parts: a science, a practice, and a social movement (Alonso-Fradejas et al., 2020). Moreover, it is associated with bottom-up and participatory approaches, as agroecological production relies on the knowledge and resources of local communities (Hammelman et al., 2022). Nevertheless, many still conceive agroecology solely as a science that provides a technological fix for the problems of the food system, ruling out its political aspect and thus disregarding the powerful influence of science in policy-making processes (Deijl & Duncan, 2020).

In this sense, it is important to highlight that the term agroecology is often used interchangeably with other concepts related to sustainable agriculture, such as sustainable intensification, conservation agriculture, or climate-smart agriculture (IPES-Food, 2022). This reflects the multiplicity of discourses behind the concept, which correspond to a diverse group of actors, ranging from farmers to scientists and government representatives. These groups also influence policy-making processes to a greater or lesser extent, affecting the outcomes according to their interpretation of agroecology (Deijl & Duncan, 2020).

Accordingly, it is important to consider who, when, and how the term is applied, as it could be co-opted and directed towards the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, it could water down the fundamental transformation of the food system, centering around notions of social and environmental justice, aimed by most proponents of agroecology today (IPES-Food, 2022).

As for agroecology in Argentina, it is gaining momentum. Already central among the strategies developed by small-scale farmers against the so-called “soy-ization” of Argentina's agriculture that started in the 90's and led to land concentration, dispossession and jeopardized the social reproduction of many small farms (Gras & Hernández, 2021). It has also played a pivotal role in the resistance against the use of pesticides, agrochemicals for spraying genetically modified seeds due to health related concerns (Skill et al., 2022). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated its social and political recognition as opposed to the dominant agribusiness model, particularly questioning the way food is being produced in a context of socio-economic crisis (Gras & Hernández, 2021). Besides, the *National Division of Agroecology (DNAE)* was created in 2021, becoming the frontline of this resistance through the showcase of success examples, as well as the collaboration with municipalities and related social movements, for the development of regulations and the advancement of education supporting agroecology (Skill et al., 2022).

### 1.3 Research objective

Summing up, most of the academic literature around PFP policies focuses on the outcomes of these initiatives and the challenges arising from its implementation. At the same time, when matching PFP with agroecology, most research pays attention to potential for PFP to enhance sustainability transitions. However, little research has been done about the processes by which these policies come together, the tensions and negotiations between the actors involved, as well as their relations to other elements such as operative agroecological networks or already existing regulatory frameworks. On the other hand, studies tend to focus on the development of policies at the national level, following international guidelines that do not necessarily recognize the context-dependency of these processes or dismiss the importance of local governments in the implementation of transformative solutions.

Hence, **to further understand how municipal PFP policies targeting agroecological products develop, this research aims to explore the interactions between different elements that make them come together.** In this sense, the study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the early stages of participatory policy-making processes and how they impact the development of tools for addressing food system challenges (Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021).

To pursue the aim of this research, I draw on three case studies in Argentinian municipalities. These municipalities have active agroecological movements and belong to an Argentinian *translocal* network of municipalities facing climate change (RAMCC). Besides, I apply assemblage theory as the theoretical lens through which I gain insight into the interactions between spaces, bodies, materialities and discourses, that bear the potential to create new subjectivities and roles for producers, municipal actors, and civil society representatives as stewards of food system transformation (Hammelman et al., 2022). To this extent, PFP policies favoring agroecology are conceptualized as municipal policy assemblages, where the interaction between actors, practices, processes enhance the mobilization of specific policy ideas (Savage, 2020).

Given the diversity of pathways by which PFP initiatives are started, I argue that assemblage thinking is an appropriate lens to understand how these policies become characterized and spatially distributed, by stressing the interactions between heterogeneous elements that trigger the policy development. Nevertheless, this research is not representative for all processes by which these policies come together, but rather contributes to the understanding of some of the interactions taking place in municipal PFP assemblages aiming to favor agroecology.

## 1.4 Research questions

To guide the present research, the following main research question has been drafted:

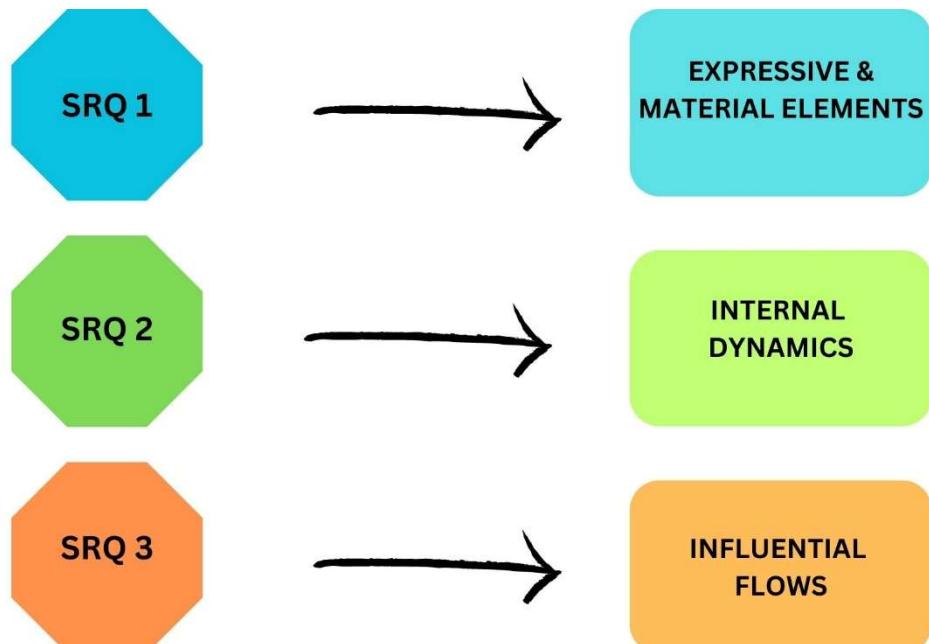
**In Argentina, how are municipal Public Food Procurement policies being assembled around agroecology?**

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions have been formulated:

SRQ1: How can municipal PFP assemblages be characterized?

SRQ2: What are the dynamics that shape the identity of the policy assemblages?

SRQ3: How do flows of policies, ideas, and practices influence the policy assemblages?



## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Theory: assemblage thinking

Assemblages as an analytical concept derives from the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They never formalized it as a theory per se, but rather made use of the concept ad hoc throughout their work in what can be considered a “*general logic of assemblages*” (Nail, 2017). However, some authors argue that it is possible to excerpt the core formal features of this logic from the large body of work by Deleuze and Guattari (Nail, 2017).

In this sense, in his paper “*What is an assemblage?*”, Nail (2017) problematizes the use of the word assemblage as a translation of the French word *agencement* used by Deleuze and Guattari. His premise being that while *an agencement* means the layout of heterogeneous elements as derived from the verb *agencer*, an assemblage, coming from the French verb *assembler*, entails the gathering of things together into unities. This semantic distinction, he argues, has two philosophical consequences derived from the uptake of assemblage as *agencement*: “*the rejection of unity in favour of multiplicity, and the rejection of essence in favour of events*” (Nail, 2017: 22). Hence, assemblages do not arrange units but rather sets of relations between autonomous elements that can be recombined ad infinitum; and assemblages are not final products, but a collection of contingent features connected to specific social and historical processes in a given moment (Nail, 2017).

In addition, Nail (2017) outlines three features of all assemblages, what Deleuze and Guattari called their *abstract machine*, their *concrete assemblage*, and their *personae*, and that can be interpreted as their conditions, their elements, and their agents. The first trait refers to the network of specific external relations that hold the assemblage together. The second are the specific elements that are arranged through these abstract relationships and thus, are reciprocally readjusted. The third relates to the immanent positions or roles within the assemblage, to those who arrange the concrete elements according to their abstract relations but are neither the origin nor the controllers of the assemblage (Nail, 2017).

Despite the efforts to describe a formal theory of assemblages as derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, its apparent ambiguity has enabled scholars to inflect different emphasis to the concept. Given its plasticity, social science scholars in a variety of fields make use of assemblage thinking to shed light on a diverse range of social formations. By framing assemblages as “*relational constructs, comprised of heterogeneous and emergent component parts that are arranged together towards certain strategic ends, in particular spaces and times*” (Savage, 2020: 319), scholars in the fields of geography, political science, anthropology, international relations or sociology have employed assemblage thinking to grasp different phenomena such as the formation of a range of spatial forms (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011), to read power as multiple co-existences (McFarlane, 2009), to speak about hybridity and process (Bueger, 2014) or to make sense of specific policy formations such as forest management practices (Murray Li, 2007).

Further, in relation to food, assemblage thinking has been mobilised in the field of urban food governance, through the concept of *translocal assemblages*, that can be conceptualized as “*composites of place-based social movements which exchange ideas, knowledge, practices, materials and resources across sites*” (McFarlane, 2009: 563). In this sense, the transformative capacity of translocal food policy assemblages has been studied (Moragues-Faus & Sonnino, 2018; Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019). At the same time, assemblage thinking has been used to analyse how food security is performed through different configurations of human and non-human actors (Hebinck & Oostindie, 2018); or to enhance social movement network theory and practice in the context of food movements (Levkoe & Wakefield, 2014).

Altogether, the use of the concept allows us to remain open, moving away from fixed forms in relation to the type of elements or relations involved in the assemblages, as well as their durability (Anderson & McFarlane, 2011). Thereby, assemblages do not imply a distinct scale or order, but have been considered an anti-structural concept that enables to discuss about emergence, heterogeneity, the decentred or the ephemeral (Bueger, 2014). Additionally, Bueger (2014) highlights multiplicity and relationality as two of the core characteristics of assemblage thinking. Multiplicity entailing an understanding of the world as something in between a coherent whole and an atomized system of particulars. Whereas a relationalist understanding of reality encompasses the consideration of assemblages as organized by relations between heterogeneous elements; these relations not being fixed and stable but rather made and remade in practices (Bueger, 2014).

One of the most prominent authors to elaborate assemblage thinking is Manuel De Landa, who presents a “re-constructed” theory of assemblages, building on Deleuze and Guattari and incorporating insights from complexity theory (Savage, 2020). Most notably in his 2006 book “*A New Philosophy of Society*”, he showcases his formulation of assemblage theory as “*a new ontology for understanding society through analysis of the components that comprise social entities*” (Woods, 2015, p.30).

Moreover, in that work, De Landa (2006) summarizes the main features of assemblage theory. Firstly, he argues that assemblages are constituted by relations of exteriority, which implies that their components are self-subsistent, thus able to be detached and reattached into another assemblage potentially constituted through different relations. Also, this means that “*the whole emerges from interactions between parts*” (De Landa, 2006, p.10), but cannot be reduced to any of those individual parts. Altogether, this entails that the linkages between assemblage components are not deemed *logically necessary*, but rather *contingently obligatory* (De Landa, 2006, p.11). Which enables the rejection of two recurring tendencies amongst social scientists, that is micro and macro reductionism, by moving beyond the characterization of social formations as biological organisms (Savage, 2020).

In addition to the exteriority of relations, De Landa (2006) defines assemblages along two other dimensions. The first one being that assemblage components can play variable roles, ranging from expressive to material, to a mixture of them both depending on the set of capacities exercised (De Landa, 2006). In this sense, material components are related to physical realities such as people or things and expressive components rather refer to affective or linguistic characteristics that shape our perception (Woods, 2015).

The second dimension outlined by De Landa (2006) refers to the simultaneous processes in which these components get involved, that stabilize or destabilize the identity of the assemblages. That is, processes of territorialization and deterritorialization, by increasing or decreasing either the degree of internal homogeneity of the assemblages or the sharpness of its spatial boundaries (De Landa, 2006). Together with processes of coding, in which expressive media intervene to describe and provide an identity to the mixture of heterogeneous elements, consolidating the effects of territorialization processes and further stabilizing the assemblage; as well as processes of decoding which allow for more flexibility within the assemblages (De Landa, 2006).

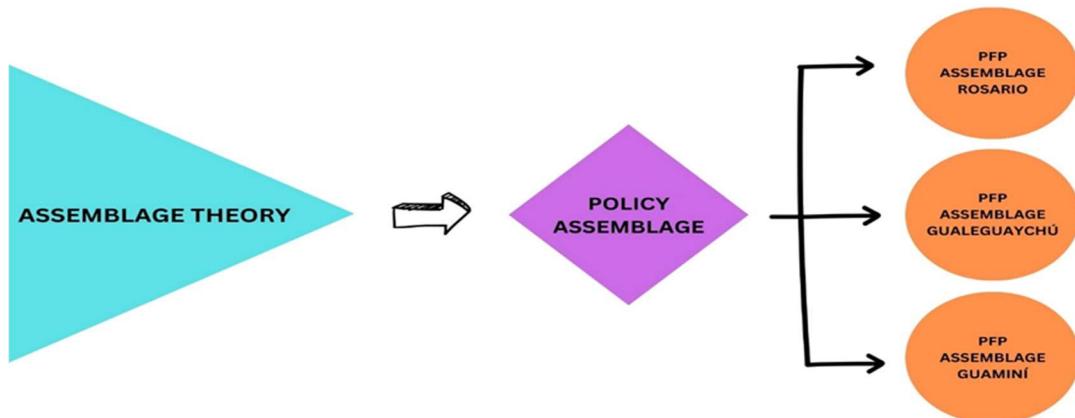
Ultimately, assemblages can be understood as the composition of heterogeneous elements that could be human and non-human, technical and natural, discursive and non-discursive, going beyond binaries of social-material or structure-agency (De Landa, 2006).

Focusing on the field of policy studies, assemblage thinking has been employed as an analytical framework for “revealing, interpreting, and representing the spatially, socially, and materially diverse worlds of policy and policy-making”, (Baker & McGuirk, 2017: 419). However, although assemblage thinking is considered useful to perceive nuances in the processes whereby policies move, mutate and manifest in a context of transnational exchange of ideas and practices; some authors underline its lack of methodological precision (Savage, 2020). As argued by Allen (2011), there is a tendency to make use of assemblage thinking in overly descriptive ways that result in mere binding exercises that do not help the advancement of useful normative arguments or thoughtful conceptualizations (Savage, 2020). In policy research, this is especially problematic when assemblages become no more than a justification for outlining policy chunks, failing to address the ways in which policies emerge, develop, and are sustained (Baker & McGuirk, 2017).

