



# CULTiVATE

## Food Sharing Governance Landscape Analysis in CULTIVATE hub locations: Utrecht

---

WP 4, T 4.1

**Authors:** Kim Medema, Ana Maria Gătejel, Noortje Keurhorst, Txell Blanco Diaz, Jessica Duncan, Oona Morrow, Lucie Sovova

How to cite this report: Medema, K., Gătejel, A.M., Keurhorst, N., Blanco Diaz T., Duncan, J., Morrow, O. & Sovova, L., (2024). Food Sharing Governance Landscape Analysis in CULTIVATE hub locations: Utrecht. Report. Zenodo.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, REA or UKRI. Neither the European Union nor the granting authorities can be held responsible for them.



Funded by  
the European Union



UK Research  
and Innovation

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Brief methodological note .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Desk-based research analysis .....	6
1.2 Semistructured interviews .....	7
1.3 Analysis.....	7
<b>2. Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Geography and economy .....	8
2.2 Demography.....	9
2.3 Governmental structure of the Netherlands and Utrecht.....	9
2.3.1 Political context.....	9
2.3.2 National, provincial and municipal government .....	10
2.3.2.1 National government .....	10
2.3.2.2 Regional government .....	11
2.3.2.3 Subnational governance: City Deals .....	12
2.3.2.4 Local government.....	13
2.4 Urban form.....	17
2.5 Buurthuizen – community centres.....	18
2.6 Volunteering in the Netherlands and Utrecht .....	19
2.6.1 Volunteering subsidies in Utrecht.....	21
2.6.1.1 Initiatievenfonds (IF).....	21
2.6.1.2 Volunteering for each other (VIVE).....	22
2.6.1.3 Social activities and day care.....	22
2.6.1.4 Together for Overvecht.....	23
<b>3. Community-Based Urban agriculture (CBUA) .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	24
3.1.1 Green space .....	24
3.1.2 Glossary of CBUA types.....	24
3.2 Regulatory regimes shaping the food sharing landscape in Utrecht.....	25
3.2.1 The main social movement and community organisations operation in the CBUA arena in Utrecht .....	26
Utrecht Natuurlijk.....	26
Volkstuinen (allotment gardens) .....	27
Community gardens.....	28
Non-profit agricultural foundations .....	28



3.2.2 The main private sector CBUA enterprises in Utrecht.....	29
3.3 Main policies, regulations and plans regarding CBUA in Utrecht.....	29
3.3.1 Key municipal departments .....	29
3.3.2 Spatial development strategy .....	30
3.3.3 Policies and regulations .....	31
3.3.4 Subsidies.....	33
3.3.5 Projects and programs .....	35
3.4 Main enablers to food sharing practices related to CBUA in Utrecht .....	37
3.4.1 Access to funding and institutional support .....	37
3.4.2 More (public) space for urban agriculture.....	37
3.4.3 Urban agriculture as a social tool .....	38
3.4.4 Collaboration among municipal departments.....	38
3.4.5 Participation, volunteering and self-organisation .....	38
3.4.6 Networks for sharing knowledge, skills and opportunities .....	38
3.5 Main barriers to food sharing practices around CBUA in Utrecht.....	39
3.5.1 Fragmentation and bureaucracy.....	39
3.5.2 Lack of political ambition and consideration of CBUA in urban planning .....	40
3.5.3 Limited and monopolized funding .....	41
3.5.4 Reliance on volunteers.....	41
3.5.5 Legislation on animal agriculture .....	42
3.6 Conflicting interests among different actors involved in FSIs related to CBUA .....	42
3.6.1 Competition for space.....	42
3.6.2 Private, communal and public food growing.....	42
3.7 The influence of the cultural and socio-ecological context.....	43
3.7.1 Cultural context.....	43
3.7.2 Socio-political context.....	44
3.7.3 Ecological context .....	44
3.8 Conclusions .....	45
3.9 Recommendations .....	46
3.9.1 Recommendation to municipality .....	46
3.9.2 Recommendation to civil society:.....	46
3.9.3 Recommendation to private sector:.....	46
3.10 Future lines of research .....	47
<b>4. Food Waste Recovery and Redistribution (FWR) .....</b>	<b>48</b>



4.1 Introduction .....	48
4.2 Regulatory regimes shaping food sharing landscapes in Utrecht .....	48
4.2.1 The main social movements and community organisations operating in the FWR arena.....	48
4.2.1.1 Food collection and meal sharing.....	49
4.2.1.2 Foodbanks .....	50
4.2.2 The main private sector enterprises operating in the FWR arena? .....	52
4.2.3 Main policies, regulations and plans regarding FWR.....	52
4.2.3.1 European regulations .....	53
4.2.3.2 European Strategies .....	53
4.2.3.3 National Government .....	53
4.2.3.4 Key regulations relevant for food sharing initiatives.....	56
4.2.3.5 Municipal Policies.....	58
4.2.3.6 Relevant subsidies .....	60
4.3 Main enablers to food sharing practices related to FWR in Utrecht.....	61
4.3.1 Participation and passionate volunteers .....	61
4.3.2 Space for operation.....	62
4.3.3 Cooperation with private sector .....	62
4.3.4 Institutional leniency and support .....	63
4.3.5 Funding from public and private sector .....	63
4.4 Main barriers to food sharing practices related to FWR in Utrecht .....	64
4.4.1 Lack of clarity on expiration dates .....	64
4.4.2 Fragmented and unclear institutional environment .....	65
4.4.3 Access to funding and infrastructure.....	66
4.4.4 Reliance on volunteers.....	67
4.4.5 Reliance on businesses' good will .....	67
4.4.6 Food quality and uncertainty of food supply.....	67
4.4.7 Acquiring healthy food.....	68
4.4.8 Social stigma.....	68
4.5 Relationship and conflicting interests between public, private and civil society actors.....	69
4.5.1 FSIs and the Private Sector .....	69
4.5.2 FSIs and the Public Sector .....	69
4.6 Recommendations .....	70
4.6.1 For the municipality: .....	70

4.6.2 In relation to the civic sector .....	71
4.6.3 In relation to the private sector .....	71
4.7 Conclusions .....	71
4.8 Future lines of research .....	72
<b>5. Social and solidarity economy (SSE) .....</b>	<b>73</b>
5.1 SSE in the Netherlands .....	73
5.1.1 Solidarity Economy in the Netherlands and Utrecht .....	73
5.1.1.1 <i>Food for (political) thought</i> .....	74
5.1.1.2 <i>Solidarity Purchasing</i> .....	74
5.1.2 Social Economy in the Netherlands and Utrecht .....	75
5.1.2.1 <i>Social Enterprises</i> .....	75
5.1.2.2 <i>Care farms</i> .....	77
5.1.2.3 <i>Meal and food sharing</i> .....	77
5.1.2.4 <i>Food for community building</i> .....	78
5.1.3 Funding & Subsidies for SSE food sharing.....	79
5.1.3.1 <i>Grants for community centres</i> .....	79
5.1.3.2 <i>Grant for citizen initiatives: Initiative Fund</i> .....	80
5.1.3.3 <i>Volunteering subsidy</i> .....	80
5.1.3.4 <i>Social work subsidy</i> .....	81
5.1.3.5 <i>U-pas</i> .....	81
5.1.3.6 <i>Cultural Events Subsidies</i> .....	81
5.1.3.7 <i>Diverse sources of income</i> .....	82
5.2 Discussion.....	82
5.2.1 Role of the public sector .....	82
5.2.2 Cooperation across sectors.....	82
5.2.3 Participation .....	83
5.3 Conclusion .....	83
<b>Appendix 1: renting municipal community centres (buurtcentrum, buurthuisjes).....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>86</b>

# 1. Brief methodological note

---

The analysis of the governance landscape of food sharing initiatives in Utrecht required a mixture of methods and data sources. In order to maximise comparability between the three Hub cities, we developed a detailed research protocol to conduct the analysis of the food governance landscape. First, three research questions were defined to explore these governance landscapes:

- RQ1: How are regulatory regimes shaping food sharing landscapes, and what is their impact on FSIs?
- RQ2: What are the main place-based enablers for and barriers to sustainable food sharing in the three cities?
- RQ3: What is the influence of the cultural and socio-ecological context in shaping FSIs?
- The methodology employed a combination of desk-based research analysis and semistructured interviews with key informants in order to gather relevant data to address the research questions.

## 1.1 Desk-based research analysis

The online search mostly took place on local repositories, such as those from the local, regional, and national administrations. Members of the city administration partner of each local team provided valuable knowledge to identify relevant repositories. Additionally, this was complemented by Google searches adding key local words. We used a set of keywords for the online search. These were translated into Italian. Local teams also added extra keywords that they thought could be relevant considering the local context.

List of keywords:

- food sharing
- urban garden
- urban agriculture
- community garden
- community composting
- community kitchen
- community cooking
- food waste
- food redistribution
- food surplus
- social and solidarity economy AND food.

Documents were selected when they responded to relevant governance categories such as:

- Local strategic plans and programmes
- Legislation: bills, ordinances, regulations, etc.
- Projects
- Official reports

- Existing studies on food sharing governance of the specific city.

Each Hub location complemented this list with other types of documents that they considered relevant for conducting the analysis in their specific context.