Therefore, some authors have engaged in the systematization of critical policy assemblage research, suggesting ways to operationalize it by breaking down the constellation of actors, practices, processes that enhance the mobilization of specific policy ideas (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). In this sense, Baker and McGuirk (2017) outline some epistemological commitments associated with assemblage thinking for critical policy research, as well as describe three methodological practices into which they translate them, namely adopting an ethnographic sensibility, tracing sites and situations, and revealing labours of assembling. While Savage (2020) identified three theoretical foundations central to a ‘policy assemblage’ approach, namely: (1) relations of exteriority and emergence; (2) heterogeneity, relationality, and flux; and (3) attention to power, politics, and agency. These foundations summarize the basis of policy assemblages and provide an incipient framework for policy assemblage research by presenting examples of how each might be mobilized. Also, by putting the spotlight on the last conceptual foundation, Savage, (2020) underlines the capacity of individuals and organisations to exercise agency in the creation of politics and its enactments. Altogether, these foundations enable the explanation of things in alternative ways to the ones used by many established traditions in policy research; thus, enhancing the imaginary on how to better do policy forwards (Savage, 2020).

## 2.2 Analytical framework: policy assemblages

For the purposes of this study, I draw on the three core theoretical foundations of policy assemblages outlined by Savage (2020) as the basis to explore the policy interplays between different elements that give rise to PFP policies targeting agroecological products in three municipalities of Argentina. in this sense, this study directs the attention towards the “tangible stuff” of these policies and moves away from ideal types, to understand policies as rather a result of heterogeneous elements interacting towards strategic purposes (Savage, 2020). The overall aim being to expose the diverse elements that have to be involved and enter into dialogue for PFP to be developed, which encompass “the meanings individuals make about policy, the networks through which policy influence flows, the technical processes through which policies are put together, plus many other policy aspects” (Savage, 2018, p. 310). INFLUENCIAL



Therefore, inspired by Savage (2020), I conceptualize the development of these municipal PFP policies that favour agroecology as policy assemblages by focusing on three different aspects that correspond to the themes addressed in the sub-research questions. That is because, policy assemblages are deemed to emerge as a result of the tension between expressive and material elements and the forces that shape them, together with the influence of external flows.

To answer the first sub-research question, the elements playing expressive and material roles in the policy assemblages will be described. To start, emphasis will be put on tracing the role of humans in the making of these policy assemblages; because policies are not mobilized in abstract, but rather by people with specific goals (Savage, 2020). In this sense, human bodies can be described as space of tension between materiality and expression, where multiple components and roles can coexist and contribute to the dynamics of the assemblage (Hammelman et al., 2022). Thus, the different people interacting in the policy assemblages will be highlighted; together with the illustration of embodied materialities, ranging from physical labour and tools to the physical locales these actors occupy (De Landa, 2006). Then, the expressive components, that go beyond language and symbols and might encompass bodily expression and linguistic or behavioural expressions of solidarity or legitimacy, will be described (De Landa, 2006).

To answer the second sub-research question, the dynamics that shape the identities of the policy assemblages will be described. As explained above, assemblages are subject to different processes of (de)territorialization and (de)coding, that stabilize or destabilize their identity (De Landa, 2006). Thus, territorialization and deterritorialization processes will showcase how these policy assemblages come together or come undone, while coding and decoding processes will respectively shed light on the description of the policy assemblages that provides an identity and the flexibilization of the assemblages through considerations or actions.

To answer the last sub-research question, I will draw on the work of Savage and Lewis (2018), who adopted an assemblage approach for tracing policy development. By doing so, they highlighted how the creation of policies is deeply influenced by (transnational) flows of policies, ideas, and practices, but adapted to a specific context that depends on local factors and conditions of possibility (Savage, 2020); as well as how policies emerge through strategic interactions between actors and organisations located within and across multiple policy spaces (Savage and Lewis, 2018). That is because assemblage thinking challenges traditional conceptions of scale by providing *“a unique way of... linking the micro- and macro-levels of social reality... whereby larger entities emerged from the assembly of smaller ones”* in a complex web of multiple, overlapping systems at intersecting scales (De Landa, 2006, as cited in Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019, p.78). Moreover, the work of Santo and Moragues-Faus (2019) is also considered, particularly to underline the role of translocal networks in the policy assemblages, as platforms to connect and exchange knowledge between municipalities facing similar situations.

Besides, following the work of Savage's (2020), I will adopt a relational approach to policy analysis, by paying *“close attention to how policy ideas and practices are assembled in specific contexts and at specific moments in time”* (Savage & Lewis, 2018, p.124). Also, his three core theoretical foundations address interrelated aspects of policies intervening in the processes by which they come together, such as emergence, heterogeneity, flux, power, or agency.

In this sense, by pointing to their relations of exteriority and emergence, Savage (2020) reiterates that assemblages are not pre-existing entities with pre-given properties, but rather a mixture of autonomous elements brought together and thus interacting while remaining independent. This consideration also enables to move beyond the structure/agency binary and to problematize the relationship between policies in abstract and their impacts and outcomes (Savage, 2020). Also, in line with contemporary debates around policy mobilities, it allows to challenge “best practices” discourses, whereby policies can be transferred from place to place and expected to deliver similar outcomes (Savage, 2020).

Moreover, Savage (2020) stresses that heterogeneity does not imply that policy assemblages are random compilations of things that happen to co-exist. Instead, drawing on Ureta (2015), he underlines the importance of looking at the particular strategic relations into which heterogeneous elements are assembled, as well as the efforts behind and the interests or purposes aimed at when doing so (Savage, 2020). Besides, he suggests directing analytical attention to processes of flux, as policies can mutate take varied forms or even be disrupted when subject to multiple interpretations and dynamics taking place around them, which make them an artefact of the current times without compromising their “illusion of stability” (Savage, 2020).

Finally, Savage (2020) highlights the context-dependent forces that contribute to policymaking. In line with complexity theory, he considers power as polycentric and policy as the result of friction and deliberation, although the state remains a prominent actor when mobilizing policy for particular purposes (Savage, 2020). Thus, following Li (2005) he understands resistance as always embedded into power relations, which implies that powerful forms of resistance can be found within the state, bureaucracies being a powerful one. Moreover, he indicates how policy emerges as a result of different actors creating the conditions of possibility, while obscuring others; their agency being situated and context-dependent (Savage, 2020).

Therefore, by considering Savage's (2020) theoretical core foundations, I aim to engage in a thoughtful analysis of the development of municipal PFP policies favouring agroecology in Argentina, one with explanatory power that can unveil spaces for improvement (Savage, 2020).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

The research objective concerns the understanding of the interactions between different elements that give rise to municipal PFP policies that favour agroecology in Argentina. As the focus of the study is not to generalize findings or to quantify but rather to extensively explore and understand the dynamics of participatory policymaking, especially in its earlier stages, making use of a qualitative research approach is arguably the most appropriate. In this sense, this research attempts to provide a detailed account of perceptions, feelings, and experiences, rather than to measure them; hence, the findings will be communicated in a descriptive and narrative manner (Kumar, 2019). Further, I will make use of case(s) study, as they are a suitable research design when aiming to grasp a real-world case embedded in a specific context to shed light on theoretical concepts; in other words, they are pertinent when striving for analytic generalizations (Yin & Campbell, 2018). By choosing multiple-case studies, precisely three, my intention is to provide more robust and compelling evidence than it would derive from a single-case study (Yin & Campbell, 2018). Besides, data is mainly obtained from primary sources through observations and interviews; although secondary sources such as government publications or mass media were also employed (Kumar, 2019).

Besides, as mentioned in the *Introduction*, the data collected for this thesis is part of a research activity within an existing project, “Local Green Jobs”, implemented by the Argentinian Network of Municipalities facing Climate Change (RAMCC), where I was an intern for six months. Therefore, the research design was highly impacted by the logic of the ongoing project, as well as by the existing relations between the network (RAMCC) and the member municipalities.

#### 3.2 Case study selection

In this context, the project had priorly established that the research would take place by visiting five municipalities selected among those belonging to the RAMCC and participating in the project (around sixty local governments). Therefore, my access to the field was mediated by the strategic objectives of the network. In this sense, my first task as an intern was to carry out a preliminary screening of candidate municipalities through the examination of relevant information from different archival sources, internal and external to the project. Moreover, a presentation to the municipalities participating in the project took place, where the objectives of the study, together with the particularities of the prospective visits were explained. Subsequently, according to criteria such as their expressed interest in the topic after the presentation, the apparent number of agroecological producers in the municipality, their size or where they are located, the number of candidate municipalities was reduced to ten. The last two criteria aimed the selected cases to illustrate the diversity of realities and municipal scales in Argentina.

Secondly, I queried the project contact in each of the ten candidate municipalities, to confirm or deny the information gathered, as well as to provide them with further details about the study that could help determine if my visit to their locality was a good fit from both sides. Finally, after having considered the different options and in consultation with the network, I selected five localities in five different geographical areas of Argentina where I conducted field research, namely: Guaminí (province of Buenos Aires), Oberá (province of Misiones), Gualeguaychú (province of Entre Ríos), Guaymallén (province of Mendoza) and Rosario (province of Santa Fe).

### 3.3 Introduction to the cases

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis, I selected three of the five municipalities to elaborate on: Rosario, Gualeguaychú and Guaminí. That is because, even though their sizes differ, all three municipalities engage in one way or another with agroecological practices as a way forward, which was not identified in the two remaining municipalities visited. In this sense, several examples of environmental engagement can be found in the three localities, and they have in place respective municipal regulations to control the use of glyphosate, a broad-spectrum herbicide widely used in the country.

#### *Case 1: Rosario*

Rosario is city of over a million inhabitants in the province of Santa Fe, located at the centre of the *pampa húmeda*, the main agricultural region of Argentina. Moreover, it is situated along the Paraná, Argentina's main navigable river, as well as at the intersection of two railroad lines and several major highways. All these factors make Rosario key hub of the agro-export economy, focusing on industrial production of (genetically modified) soy, wheat, and corn (Hammelman et al., 2022). However, horticultural production systems persist in the peri-urban and urban areas, driven by the creation of municipal programs and projects that promote and support agroecological production in these spaces.

#### *Case 2: Gualeguaychú*

Gualeguaychú is a medium-size city (around one hundred thousand inhabitants) of the province of Entre Ríos, located at the border with Uruguay and well connected to Argentina's capital, Buenos Aires. The main economic activities are tourism and agriculture and livestock. In environmental matters, the Safe and Sovereign Healthy Food Plan (PASSS) has been promoted to achieve a local and diversified production system. Likewise, there are agroecological horticultural producers who sell their production at weekly farmers markets and at the newly established municipal market.

#### *Case 3: Guaminí*

Guaminí is a small municipal district (around twelve thousand inhabitants) located in the south of the province of Buenos Aires where the main economic activities are agriculture and livestock, mainly of cereals and beef. Besides, the municipality and related institutions are supporting horticultural production through training, provision of inputs and tools or marketing spaces, which has generated new family farmers in recent years. In addition, it is the place of origin of RENAMA, so there is a large group of agroecological producers, producing grains and oilseeds, but also including an incipient sample of market gardeners.

### 3.4 Research methods

#### 3.3.1 Data collection

Making use of multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon, helping to strengthen the finding in what is known as data triangulation (Yin & Campbell, 2018). Therefore, to grasp the interactions that result in the development of PFP initiatives that favour agroecological producers, three sources of evidence were emphasized: interviews, observations, and documentation.

The data collection process consisted of field visits to four of the five selected municipalities, as I was based in one of them (Rosario). Therefore, I conducted fieldwork for about a week in four of the localities; while in Rosario, the fieldwork could be considered as stretched over the six months of my internship. During the visits, interviews and observations took place. Moreover, as explained before, the data informing this thesis derives from three of these municipalities, although the rest of the visits contributed to the further understanding of the national context in which the research is embedded. Also, all data collected is in Spanish.

### *Interviews*

The main source of data for this study are interviews, both semi-structured and informal. Hence, during the field visits to the three municipalities examined, a total of thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted (see *Annex* for the list of interviewees). Following an interview guide to obtain reliable and comparable qualitative data (Bernard, 2017). These interviews were audio recorded with a phone. Besides, due to the wide range of actors relevant to the subject, three main groups were identified in each one of the municipalities: the supply side, composed of producers, most of them small-scale family farmers; the demand side, which corresponds to municipal actors, in both political and technical positions; and other actors, those who cannot be categorised in any of the above but belong to social organisations, institutions or are relevant individuals who could support the implementation of a local PFP initiative.

A different interview guide was developed for each one of the three groups identified, as their relevant knowledge regarding PFP differs depending on their position in the constellation/assemblage. However, some common initial questions were prepared to explore everyone's perception about PFP, in relation to the utility, viability and previous or current participation in PFP experiences, aiming to enhance the comparability of the study. The topics included in the respective interview guides addressed the main aspects of PFP relevant for the case(s), ranging from exploring the current provisioning possibilities to the specific purchasing procedures used at the. Moreover, the questions were primarily open-ended, although some closed questions were also asked.

Lastly, a participant information sheet and an informed consent form were developed and distributed among the thirty-two participants before the start of the interview. The former addressing the purpose of the study, the consequences of participation and issues around data protection and confidentiality; whereas the latter was meant to make sure that their participation was voluntary and informed. The physical signed forms are in Wageningen, and the audio recordings are stored in my personal university OneDrive account. At the end of the thesis these will be transferred to the W drive in alignment with the CSPS Data Management Policy.

Alongside the formal interviews, many informal interviews took place during the course of each fieldwork visit. These type of interviews characterized by a lack of clear structure are useful when settling in, to build rapport and uncover interesting topics that could have been overlooked (Bernard, 2017). Yet, many of these interviews took place in Rosario, where I participated in the activities of the RAMCC while also becoming personally involved with some environmentalist groups, which granted me access to events and meetings related to the local agroecological movement. Therefore, some informal interviews happened spontaneously, while sometimes I made use of the interview guides developed to ask relevant questions, even if these interviews were not recorded. Instead, they were registered in my field notes, as in most cases I was able to write in my research notebook while conducting them, having previously asked for oral consent from the interviewees.

### *Observations*

The second research method employed during fieldwork visits, but also throughout my six months in Argentina, was observation. Exploring the dichotomy between what people think they do and what they actually do is helpful to obtain a holistic picture of phenomena (Bernard, 2017).

It is important to make a distinction between the moments when I was carrying out non-participant observations, mainly in Guaminí and Gualeguaychú, where I remained a passive observer that watched and listened to the activities I was invited to as they were performed (Kumar, 2019). Whereas in Rosario I was able to be a participant observer over my six month stay, by getting close to people and building rapport and trust I could witness and record relevant information (Bernard, 2017). Therefore, I participated in the actions being studied by becoming involved in the local community and being an intern at the RAMCC. This gave me access to relevant insights and connected me to people and places in ways that could not have been possible if I carried out this study on my own, which enriched the understanding of the process happening around PFP and agroecology. For example, I attended local agroecological events or was exposed to the ways the RAMCC managed their interactions with local governments.

Finally, the observations were recorded in a narrative manner by describing the interactions in my own words in my research notebook. Besides, no systematic observations were made but rather happened in a continuum.

### *Document analysis*

A variety of documentary information, both in paper and electronic format, was collected throughout the research process, including emails, leaflets, pictures, press releases, minutes of meetings, mass media articles, administrative documents and progress reports or any other internal project records. These documents can be considered useful even if acknowledging their potential bias (Yin & Campbell, 2018). They were collected mostly during the fieldwork visits as well as granted access to through my internship at the RAMCC. Moreover, some materials were gathered through the interaction with international organizations leading to a forum on PFP.

Thus, the materials obtained have been used to inform the research design and to enrich the description of the phenomenon. Also, the secondary data gathered was particularly relevant for the description of the national and international flows of policies, ideas and practices that inform the policies, as their identification was not formally captured during the data collection process.

#### **3.3.2 Data analysis**

The data obtained through the aforementioned methods, mainly in the form of a research notebook including the content of informal interviews and observations, as well as the interview transcripts from the thirty audio recordings have been processed and analysed. For these purposes, the audio transcription software *Trint* was firstly used for the semi-structured recorded interviews, obtaining the written text of the full interview.

Secondly, the data analysis of these transcriptions has been done by coding for predetermined categories related to assemblage thinking. Therefore, the interviews were firstly coded for the material and expressive elements that take part of the policy assemblages. Subsequently, the coding aimed at the identification of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization* processes taking place. Finally, processes of coding and decoding were unravelled, particularly regarding meanings that different actors give to PFP, with or without connecting it to agroecology. Altogether, the content analysis allowed to characterize the developing of PFP policies favouring agroecological products in the three municipalities as policy assemblages, answering the three sub-research questions. Then, this information has been discussed and linked to the relevant literature and used to answer the main research question.

### 3.5 Reflection on methods

This study is embedded in an internship experience at the RAMCC, which comes together with its own set of particularities. Regarding the sampling, the cases were not randomly selected but rather selected from the pool of municipalities belonging to the network, and more specifically, from those participating in the project “Local Green Jobs”. This greatly conditioned the selection, as they are equally relevant municipalities in Argentina that are in the initial stages of developing PFP initiatives linked to agroecology. In that sense, the cases studied might not reflect the national situation completely, but rather point out to the context-dependency of PFP initiatives.

Similarly, only three of out of five municipalities visited were finally selected as case studies, due to the fact that the remaining localities did not extensively engage in agroecological initiatives. Which could have been prevented if the focus of the study had been defined more precisely or more thorough desk study would have been carried out by the project team prior to my arrival.

Moreover, the preparation of the interview guide was constrained by the project logic and certain topics became off the table or were not given priority. At the same time, my entry point in the cases selected were the local governments, which already had an established dynamic with the RAMCC. This conditioned the sampling because the arrangement of semi-structured interviews partly depended on them, reducing my freedom to choose respondents, and influencing the angle from which I started my enquiry. Further, the observations took place over the course of many months and without structured guidelines, which made it difficult to register all details.

Additionally, participant observations in particular come with their own challenges, such as the appearance of personal bias, the existence of long intervals between the situation and the writing of the notes or the possible influence on people’s behaviour. In this sense, although the fact that I was conducting research was well-known by all participants, the extent to which they were aware of my observations taking place remains unclear, as they were mostly made alongside interviews (Yin & Campbell, 2018). As for the interviews, my position as an intern impacted the freedom to ask difficult questions as I was researching while simultaneously representing the RAMCC; which could have also influenced the responses obtained.

Moreover, the way in which the data was collected and put in order could have been thought out more carefully from the beginning. As it impacted later stages of the thesis process, particularly the coding, that could have been more systematic and yield clearer findings

Finally, the elaboration of this thesis report started in the following months after fieldwork. However, due to the particularities associated with finishing up my internship process at the RAMCC, together with personal circumstances, the actual writing process started several months later than expected. Nevertheless, this study relies on data collected from February 2022 until July 2023. Thus, there might be events that impacted the assemblages studied in the meantime.

## 4. Empirical Results

The next three sections present the results organized per sub-research question theme, namely: the characterization the municipal PFP assemblages (4.1); the dynamics that shape the identity of the policy assemblages (4.2); and the flows of policies, ideas and practices that influence the policy assemblages (4.3).

By answering these questions, it is possible to position the development of municipal PFP policies revolving around agroecology in Argentina as policy assemblages formed by an array of heterogeneous element coming together to transform existing arrangements into something new and governable (Savage, 2020).

### 4.1 Characterization of the municipal PFP assemblages

In this section, the policy assemblages around PFP emerging in three Argentinian municipalities will be characterized in order to answer the first sub-research question. Thus, the different elements playing material and expressive roles will be described, case by case. As outlined in the *Theoretical framework*, the starting point are the human bodies (producers (1), municipal actors (2), other actors (3)), seen as the space where expressive and material elements come together for particular purposes when doing policy. Hence, the material components of the policy assemblages will be presented by dividing between people interacting and the related materialities beyond them. Then, further elements of the policy assemblages will be outlined, namely linguistic and non-linguistic components playing expressive roles. Finally, the recurring elements across the three cases will be outlined in order to draft commonalities that contribute to the conceptualization of the policy assemblages.

#### 4.1.1 Expressive and material elements per case

*Case 1: Rosario*

##### Material components

The data shows that among the variety of producers that coexist in Rosario, the ones interacting in the municipal PFP assemblage are targeted by the Greenbelt Project. This is a municipal project that aims to strengthen agroecological farming in peri-urban areas; thus, the production is agroecological or transitioning towards it. Although these producers are not organized in a cooperative or associated formally, their belonging to the Green Belt project creates physical spaces where to connect and work in joint initiatives, such as meetings to agree on common prices for their products and provides them with resources to produce agroecologically.

Concerning municipal actors that take part in this PFP assemblage, some of the key actors identified are municipal employees working in the Green Belt project, such as agronomists who provide technical assistance to the agroecological producers. These professionals also audit the application levels of agrochemicals around the agroecological producer's field and facilitate the creation of new commercialization channels by providing market spaces or connecting producers to intermediaries who can sell their produce.

Moreover, on account of the testimonies, it appears that a crucial role is played by the employees of the municipal secretariats participating in the current PFP Working Table, set up as an interdisciplinary collaboration to advance PFP, managed between the Secretariats of Economic Development, Innovation, and Employment, Environment and Public Space, Public Health, and Human Development. Further, two other municipal actors are pinpointed, that is the Procurement and Supply directorate that manages and monitors big municipal tendering processes and the directors of smaller municipal institutions directly buying food, who actively make decisions about suppliers, together with people working in these municipal institutions, such as cooks or staff canteen that have to deal with the products given to the food receivers.

Regarding other actors partaking the PFP assemblage, through the data collection phase, several actors were identified, such as *Suelo común*, a food shop selling agroecological products, many of them produced by Greenbelt farmers and sold per a price agreed among the parts in bi-monthly meetings facilitated by actors of the Green Belt project. Also, caterers currently supplying food to the municipality; local advocates of agroecology, like *Red de comercio justo del Litoral*, a network of producers of goods and services and *Taller Ecologista*, an organization with a long tradition working on socioenvironmental issues; and the *BAR*, the local food bank, collaborating with the municipality to provide food that otherwise would be wasted.

Besides, it is important to underline that this assemblage is constituted through additional material elements or materialities associated with the bodies described above. Firstly, through spaces such as producer's fields or hospitals and community centres where food is prepared and consumed. Secondly, through the agroecological vegetables and fruits obtained from the labour of the producers. Besides, it is constituted through infrastructure, especially the one needed at the facilities where food is processed to accommodate local and seasonal produce, but also the infrastructure necessary for the producers to achieve the scale of production needed to supply the municipality. Also, the external professionals hired by the producers to achieve adequate levels of formalization that would enable them to engage with the state; as well as the financing necessary for producers to be capable of enduring the long municipal payment terms, are crucial elements of this assemblage. Some other material elements include the institutional agroecological certification by which the municipality endorses the production under the Green Belt project, where the involvement in the project and the participation in the markets and spaces facilitated becomes a guarantee of having followed agroecological production standards. Also, the institutional regulations and norms around procurement, particularly in relation to payment times, supplier or product selection criteria and transparency, involving extensive paperwork.

#### Expressive components

As for the components of Rosario's PFP assemblage favouring agroecological products that play expressive roles, diverse elements were identified, both linguistic and non-linguistic. Firstly, the idea of PFP as a win-win solution for supporting agroecological farmers by providing an outlet for their products while enhancing healthier and more sustainable diets for all. In this sense, as Participant 10 explained:

*"The food produced by each agroecological producer would bring all the necessary nutrients to the body of every human being. (...) I believe that (PFP) is possible and it is good for them (the producers) because it is a joint purchase, and it is good for those who cannot or do not have a vehicle to go to the farmers market and all that".*

Nevertheless, doubts about the feasibility of PFP also take part in the assemblage, in relation to the producers and their level of formalization and volume of production. But also, as a result of climatic events that complicate the reliability of production or because of the influence of inflation, that is omnipresent in the country, shaping people's possibilities and livelihood strategies. As expressed by Participant 3:

*"Budgets in these governments are finite and we have to prioritise and resolve other issues. As I was saying before, urgent, and daily emergencies. Unfortunately, it's a bit like what we were talking about before, in these countries we live in a continuous emergency".*

Expressive components also include the positive qualities attributed to agroecological production, in opposition to conventional or even organic farming, which serve as a justification for the prioritization of these products. Ideas around product pricing play a role as well, although different approaches interact within agroecological networks. As Participant 7 (producer) explains: *"People don't mind paying because they know it's healthy, that it's free of pesticides"*.

Municipal actors engaged in the Green Belt project also expressed their personal engagement with agroecology, which is not often expected from institutional actors (Hammelman et al., 2022). In addition, this support, especially in the transition towards agroecological practices, is highly appreciated by the producers from the Green Belt project, as Participant 8 mentioned: *"We have achieved everything thanks to them, thanks to the talks, thanks to the training. Without the support they have given us, we would not have been able to make this change"*.

Moreover, feelings of pride regarding the thorough support from the municipality, especially in relation to provision of infrastructure, inputs, and knowledge, belong to the assemblage, as they constitute a favourable grounding for the success of public policies targeting agroecological producers. As Participant 5 describes: *"We have to accompany these producers so that we have more and more of them and so that the whole area is agroecological, free of agrochemicals"*. In this sense, expressions of political will to introduce transformation by carrying out this targeted policy are a crucial element of the assemblage. However, feelings of mistrust and unreliability are also associated with the local government, due to usual short-term objectives and dependency on spontaneous funds to carry out their assistance.

Furthermore, this assemblage also depends on the expression of legitimacy of agroecological production, where the municipality becomes a source of authority that guarantees that the production standards are being achieved and could fit the product descriptions in the procurement contracts. Legitimacy is also present through the involvement of local civil society organizations in the initiatives, as they are able to ensure their continuation by holding the municipality accountable. Also, by involving civil society, frustration becomes an expressive component of the assemblage when the state is reputed rather passive initially, and these organizations become instigators of the process. As described by Participant 6: *"when you set up this type of initiative from the organisations, then the state tries to take a step further"*.

Finally, expressions of entitlement play a role when addressing who is deemed to participate in procurement procedures, as for many interviewees producers are not suitable suppliers due to their usual lack of formalization, unsteady volume of production, potential inability to meet product seasonality, availability, and size requirements or to handle the payment terms, as articulated by Participant 3: *"People that carry out this type of tasks often live day to day and cannot stand, so to speak, those times or those deadlines of the State"*. Which does not necessarily match some of the producers' realities, as they are formalized and have stable volumes of production and contrasts with the efficiency and reliability attributed to traditional suppliers.

In this sense, a coop or producers' association grouping the Green Belt producers would be considered a more trustworthy partner. But in its absence, there are many positive qualities attributed to intermediaries who can fill the gaps that the agroecological producers cannot fill. Hence, middlemen roles such as the one played by *Suelo Común* when bringing together the Green Belt agroecological productions, that would otherwise be small to satisfy the public demand, as well as by agreeing on their prices, are seen as a mean to the end of municipally procuring those products.

## Case 2: Gualeguaychú

### Material components

Firstly, the people interacting in the PFP assemblage of Gualeguaychú are described. On the basis of the data obtained, it can be said that the producers are scattered and belong to different formal or informal groups, although their common definitory trait is their familiarity with agroecology. Hence, agroecological or in transition producers were identified, who sell their produce in two different weekly farmers' markets organized in town. Also, some of them recently started selling their produce at a newly established municipal market whose aim is bringing together local and agroecological products. Moreover, the producers participating in the municipal market belong to two different producers' organizations: *La Soberana*, a cooperative constituted of both market gardeners and livestock farmers from town or its surroundings; and the local branch of the UTT, a national organisation of small-scale producers and peasant families that is entitled to produce agroecologically in the municipal nature reserve *Las Piedras*.

As for the municipal actors constituting the assemblage, it is possible to pinpoint the municipal areas working in the Healthy, Safe and Sovereign Food Plan (PASSS), such as Environment, Health, or Production, the most prominent being the Social Economy department. This is because some of its employees are actively trying to support agroecological producers, mainly by facilitating commercialization. For this they have coordinated efforts with regional authorities responsible for school meals, working towards bringing local agroecological products to the educational facilities; thus, these regional institutions can also be considered part of the assemblage.

Besides, two other municipal areas are singled out, namely the Supply and Treasury department, due to its implication in the managing and monitoring of tendering processes; as well as the directors of those governmental institutions that buy food and thus, who often make purchasing choices. Lastly, the workers within these facilities, such as cooks or staff canteen, have been identified as part of the assemblage, being the ones dealing with the products that will be consumed by the food receivers.

Regarding other actors, drawing on data, it has been determined that *Ñande Revolución*, a local women's cooperative that commercializes agroecological products, takes part in this PFP assemblage. That is because the incorporate some of the fruit and vegetables that local agroecological producers are unable to sell at the farmer's market. Moreover, other pinpointed actors are the local division of the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), whose employees played a crucial role in the introduction of agroecology in town, as well as in bringing together the otherwise dispersed producers by organising them in a working group and promoting the development of a local Participatory Guarantee System (PGS).

Also, the aforementioned UTT, considered an important partner during negotiations around strategies to support agroecological production. Lastly, the local division of the Secretariat of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture, that offers support to producers in the form of accessing to finance or resources, including knowledge around formalization, which can play an important part in the participation of producers in PFP.