## 1.2 Semistructured interviews

Each Hub location had to select between three and five participants for each of the food sharing arenas according to the following criteria:

- The sample had to cover the three food sharing arenas, taking into account the priority research topics of each Hub location.
- Interviewees had to have extensive experience in at least one of the food sharing arenas.
- The sample had to include participants who had taken part in the governance of FSIs at a diversity of administrative levels and positionalities.
- The sample had to include food sharing practitioners, government officials in relevant departments or agencies, and others if relevant.
- Most of the participants had to be based in the study location and familiar with its local context.
- The sample had to be gender diverse, and the inclusion of minority populations, when possible, had to be a priority. Each city will recruit a group of at least 10 key informants to be interviewed.

In Utrecht, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews, which lasted 40 to 80 minutes. The interviews were recorded and anonymised. We transcribed and analysed them using the qualitative software Atlas.ti.

## 1.3 Analysis

The codification process for both the grey literature and the semi-structured interviews was based on a tree code category developed from a systematic literature review of academic articles focused on governance and food sharing. An initial tree code was developed and later discussed through a participative process with CULTIVATE partners, a total of 48 participants representing academia, policymakers and food sharing initiatives across Europe. The tree code aimed to identify potential barriers and enablers using two levels of categories. The first level listed eight broad categories of barriers and enablers: actors' discourses, internal organisation, knowledge, participation, regulations, relations between actors, resources, and structural factors. Each category contained a second level of codes representing the most relevant aspects of the first-level categories. We complemented the tree code during the process of analysis of the documents and interviews.

## 2. Introduction

---

### 2.1 Geography and economy

The Netherlands is the 5<sup>th</sup> most densely populated country in mainland Europe with current population numbers reaching 17,635,930. Currently, 92% of the inhabitants live in urban areas with a density of 522 per Km<sup>2</sup>. Utrecht is a part of the Randstad region - an urban agglomeration made up of 16 municipalities from four provinces: Zuid-Holland, North Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland – which accommodates 41% of the total population. Utrecht is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city, in the Netherlands and the capital city of the Utrecht Province.<sup>1</sup> The city area of nearly 100 square kilometers is organized into 10 districts with over 110 neighborhoods, which in turn also have sub-neighbourhoods<sup>2</sup>. Situated in the center of the country, Utrecht city is traversed by four rivers connected by canals built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, called Oudegracht. The central station of Utrecht is an important hub for national and international rail travel, with a total of 216 000 travelers passing through Utrecht central station every day<sup>3</sup>.

Of the total surface of the Netherlands, 54% (2,2 million hectares) is used for agriculture, with a national average farm size of 41 hectares [27]. In Utrecht Province, most of the agricultural land is used as grasslands and dairy production, fruit and vegetable production accounts for an insignificant share of food produced in the region. From a recent FAO report, it appears that in the U10 Region, which includes Utrecht City and neighbouring municipalities, the agricultural landscape is made up of small-scale farms and gardens with an average farm size of 4 hectares

The Randstad holds political and cultural importance at the national level and generates 46% of the total Dutch GDP and Utrecht Province records the second-highest GDP per capita in the Randstad area<sup>4</sup>. At the national level, the household average income is €46,900 per year. The Utrecht City average income was €55,000 in 2021<sup>5</sup>. The Central Bureau for Statistics reports 8% of Dutch residents to be at risk of poverty as of 2019<sup>6</sup>. Dutch residents spend around half of their income on housing and utilities. The share of income spent on food items is around a quarter of the total private income in 2021<sup>8</sup>. An economic trend observed in 2022 is an 11% increase in food prices, signalling a potential impact on overall household budgets<sup>9</sup>. This price surge might contribute to shifts in spending patterns and increase need for food assistance.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/visualisaties/dashboard-bevolking/regionaal/inwoners>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/wonen-en-leven/wijken/indeling-wijken-en-buurtten/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/city-of-utrecht/this-is-utrecht/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Randstad>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2008/15/randstad-economy-fourth-largest-in-europe>

<sup>6</sup> <https://longreads.cbs.nl/the-netherlands-in-numbers-2023/what-is-working-peoples-income/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://longreads.cbs.nl/the-netherlands-in-numbers-2021/how-many-families-are-at-risk-of-poverty/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/visualisaties/income-distribution-spendable>

<sup>9</sup> <https://longreads.cbs.nl/the-netherlands-in-numbers-2023/how-much-more-expensive-did-food-get/>



## 2.2 Demography

In 2019, the Utrecht province recorded a population of 1.38 million people, making up 8% of the Dutch population. Utrecht city is home to 367 947 inhabitants, as of 2023, who live at a density of 3,924 persons per square kilometre. Utrecht City's population is expected to reach 400,000 inhabitants between 2024-2029<sup>10</sup>. To accommodate the new inhabitants, the municipality is planning to build over 60,000 homes between 2023 and 2040<sup>11</sup>, almost all of which will be built within the existing boundaries of the city (DOC-UTR-12, p.138). The population of Utrecht city is younger than the Dutch average<sup>12</sup>. This is largely due to Utrecht University, one of the larger universities in the country, hosting over 31,000 students yearly.<sup>13</sup> In the city of Utrecht alone, 53 % of registered residents have a university diploma and 28% have a secondary education diploma, including some form of vocational schooling.

The city of Utrecht has a high level of cultural diversity being home to 172 nationalities. Almost 40% of the residents are either first or second-generation migrants. According to the 2020 statistics, 33% are from the EU, 23% from Morocco, 10% from Turkey, 8% from Suriname and Dutch Antilles, while the remaining 24% are from other non-EU countries [5]. While 60% of the population declared no religious affiliation, 28% identify as Christians, 10% as Muslim, and almost 1% adhere to Hinduism [6]. This contributes to a vibrant and dynamic cultural life. For example, during Ramadan religious and non-religious organizations alike prepare Iftar meals to be shared with the wider community [24].

## 2.3 Governmental structure of the Netherlands and Utrecht

### 2.3.1 Political context

In the municipal elections held in 2022, Utrecht city residents with the right to vote, re-elected a progressive cabinet formed of a coalition between GroenLinks, the Green Party (18.5%) and D66-the Social Liberal Party (16%), holding the majority of the City Council seats [6]. During the Provincial Elections in 2023, citizens of the Netherlands, including the Utrecht Province, voted in favour of the BBB (BoerBurgerBeweging-Farmer Citizen Movement), the conservative right party established in 2019. The most recent parliamentary elections in November 2023 resulted in the mostly-right, openly racist, populist party, PVV (the Freedom Party) winning a majority of seats in parliament [23].

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/publicaties/onderzoek-en-cijfers/onderzoek-over-utrecht/bevolkingsprognose/#:~:text=Met%20de%20groei%20van%20het,4.760%20inwoners%20per%20km2>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.rtvutrecht.nl/nieuws/3671644/utrecht-verwacht-400000ste-inwoner-in-2029>

<sup>12</sup> <https://allecijfers.nl/gemeente/utrecht/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.provincie-utrecht.nl/english>

## 2.3.2 National, provincial and municipal government

### 2.3.2.1 National government

The political system of the Netherlands is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The government consists of the King, the Prime Minister, and the ministers. The parliament has two chambers, one of which (Tweede Kamer- Lower Chamber) is elected directly by Dutch citizens. The electoral system works based on a list system of political representation. Elections are held for the four different levels of governance: national parliament, provincial councils, regional water authorities, and municipal councils.

Nationally, the [Ministry](#) of Agriculture, Nature and Food is responsible for policy on agriculture, nature management, forestry, fishery and food quality. In the area of food and food sharing, the ministry mainly creates policies and rules on food quality, and those subject to these rules are audited by the Dutch Authority of Food and Goods ([NVWA](#)). Any professional (community) kitchen or restaurant is obliged to follow regulations for food quality and undergo auditing by the NVWA. Furthermore, the policies of the Ministry of Public Health, Wellbeing and Sport concerning food are mainly about promoting individual healthy lifestyles and eating, and striving for supportive (green) environments that foster encourage physical activity.

The national government is generally quite hesitant in creating policies around food that directly influence individual consumers, due to the perception of such measures as *betutteling* or paternalism in English. This term is often used to express dissatisfaction with perceived overregulation or interventions in personal choices and freedoms. One specific example where this concept is applied is in discussions about government involvement in regulating dietary choices, where certain measures aimed at promoting healthier eating habits may publicly be considered instances of *betutteling*. This is in line with the neoliberal tendency that has been in the Netherlands for years.

### 2.3.2.2 Regional government

Administratively, the Netherlands is organized into twelve provinces, each with its own representative body and government. The provincial governments oversee matters such as spatial planning in rural areas, regional accessibility and regional economic policy. The provincial governments act as an intermediary between the central government and the municipalities. The full task package of provinces can be read in the figure 1.

The province:

- determines whether towns and villages can expand and where business parks and office parks can be built. This is stated in the Spatial Planning Act;
- determines where roads, railways, shipping links, industrial areas, agricultural and nature areas and recreational facilities will be located. The province makes so-called structure plans for this purpose. Municipalities take this into account when making their zoning plans;
- is responsible for the construction and maintenance of provincial roads, cycle paths and bridges;
- ensures clean swimming water and safe routes for trucks carrying hazardous substances. This is stated in national environmental legislation;
- realises new nature and preserves current nature;
- monitors compliance with environmental laws on air, soil and water. In addition, the province combats pollution, for example through soil remediation;
- supervises the water boards
- supervises the municipalities. Each year, the municipalities have their budgets and annual accounts approved by the provincial executive.

Figure 1. Tasks of Dutch provinces as [described](#) by the national government

From the starting point that land management and agriculture are part of the provincial task, the province of Utrecht has created a [food agenda](#) which was active between 2021 and 2023. This food agenda focuses on making the regional food sector more sustainable through stimulating short chain production, and healthy and sustainable consumption patterns (DOC-UTR-03). To work towards these goals, the province hosts networking events, provides funding (e.g., for Operation Food Freedom described in 2.1.3), highlighting best practices through an award, and takes part in other projects such as *Regio Deal Foodvalley* (a diverse cooperation of public, private and civic actors for the creation of healthy food environments).

Additionally, the Netherlands is divided into 21 Water Councils (Waterschappen) which are responsible for the control and improvement of water management, including levying taxes, planning and building as well as issuing permits and the treatment of sewage water in designated municipalities. Regardless of citizenship, EU citizens and non-EU citizens holding a legal resident permit have the right to vote in the water authority elections.

### 2.3.2.3 Subnational governance: City Deals

A notable governance structure in the Netherlands that may be unique internationally is the subnational City Deals in which the municipalities of cities form alliances to work on various topics. The City Deals are officially defined as “concrete cooperation”<sup>14</sup>. The cities contractually commit to work together on “growth, quality of life, and innovation [...] working on concrete urban transition challenges”<sup>15</sup>. The collaborations do not only involve cities but also the national government, businesses and civil society organisations. Cities work independently and/or together on projects or programs within the goals of the City Deal. Provinces also participate, but less frequently than cities. There are City Deals on many different kinds of topics, past Deals for example are “circular city”, “the inclusive city”, “food on the urban agenda” and “climate adaptation”.

The municipality of Utrecht currently takes part in eight City Deals on various topics. Those most relevant to food sharing and urban agriculture are “healthy and sustainable food environments (2021-25), and its predecessor, “food on the urban agenda” (2017-19) (DOC-UTR-13; DOC-UTR-56). Also of relevance to the Social and Solidarity Economy is the current City Deal “Impact Entrepreneurship” (2021-25) which has a focus on social enterprise.

City Deal “food on the urban agenda”(2017-19) was formed in reaction to an official letter from the Ministry of Economics to the Second Chamber (e.g. parliament) which describes the urgency of creating a (national) food agenda that can address robustness, sustainability and health in an integrated way. This City Deal was an attempt to clarify the role of cities in the food agenda with a particular focus on: regional food systems and short food supply chains; education, inclusion and healthy food environments; and administrative and sustainability innovation. According to the City Deal website, this Deal resulted in a prominent place for food on the political agenda of Dutch cities. However, the impact of the City Deal on Utrecht’s stalled food policy agenda is unclear. The City Deal did, however, lead to the development of a [Recipe book](#) of good practices in local food policy in Dutch Cities and Provinces, where Utrecht’s edible neighborhood Rijnvliet and Voedseltuyn Overvecht are featured. A summary of the whole City Deal was created in [magazine format](#), which states that the most important result is the formation of networks within the participating municipalities and provinces. The network was centred around exchange of knowledge and experience. This City Deal led to the creation of a follow-up City Deal called “healthy and sustainable food environments” in which Utrecht municipality is also a participant (DOC-UTR-13; DOC-UTR-56).

The ambition of the City Deal “healthy and sustainable food environments” is to make the food environment predominantly healthy and sustainable by 2030. Especially around schools, in public buildings, in supermarkets, catering and restaurants. In this way the City Deal aims to contribute to fitness, vitality, disease prevention and a nature, environment and climate system in balance. The focus of this City Deal is on the possibilities of influencing the streetscape in terms of what food businesses are allowed to settle where. Currently government, whether national, regional or local, has no control over the distribution and (non) diversity of food businesses. The zoning plans of cities and regions include commercial destinations, but there is no policy or governance tool to reject unwanted businesses. The only possibility is to start a conversation with businesses and other

---

<sup>14</sup> City Deals general information <https://agendastad.nl/city-deals/>

<sup>15</sup> City Deals general information <https://agendastad.nl/over-agenda-stad/>

stakeholders involved. There have been instances in which municipalities engage with business owners of a certain street or region and attempt to come to agreements on what food is on offer in their businesses (field notes from conversation with municipal official from public health, 2023).

Utrecht's participation in the current City Deal centres around the development of a new neighbourhood called [Cartesius](#) which will serve as a living lab for Utrecht and the City Deal. Utrecht is attempting to create a healthy neighbourhood in collaboration with various partners, mainly the contractors and some academic partners. They want to create a healthy streetscape, but as mentioned, there is no tool or policy that gives the municipality deciding power. The municipality will attempt to succeed by collaboration and conversation with the businesses that will come to reside in the neighbourhood. Cartesius is currently still in the planning and design phase. Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Ede also have a living lab, or even three in the case of Amsterdam, in which they develop new neighbourhoods or redesign existing ones. All living labs attempt to do the same thing: create healthy streetscapes.

In order to finance the activities of the City Deal, cities commit five or ten thousand euros to the City Deal each year, depending on their size (smaller or larger than 100 thousand residents). The national government departments of Internal affairs, Agriculture, nature and food quality, and Public health, wellbeing and sport each commit 25 thousand a year, plus another one-time inlay of 30 thousand by internal affairs. Other participating parties make in-kind contributions. The financial inputs are bundled together and used within the City Deal. How much funding is allocated to what project or process within the City Deal is unclear from the information available. In addition to the monetary input expected from participating actors, all actors are also expected to use two work days per month for activities arising from the City Deal.

#### 2.3.2.4 Local government

As of 24 March 2022, the Netherlands has 344 municipalities. The number of municipalities has decreased considerably in recent years because many small municipalities have been merged as a part of municipal redivisions to increase administrative power and professionalism. In 1970, there were 913 municipalities. The municipality of Vleuten-De Meern (East of Utrecht), merged into Utrecht municipality in 2001.

Every municipality has a municipal council, a mayor and a college of mayor and aldermen. An important task of the municipal council is to monitor the college. The college is accountable to the municipal council. An alderman cannot be a member of the municipal council. Municipal councils are directly chosen through elections by Dutch and EU citizens registered in the municipality; non-EU nationals are excluded from voting unless they have been living in the country for more than five years. The size of a municipal council depends on the size of the municipality. Utrecht's council consists of 45 councillors. Most of the councillors are part of a local or national political party. The mayor is the chair of the council. Decisions are made through a majority vote. The mayor cannot vote. The council determines the broad outlines of the municipality's policies. The college of the aldermen and the mayor are then responsible for implementing council decisions. Every aldermen is tasked with one or multiple themes, its policies and implementation. Aldermen work with large departments of officials on each theme.

Municipal governments deal with matters of direct and exclusive interest to its own residents, including providing certain services and facilities. On many matters, the municipalities create and oversee their local regulations independently. Other regulations concern the implementation of national policy and strategy. The latter is called *medebewind* or co-governance. The income of municipalities therefore comes mainly from the national government, and on a minor scale from taxes and entry fees to a few municipal properties such as swimming pools. Over the past 20 years, the national government has decentralised more tasks and powers by transferring them to municipalities; recently The Social Support Act, the Participation Act, and youth care were added to the municipal duties. Municipalities are given a lot of room to perform these tasks as they see fit, but sometimes the central government imposes specific guidelines for implementation. An overview of municipal tasks is given in Figure 2.

The organisational structure of the municipality of Utrecht is difficult to grasp both for an outsider

The municipality:

- keeps track of who lives in the municipality. This is done in the Basic Registration of Persons (BRP).
- issues official documents, such as a passport or identity card and a driving licence.
- grants benefits to those who cannot support themselves.
- is responsible for the Social Support Act, the Participation Act, and youth care.
- is responsible for school housing and spends money on pupils who need extra assistance.
- makes zoning plans. These state which area is designated for houses, which part for nature and which part for businesses.
- supervises housing construction and makes agreements with housing corporations.
- constructs streets, roads, footpaths and cycle routes. And makes sure they are maintained.
- implements the Environmental Management Act. This regulates, among other things, the separate collection of household waste.
- grants subsidies, for example to a swimming pool or library.
- ensures that business parks are easily accessible

and insider; the interviewees from the municipality were not always aware of the structure of

Figure 2. Tasks of municipalities in the Netherlands as [assigned by the national government](#)

Utrecht. It is particularly hard to understand what department is responsible for what policy. The red hexagons are called organisational units, which represent departments in Figure 3.