It is important to underline that this assemblage is constituted through additional material elements associated with the bodies described above. Firstly, spaces like producer's fields or those where food is bought to be cooked and provided, namely schools, kindergartens, community centres or medical centres. Secondly, the agroecological fruits and vegetables produced locally through the labour of the producers and the infrastructure needed for that to happen.

Moreover, it is constituted by the infrastructure needed to process and cook local and seasonal products in the municipal facilities where it is destined. Also, the financial resources that would be required for the producers to engage in PFP processes, both in relation to the recruitment of external professionals to be able to be formalized, as well as regarding the endurance of the long municipal payment terms. In this sense, a newly introduced reimbursement method by which suppliers are able to withdraw part of the money before the official payment date constitutes a promising element of the assemblage.

Furthermore, the prospective Participatory Guarantee System emerging, by which local and participatory certification of agroecological productions can be achieved, would also take part. That is because it would endorse the agroecological products produced locally, making them suitable to be purchased when following the new procurement regulations developing in the context of the policy assemblage. Finally, current institutional regulations around PFP are also constituting material elements of the assemblage, especially regarding payment times, supplier or product selection criteria and transparency, of which municipal actors prepare paperwork.

#### Expressive components

Regarding the description of components of Gualeguaychú's PFP assemblage playing expressive roles, it is possible to start with the idea of PFP from agroecological producers as a mean to an end; the end being a local food system that guarantees the human right to food for all citizens. Thus, PFP is embedded in the PASSS, the flagship food policy of the municipality by which food sovereignty and the increased consumption of healthy foods are intended. In this sense, ideas around improving public meals' nutritional quality have a strong presence in the assemblage, as the PASSS aims to eliminate processed foods from the menus and to enhance the preparation of homemade meals, especially by replacing industrial cakes. As Participant 17 expressed:

*"For some months now, we have been working on the idea that from June onwards we will try to ensure that almost 100% of all food is agroecological, free of processed food and so on. But we are still in transition".*

Further, the consumption of healthy, safe, and sovereign food is directly linked to agroecology, thus, another aim of the PASS is to provide nothing but agroecological foods in municipal institutions. Moreover, some of the municipal actors interviewed connect agroecology with the project setup in the municipal nature reserve *Las Piedras*, meant to showcase a new way of producing food locally in contrast to conventional farming, where many agrochemicals are applied, because *"in an agroecological production system no one is at risk"*, as mentioned by Participant 13, a municipal actor.

Regarding producers who do not belong to *Las Piedras*, their engagement with agroecological ideas and principles was pinpointed, although many of them make use of agrochemicals occasionally. As expressed by Participant 16, a producer:

*"We've been trying for a few years now, I mean, researching, learning about agroecology. But if I have to apply something, I apply it. I mean, everyone says that it's easy, but I'm not convinced".*

Therefore, different expressions of possibility coexist, where agroecology is promoted by the municipality as the way forward, but many producers manifested doubts about its viability.

Altogether, PFP is considered an ideal goal given the current lack of agroecological production surplus; together with ideas about the unsuitability of producers to become municipal suppliers due to their lack of formalization. Moreover, climatic events impacting the productions, as expressed by Participant 12: *"First there was the drought, then, as the rain came late, we had already lost the tomato harvest, and this year I had almost no pumpkin harvest either"*.

Together with the lurking phantom of inflation, engrained in the national narrative, contribute to the doubts about the feasibility of PFP coexisting in the assemblage. However, expressions of political will to make it happen constitute a prominent expressive element of this assemblage. As described by Participant 18:

*"There can be a much broader support from the municipality and its different areas. Support about where you have to register, what you have to do to participate, etc. It also seems to me that it is a matter of time, as you have to give time for the producer to have the amount of production necessary to cover the supply needs".*

In this regard, the consideration of the organization UTT as an important partner plays a role in the assemblage, given their agreement with the municipality by which certain related families are able to live and produce agroecologically in the municipal reserve *Las Piedras*. The agreement includes support and knowledge for the agroecological transition of local producers; together with taking a supplier role in PFP initiatives after achieving a bigger volume of production.

In this sense, the organization being formalized and having commercialization circuits in place is considered relevant for the success of the policy. However, some of the producers manifested the lack of effective assistance resulting from that agreement and their reservations because these families come from outside of town (and even the country), as expressed by Participant 16:

*"It is a project of the municipality through which they brought people from La Plata to Las Piedras, who are producers, Bolivians. They had put together a group and they were going to teach us about agroecology. Supposedly in six months we had to produce agroecologically. But it didn't work out. (...) I remember that when they started this project, they tested the water here and after 15 days they had to repeat and so on for three months, but they never came back".*

In contrast, most of these producers highly appreciate the support received from certain representatives of the INTA around agroecology especially the emphasis on formalization, certification, and cost calculation. Like Participant 15, a producer, puts it: '

*'Apart from being the facilitator of the local supply group, I am friends with her (the INTA representative). One day she says - what about the costs? I'll help you. And we sat down at the table, and we started to work out the costs and she told us that we were losing money'.*

Along the same lines, Participant 12 recounted: *"The girls from INTA, when I started going to the farmers market, told us - write it down, know what you spend, what you produce in a month, if it is profitable for you so you know from year to year, if you earned more last year or this year"*.

Moreover, the support from the Secretariat of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture has also been indicated as valuable for achieving the formalization of local small-scale producers necessary to participate in PFP processes.

Similar positive attributes can be extended to an intermediary like the women's cooperative Ñandé Revolución, that appears to be a more suitable partner for PFP to be initiated in the near future, as they cluster individual productions that are otherwise insufficient and have better means to deal with a public procurement process. Moreover, they have strong bonds and emotional connections to many of the producers, being able to access certain circles where municipal actors are not necessarily welcomed, which makes them attractive potential intermediaries. As Participant 14 expressed:

*"We have a special relationship with the local producers, we all know each other here, it's very small, but the ones we work with are the ones with whom we have been able to continue developing a, let's say, healthy relationship. We achieved what I was saying about solidarity after years of work, because trust is being built up".*

### *Case 3: Guaminí*

#### Material components

Firstly, on the basis of data, people interacting in the PFP assemblage of Guaminí are described. As for the producers targeted by the policy, they are agroecological market gardeners who often belong to cooperative working groups. In this sense, two main cooperatives were identified. The first one associated with the municipal project *PROTAAL*, by which tools and resources are provided for producing agroecological vegetables in specific facilities for the members of the cooperative; however, the group has experienced much change and rotation of its members.

The second cooperative called *FRAAGUA* is associated with the local centre of agrarian studies (*CEA N30*) and the *RENAMA*, the national agroecological network of municipalities, and integrated by rural families that produce agroecological fruits, vegetables, meat, etc; also, it emerged as complementary to the existing group of local agroecological producers of grains and oilseeds.

Regarding municipal actors involved in the PFP assemblage, different municipal areas have shown interest in connecting procurement needs to available local production. The Production secretariat, responsible for the municipal program *PROTAAL*, is one of the main proponents of the policy, in conversation with the Procurement department; this secretariat offers the weekly technical support of an agroecological agronomist in all three productive units under the program. The Environment directorate and the Social Development directorate are also taking part, by contributing to the monitoring of agroecological production standards or by currently purchasing agroecological products aimed at food aid receivers.

At the same time, the assemblage is also constituted by the local School Council, a provincial collegiate body whose members are elected amongst the municipal political parties' candidates and whose responsibilities include the managing and monitoring of tendering processes for the local schools, hence the decision on the suppliers. Besides, the directors of the municipal institutions buying food, such as Social Development divisions or hospitals that directly purchase fresh produce, together with the kitchen and canteen personnel of these facilities that process and distribute the food, take part in the assemblage.

Concerning other actors, the aforementioned *CEA N30* has played a crucial role in bringing producers together and promoting agroecological practices, also it has advanced the cooperative by securing financing and resources for the production of fruits, vegetables, flour, or dairy. Its director being a former municipal employee who also worked to develop the consultation whereby the citizens succeed to convince the municipality to ban the use of glyphosate. Moreover, the agroecological agronomist who collaborates with the institution is also an important part of the assemblage, due to the monthly visits and online contacts by which the agroecological transition is ensured and maintained.

Additionally, other material elements constituting the assemblage are the spaces, like the producer's fields, both private and municipally owned, the hospitals, schools, or elderly homes where food is bought and the facilities of the *CEA N30*, where social and technical meetings of the cooperative *FRAAGUA* take place. Moreover, the agroecological fruits, vegetables and animal products that could be purchased; and the infrastructure needed to achieve the volume of production necessary or to accommodate the fresh produce, in the case of the institutional facilities.

Also, financial resources play a strategic role in the assemblage, especially when considering the often late municipal payment times; as well as the support from external professionals hired by the producers to achieve adequate levels of formalization that would enable them to engage with the state.

Besides, the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) that is being jointly developed by diverse local actors, could potentially play a role in the assemblage, making it possible to certify the agroecological productions. Finally, the current institutional requirements around procurement are relevant to the assemblage, mostly in terms of the supplier or product selection criteria, the payment times, and the transparency.

#### Expressive components

Regarding the elements of Guamini's PFP assemblage playing expressive roles, first it is possible to highlight the idea of PFP as an optimal way to support local producers by making use of the municipality's existing demand and redirecting it towards healthier products. Ideas around the better quality of agroecological products are also engrained in almost all the interviewees, together with the positive value given to purchasing local products for the local economy to be boosted. Likewise, ideas around the pricing of agroecological products also take part, in this case pointing towards a price reduction due to the elimination of intermediaries, but also as a strategy for everyone to be granted access to these products. As mentioned by Participant 23: *"We aim for our vegetables to reach everyone, all social classes, not just because it is agroecological it has to be for the upper social class, it has to be consumed by everyone"*.

Besides, many participants manifested their understanding of agroecology as a new way of living and interrelating with the environment and other humans; especially in the case of the producers associated to the CEA N30, given the interactions with the associated agronomist. As exemplified by Participant 28:

*"He (the agronomist) is a person who not only knows how to cultivate. He also tells you what this is for, what that is for. When I started talking to him, for example, I hated eucalyptus because it drinks the water from the lettuce, but he explained to me that eucalyptus also has its own ways and benefits. Because when it rains a lot it drinks the water too, so it helps you to keep it drier and it gives you shade all year round because the leaves don't fall off. And it's fabulous to know all those things that I might have thought about in a different way, from the negative, what it takes away from you, instead of what it gives you".*

Moreover, the constant exchange with the CEA N30 director constitutes an important part of their agroecological success. Participant 23 described him as follows:

*"He has an enthusiasm, and he is dragging the rest. He's always thinking what the other one needs. (...) And he could stay very comfortable in the CEA because he's the director and yet he is always there to support".*

In this sense, feelings of solidarity also take part, both expressed in words through formal arrangements when forming a cooperative, but also behaviourally through shared sacrifice and mutual help, which becomes of ultimate importance when starting PFP initiatives. As explained by Participant 29 when asked about the existence of surplus production for the municipality to purchase food: *"There is a growing organisation that empowers and enables better planning... In horticulture alone, in the last three years, we have gone from approximately forty tonnes per year to more than five hundred"*. Thus, ideas around planification also play a big role in the assemblage, as it is considered essential for the success of PFP.

At the same time, motivation and recognition are also involved and could contribute to the assemblage, as expressed by Participant 23: *"Let's say that it also gives us a kind of extra desire to work that you are actually valued in your own district"*. Moreover, receiving big amounts of money at once was also considered a positive thing of participating in PFP initiatives. However, feelings of frustration and mistrust in relation to the municipality were also expressed, especially when describing the tensions raised when the PROTAAL program was launched, as it prioritised new producers rather than supporting the already existing ones.

Also, some participants expressed confusion about the lack of communication between the municipality and the CEA N30, as it would be beneficial to avoid duplicities and enhance complementary actions that could optimise the assistance of producers. As articulated by Participant 24:

*"It is a pity. We always talk about it separately. They have achieved incredible projects by bringing infrastructure or bringing people, specialists, and we always talk about what it would be like if they joined forces, if they could come to an agreement, but well, no".*

Further, expressions of political will to assist the producers and enhance their commercialization opportunities, one pathway being PFP, were present in all municipal interviewees, like Participant 22 expressed: *"We also think of different commercialisation channels, as a way for these foods to also be purchased by the state, in principle by the municipal and provincial governments"*.

However, some municipal actors also articulated doubts about the suitability of producers for getting involved in government processes because of their apparently insufficient volume of production and lack of formalization, together with their inability to wait the time it takes for the municipality to pay back as opposed to traditional suppliers. As Participant 25 expressed:

*"On a daily basis, the complexity is the quantities and the logistics. Because I understand and I am an advocate, of course, of betting on those who are starting out, on the local, organic producer, but if they cannot meet the requirements, I cannot".*

Nevertheless, these doubts were mainly manifested in relation to long and substantial tendering contracts and not regarding direct purchases that are already happening, as many municipal institutions already procure their fresh products from local producers. Besides, cooperatives were seen as a more trustworthy partner, ensuring the fulfilment of the contracts, and being formalized, while at the same time operating more efficiently due to the task division that allows producers to focus on their fields while other commercialize.

#### 4.1.2 Recurring elements across cases

Despite the fact that these municipalities have different sizes and contexts, recurring elements across the three cases can be identified, which is valuable to characterize the municipal PFP assemblages and answer the first sub-research question.

Firstly, it can be argued that in all cases, PFP targets a somewhat definable group of agroecological producers. Especially in the cases of Rosario and Guaminí, the producers benefited are related to local agroecological networks that have been formed in collaboration with the municipality. These agroecological networks play a leading role in the transition towards more sustainable practices, the coordination of producers and the provision of resources, knowledge, infrastructure, etc. In Gualeguaychú, the agroecological transition is struggling to crystallize in absence of a defined agroecological network that clusters producers, sets common objectives, and assists with the actions needed for the production system to change. However, the support from representatives of certain organizations somewhat compensates that flaw, as it has helped to cluster producers and introduce them to agroecology or the importance of formalization; ultimately assisting the municipality to delimit the producers targeted by the policy.

As for the agroecological discourse, it is quite homogeneous in the three localities, where these productions are considered healthier, of better quality and more sustainable. Moreover, feelings of pride about the long-standing traditions of socio-environmental policies in the localities, particularly related to the regulation of the use of agrochemicals, were expressed in all three cases. Nonetheless, although Gualeguaychú seems to have the strongest political discourse around food system transformation coordinated by a flagship municipal policy, this does not necessarily translate into better support from the municipality to their agroecological producers.

Altogether, drawing on data from all three municipalities, it appears to boil down to certain actors (municipal or not) who are strongly committed to these changes, becoming a stewardship to protect and promote agroecological production. Moreover, it can be suggested that these different actions to advance agroecology are constitutive of so-called local agroecological networks, setup in different shapes and degrees of formality around local producers.