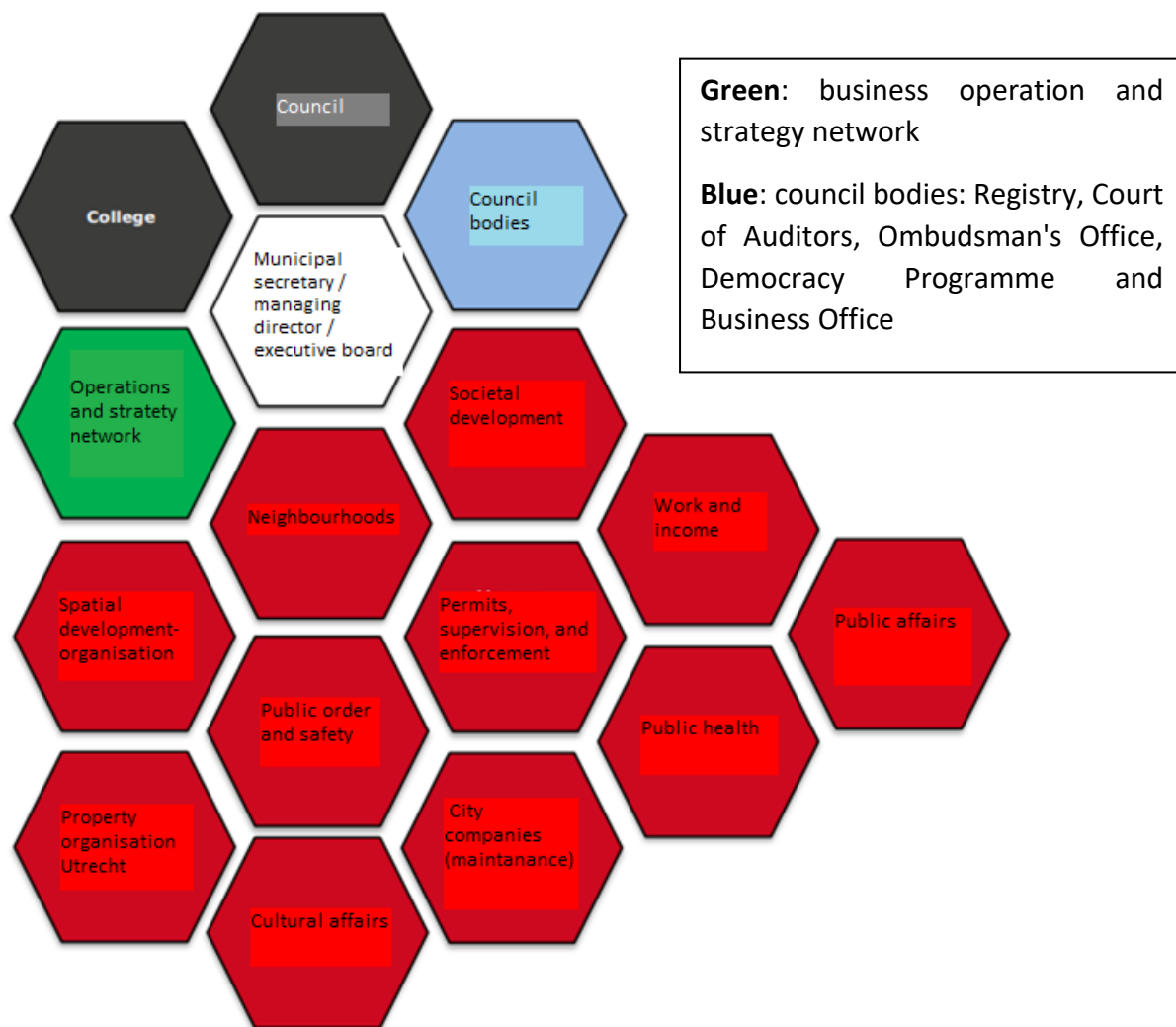


Figure 3. Organisational structure of Utrecht Municipality according to the municipality [itself](#)

The [website](#) containing the collection of all policy per theme or department is organised differently than the organisational structure, making it hard to understand departmental structure. Most organisation elements (as shown in figure 3) have many subdepartments as depicted in figure 4: the bold headings represent the organisation elements and the underlined headings represent the themes per which policies are organised on the municipal website. All policies with an asterisk are



a part of the overarching vision for the future of the living environment of the city, called the Environmental Vision.

<u>Future of the city (the course)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial Strategy 2040*</li> <li>• Liveable city and social facilities*</li> <li>• Health for everyone*</li> </ul>	
<b>Property organisation Utrecht</b> <u>Living, building and safety</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction and development*</li> <li>• Heritage*</li> <li>• High-rise building*</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Prosperity*</li> <li>• Living*</li> <li>• House division and conversion*</li> <li>• Houseboats*</li> <li>• Caravan locations*</li> </ul>	<b>Societal development</b> <u>Care, welfare and education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Newcomers</li> <li>• Education?</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Welfare</li> </ul>
<b>Spatial development organisation</b> <u>Environment, sustainability and animal welfare</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil, groundwater and subsurface*</li> <li>• Animal welfare*</li> <li>• Energy*</li> <li>• Sound*</li> <li>• Hazardous substances, external safety*</li> <li>• Reuse and waste</li> <li>• Climate change*</li> <li>• Air quality*</li> <li>• Water</li> </ul>	<b>Public health</b> <u>Care, welfare and education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health*</li> </ul>
<u>Traffic and accessibility</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freight transport*</li> <li>• Parking*</li> <li>• Traffic and mobility*</li> </ul>	<b>Work and Income</b> <u>Work and income</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer work</li> <li>• Work and income</li> </ul>
<u>Public space</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public space*</li> <li>• Play areas*</li> <li>• Green*</li> <li>• Trees*</li> </ul>	<u>Care, welfare and education</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wmo (social support)</li> </ul>
<u>Entrepreneurs</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry areas*</li> <li>• Coffee shops</li> <li>• Retail*</li> <li>• Hospitality*</li> </ul>	<u>Entrepreneurs</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• Working at home*</li> </ul>
	<b>Cultural affairs</b> <u>Leisure and tourism</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events*</li> <li>• Art and culture</li> <li>• Play areas*</li> <li>• Sports</li> <li>• Tourism</li> </ul>
	<b>Organization, council and college</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchasing</li> <li>• International Business</li> <li>• Participation</li> </ul>

Figure 4. Structure of Utrecht policies on their website meant for informing the public of Utrecht policy.



In the current structure of the municipality, there is not one department responsible for all issues surrounding the subject of food and thereby food sharing, rather, many departments work with a small aspect of food, as will become clear in further chapters. The Public Health department published a document called the 'Utrecht food agenda' in January 2022, which contains a future vision and a list of current initiatives in the city and work being done by the municipality to work on that vision (DOC-UTR-19). This list only contains initiatives and structures that already existed at the time of the creation of the food agenda, so there is little to no indication of how the vision could be implemented. The vision consists of six key points as shown in frame 5 below.

1. Everyone knows what healthy and sustainable food is
2. Healthy, sustainable, and affordable food is well available throughout the city
3. Smart networks of actors create success
4. Farmer and citizen are connected
5. Circular food chains
6. The edible city (public green is edible)

*Figure 5. The five focal points of the Utrecht food agenda from 2022.*

Since publishing this agenda, the Public Health Department has come to be seen by other actors in the municipality, as being responsible for food policy. One staff member of the department is approached whenever the topic of food comes up, which they are not always pleased with – since they do not see themselves as the being responsible for food policy. Food is only a matter of concern for the Public Health department when there is a clear connection to health. For example, the Public Health department did not feel responsible to answer a council question about plant-based protein because of the emphasis on sustainability rather than health (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department). When it comes to food systems change health and sustainability are clearly interwoven, however when public sector actors do not have the resources or capacity to weave these linkages silos can result – reproducing a fragmented approach to food policy. Moreover, having no office or department that clearly wants the responsibility for food policy does not suggest that there is political will for this to move forward.

## 2.4 Urban form

Most activity in Utrecht, such as shopping, cultural activities, and restaurants, is concentrated in the city centre, which is enclosed by the Oudegracht. As the city grows, the centre is seeping outside of the borders of the Oudegracht and neighbourhoods start to develop their own smaller centres. Neighbourhoods much further out from the city centre have their own smaller centres with similar but fewer facilities. In the West side of the city, the neighbourhoods of Vleuten, De Meern and Haarzuilens used to be separate villages in a different municipality, but were merged with the Utrecht municipality as the city grew. As a result, these now neighbourhoods are a part of Utrecht city, but they still have a rather distinct character and their own centre.

During the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Utrecht went through a massive wave of urbanization which turned the city centre into a heavy car traffic area. In 2017, the municipality decided to return

a motorway built in the 1970s to its former use as the Stadsbuitengracht water canal [40]. Urban planning is now mainly focussed on walking and cycling, and many streets are car free or prioritize bikes and public transport. The public transportation within Utrecht consists of many busses, a few trams and a six train stations in addition to the central station where all public transport converges. On an international level, Utrecht has received recognition for its efforts to reclaim green space in the area and its ambition for a car-free city centre. In 2022, Utrecht received the European Prize for European Public Space and recently, the city has been awarded the 3<sup>rd</sup> place at the Green Cities Award 2023 for its greening projects: Catharijnesingel, Park Oosterspoorbaan and Croeselaan<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.5 Buurthuizen – community centres

The Dutch *buurthuizen* or community centres are a wide-spread phenomenon throughout the country in both large cities and small towns. The Netherlands counts a total of 7500 community centres, and there are 49 within Utrecht<sup>17</sup>. They host a wide variety of activities (e.g. cooking and eating, sports, arts and crafts, book clubs, games, lectures and courses) for residents of all ages, organised by different groups of residents or external organisations. Community centres serve a myriad of crucial functions that contribute to the well-being and vitality of neighbourhoods. Foremost among these is their role as social hubs, addressing loneliness by providing a welcoming space for all individuals. These centres actively foster social cohesion, acting as meeting grounds where neighbours can engage with one another, creating valuable connections that can extend beyond mere social interaction. In this way, community centres become conduits for support, facilitating the exchange of assistance among residents.

*Buurthuizen* are important in the context of FSIs because they provide a social and material infrastructure for food sharing. All community houses have multi-functional spaces including fully equipped community kitchens, dining rooms, meeting and leisure rooms (often with equipment for various activities e.g. games, arts and crafts supplies), available for any neighbourhood initiative, which can be rented for free or at a low cost. As a result, the *Buurthuizen* host many forms of food sharing, and provide an indispensable infrastructure for the social and solidarity economy. Many community meals take place in community centres, some of which are made with surplus food. Some centres may even have a community garden or a community fridge<sup>18</sup>.

Of the 49 community centers in Utrecht, 25 are owned and directly financed by the municipality and available for rent through [the municipal platform](#), and 24 are locally self-managed and connected by an association called [Dwarsverband](#). The community centres involved in this association receive a subsidy through the [VIVE](#) subsidy scheme (DOC-UTR-05).

The cost of renting space at a *Buurthuis* is determined by the economic nature of the activity, and the owner of the community center. The rental cost at municipally owned centers depends on the activity and the organizer, mainly whether or not the initiator receives pay or subsidy. Full rent (100%) has to be paid when the organisation keeps part of the revenue as income. Nothing has to

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://award.thegreencities.eu/award-2023/the-netherlands/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/ruimte-en-milieu/compensatie-niet-buurthuizen-blijven-open#:~:text=Nederland%20telt%20zo'n%207.500,kunnen%20krijgen%20op%20allerlei%20gebied.>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.dwarsverbandutrecht.nl/leden/burezina/>

be paid when the whole organisation is voluntary, and 35% of rent has to be paid for an in-between situation. The full explanation of the rental scheme can be found in appendix 1. Table 1 below offers a summary of the payment scheme<sup>19</sup>.

Table 1. Rental costs of municipal community centres in Utrecht<sup>20</sup>

Size of space	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Costs per hour (€)	Costs 35% (€)
S	3 – 50	13.20	4.62
M	50 – 80	25.31	8.86
L	80 – 260	55.01	19.25
XL	206 – 500	113.12	46.59

Although united, the *Dwarsverband* community centres do not have a collective rental system. One small community centre offers free use of space for residents and their initiatives, but asks an unknown fee from external organisations<sup>21</sup>, another asks €60 for a room of 84 m<sup>2</sup> per morning, afternoon or evening<sup>22</sup>.

Although *Buurthuizen* are a vital infrastructure for food sharing and the social and solidarity economy in Utrecht, there is no formal city policy that requires the building, funding, or maintenance of community center. Facilitating or financing *buurthuizen* is not a legal duty of the local, regional, or national government. Utrecht has chosen to keep the community centres it has because of the many functions that *buurthuizen* fulfil. However, in the last decade or so, many *buurthuizen* in the Netherlands have been closed due to municipal budget cuts, increasing (energy) costs or to make room for new housing<sup>23</sup>.

## 2.6 Volunteering in the Netherlands and Utrecht

The Netherlands has a strong culture of volunteering and citizen involvement. Contributing to society is an important social norm grounded in protestant ethics while on a practical level, volunteering is enabled by relatively common part-time work arrangements. This results in a situation where volunteering is widespread and often takes a formalized form. The Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics publishes a yearly overview of volunteering in the Netherlands<sup>24</sup>. Latest date from 2022 show that about 41% of Dutch citizens volunteer at least once a year. This number is

<sup>19</sup> Rent for community centres <https://www.utrecht.nl/zorg-en-onderwijs/activiteiten-welzijn-in-de-wijk/ruimte-huren-in-de-wijk/toelichting-kosten-voor-ruimte-huren-in-buurtcentrum/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/zorg-en-onderwijs/activiteiten-welzijn-in-de-wijk/buurtcentrum/ruimte-huren-in-een-buurtcentrum/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.dwarsverbandutrecht.nl/leden/het-trefpunt/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.wevehuis.nl/kosten>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.hartvannederland.nl/regio/zuid-holland/buurthuizen-dreigen-in-rap-tempo-te-verdwijnen-het-is-geen-prioriteit>

<https://nos.nl/regio/zh-west/artikel/430630-geliefd-buurthuis-verdwijnt-door-nieuwbouw-experts-maken-zich-zorgen>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/longread/rapportages/2023/vrijwilligerswerk-2022>

somewhat lower than pre-pandemic, when 49% of citizens volunteered at least once a year. Of the volunteers, 44% did so weekly, 31% did it monthly, 45% occasionally, and 17% once a year.

In 2022, similar to previous years, most people volunteered at sports associations (13% of volunteers). This was followed by schools, neighbourhood organisations, care or health care, philosophical organisations and hobby associations (6-7% each). Furthermore, people volunteered for cultural associations or organisations (5%), youth or community work (4%), nature conservation (3%), social assistance and refugee work (3%), and labour and political organisations (2%). Dutch volunteers indicate that they do it because they “like doing something for someone else”, because they enjoy it, and as a way to socialise.

Volunteering is defined as activities which<sup>25</sup>:

- Are in the public interest or in some social interest.
- Are not for profit.
- Do not replace a paid job. The volunteer is not employed by the organisation. It is not the volunteer’s profession.
- Benefit an organisation that:
  - o Is not subject to corporation tax or is exempt from it
  - o Is a sports association or sports foundation
  - o Has a status of a Public Benefit Organisation (ANBI)

According to national tax policy, volunteers can receive a compensation for their work, up to a maximum of €5.50 (volunteers over 21 years of age) or €3.25 (younger than 21) per hour, €210 per month and €2100 per year in 2024<sup>26</sup>. This compensation, together with compensation for incurred expenses, are exempted from tax. People receiving unemployment or social assistance benefits are also allowed to do paid volunteering without loss of benefit if the compensation does not exceed the maximum<sup>27</sup>. However, social assistance beneficiaries younger than 27 have their benefits lowered if they also receive volunteering compensation.

Apart from allowing a compensation and reimbursement, the national government attempts to stimulate volunteering with a few other policies. Volunteers can receive a free certificate of good conduct (VOG) which is required for volunteering at most organisations. Volunteering organizations which coordinate volunteers in a specific location are also eligible for government-funded National Volunteering Awards. Volunteering is also supported by NGO actors: one example is the yearly volunteer day NL Doet organized by the Oranje Fonds with sponsorship of numerous public and private actors.

Other forms of volunteering include the Societal Service (*Maatschappelijke Diensttijd, MDT*), a volunteering program for youth (12-30). The MDT has an online platform for volunteers to find organisations at which they want to work for a period of minimum 80 hours and maximum 6 months, parttime or fulltime. The volunteers are supervised and guided within the organisation

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrijwilligerswerk/vraag-en-antwoord/wat-is-vrijwilligerswerk>

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontentnl/belastingdienst/prive/werk\\_en\\_inkomen/werken/werken-als-vrijwilliger/vrijwilligersvergoedingen/vrijwilligersvergoedingen](https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontentnl/belastingdienst/prive/werk_en_inkomen/werken/werken-als-vrijwilliger/vrijwilligersvergoedingen/vrijwilligersvergoedingen)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrijwilligerswerk/regels-voor-vrijwilligers-en-vrijwilligersorganisaties>

where they volunteer to promote personal development. Organisations that wish to offer an MDT can apply for a subsidy at the national government. These have to be socially engaged organisations such as schools, healthcare organisations, or cultural organisation<sup>28</sup>.

Lastly, *mantelzorg* describes a form of community-based care. Mantelzorg means providing unpaid, regular and often long-term care to someone socially related (friend, family member, neighbour) in their household, such as helping with housework. This care is facilitated by a personal budget which the municipality allocates to a person needing care. Part of this budget can be used to compensate the work of the carer. The same care provided to someone outside the social circle is seen as volunteering<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to publicly supported volunteering, we see an emerging trend in the form of corporate volunteering. This involves employees dedicating working hours to volunteer tasks, blurring the line between traditional volunteering and compensated work. The concept challenges conventional notions of volunteering, as participants are remunerated for their time, raising some questions on the traditional ideals of volunteerism at the municipality:

I think it's such a weird thing for companies to say that they provide volunteer work. And that those people are volunteering on boss's time. In my opinion, there's no such thing as volunteering on boss's time, because then you're just paid to do other work. (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

Nonetheless, the municipality is glad to see this trend evolving as it may signify an increasing involvement of the private sector in societal challenges.

### 2.6.1 Volunteering subsidies in Utrecht

In Utrecht, the culture of volunteering, participation and community-based care is reflected by several subsidy schemes. These subsidies are not content-specific but can be used for various activities and they present a way in which food sharing initiatives can access public funding. The following subsidy schemes were mentioned by our interview partners as particularly relevant for food sharing initiatives. However, it is difficult to ascertain the amounts of initiatives or funding allocated to FSIs – even though the municipality has a public register of subsidy beneficiaries, the content of their activities is not listed, and many of the initiatives of informal groups are only listed as “private beneficiaries”.

#### 2.6.1.1 Initiatievenfonds (IF)

The Initiative Fund (Initiatievenfonds (IF), DOC-UTR-17) is a subsidy scheme intended to support “neighbourhood, district or city initiatives in which people commit to each other and their environment”. The activities need to contribute to the common good beyond the group of initiators. Both individual citizens and organisations can apply for funding. The total budget is proportional to the number of inhabitants divided over the districts of Utrecht because the fund focuses on

---

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.dus-i.nl/subsidies/maatschappelijke-diensttijd-2023>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vrijwilligerswerk/vraag-en-antwoord/wanneer-ben-ik-mantelzorger>

initiatives on the district level, although a part of the budget is also reserved for city-wide initiatives. Therefore, the district bureaux (*wijkbureau*) are the main contacts for the Initiative Fund.