Besides, expressions of political will to introduce transformation by carrying out this targeted policy constitute important elements of all three assemblages. However, they coexist with doubts about it due to the unsuitability of the producers as opposed to the reliability attributed to traditional suppliers, which was a common theme among part of the municipal actors in the three municipalities. Although, some testimonies revealed considerable levels of formalization and production stability of the local farmers.

Moreover, concerns about the municipal payment times were also shared by all three groups of bodies in all cases; together with the need to adapt the current procurement regulations to the reality of local agroecological producers. In this sense, the novel reimbursement method introduced in Gualeguaychú is deemed a promising option. Also, doubts about the feasibility of PFP were linked to the climatic events increasingly affecting food production, as well as to the effects of the inflation, an omnipresent burden in the country that becomes especially relevant given the tardiness of government reimbursements.

Regarding the certification of agroecological products, the development of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is in the agenda of all three cases, although Rosario and Guaminí use an institutional certification resulting from the participation of the producers in municipal programs.

As for the case of cooperatives, they have an important role in Guaminí, by grouping many of the local producers; and in Gualeguaychú, in this case constituting a smaller sample of the targeted group with whom it is possible to dialogue and formally interact. Rosario lags behind in the matter, despite the fact that the boundaries of the group of producers are set through their participation in the municipal Green Belt project. In this sense, feelings of solidarity and mutual sacrifice were found most prominently in Guaminí, where associative feelings are cultivated within the cooperative. Followed by Rosario, where the group shares certain spaces and moments without a legal framework. Whereas in Gualeguaychú, group feelings were not identified, only in relation to smaller groups.

Further, the participation of intermediaries in PFP initiatives is a recurring theme as well, especially given their gathering of otherwise smaller productions that would not satisfy the municipal demand. In this sense, both Rosario and Gualeguaychú count on the involvement of external organizations as the way to proceed in the short term, especially given the lack of umbrella organization of producers and the different degrees of formalization of individual farmers. Guaminí, with its considerably smaller scale, can make use of the newly formed producers cooperatives as suitable partners for setting up PFP experiences in town.

Finally, all three municipalities participate in the project implemented by the RAMCC, of which this study is part of. Therefore, it can be argued that this intermunicipal network also takes part in all three respective policy assemblages currently developing. By playing material and expressive roles, both providing some infrastructure through this research but also enhancing the narratives and feelings around PFP circulating around the municipalities, they influence the development of PFP in the constellation arranged in this particular time and places.

## 4.2 Dynamics that shape the identity of the policy assemblages

In this section, the dynamics that shape the identity of the policy assemblages will be described in order to answer the second sub-research question. Thus, different processes of (de)territorialization and (de)coding happening within the municipal PFP assemblages will be outlined, further conceptualizing the policy assemblages at issue.

### 4.2.1 Processes of territorialization and deterritorialization

The terms territorialization and deterritorialization are used to describe how assemblages respectively come together or come undone (Savage, 2018). These two simultaneous processes either stabilize or destabilize the identity of the assemblage by increasing or decreasing the sharpness of its spatial boundaries or degree of internal homogeneity (De Landa, 2006).

#### *Territorialization*

As for the processes of territorialization occurring within the three policy assemblages, it is possible to start by describing the mechanisms by which their spatial boundaries are defined, that is to say, understanding territorialization literally and linked to a particular place. In all cases, the interpersonal networks created around PFP operate in the municipal jurisdiction, within the physical borders of the town. Even when coordinating efforts with regional or national authorities, it is with the local branches of these authorities; and the places where the food is destined are located in the municipality, such as in the interactions with the regionally managed School Council in Guaminí or the local office of the nationally based INTA in Gualeguaychú.

Territorialization can also be non-spatial and refer to the increasement of the internal homogeneity of an assemblage. For instance, the sorting process that exclude certain categories of people from participating in the assemblage. In this sense, the selection of agroecological or in-transition farmers as a target group for this policy contributes to the internal homogeneity of the assemblage and thus, can be considered a territorialization process. That is because in all three cases, the targeted producers constitute a small sample of the larger local producer's population, which includes not only different farming approaches such as conventional farming, but also those producing grains and oilseeds. Besides, other territorialization forces are political will and political commitment towards the arrangement of PFP policies, that were often highlighted by participants as necessary to make the policy assemblage come together, especially political will from higher municipal authorities.

At the same time, the internal homogeneity of the assemblages is increased through different actions enacted by the so-called agroecological networks associated to the targeted producers. It is relevant to emphasize that these actions do not only involve practical interactions, but also imply a certain degree of social bonding. In Rosario, this is done by the Green Belt project that clusters producers and provides them with technical and personal support, as well as resources and infrastructure to ensuring the continuation of agroecological practices. Moreover, intermediaries such as Suelo Común or local advocates of agroecology are also considered part of Rosario's agroecological network, thus also part of the territorialization. In Guaminí, the FRAGUAA cooperative functions in a similar manner, bringing together agroecological producers while also providing practical guidance and promoting their task division.

Further, Gualeguaychú's producers' group benefited from the work done by the INTA, that triggered the agroecological transition in town by mapping out the existing small-scale producers and emphasizing on formalization, certification, and cost calculation. Moreover, the work of other organizations, such as the local branch of the Secretariat of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture, also helped binding the components together, when trainings or information meetings operate as a stabilization process, as they are highly valuable for achieving the formalization of local small-scale producers necessary to participate in PFP processes.

The engagement of producers' cooperatives in the assemblage can also express territorialization. That is because the internal homogeneity of the assemblage is increased when such structure, that groups together local agroecological farmers, becomes a partner in PFP processes. By involving them as a group, the assemblage benefits from both the formalization and the already established relations, including the task and role division, which contributes to the consistent functioning of the policy. For example, in Guaminí, most of the interviewees related to the FRAGUAA cooperative highlighted the advantages of participating in PFP through the organization, as the common pool of production could guarantee the fulfilment of volume requirements and their administrative resources could ensure their ability to replace their products by similar ones that can be bought in other markets.

Besides, in all three localities, the work towards setting up a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) to certify local agroecological productions, contributes to the stabilization of the assemblage, as it brings together producers and other relevant actors, allowing interpersonal networks to form and social bonds to develop while also ensuring certain agroecological production standards, both things valuable for setting up PFP initiatives. In addition, interactions with intermediaries such as Suelo Común and Ñandé, in Rosario and Gualeguaychú respectively, could also be considered a territorialization process, as transactional prices are agreed upon the parts, homogenising the sales strategy of the producers. Also, it cultivates their interconnections by providing a regular meeting point, which contributes to the homogeneous functioning of the assemblage as well.

#### *Deterritorialization*

Through deterritorialization processes the spatial boundaries of the policy assemblages are shaken. In this sense, it can first be mentioned that involving producers from outside of town has destabilizing effects. A process that in Gualeguaychú has been identified in the prioritization of the UTT in negotiations around PFP, which has been manifested as a reason for discomfort by some of the interviewees, as most of the UTT representatives come from Buenos Aires and so does a considerable part of the products they sell in the municipal market. Besides, another deterritorialization process that destabilize the spatial boundaries of the assemblages is caused by the pressures of urbanization that force the conversion of agricultural land into industrial or living areas. As well as the pressures to cultivate commodity crops such as soy, that hamper the production of vegetables or fruit to actually feed the citizens, as was clearly identified in Rosario.

As for the deterritorialization processes that decrease the internal homogeneity of these assemblages, the present municipal procurement criteria are good examples. That is because most of the current supplier or product selection requirements are disconnected from the capacities of many of the local small-scale agroecological producers. Formalization requirements are too demanding and there is a mismatch between menus and producers' realities. Hence, only some producers are able to participate and compete with traditional suppliers. The same applies to current reimbursement terms, which exclude many producers who do not have sufficient financial means to wait for deferred payments.

Besides, change in political strategies and the termination of electoral cycles can also make the assemblage come undone. As well as the lack of coordination between municipal departments when working towards PFP initiatives, that was identified in all three cases to different degrees and can constitute an important deterritorializing force. That is because PFP comprises the harmonisation of the needs of institutions purchasing food, which are conditioned by budgetary and cultural factors, with the producers' situations in terms of availability, seasonality, etc. Thus, for the assemblages to be stabilized, coordination efforts among the different areas responsible for these processes would need to happen; together with some flexibilization of the formalization criteria and improvement of the municipal payment terms.

In addition, negative opinions about the feasibility of PFP, given the lack of formalization and volume of production necessary to engage with the state can also be deemed harmful for the maintenance of the internal homogeneity of the policy assemblages.

Regarding particular processes examples, in Rosario, although the PFP Working Table was set up as an interdisciplinary collaboration between various municipal areas, it does not include some, such as the Procurement and Supply directorate, which seems to fall short in addressing the policy holistically. Moreover, other factors contribute to the destabilization of the assemblage, such as budgetary cuts for the Green Belt project, where municipal agronomists are not even reimbursed for the gas spent when visiting the producers, having to make use of their personal funds to keep supporting them. Also, the indirect effect of the heavy application of agrochemicals in the surroundings of the fields of the Green Belt producers could also be considered as deterritorializing, making it difficult to ensure the agroecological standards of their productions. In Gualeguaychú, the municipal program PASSS showcase a strong will and commitment towards agroecology, healthier diets, and food system transformation. However, the policy does not necessarily translate into actual change and coordinated efforts are residual. Besides, the current production shortfall challenges the setup of PFP initiatives, which altogether, further destabilize the municipal PFP assemblage. As for Guaminí, the lack of understanding and agreement between key actors causes duplicities and inefficiencies, undermining the assemblage by delaying the policy to happen when optimal conditions are in place. In this sense, the poor communication between the different actors involved only contributes to the situation.

Finally, forms of resistance found within these policy assemblages can also be considered as deterritorialization processes. Bureaucracies are good examples of resistance within governmental authorities, as individuals engaged with the work of the state can decide to resist certain policies or apply them according to their personal criteria (Savage, 2020). In our study, some examples of these forms of resistance were shared by some of the participants, especially in relation to past PFP experiences that did not succeed partly due to this fact. For example, in Rosario, where regional authorities made normative changes to start buying local vegetables from Green Belt producers for the penitentiary system; in this case, much resistance was found from the employees of the penitentiary institutions, who sometimes refused to open the door when produce was being delivered, which resulted in the failure of the procurement process. Besides, past policies that failed to deliver their promised outcomes can also shake the identity of these PFP assemblages, as they contributed to the loss of trust and discredit of the state.

#### 4.3.2 Processes of coding and decoding

Assemblages are subject to processes of coding, in which expressive media intervene to describe and provide an identity to the mixture of heterogeneous elements, consolidating the effects of territorialization processes and further stabilizing the assemblage. However, assemblages can also be subject to processes of decoding, which allow for more flexibility (De Landa, 2006).

##### *Coding*

The use of the terms “agroecology” and “Public Food Procurement (PFP)” and the body of scientific knowledge and theory that it implies, can be considered acts of coding that describe the assemblage to which they are applied (Woods, 2015). In this sense, these concepts are operationalized in particular ways that serve strategic purposes.

The coding process around PFP is evidenced when considering that municipalities and other governments purchased food for decades without paying attention to specific attributes, such as if the food is local, diverse or seasonal; from whom it will be purchased, like local smallholder farmers or rather big retailers; and from what type of production system that food comes from, for example agroecology, that is aligned with sustainable practices (L. F. J. Swensson et al., 2021).

Therefore, the way in which PFP initiatives have been designed in the last decade or so, where government purchasing powers and regular demands for food have started to be used as policy instruments to contribute to sustainable development, can be considered a process of coding in itself. Besides, PFP is believed to have the potential to deliver beneficial outcomes for food production as well as food consumption, by enhancing agroecology and agrobiodiversity while promoting healthier and more diverse diets (L. F. J. Swensson et al., 2021). On this note, various benefits and their associated discourses coexist in the concept of PFP if linked to the local, agroecological and smallholder agriculture production. In this research, some of the discourses around potential benefits of PFP are mobilised. Thus, in the cases at stake, different actors have diverse starting points for engaging with PFP, describing, and providing identity to the assemblage diversely.

On the one hand, many interviewees connect this policy with the promotion of agroecology as a safer and more sustainable production system. Some discourses centre around reviving farmers customary knowledge, by which production practices did not rely on the use of poison aka agrochemicals such as herbicides or fertilizers. In Gualeguaychú, some actors described agroecology as a way to bring back traditional wisdom to regain balance and thus counter the toxic conventional agriculture. Besides, in Rosario, some municipal actors advocating for agroecology pinpointed the importance of rewarding the producers for their efforts in following agroecological practices, more labour intensive. In Guaminí, some producers explained how their vegetables are delivered without being totally clean, so some little bugs are visible to proof that the produce has not been sprayed.

Further, PFP is described as a way to ensure the purchasing of agroecological products, because market opportunities for agroecology are often more limited than those for conventional farming. As explained by some producers in Guaminí, PFP is extremely helpful to make their products known while becoming a stable source of income. Therefore, using the government purchasing power is considered crucial to upscale agroecological production, encouraging strategic planification and incentivising the compliance of agroecological guidelines to ensure a certain production standard. In this sense, municipal actors in Rosario see PFP as part of the policies to support agroecological producers of the *Green Belt project*.

Another eminent narrative in all three municipalities outlines PFP as a way to promote local food. That is because buying local is meant to create jobs, support the taxpayers, and ensure that the profit stays in the municipality while at the same time wealth is being distributed among local people. Moreover, PFP from local smallholders is associated with the elimination of intermediaries, which leads to a better price, thus being beneficial for both producers and consumers (the municipality in this case). Besides, PFP is also deemed to stimulate feelings of belonging in rural areas by generating opportunities in agriculture and contributing to the positive imagery of remote areas.

Finally, PFP is described in relation to healthier diets and considered a steppingstone for all citizens to access quality and safe foods, not contaminated by agrochemicals. In this sense, as Hammelman et al explain, *“through narratives regarding the bodily impacts of agrotoxins on both producers and consumers, these agroecological assemblages construct bodies that are ‘healthy’ and ‘clean’ as a result of engagements with agroecological production and in contrast to bodies produced through conventional agriculture that are ‘poisoned’”* (Hammelman et al., 2022, p.378). This is particularly present in Gualeguaychú, where in the context of the food policy PASSS, the goal is to provide nothing but healthy and agroecological foods in municipal institutions. Thus, PFP from local agroecological smallholder farmers becomes a mean to that end.

Also, some producers and related actors tap into this discourse, where making business becomes subsidiary to guaranteeing access to healthy food and feelings of solidarity and accountability also contribute to the construction of the identity of the assemblage. Discourses around keeping low prices for agroecological products, so everyone have access to them and their benefits, are also contributing to the description of PFP assemblages. Altogether, this process of coding can be linked to narratives around the potential of school feeding programmes to advance healthier diets for direct food consumers and the local community (L. F. J. Swensson & Tartanac, 2020).

#### *Decoding*

As for the processes of decoding that allow assemblages to gain some flexibility, a few can be named as occurring in the case studies. Firstly, some actors prioritise the support to small-scale producers over considerations about production practices, which makes agroecology secondary while opening the action range of the policy. This is particularly relevant in cases like Gualeguaychú, where many producers are yet transitioning towards agroecology and pick and choose some elements of it whenever it suits their operations.

Secondly, processes of decoding take place when intermediaries are put first. Something that is happening in Rosario and Gualeguaychú, where the inexistence of producers' cooperatives calls for innovative solution in the short term, such as the involvement of *Suelo Común* and *Ñandé*, respectively. This choice seems at odds with the discourse around short food supply chains and the elimination of intermediaries to decrease costs, but it makes it feasible to start buying local smallholder productions thus supporting those producers.

Further, conceptualizations of agroecological prices as higher due to the labour intensity and the smaller scale related to less mechanization, can also be described as processes of decoding. That is because they open up the debate on fair pricing and allow to explore the possibility of paying just amounts to producers who practice agroecology, even in the context of limited budgets.

Besides, in the case of Guaminí, direct purchases to agroecological producers that belong to the local cooperative are already occurring, without a normative disposition ruling. This can also be considered as a process of decoding, as the purchasing decision is subject to the personal criteria of those in charge at this moment in time, which introduces flexibility but also the risk of the lack of continuity.

Finally, informal communication and contacts between different actors to make PFP a reality without directly involving the municipalities can also be considered as decoding. As they have the potential to fulfil the ultimate goal of supporting local agroecological smallholders even when the authorities are not willing to cooperate. This approach can be found in Rosario, where different civil society organizations already buy produce from these farmers destined to soup-kitchens.

## 4.3 Influential flows of policies, ideas and practices

In this section, different flows of policies, ideas and practices that influence the development of these municipal PFP assemblages will be described in order to answer the third sub-research question. That is because, drawing on the work of Savage and Lewis (2018), it is argued that the creation of policies is deeply influenced by (transnational) flows of policies, ideas, and practices, but adapted to a specific context that depends on local factors and conditions of possibility.

In our case, the most relevant flows identified can be differentiated between national flows and international flows. The former comprising input from translocal networks and organizations operating across localities, with a strong focus in the Argentinian context. While the latter comprising transnational flows that can also be deemed part of a current focus on PFP in international arenas.

It is important to underline that the description of these flows is based on secondary data obtained through documentation, a method not formally captured during the data collection process. However, as these flows deeply shape the policy assemblages, their context and boundaries, it was considered necessary to include this information in order to thoroughly conceptualize these municipal PFP assemblages developing.

Moreover, it is not claimed that they are the only ones, but rather two relevant ones that shape the municipal PFP assemblages at issue, to the extent that they would look different or might not have been started to develop at all if it were not for the roles that these flows play (Savage & Lewis, 2018). The specificities of these flows influencing the municipal PFP assemblages will be outlined in the following sections.

### 4.4.1 National flows

As for the influential flows of policies, ideas, and practices within national borders that play an important role in shaping the characteristics of the policy assemblages. I start by highlighting the work of the RAMCC through the “Local Green Jobs” project, from which this research is a part of, and thus, a relevant source of input to which I had access over the course of this study. The efforts carried out within this translocal network of municipalities to introduce or deepen PFP on municipal agendas, can be considered an influential flow that has conditioned the assemblages. Together with the exploration for the creation of concrete tools aiming towards the generalization of PFP initiatives favouring sustainable ways of production.

However, ideas around redirecting the municipality’s regular demand towards higher purposes were not introduced by the project. In the case of Rosario, these ideas have been around for over a lustrum, with successful implementations in items like sustainable electronics. Moreover, the particular idea of satisfying the municipal food demand with local products has also been explored before in Rosario, by actors involved in the municipal urban agriculture program; and more recently put in practice through a pilot project by which local vegetables from Green Belt producers were bought for the penitentiary system. This institution depends on the regional government, although the efforts were a collaboration between some regional authorities and the municipal actors participating in the Green Belt project.

Nor do efforts towards connecting local produce and municipal needs happen to be new in Gualeguaychú, where regional authorities are working towards sourcing school meals from local agroecological producers in collaboration with the municipality; while the PASSS program also contemplated PFP from the start, back in 2018. Neither in Guaminí, thanks to the influence of the RENAMA, the translocal agroecological network of Argentinian municipalities, now accompanied by the work of the National Division of Agroecology (DNAE), that emerged recently in close connection to the former. In the case of Guaminí, local production is already being bought for certain municipal institutions.

As it has been evidenced, the work of the RAMCC has not brought a totally novel idea into the municipal policy game but has rather tapped into an existing trend within the municipalities at issue. Contributing to the further development of the policy by bringing in new ideas, perspectives, and confidence about the relevance of PFP, which could become the necessary boost for these policies to crystallize. Besides, following Santo and Moragues-Faus (2019), I argue that some of the value of the RAMCC lies in the provision of manly social and digital infrastructure. By creating a space for municipalities to connect and share knowledge through the participation in this study, they help the implementation of the policy while also supporting the spread of PFP to new municipalities (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019).

#### 4.4.2 International flows

Regarding international flows of policies, ideas and practices that influence the characteristics of the policy assemblages, the work of FAO can be acknowledged as utterly important. That is because, over the last decade, they have made efforts to document and draw lessons from PFP initiatives around the world. Some of these initiatives were promoted by FAO itself, such as the programme “Purchase from Africans for Africa” (PAA), jointly implemented with the World Food Programme (Rahmanian et al., 2016). While others emerged autonomously and were turned into a model for other Global South countries, such as the case of Brazil, made a reference to other countries through a technical cooperation agreement between FAO and the Brazilian federal government established (Coca, 2021). Moreover, in extensive FAO literature, PFP has been pinpointed as a promising institutional mechanism for advancing healthier diets and enhancing sustainable production (FAO, 2018; Rahmanian et al., 2016.; Swensson et al., 2021; Swensson & Tartanac, 2020); a process that culminated in the publication of the book *“Public food procurement for sustainable food systems and healthy diets”*, conceptualised as a comprehensive publication addressing the multifaceted nature and potential of PFP (FAO, 2021). The same applies to the concept of agroecology, especially because FAO’s definition of the 13 operational principles to guide agroecological food system transformation that translate the previously defined “10 elements of agroecology”, which introduced the concept into mainstream policy.

Altogether, it is hard to estimate the exact influence of these global policy ideas, practices, and organisations on the PFP assemblages at stake. However, their effect on the conceptions and actions of the municipalities under study, as well as on those of the translocal networks described above, cannot be dismissed. Some interviewees declared certain levels of exposure to FAO documents, events or training programmes, through which they got to know PFP and its potential as a game changer for food system transformation (L. F. J. Swensson et al., 2021). Thus, the role of FAO in informing what the concepts of “Public food procurement” and “Agroecology” mean and looks like is illustrated, both in its policy and practice. Nevertheless, as explained by Savage and Lewis (2018), it is not suggested that FAO has a direct “top down” over the PFP assemblages; but rather emphasize its strong influence in the framing of the policy and in the consideration of problems and solutions. As these ideas and practices have to be translated and assembled into the Argentinian context (Savage & Lewis, 2018).

Besides, it is important to stress the influence exercised through the participation of two of the municipalities in the “International exchange forum on sustainable public food procurement 2022”, organised as part of the joint project by FAO and the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) on implementing sustainable PFP practices to catalyse a shift towards sustainable urban food systems (IDOS, 2022). The forum brought together experts from Africa, Europe, and Latin America and was precluded by online city exchanges where Rosario and Gualeguaychú shared experiences, challenges, and ways forward, in relation to PFP, with the cities of Valencia (Spain) and Manabí (Ecuador). This concrete international flow of ideas and practices will foreseeable be influential in the expansion of the PFP assemblages. That is because many cities face similar issues when implementing such policy and thus, may benefit from exchanging ways to approach it (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019).

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter, I answer the main research question: “*In Argentina, how are municipal Public Food Procurement policies being assembled around agroecology?*”. To do that, I identify the main findings of the study by theoretically grounding my empirical results.

As outlined in the *Theoretical Framework*, the three interconnected theoretical foundations central to a policy assemblage approach suggested by Savage (2020) constitute the starting point of my analysis, guiding my conceptualization of the development of PFP initiatives that favour agroecological producers as policy assemblages. Besides, Savage’s (2020) account has led to the placement of relationality at the forefront and the consideration of aspects such as *heterogeneity, flux, power, or agency*.

Nevertheless, I move beyond his theoretical framework to present my main findings, exploiting the interrelatedness of the analytical foundations he describes to pinpoint the findings of this thesis. Finally, I present my reflections on the contributions and limitations of the study.

### 5.1 Main findings

#### 5.1.1 Finding 1

Rather than understanding municipal PFP in Argentina as a coherent thing or a “whole” definable by the sum of its parts, the analysis illustrates how the policy is purposively *made to cohere* when coming together (Savage, 2020). In two of three municipalities, institutional certifications of agroecological products were in place prior to the development of the policy assemblages; similarly, producers’ cooperatives were already operating, and support was granted to producers, in greater or lesser extent. Moreover, local intermediaries were already clustering agroecological productions and agreeing on prices with the producers. These accounts signify that the elements taking part in the respective policy assemblages constitute autonomous entities with emergent properties that exist beyond their interactions with other components of the PFP assemblages and thus could be reassembled into additional policy processes (Savage, 2020).

Likewise, on the basis of data, it is evidenced that PFP has become a point of intersection of pre-existing strategies for the promotion of local food production, the shortening of food supply chains, the enhancement of healthier diets or the advancement of agroecology. As the governments purchasing powers and regular demands for food are now redirected towards more complex desired impacts. Therefore, in line with McCann & Ward (2013), the analysis illustrates how strategic alliances are always evolving and could be modified, fully or partly, for the achievement of similar or completely different aims.

Besides, the analysis illustrates certain commitment to sustain the assemblage in the face of tensions and challenges, despite the mismatch between the current procurement criteria and the producer’s realities or the alleged producers’ unsuitability for engaging in state purchasing processes. This resonates with the work of Savage (2020), who highlighted the effort behind bringing together heterogeneous components to transform existing arrangements into something new that is maintained over time and struggles.

Altogether, in line with the insights of Savage (2020), my analysis shows that the policy assemblages in the making do not have an essence or singular rationality but rather a deliberated internal coherence resulting from the gathering of heterogenous elements for the development of the policy. Hence, that these components are now assembled around the strategic goal of establishing PFP initiatives that favour (agroecological) small-scale producers in the given municipalities, translates into the possibility to jointly operate with strategic impacts. This finding also echoes the work of De Landa (2006), who argued that relations between self- subsistent assemblage components can be described as *contingently obligatory* rather than *logically necessary*.

### 5.1.2 Finding 2

Another finding of this study points to the fact that these policy assemblages around PFP and agroecology can be considered an artefact of the present; holding together temporarily but subject to pressures and contestations that can impact the current arrangement of PFP policies favouring agroecology in these municipalities, by changing them, disrupting them, or even making them disappear (Savage, 2020).

My analysis shows that simultaneous dynamics take place within the policy assemblages, stabilizing or destabilizing their identities. On the one hand, processes by which assemblages come together (territorialization), such as the involvement of already existing and formalized producers' cooperatives; the different actions enacted by the so-called agroecological networks associated to the targeted producers, that bring them together and provide support, resources and/or infrastructure; or the coordination of efforts with regional authorities to implement PFP initiatives in the municipalities. On the other hand, processes by which policy assemblages come undone (deterritorialization), such as the lack of coordination between municipal departments; the communication obstacles amongst different actors; production shortfalls; or the mismatch between political discourse and effective assistance to producers.

These dynamics evidence that the policy assemblages are in constant motion, concurrently coming together and coming apart as a result of a variety of factors, while being temporarily concatenated (Savage, 2020). Moreover, they underline the consideration of policy assemblages as subject to forms of disruption, which was illustrated in the analysis by showcasing the fragility and discontinuity of municipal support, subject to budgetary constraints, political strategies, or electoral cycles; or through the description of (un)successful past experiences of PFP.

This finding also relates to the work of Savage and Lewis (2018) and their description of how policies might give "illusions of stability", until a wider look unveils the perpetual flux to which they are exposed. Which is also evidenced by the fact that ideas around PFP are not new in these municipalities, but now take different turns and developed in certain directions when influenced by the current context. Thus, delving into the idea of flux, it can be argued that PFP policies, in the terms envisioned in this study, are a product of current times, but might change, evolve, mutate, or even disappear. However, that does not put into question their existence, or their current "stability", but rather underlines their temporality and permeability, which ultimately unveils spaces of potentiality and change, for imagining how these policies around PFP and agroecology could be *made to cohere* differently (Savage, 2020).

### 5.1.3 Finding 3

The analysis makes visible how PFP emerges as a result of different actors creating certain conditions of possibility, while obscuring others (Savage, 2020). Following Li (2007), the focus was placed in understanding how issues are defined during stances of policy development. Thus, by recounting the (coding) processes by which the PFP assemblages are described, it was evidenced that specific discourses were associated with the advancement of PFP. In this sense, certain actors operationalize the concept of PFP for the promotion of agroecology, considered a safer and more sustainable production system; or to ensure the purchasing of agroecological products, that are often difficult to market. While other actors associate PFP to the promotion of local food that translates into municipal (economic) development; or connect it to the improvement of local diets through the provision of food free of agrochemicals. By linking PFP to the aforementioned narratives, various actors create different potentialities, as "*certain kinds of problems and solutions become thinkable whereas others are submerged*" (Li, 2007, as cited in Savage, 2020, p. 331). Additionally, the analysis evidenced how these different accounts provided depend on the positionality of the actors and their role within the policy assemblages, that is, depend on their power.

In contrast, on the basis of data, it appears that some actors try to obscure possibilities for doing policy differently. In this sense, many bureaucrats referred to the lack of formalization and/or volume of production of local farmers as a bottleneck for PFP to take off, expressing negative opinions about the feasibility of this policy in the given municipality. However, these testimonies do not necessarily match the possibilities or the short-term solutions that can be implemented to bridge the gaps by, for example, actively supporting the transition towards agroecology or involving intermediaries in the short-term to already implement PFP initiatives that create markets for agroecological products.