A possible initiative will go to their (neighbourhood bureau) with their application, which will first be judged by the district advisor. Two entry conditions to be met are that 1) the initiative is widely (enough) supported by its surroundings and 2) it aligns with the main goal of Utrecht municipality for this fund. If approved, the district advisor sends the application to the subsidy bureau of the municipality for final judgement. An initiative can receive up to 35.000 EU/year, and there is a maximum of three years of support with the following exceptions: local newspapers or websites, residents groups, yearly events and initiatives relying fully on unpaid work (incl. volunteering).

In 2022, the municipality supported 967 initiatives via the Initiative funds, about one third less than before the Covid-19 pandemic. For 2024, 3,3 million euro is budgeted. There is a lack of information available on how much funding was allocated and to who.

#### 2.6.1.2 Volunteering for each other (VIVE)

A subsidy for volunteering called “Vrijwillige inzet voor elkaar” (DOC-UTR-23), which translates to Volunteering for each other focuses on “supporting and enabling volunteer efforts for each other, strengthening community power and facilitating organizations with a strong network in the lives of vulnerable residents.” VIVE resulted from a merge of several separate volunteering subsidies with different themes. The joining of these grants was meant to simplify the subsidy (application) process for the citizens of Utrecht.

In 2022, VIVE supported 97 applicants, fewer than the year before. For 2024, 8,8 million euro is budgeted. The money comes from two departments: employment and income, and societal development (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain). Unlike the IF, VIVE is distributed on the level of the municipality and it is aimed at funding larger and longer projects that benefit the entire city (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain). The municipality aims to allocate the subsidy to initiatives from diverse neighbourhoods targeting different groups of inhabitants. Applications are not limited by a maximum amount, but only certain “necessary costs” can be covered, which notably exclude labour costs. Initiatives can be funded for a maximum of three consecutive years.

In general, the subsidy is meant for taking care of each other and reaching social goals through practical help (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain). Examples of eligible activities include support for vulnerable inhabitants (by practical help and prevention of social isolation) , neighbourhood networks and district information points, and development of language and digital skills. Even though food sharing is not an explicit goal of the subsidy, organizations using food (sharing) as a means are eligible, e.g. when food related activities are used to foster social cohesion.

#### 2.6.1.3 Social activities and day care

The subsidy Sociale prestatie en dagbesteding (DOC-UTR-18), which translates to Social performance and day care, is intended for initiatives which facilitate daily activities and care for people who are unable to have a paid job (e.g. due to mental health or behavioural issues, mental or physical disability, addiction history, long-term unemployment, low literacy, poor command of

Dutch language or other reasons). The goal is to activate vulnerable people and enable them to contribute to society, while preventing social isolation. The activities should enable “Utrecht residents in a vulnerable situation to [...] participate in Utrecht and have a meaningful day. Not everyone can provide a work performance (paid work), but a social performance is often possible. People who are active - in one way or another - and 'get out and about' feel better about themselves, have more structure in their lives and are better able to manage (independently).” The total budget of the subsidy was 5.97 million in 2023.

#### 2.6.1.4 Together for Overvecht

Samen voor Overvecht, or Together for Overvecht, is a specific subsidy program for the neighbourhood of Overvecht, which is seen as problematic in terms of unemployment, criminality and health issues. Over the last 15 years, the municipality has targeted the neighbourhood through numerous development programs focused on safety, opportunities for youth, access to healthy food and sport, and support for local initiatives. Many NGOs are active in the neighbourhood and inhabitants' living situation and views are regularly monitored.

The subsidy program Samen voor Overvecht started in 2019 with the goal to “work together to create a neighbourhood where residents enjoy living together and which is attractive to new residents, visitors, investors and entrepreneurs. A neighbourhood in which the resilience of residents is strengthened, and everyone can participate” (DOC-UTR-20, DOC-UTR-21). Within this program there is special attention and additional funding for initiatives from Overvecht. The budget for this program in 2023 was 2 million euro.



## 3. Community-Based Urban agriculture (CBUA)

---

### 3.1 Introduction

#### 3.1.1 Green space

Currently, the Utrecht municipality manages about 3,350 hectares of public space, 37% of which (or 1,240 ha) are green areas and 21% is water. Green areas include nearly 190 hectares of forest and parks. Some of the green spaces are centred around the 250 kilometres of ponds and small watercourses with 800 bridges and 65 kilometres of quays. In addition, peri-urban areas are part of the city's plan for public green. Utrecht is located close to the national park *Utrechtse Heuvelrug* on the East side of the city. Utrecht Municipality owns three estates on the south east border of the city called old *Amelisweerd*, new *Amelisweerd* and *Rhijnauwen*, which are open to the public during the day. The three estates are located close to each other along the bank of the Rhine river and include forest, grassland, gardens, farms, a castle and a fort. The estates are a hub for culture, culinary visits, farming and environment education, and nature enjoyment. The municipality of Utrecht presents itself as “green”: green and recreational areas as well as healthy living environment are often mentioned in planning strategies (see section 3.1.3) which foresee an expansion of current green areas.

#### 3.1.2 Glossary of CBUA types

Urban agriculture, i.e. food production within the city boundaries, is considered as part of urban green areas by the municipality (DOC-UTR-02). However, it does not have a specific land use designation, which also complicates quantifications of CBUA areas. A quick inventarisation for this report showed 47 CBUA organisations (see section 3.1.1). Following are the most common types of urban agriculture found in the city.

**Allotment gardens** (volkstuinten in Dutch) refer to a traditional form of gardening, whose history in the Netherlands dates back to early 20th century. Allotments are run by association, who rent a large piece of land, typically owned by the municipality, which is further divided into smaller plots (25-250 m<sup>2</sup>) rented to individuals and households. Even though plots are managed privately, the associations commonly feature shared facilities and tools, collectively managed shared spaces as well as opportunities for knowledge exchange, mutual help and food sharing. Allotment areas are required to be open to public from sunrise to sunset, although in practice associations tend to sometimes close their gates to protect their property and plants, especially during harvest season.

**Community gardens** present a related, albeit more recent form of collective gardening. Unlike in allotments, plots are managed collectively and harvest is always shared among members. In Utrecht, community gardens are typically located on land rented from the municipality, a private owner or the Utrecht Natuurlijk association (see 3.1.1). Compared to allotments, community gardens typically emphasize educational and social functions over food production. In the Dutch context, however, the two terms are often used interchangeably (Veen 2014).



**Urban farms** are run by professional farmers which might be private or non-profit entities (see 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 ). They are larger in size compared to urban gardens, and typically located on the outskirts of the city. Apart from fruit and vegetable production, some also have animals. In Utrecht, most farms combine food production with environmental and education as well as social services, and in that sense might be involved in food sharing. A specific model are **care farms**, which provide work therapy for people with mental health or social issues and which are partly funded from health care funding streams.

**School gardens** are promoted within several national-level programs which see food growing as an important part of environmental and food education in primary schools. The approach to gardening varies depending on each school's context, and while teachers, pupils, external gardening coaches and parents are involved in gardening to varying degrees (Janse 2023), school gardens are not accessible to public.

**Neighbourhood green** (BuurtNatuur) is a form of small scale public greenery which is self-managed by residents with the support of the municipality. These spaces typically include very small plots in public areas, e.g. around trees, in planters or on the sidewalk which contribute to community cohesion and neighbourhood beautification rather than food production.

**Food forestry**, i.e. food production systems which mimic a forest ecosystem by using edible and perennial plant species, is a trending topic in the Netherlands (Roodhof 2024). With a minimum requirement of 1 ha of land, food forests are mostly located outside urban areas (including [Haarzuilens](#) just outside Utrecht's borders). In additions, some of the local gardens and parks include food forest elements in their design, most notably the newly built **Edible Neighbourhood** of Rijnvliet (see 3.1.3.4).

## 3.2 Regulatory regimes shaping the food sharing landscape in Utrecht

The regulations that affect urban agriculture in Utrecht are mainly local and related to two areas: land use and zoning, and participation and volunteering. This section describes the key players, main strategies, projects and programs, and policies in the municipality of Utrecht that affect UA.

Firstly, the key players in the field of CBUA in Utrecht are introduced. These are mostly social movements (3.1.1.) such as allotment garden associations, community gardens, and independent foundations. There are also a few private enterprises in the CBUA sector in Utrecht as shown in 3.1.2. In section 3.1.3, the main strategies, policies and projects and programs are presented, starting with a short description of the municipal departments engaged in CBUA in various ways (3.1.3.1). Even though the city supports certain CBUA initiatives and generally conceives CBUA as beneficial, there is no specific strategy on UA. The main urban planning strategy mentions CBUA only very briefly but provides relevant context nonetheless (3.1.3.2) Similarly, policy rarely targets UA, and many initiatives are instead supported through frameworks related to participation and volunteering. Two important exceptions pertain to the municipality's position towards allotment gardens, and the Utrecht Natuurlijk foundation (3.1.3.3). Lastly, the municipality has (had) a few

projects related to urban agriculture, the neighbourhood of Rijnvliet being the most prominent (3.1.3.4).

### 3.2.1 The main social movement and community organisations operation in the CBUA arena in Utrecht

#### Utrecht Natuurlijk

The CBUA governance landscape in Utrecht is marked by entanglements between the municipality and the civic sector, resulting from historical pathways. Utrecht Natuurlijk is a key actor which formally operates as an independent foundation (*stichting*) but has strong ties to the municipality.