In tying these findings altogether, it can thus be concluded that in the process of development of the PFP assemblages that favour agroecological products, certain pathways become imaginable while others remain unconceivable. Which is strongly related to the situated and context dependent agency of policy actors and organizations, and the roles they play in the process of putting together PFP (Savage, 2020). Therefore, by linking PFP to certain narratives related to the advancement of agroecology, the imaginary of strategies for the promotion of agroecological products and practices is broadened, creating new potentialities for food system transformation. The same can be said about the strategies addressing healthier diets or municipal development.

#### 5.1.4 Finding 4

As a continuation of the finding presented above, the analysis reflects the performance of the state (the municipality) as a catalyst of power rather than its main holder. Thus, the potential for forging and resisting certain policy processes is distributed throughout all actors and components of the assemblage and power is deemed polycentric (Savage, 2020).

In this vein, this research has evidenced the crucial role of many non-municipal actors and assemblage components in the advancement of PFP initiatives that support agroecology. Therefore, other nodes of power consist of local agroecological networks, that bring together producers and lead the transition and sustaining of agroecological practices; producers' cooperatives, that have increased their negotiation power by unifying their voices; or intermediaries, who have the means to potentially make PFP work in the short term, given their formalization and logistic capacity.

Yet, this does not mean that power is equally distributed, as some actors have more capacity than others to impact the policy assemblages (Savage, 2020). In this research, that is exemplified by the fact that political will and command from higher municipal authorities, were often pinpointed as necessary to make PFP happen. After all, in line with the insights of Savage (2020), the analysis illustrates that the state remains a primary force that mobilizes power to steer the conduct of individuals towards specific ends.

That is notably the case in the event of resistance, understood as always embedded into power relations and thus, also lying within the state such as bureaucracies (Savage, 2020). In all three cases, most municipal bureaucrats seemed reluctant to changing their modus operandi to accommodate the requirements of PFP favouring agroecological producers. Moreover, episodes of resistance during the implementation of similar policies in the past were described by some of the participants. In this context, the aforementioned political will and command were identified as crucial to fight back and accomplish PFP.

Conclusively, different forms of power and resistance are integrated into the whole policy development process, from its preliminary stages to its actual operationalization. Therefore, as expressed by Savage (2020, p.330), *"we see that policies not only lack an essence or singular guiding rationale, but the same holds for the power and political relations that determine the nature of their production"*.

### 5.1.5 Finding 5

Another finding identified indicates that policies do not happen in a vacuum, but are deeply influenced by national and transnational policies, ideas and practices (Savage, 2020). This research has indicated that the role of the RAMCC is significant for the development of municipal PFP policies. That is because, although ideas about setting up PFP initiatives were not introduced by the project of which this study is part of; the visits, interviews, and related activities, appear to be useful to deepen the topic on municipal agendas. In this sense, various (trans)local and national agroecological networks have been identified as key drivers for the development of PFP policies. Yet, the social and digital capital provided by the RAMCC, are considered as highly influential (national) flows that impact the PFP assemblages.

These observations align with the work of Santo and Moragues-Faus (2019), who pointed out the potentiality of translocal food movements for connecting and exchanging knowledge between the participating municipalities. In this sense, the analysis illustrated that the different networks involved enhance the development of the policies while at the same time facilitating their upscale to other localities.

Regarding the international flows that influence the policy assemblages, the work of FAO was emphasized in relation to the construction of a body of knowledge and practice that could support the expansion of PFP initiatives around the world. In this sense, the analysis evidenced the significance of the documents, events or training programs that exposed the three municipalities under study to the concept of PFP and its potentials. Thus, in line with the insights of Savage (2020), it is possible to assert that the development of municipal PFP policies in Argentina can be partially understood as an artefact of these transnational flows.

Altogether, the analysis has described how some of these connections were made through the RAMCC or national agroecological network; what is connected to what, such as the municipalities with each other or to international organizations like FAO; and what these connections make possible or not, as there has been an important transfer of knowledge and social capital, that has not necessarily been accompanied by physical or economic capital. *Thus*, focusing on the national and international flows of policies, ideas and practices that influence the PFP assemblages, stresses the importance of relations established across spaces in the development of these policy assemblages (Savage, 2020).

### 5.1.6 Finding 6

The last finding points to the fact that the assemblage of policy components is profoundly shaped by context-dependent factors (i.e., specific conditions of possibility) and the relations established between them in the given time and place (Savage, 2020).

The analysis showcased how, in each of the three cases, the relations between the municipality and local agroecological networks, producers' cooperatives, and intermediaries played differently, resulting in the development of singular PFP assemblages. As mentioned above, the agency of actors and organizations is situated and context-dependent; thus, their creation of conditions of possibility is highly impacted by political and policy contexts (Savage, 2020).

Besides, the contextual differences are also reflected in the different operationalizations of PFP developed across the municipalities. In all three cases, place specific sorting criteria were employed to select the targeted producers. Moreover, different considerations were linked to PFP depending on the different aims at stake, such as the prioritization of agroecological producers in Rosario; the focus on healthy, safe, and sovereign food in Gualeguaychú; and the emphasis on local and rural development in Guaminí.

Altogether, it was indicated that policies can take varied forms, which ultimately underlines the importance of adapting policy to the local conditions of possibility. A significant implication, in line with contemporary debates around policy mobilities, is the challenge of “best practices” discourses, where policies can be transferred from place to place and expected to deliver similar outcomes (Savage, 2020). As evidenced in the analysis, even when municipalities have similar traits or trajectories, for example in relation to environmental commitment or to the support of agroecological farmers, the place-specific factors render complicated the copy-paste of policy formulas.

These observations problematize the relationship between policies in abstract and their impacts and outcomes in practice (Savage, 2020). In this sense, the accomplishments or failures during the development of municipal PFP assemblages cannot be solely attributed to the policy itself but are also a product of the broader context in which PFP is embedded. Besides, this reiterates the value of focusing on how these policies mutate and are translated when moved to different contexts, rather than how they are transferred (McCann & Ward, 2013). That is because, noticing how generic policies mutate to accommodate the local context ultimately provides us with more tools to render policies workable and long-lasting.

## 5.2 Reflection on the contributions and limitations of the study

This thesis is the result of assembling a variety of goals, motivations, and expectations for the last year, both in Argentina and the Netherlands. The study was part of an existing project, which entailed that my entry point to the cases was a network of municipalities and also encompassed challenges to accommodate my own academic pursuits into the agenda. Moreover, as elaborated on the *Methodology*, my role as an intern of the implementing project partner highly impacted the research design. As I was partly constrained by certain dynamics that were not necessarily stimulating critical research but rather aimed to contribute to the existing relations between the network (RAMCC) and the selected municipalities.

It is also important to highlight that data was collected before deciding for assemblage thinking as a theoretical and analytical framework. All the same for the conceptualization of the interactions between heterogeneous elements taking place around PFP and agroecology as policy assemblages. Yet, if an assemblage lens would have been applied from the start, more targeted questions could have been asked, unveiling more details and nuances that could strengthen the description of the elements, dynamics and influences shaping the PFP assemblages.

However, looking back at the data collection process, some of the epistemological commitments associated with assemblage thinking as outlined by Baker and McGuirk (2017) were indirectly adopted; and as a result, the methodological practices in policy research that they describe were partly applied. Hence, the data obtained was qualified for applying an assemblage lens, which facilitated the analytical work presented in this thesis. Moreover, as I was coming in the study through a municipal network, the policy assemblages rotate around municipalities, but that does not mean that this would have been necessarily the case if I had accessed the field differently, as interactions around PFP and agroecology happen beyond these conceptualized assemblages.

Besides, the flexibility and malleability of assemblage thinking entails some risks, namely the use of the term in overly descriptive ways that become mere binding exercises (Savage, 2020). Nevertheless, by presenting the main findings of the study in discussion with the theoretical foundations of an assemblage approach to policy analysis outlined by Savage (2020), this thesis has directed the attention towards the “tangible stuff” of policies, moving away from ideal types and engaging in a thoughtful conceptualization with explanatory power (Savage, 2018).

In that regard, this study has brought attention to the channels of power, politics and agency that delimit some possibilities for doing policy, while obscuring others (Savage, 2020). By abandoning the consideration of policies moving in a vacuum, it has been possible to identify the crucial role of certain actors in doing so for particular purposes. Moreover, the study has underlined the mutability of policies when exposed to different contexts. Hence, it has been evidenced how rather than simply determining or capturing what is there, assemblage lenses unveil spaces of potentiality and change (Savage, 2020).

That is particularly relevant for research around PFP, considered as a win-win solution and also deemed transferable to many diverse locations where it could deliver its promised positive outcomes. Yet, if these “template” policies are not translated into something conceivable within the local practices and conditions of possibility, PFP will not succeed to be implemented and sustained in the long term.

Additionally, this study has expanded on the work of Hammelman et al. (2022) and their account of agroecological assemblages in Rosario. By including the Green Belt project agroecological assemblage into the conceptualization of PFP assemblages developing in the municipality, new subjectivities and roles for related producers, municipal actors, and civil society representatives were identified. Thus, broadening the imaginary of strategies for the promotion agroecology and food system transformation.

Finally, on a more practical note, this study has provided with useful information for the further development of PFP initiatives that supports agroecology in Argentinian municipalities. Feeding back to the municipalities and municipal networks and supporting on the quest for PFP and the advancement of agroecology.

Ultimately, by applying a policy assemblage lens on a specific policy steered towards food system transformation and making use of three case studies in Argentinian municipalities, this thesis has opened up possibilities to explore *“how and why policy matters, and how it might be made better into the future”* (Savage, 2018, p. 310).

## 6. Conclusion

A wide array of policy-driven solutions to address the challenges associated with our current food systems are being deliberated. In this context, there is increasing attention being paid to the implementation of policies advancing agroecology and the setup of PFP initiatives. Moreover, these two approaches have the potential to be combined, by redirecting governments' purchasing power and regular demand for food towards agroecological products.

Nevertheless, research on policies combining PFP and agroecology falls short in addressing the relations and ways by which they come together, not often considering the interactions between different elements such as agroecological producers, networks, discourses, municipal actors, or regulatory frameworks. Additionally, many studies have concentrated on policies at the national level, overlooking the expanding role of municipalities and municipal policy for the achievement of sustainability goals and the enhancement of food system transformation.

In this regard, this thesis has strived to understand how municipal PFP policies that take agroecology into account are being brought together by drawing on three case studies in Argentinian municipalities. To do so, an assemblage lens was employed for exploring the interactions between different elements, such as bodies, materialities, discourses or feelings that are part of the policy development taking place. More precisely, the analytical framework was that of policy assemblages, used in policy studies to explore the constellation of actors, practices, processes that enhance the mobilization of specific policy ideas. Hence, the main research question of this study was formulated as follows: *"In Argentina, how are municipal Public Food Procurement policies being assembled around agroecology?"*

In order to answer the main research question of the study, three sub-research questions were formulated, aiming at conceptualizing the development of PFP favouring agroecological products in Argentina as policy assemblages. That is why, as presented in the *Empirical results*, three things were carried out on the basis of the data collected to answer the sub-research questions, namely: characterizing the three policy assemblages developing, by underlining the **expressive and material elements** interacting; identifying the **dynamics** in place within the assemblages; and lastly, describing the most **influential national and international flows** of policies, ideas, and practices.

Subsequently, it was possible to identify the main findings of the study that answer the main research question, that is to say: municipal PFP policies in Argentina are *made to cohere*; the policy assemblages formed are an artefact of the present; holding together temporarily but subject to pressures and contestations that can change them, disrupt them, or even make them disappear; PFP policies emerge as a result of different actors creating certain conditions of possibility, while obscuring others; different forms of power and resistance are integrated into the policy development process, thus, municipal governments are catalysts of power; policies do not happen in a vacuum, but are deeply influenced by national and transnational policies, ideas, and practices; and, the assemblage of policy components is profoundly shaped by context-dependent factors (i.e., specific conditions of possibility).

Altogether, this thesis has contributed to the understanding of the development of municipal PFP policies favouring agroecology through a policy assemblages' lens. By underlining the mobility of policies and identifying the role of certain actors in doing so for particular purposes, spaces of potentiality and change have been unveiled. Moreover, this thesis has highlighted the context dependency of policies, pointing to the need to adapt policies rather than copy-pasting them, which is especially important to consider given the potential envisioned for PFP, believed to be transferred to many different contexts and deliver its promised outcomes no matter what.

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## 8. Annex

### 8.1 List of interviewees

	Actor group	Place	Label
1	Other	Rosario	Representative of Rosario food bank
2	Other	Rosario	Lawyer specialized in PFP
3	Municipality	Rosario	Employee of Public Health, and Human Development Secretariat
4	Municipality	Rosario	Employee of (Supplies dpt.) Public Health, and Human Development Secretariat
5	Municipality	Rosario	Employee of Environment and Public Space Secretariat
6	Other	Rosario	Local advocate for agroecology - Cooperative of goods and services
7	Producer	Rosario	Producer Green Belt program (F)
8	Producer	Rosario	Producer Green Belt program (M)
9	Producer	Rosario	Producer Green Belt program (M)
10	Producer	Rosario	Representative of Urban Agriculture Program
11	Municipality	Gualeguaychú	Employee of Stock office
12	Producer	Gualeguaychú	Producer (F)
13	Municipality	Gualeguaychú	Employee at municipal natural reserve Las Piedras
14	Other	Gualeguaychú	Local advocate for agroecology - Social retailer
15	Producer	Gualeguaychú	Producer (M)
16	Producer	Gualeguaychú	Producer (M)
17	Municipality	Gualeguaychú	Nutritionist municipal kindergarten
18	Municipality	Gualeguaychú	Employee Supply and Treasury department
19	Municipality	Gualeguaychú	Employee for the regional coordination school meals
20	Other	Gualeguaychú	Member of the Secretariat of Family, Peasant, and Indigenous Agriculture
21	Other/Producer	Gualeguaychú	Member of the local branch of the UTT
22	Municipality	Guaminí	Employee of Production Secretariat
23	Producer	Guaminí	Producer (F)
24	Producer	Guaminí	Producer (F)
25	Municipality	Guaminí	Member of Local School Council
26	Municipality	Guaminí	Employee of Social Development Secretariat
27	Municipality	Guaminí	Employee of Procurement department
28	Producer	Guaminí	Producer (M)
29	Other	Guaminí	Member of Local centre of agrarian studies
30	Producer	Guaminí	Producer (M)

## 8.2 Participant Information Sheet



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### Compras públicas sostenibles de alimentos en municipios argentinos

#### HOJA DE INFORMACIÓN PARA PARTICIPANTES

Se le invita a participar en un estudio de investigación sobre compras públicas sostenibles de alimentos en municipios argentinos. La maestranda Fara Lledó San Mauro, de la Universidad de Wageningen en Holanda, dirige esta investigación en el marco del proyecto Empleos Verdes Locales (EVL). Antes de que decida participar, es importante que entienda por qué se está llevando a cabo la investigación y en qué consiste. Por favor, téngase el tiempo necesario para leer detenidamente la siguiente información.