The Utrecht municipality used to own and run six public vegetable gardens and five urban farms. These were managed by the department *Stadsbedrijven* (City Companies), which is in charge of public space including green areas (see 3.1.3.1). The part of *Stadsbedrijven* that led the gardens and farms split off from the municipality in 2015 to become an independent foundation called [Utrecht Natuurlijk](#)<sup>30</sup> (Naturally Utrecht). The municipality still owns the farms and gardens, but Utrecht Natuurlijk is now responsible for the management. Utrecht Natuurlijk remains very closely related to the municipality, leading to a distorted funding and governance landscape (see section 3.1.3.3).

The core of Utrecht Natuurlijk is nature and environment education as illustrated in this quote from an interview with Utrecht Natuurlijk:

“Then, as a successor to that Anthropocene, the Symbiocene should be the succeeding period in which man and nature live together in harmony without sacrificing the quality of the earth. We do not yet know exactly how to do that and what we [Utrecht Natuurlijk] are saying is that we actually want to learn that together with the city of Utrecht. What could that look like in Utrecht? That's our main goal.” (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation)

To this goal, Utrecht Natuurlijk manages the city-owned urban farms and gardens which offer food production, gardening with children, courses, sports activities, cooking, and more. The farms combine arable farming with animals: “Actually what we want to show there is kind of a window on agriculture. So, the most common Dutch farm animals are on display there. So, cows, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens and yes often some guinea pigs and rabbits” (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation).

Utrecht Natuurlijk is a key actor in school gardens as well. It has declared as a goal that every child in Utrecht should be able to eat self-grown vegetables by 2030. To this goal, it hosts educational activities on its own farms and gardens, and it also provides material and didactic support as well as coaching for schools who want to garden on their own location. According to their [2022 year report](#),

---

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.utrechtnatuurlijk.nl/nmc-per-1-januari-stichting-utrecht-natuurlijk/>

Utrecht Natuurlijk's activities were attended by over 46 000 primary school pupils (for comparison, the city of Utrecht counts a total of 26 000 children attending primary school<sup>31</sup>).

The locations of Utrecht Natuurlijk are host to other initiatives. For example, an initiative for gardening with newcomers called [Common Ground Two](#), is located on one of the gardens of Utrecht Natuurlijk. The [Bee Association](#) is active at at least one of the Utrecht Natuurlijk's locations. The foundation wants to be a "green podium of community centre", maintaining the spaces in which citizens can create diverse green initiatives, as can be read in this quote from an interview with Utrecht Natuurlijk:

"We actually kind of see our locations as a kind of green neighbourhood stages that we do manage, but they don't belong to us. So basically, we're open to anyone who would like to do something with that. Kind of like a green neighbourhood venue, where everybody should be able to find a place." (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation)

Apart from having a physical space for collaboration, Utrecht Natuurlijk also provides resources and advice on urban gardening, hosts workshops etc. It is also active online, where it co-hosts the platform [BuurtNatuur030](#) with [Milieu Centrum Utrecht](#) (Environment Centre Utrecht). This platform supports (small) green spaces in Utrecht which are self-managed by citizens. These initiatives are supported by the municipality (see 3.1.3.3) and they typically involve small plots or planters in the streets of the city, e.g. in tree beds and along the sidewalks. The BuurtNatuur030 maintains their map and it connects volunteers with existing initiatives.

### Volkstuinen (allotment gardens)

*Volkstuinen* have been a part of the green structure of Dutch cities including Utrecht for a long time. The national umbrella organization, [AVVN](#) (Algemeen Verbond van Volkstuindersverenigingen or General Alliance of Allotment Garden Associations) was established in 1928<sup>32</sup>, both for enhancing the gardening itself and for supporting local organisations in administrative issues and navigating the relationship with local governments. The lengthy existence of the AVVN implies a long-lived collaboration between the gardens and the local governments. Utrecht is home to 16 allotment garden associations, which are united in a local organization called [Overleg Volkstuinen Utrecht](#) (Utrecht Allotments Consultation, OVU). The OVU is responsible for communication with the municipality, where they have one or two permanent contacts in the Green department to cooperate with. The AVVN receives subsidies from the municipality to manage the allotments.

The 16 allotment associations in Utrecht manage a total of 1588 plots for rent (DOC-UTR-08). This number is from 2018 and has likely grown because many associations have been splitting their gardens into smaller plots to be able to welcome more gardeners. The exact number of gardeners is unknown but allotments are mostly used by individuals, couples or families. An estimation would thus be between 1588 and about 6000 (the amount of gardens times four), which means between 0,44% and 1,67% of Utrecht residents have an allotment garden. However, a lot more residents would like to have a *volkstuin* as can be concluded from the waiting lists of up to 5 years, some have

---

<sup>31</sup> <https://allecijfers.nl/basisscholen/utrecht/>

<sup>32</sup> AVVN <https://www.avvn.nl/over-avvn>

even closed their waiting list. In terms of area, with an estimated average plot size of 250m<sup>2</sup> (DOC-UTR-08), allotments cover approximately 37.5 ha.

By renting a plot at an allotment complex, people become members of the allotment association. The association also manages shared facilities which differ per location. Most have water taps and a toilet, some also have a communal space with a kitchen. The price for renting an allotment garden also differs per association, ranging from 1,2€/m<sup>2</sup> to 1,6€/m<sup>2</sup>, often supplemented with some additional fees and one-time costs such as a registration fee and a deposit, the height of which also differ per association. Based on the information available on the websites of 7 out of 16 associations, total costs of renting a plot can amount to 149-385 € per year.

The allotment garden associations operate independently. Each is managed by a board of elected members who coordinate the maintenance of shared facilities (e.g. by rotating tasks or organising collective working days). Associations also facilitate gardening advice for members, for example through a gardening committee of experienced gardeners willing to help others. Besides communal work days – which also have a social aspect - the boards also organise events that are open to the broader neighbourhood, such as small markets.

### Community gardens

Various neighbourhoods in Utrecht have different types of (small) community gardens in semi-public areas. These gardens are mostly independent from other organisations and fully citizen led. Inhabitants can request permission to start a community garden on public land, which is conditioned by the accessibility of the garden – it needs to remain open to public. In exchange, gardeners do not need to pay rent to the municipality, and they are eligible to apply for funds via the [Initiative Funds](#). Some community gardens are formalized as foundations, whereas others such as [Midland BuurtMoestuin](#), remain informal in their organizational form, communicating mostly through social media platforms and at the physical location.

The main function of community gardens is to bring the neighbourhood inhabitants together and create social cohesion. The level of food production differs per initiative. The garden can be a place to meet other local residents and learn to grow food together to make fair food accessible for all, as is stated by the [Voedseltuin Overvecht](#). [Spinozaplantsoen](#) is an example of a multifunctional garden, where “social, educative, creative and sporty activities” take place. Other gardens are more focussed on the creation of a community centred around a communal green space, in which urban agriculture only has a small role, such as in the [Kersentuin](#). Some community gardens, such as Spinozaplantsoen and [Bikkershof](#) also have animals (chickens, ducks or rabbits). Some of them also follow particular approaches to food production such as permaculture in the case of Bikkershof.

### Non-profit agricultural foundations

The last type of CBUA actors are larger independent non-profit foundations, which typically operate on larger pieces of land and combine different activities. [Foundation](#) (*stichting*) is a non-profit legal form defined by a socially beneficial goal. Foundations can apply for subsidies and receive donations, but they can also run a business and provide paid employment, as long as profits are used to fulfil the foundation’s cause. This form is used by urban farms which combine commercial food

production with socially beneficial activities and often feature different types of labour relations (employees, volunteers, etc.) and income streams.

[De Moestuïn](#) is a social (care) farm where “people with a vulnerability can safely participate in society”. Run as a foundation with two sub-divisions, De Moestuïn combines commercial food production – where it sells organic vegetables and fruits in a farm shop and supplies local restaurants and businesses – with a care facility, which provides work therapy and social integration to people disadvantaged on the labour market. The care farm model is also used by [13 farms located outside the city](#), within the Utrecht province. These farms serve as a (day) care facility for diverse groups of clients (e.g. people with dementia, autism or addiction).

The [Koningshof](#) foundation operates similarly to an allotment in that it rents out plots of land to individuals and households. Part of the plots is located in a greenhouse and the foundation also provides gardening supervision and training for members. Another part of the land is used to cultivate produce for sale, and the foundation also runs a café, organizes workshops for public and hosts a beekeeper.

[Moestuïn De Haar](#) is a community supported agriculture on historical lands on the outskirts of Utrecht. Members pay a fee and harvest the produce, which is grown by professional gardeners hired by the foundation.

[Lekker Land Goed](#) foundation seeks to combine high nature value with food forestry. Their flagship project, the Haarzuilens food forest is developed in collaboration with Naaturmonumenten<sup>33</sup>. The five hectares designated for food forestry are situated on the Haarzuilens Estate which is open to the public for recreational activities. Visitors are allowed to taste the food but not to collect it for redistribution. The food produced is sold to restaurants in Utrecht.

### 3.2.2 The main private sector CBUA enterprises in Utrecht

Several commercial actors operate in the sphere of CBUA and use sustainability, urban food production and in some cases also circularity as part of their business identity. There are two urban farms which produce food for their own restaurants: [Stadjochies](#) and [The Green House](#). Both aim to be sustainable or even circular in the case of The Green House and want to show their guests what is possible within home-growing food on Dutch soil. Similarly, some other Utrecht restaurants, e.g., [Heron Petit Restaurant](#), engage in buying local product from gardens within Utrecht such as De Moestuïn. Another form of private sector CBUA in Utrecht is the cultivation of oyster mushrooms on coffee grounds, as done by the [Clique](#) and [Funghi Factory](#).