##### ¿Cuál es el objetivo del estudio de investigación?

El objetivo es explorar el potencial de un modelo de compra pública de alimentos para impulsar la transición hacia sistemas agrícolas diversificados o la agroecología en 5 municipios de Argentina. Para ello, se abordarán diferentes cuestiones relativas a la oferta y demanda de alimentos en el contexto municipal, así como a los procesos administrativos asociados.

##### ¿Por qué ha sido elegido para participar?

Se le invita a participar en este estudio porque su aportación se considera relevante debido a su relación directa o indirecta con la temática a abordar.

##### ¿Cuáles son los beneficios de participar?

Al compartir sus experiencias con nosotros, ayudará a comprender mejor los principales elementos a tener en cuenta para el establecimiento de un modelo de compra pública sostenible de alimentos en el ámbito municipal argentino.

##### ¿Existen riesgos asociados a la participación?

No hay riesgos significativos asociados a la participación.

##### ¿Está obligado a participar?

No, depende de usted. Si decide participar, conserve esta hoja informativa y rellene el formulario de consentimiento informado para demostrar que entiende sus derechos en relación con la investigación y que está dispuesto a participar. Anote su número de participante (que figura en el formulario de consentimiento informado) y proporcíñelo al investigador principal si desea retirarse del estudio más adelante.

Usted es libre de retirar su información del conjunto de datos del proyecto en cualquier momento hasta que los datos estén totalmente anónimizados en nuestros registros el 31 de julio de 2022. Debe tener en cuenta que sus datos pueden ser utilizados en la producción de productos de investigación formales (p. ej. artículos de revistas, documentos de conferencias, resúmenes de políticas e informes) antes de esta fecha, por lo que se le aconseja ponerse en contacto con la universidad lo antes posible si desea retirarse del estudio. Para retirarse, póngase en contacto con la maestranda Fara Lledó San Mauro (los datos de contacto figuran más abajo). No es necesario dar una razón. La decisión de retirarse, o de no participar, no le afectará en modo alguno.

##### ¿Qué ocurrirá si decide participar?

Se le formularán una serie de preguntas relacionadas con la compra pública sostenible de alimentos. La entrevista tendrá lugar presencialmente/en línea en un momento que le resulte conveniente. Lo ideal sería grabar sus respuestas en audio/video (y para ello necesitaremos su consentimiento), por lo que el lugar debería ser una zona bastante tranquila. La entrevista debería durar entre 45 y 60 minutos. Su entrevista será transcrita. Se le entregará una copia de la transcripción.



#### Protección de datos y confidencialidad

Sus datos se almacenarán de acuerdo con el Plan de Gestión de Datos del Grupo de Sociología Rural de la Universidad de Wageningen. Toda la información recopilada sobre usted se mantendrá estrictamente confidencial. A no ser que se anonimicen en nuestros registros, sus datos serán referidos por un número único de participante y no por su nombre. Si consiente que se le grabe en audio/video, todas las grabaciones se destruirán una vez que se hayan transcrita. Sus datos sólo serán vistos por el equipo de investigación. Todos los datos electrónicos se almacenarán en un archivo informático protegido por contraseña en los servidores seguros de la Universidad de Wageningen. Sólo el equipo de investigación tendrá acceso a estos datos. Su información de consentimiento se guardará por separado de sus respuestas para minimizar el riesgo en caso de que se produzca una filtración de datos. El investigador principal se responsabilizará de la protección de sus datos, que se conservarán durante al menos 10 años tras la finalización del proyecto. Transcurrido este tiempo, los datos podrán ser destruidos.

#### ¿Qué pasará con los resultados de este estudio?

Los resultados de este estudio podrán resumirse en artículos publicados, informes y presentaciones. Las citas o las principales conclusiones siempre serán anónimas en cualquier publicación formal, a menos que tengamos su permiso previo y explícito por escrito para atribuirlas por su nombre.

#### ¿Cómo presentar una queja?

Si no está satisfecho con algún aspecto de esta investigación, póngase primero en contacto con la investigadora principal, Fara Lledó San Mauro (información de contacto más abajo).

Si sigue teniendo dudas y desea presentar una queja formal, escriba a [Carolina Soria, coordinadora Empleos Verdes Locales:](mailto:carolina.soria@ramcc.net)

[csoria@ramcc.net](mailto:csoria@ramcc.net)



RED ARGENTINA DE  
MUNICIPIOS Y ENTIDADES  
PARA EL CAMBIO CLIMÁTICO

Junín 191 - Alto Buró - Rosario (2000), Argentina

[información de contacto de la maestra Fara Lledó San Mauro:](#)

[fara.lledosanmauro@wur.nl](mailto:fara.lledosanmauro@wur.nl)

Teléfono: +34 663034605 (WhatsApp) / +54 3417414465 (Llamadas)

## 8.3 Informed Consent Form



Nº de participante:



### Compras públicas sostenibles de alimentos en municipios argentinos FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Se le invita a participar en este estudio de investigación. El fin de este es explorar el potencial de un modelo de compra pública de alimentos para impulsar la transición hacia sistemas agrícolas diversificados/ la agroecología. Asimismo, el estudio se realiza en el marco del proyecto Empleos Verdes Locales (EVL), del cual participan la RAMCC, IN SITU, la Cámara de Comercio Italiana de Rosario y Wageningen University & Research.

Antes de decidir si quiere participar, debe leer la Hoja de Información para Participantes que se adjunta.

No dude en hacer preguntas si algo no está claro o si desea más información sobre cualquier aspecto de esta investigación. Es importante que se sienta capaz de tomarse el tiempo necesario para decidir si desea o no participar.

Si está dispuesto a participar, confirme su consentimiento marcando con un círculo la palabra SI en cada una de las afirmaciones que figuran a continuación y, además, firme y feche el formulario como participante.

1	Confirmo que he leído y comprendido la <u>Hoja de Información para Participantes</u> para el estudio mencionado y que he tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas	SI	NO
2	Entiendo que mi participación es voluntaria y que soy libre de retirar mis datos, sin dar una razón, poniéndome en contacto con la investigadora principal (Fara Lledó San Mauro) o con el coordinador de EVL (Carolina Soria) en cualquier momento hasta la fecha especificada en la hoja de información del participante (31 de julio de 2022)	SI	NO
3	He anotado mi número de participante (en la parte superior izquierda de este formulario de consentimiento), que puede ser requerido por el investigador principal si deseo retirarme del estudio	SI	NO
4	Entiendo que toda la información que proporcioné se guardará de forma segura y se tratará de forma confidencial	SI	NO
5	No tengo inconveniente en que la información que proporciono se utilice (de forma anónima) en artículos académicos y otros resultados de investigación formales	SI	NO
6	Estoy de acuerdo en que la entrevista sea grabada en audio/vídeo	SI	NO
7	Estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio anteriormente descrito	SI	NO

Gracias por su participación en este estudio. Se aprecia mucho su colaboración.

Nombre del participante	Fecha	Firma
Investigador/a	Fecha	Firma
Fara Lledó San Mauro	30.04.2022	

## 8.4 Interview guide – Producer

### ENTREVISTA OFERTA

#### **Preguntas iniciales**

1. ¿Sabe de qué se trata la CPA? *Si/NO. Si la respuesta es NO pasa a la pregunta 5. Si es SI:*
  2. Cree que sirve para:
    - favorecer a los agricultores locales.
    - Mejorar el precio de compra actual de hortalizas y frutas.
    - Ninguna de las anteriores.
    - Otra, ¿cuál?
  3. ¿Cómo evalúa la viabilidad de implementarlo en tu localidad?
    - si es factible por qué?
    - si no es factible por qué?
  4. ¿Participaste de alguna experiencia por el estilo?
  5. ¿Qué le parece la idea?

#### **Producción de alimentos y explotación agrícola:**

*Qué, Cuánto, Cuándo:*

6. ¿Qué produce? (tipos de producto)
7. ¿Cuál es la superficie productiva del campo?
8. ¿Cuáles son las principales campañas agrícolas (estación) y la producción asociada? (producto estacional)
9. ¿Cuál es la producción total de cultivos y ganado? (volumen estimado)
10. ¿Cuenta con excedente productivo suficiente como para volcarlo en un sistema de compra pública?
11. ¿Cree que un sistema de compra pública puede favorecer la diversificación y el aumento de la producción?

*Quién:*

12. ¿Forma parte de alguna organización de productores?
  - a. En caso afirmativo, ¿es una organización formal o informal, tiene personalidad jurídica?
  - b. En caso afirmativo, ¿qué modelo asociativo adopta?
  - c. En caso afirmativo, ¿piensa que la organización tiene la capacidad suficiente para abastecer al municipio si se armara un sistema de compra pública? (en términos productivos, organización administrativa, logística, ...)
13. Respecto al uso de este campo, ¿es dueño o alquila? Si alquila ¿tiene contrato escrito o de palabra?

*Apoyo al agricultor:*

14. ¿Participa actualmente en alguna política nacional, provincial y/o municipal que apoyen a los productores? (ámbito técnico/capacitación, cuestiones financieras, contables y administrativas (p.ej. abrir una cuenta bancaria, firmar un contrato, pagar impuestos, análisis de costes), facilitando el acceso al crédito y/o a insumos)

*Agroecología:*

15. ¿Conoce la agroecología?
16. ¿Aplica métodos de producción agroecológicos?
17. ¿Participa actualmente en alguna política nacional, provincial y/o municipal que apoye a la agroecología?
18. ¿Qué autoridades y/o organizaciones están implicadas?

#### **Procesamiento de alimentos, postcosecha y almacenamiento:**

19. ¿Tiene algún nivel de procesamiento de alimentos o solo vende fresco?
  - a. En caso afirmativo, ¿cuáles son los principales tipos de actividades de procesamiento de alimentos en las que participa?
  - b. ¿Existe alguna organización y/ o actor que le asista en dichas tareas?
  - c. ¿Cuál es el nivel de acceso a la infraestructura e instalaciones necesarias?

- d. ¿Cómo aborda las normas de calidad e inocuidad de los alimentos?
- e. ¿Recibe algún apoyo institucional o por parte de la sociedad civil o el sector privado (p.ej. fundaciones, iglesias, ONG, cooperativas, escuelas, universidades, etc.) en este ámbito?

**Comercio y comercialización de alimentos:**

- 20. En caso de que se le compre su mercadería, ¿tiene vehículo adecuado para ello o contrataría un servicio (flete) a esos efectos?
- 21. ¿Vende su producción en la localidad?
- a. En caso afirmativo, ¿Dónde? (¿mercados municipales, mercado concentrador, etc.?)
- 22. ¿Recibe apoyo de alguna organización y/o actor en el proceso de comercialización (p.ej. intermediario o distribuidoras solidarios (DHO))?
- 23. Si vende producción agroecológica, ¿hay algún tipo de diferenciación (p.ej. certificación) con los productos convencionales?

## 8.5 Interview guide – Municipal actor

### ENTREVISTA DEMANDA

#### **Preguntas iniciales**

1. ¿Sabe de qué se trata la CPA? *Si/NO. Si la respuesta es NO pasa a la pregunta 5. Si es Sí:*
2. Cree que sirve para:
  - favorecer a los agricultores locales.
  - Mejorar el precio de compra actual de hortalizas y frutas.
  - Ninguna de las anteriores.
  - Otra, ¿cuál?
3. ¿Cómo evalúa la viabilidad de implementarlo en tu localidad?
  - si es factible por qué?
  - si no es factible por qué?
4. ¿Participaste de alguna experiencia por el estilo?
5. ¿Qué le parece la idea?

#### **DEMANDA**

##### *Planificación:*

1. ¿Qué dependencias municipales compran alimentos?
2. En esa dependencia, ¿las compras de alimentos están centralizadas o descentralizadas? Es decir, ¿lo define cada dependencia municipal que compra alimentos o está centralizada en el municipio?
3. ¿Cuál es el origen de los fondos para las compras (p.ej. municipal, provincial, nacional, otros)?
4. ¿A quién compran alimentos (p.ej. empresas, mayoristas, minoristas, productores)?
5. ¿Qué tipos de alimentos adquieren?
6. ¿Quién determina las necesidades nutricionales a cubrir con dichas compras?
7. ¿Cómo se elabora el menú de los diferentes establecimientos que reciben los alimentos?

##### *Contratos - PROCESOS ADMINISTRATIVOS:*

8. ¿Qué volumen tienen las CPA (puede figurar en partidas presupuestarias, rendiciones de instituciones, presupuestos del mm/ institución)?
9. ¿Se sabe el % de presupuesto (mm) que se destina a compra de alimentos?
10. ¿Con qué frecuencia se realizan estas adquisiciones?
11. ¿Qué método de compra pública se lleva a cabo actualmente (en el municipio) (licitación pública, compra directa, partida especial que maneja cada institución)?
12. ¿Cuál es la normativa que la rige? ¿Esta normativa da preferencia a la compra local y/o agroecológica?

13. ¿Qué requisitos de proveedores tienen dichas compras públicas (p.ej. requisitos de registro, garantías de oferta y cumplimiento, requisitos de calidad e inocuidad de los alimentos o especificaciones para la compra de alimentos)?
14. ¿Cómo se fija el precio de estas compras?
15. ¿Se contempla la posibilidad de pagar un diferencial o darles prioridad a los productos agroecológicos?

*SI TIENEN UN SISTEMA PÚBLICO DE COMPRA DE ALIMENTOS:*

16. ¿Cómo llegan los alimentos a las dependencias municipales correspondientes?
17. ¿Existe infraestructura para la recepción (pesar, lavar, limpiar, etc.), almacenamiento, elaboración, preparación y distribución de los alimentos?

**INTERMEDIARIOS**

18. ¿Existen organizaciones de la sociedad civil/grupos de consumidores que participen en la cadena de valor o estén relacionadas de algún modo con las compras de alimentos?
19. ¿Existen actores del sector privado que participen en la cadena de valor o estén relacionados de algún modo con las compras de alimentos?
20. ¿Cómo podría vincularse a los actores citados anteriormente en un sistema de compra pública? (esquema)

**Gobernanza:**

21. ¿Existen procesos indirectos de estímulo a las compras de productores locales?
22. ¿Existen mecanismos que garanticen la transparencia del proceso?
23. ¿Existen formas de seguimiento/evaluación de los resultados de las compras públicas?