## 3.3 Main policies, regulations and plans regarding CBUA in Utrecht

### 3.3.1 Key municipal departments

The fragmented nature of CBUA governance in Utrecht is reflected in the departments involved in decision-making, summarised in Table 4. Some departments are directly involved in CBUA by

---

<sup>33</sup> A Dutch nature conservation NGO which buys and manages nature reserves.

planning and making decisions about public space (the public space department and its subdepartments) and effectively managing the space (*stadsbedrijven*). Other departments have a supportive role, for example through education or volunteering which are not CBUA specific but which are actually used by CBUA initiatives.

Overall, regulations surrounding CBUA lack systematization and are fragmented both horizontally (ranging from city-level strategy to ad hoc regulations pertaining to specific types of UA) and vertically (spanning diverse topical departments).

*Table 2. Departments of the municipality of Utrecht, and how they are involved in urban agriculture*

Department	Subdepartment	Function regarding urban agriculture
Spatial development	Public Space*	Responsible for the planning of the entire public space, such as deciding where will be green space
	Green*	Responsible for the planning and governance of green structure of the city, including allotment gardens and Utrecht Natuurlijk. The department also handles any green initiatives coming in in various ways, such as through the <a href="#">Initiative Fund</a> .
	Trees*	Responsible for trees on any public terrain (incl. allotments, Utrecht Natuurlijk). The actual tree maintenance is performed by 'Stadsbedrijven'
	Space to Play*	Subdepartment responsible for playgrounds. Playgrounds may be planned to include UA.
	Construction and development*	Not structurally involved with UA, but project-based, e.g., the development of the edible neighbourhood of Rijnvliet.
Work and Income	Volunteer work	Stimulate and support volunteering.
	Work and Income	Responsible for a subsidy ' <a href="#">Social activities and day care</a> ' which can be used by CBUA initiatives providing care for vulnerable people.
Societal development	Education	Responsible for schools and school areas. The greening of school areas can sometimes include gardens or other forms of UA
	Wellbeing / social development	Responsible for the subsidy <a href="#">Volunteering for each other</a> which can be used by CBUA initiatives.
<i>Stadsbedrijven</i>		The executive maintenance department of Utrecht, responsible for waste collection, clean streets and maintenance of green areas.
District coordinators		Responsible for allocating the <a href="#">Initiative Fund</a>

\* These departments are involved in the Spatial Strategy, see the next section.

### 3.3.2 Spatial development strategy

The general vision for the development of Utrecht is detailed in the Spatial Strategy Utrecht 2040 (Ruimtelijke Strategie Utrecht (RSU) 2040, DOC-UTR-12) which sketches the vision of Utrecht in 2040. The strategy is a result of cooperation between municipal departments (see Table 1 above) and it unites all policy on the Utrecht living environment. As such, it forms a starting point for



thematic policies and plans for specific areas. That said, the strategy is a vision document without binding power.

The RSU has been published in response to the increasing pressures on the city: the rapid growth of the population of Utrecht and the increase of climate stress within the city. The strategy foresees that Utrecht will grow in number of inhabitants but not in size; the outer boundaries are to remain the same. Thus, the density of the population is expected to grow. Yet, there are strong ambitions to make Utrecht greener as well.

The RSU is based on the concept of the 10-minute city. It envisions complementing the current centre of Utrecht with smaller neighbourhood centres providing necessary facilities: “housing, work locations, social facilities, sports facilities, and green spaces” reachable within 10 minutes by walking, cycling or public transport depending on the type of facility (DOC-UTR-12). Within this logic, the RSU includes a so-called barcode which describes the space requirements of urban facilities and infrastructure. The barcode applies to both existing and newly developed areas, and it details the needs for each 10 000 houses in terms of space for education, care and wellbeing, sports and play areas, green areas, infrastructure, job opportunities and energy production. In relation to UA, for instance, 10 000 houses require “2,2 playgrounds / petting zoos/ city farms”, 50 ha of green space in the neighbourhood, 25 ha of green space in the city and 42 ha of green space around the city.

As the barcode already suggests, an increase in green space is needed for an increase in housing. The RSU thus envisions additional 220 ha of green space within the city boundaries and 220 ha of green space around on the city border. These green borders should connect with the inner city through green corridors, often constituted by enlarged green river banks. While the layout of the outer green borders and the green corridors is still to be planned, the strategy counts with a mixed layout including recreational and sport areas with forests and natural sites, energy production and urban agriculture.

In addition to the green borders and corridors, the Urban Strategy points to one specific where urban agriculture is to be developed: Laagraven. This will be a new ‘landscape park’ (DOC-UTR-12, p.159) which will also include nature, rainwater retention, recreation, field sports, energy production. Laagraven is located just outside of the city borders on the South side where it borders with the municipalities of Nieuwegein and Houten.

### 3.3.3 Policies and regulations

#### **The Omgevingswet (Environment Act)**

The Environment Act<sup>34</sup> is a new regulation from January 2024, which consolidates previously fragmented legislation regarding zoning, land use and physical environment. Before its implementation, individuals or organizations seeking to make changes in their physical environment had to navigate a complex administrative process with multiple permits and authorities. The Environment Act includes regulations related to land use, the types of buildings allowed, required environmental permits, and permits for organisation of events. It introduces a single digital interface

---

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/omgevingswet/?utm\\_campaign=bzk-omgevingswet-01-2024&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_content=ros-search-alg&utm\\_term=searchad-multi-device-cpc-performance&gclid=CjwKCAiAkp6tBhB5EiwANTCx1Esn3BqHPEAJZV7osF-b2lhX16nGJfVvxgijy6zhXwWGkV07t6LckBoCdRgQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/omgevingswet/?utm_campaign=bzk-omgevingswet-01-2024&utm_medium=search&utm_source=google&utm_content=ros-search-alg&utm_term=searchad-multi-device-cpc-performance&gclid=CjwKCAiAkp6tBhB5EiwANTCx1Esn3BqHPEAJZV7osF-b2lhX16nGJfVvxgijy6zhXwWGkV07t6LckBoCdRgQAvD_BwE)

on national level for information and permit applications related to changes in the physical environment.<sup>35</sup> This legislation also obliges municipalities to present a single Environmental Plan (Omgevingsplan) which will replace current zoning plans (bestemmingsplannen).<sup>36</sup>

## **Regulations of urban gardening on public land**

### *Starting new (UA) initiatives*

Utrecht inhabitants are allowed to start their own initiatives in the public space as long as two conditions are met. First, the space needs to remain public, which means that initiatives cannot restrict access to the area. Second, the initiative needs to be widely supported by the neighbourhood, which is assessed by the neighbourhood coordinator. If these conditions are met, inhabitants are granted access to the area free of rent, and they are eligible for funding via the IF. This mechanism is not destined specifically to UA, but it can be used to establish small green projects such as those presented on the BuurtNatuur030 platform (3.1.1), but also larger community gardens such as [Voedseltuin Overvecht](#). The municipality also supports these initiatives by providing plants and soil (once per project), lending tools, providing advice, helping during cleaning actions and disposing of green or other waste.

### *Accessibility*

Accessibility is required also from more formally organised types of UA, and different initiatives fulfil this requirement in ways that fit their practical reality. The city farms managed by Utrecht Natuurlijk are open six days a week during daytime, while the opening times of their gardens vary between one and four days a week. Even though community gardens are required to stay accessible to public, some of them have restricted access, for instance by locked fences to which their members have keys. Allotments operate in a similar logic: they need to be officially open to the public during daytime, but have a tendency to close their gates when no gardeners are present in certain seasons. Legally, the requirement for open access to allotments is ascertained by the fact that pathways running through the allotments (located on municipal land) are not rented out, and thus remain in the hands of the municipality.

In 2018, the municipality commissioned research into potential locations for new allotments, which was driven by long waiting lists in existing allotments and the need for more green space in the city. A policy memo (DOC-UTR-08) identified five locations, but later the municipality decided not to pursue the establishment of new allotments, both because they found the shortage to be smaller than expected and because they want to stimulate more communal forms of gardening which would accommodate more participants on a smaller area. Based on this decision, the municipality is steering existing allotment associations to become more open towards non-members and to provide more people with a recreational outdoor experience and increase social cohesion (DOC-UTR-07, DOC-UTR-45). One of the mechanisms to encourage this is the yearly subsidy called Shared Recreational Use (see below).

---

<sup>35</sup> <https://omgevingswet.overheid.nl/home>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/wonen-en-leven/bouwen-en-verbouwen/omgevingswet/>



## *Allotment management*

The municipality is responsible for all trees on public grounds. A total of 140 000 trees, including fruit trees, are [mapped](#) in parks, estates and on streets. The municipality also manages trees in allotments, due to a perceived risk of damage or injury in unprofessional tree care. The *Stadsbedrijven* department is also in charge of other communal elements such as pathways and hedges, as explained by a municipal officer in the Green department:

“There are a lot of communal elements in there, we do the management together. So, the allotment gardens themselves are self-managed, but together we actually do the layout of the gardens, with the [allotment] association. And the trees are all ours. Trees cannot be managed by individuals if they are in the public space because of danger of falling down and falling branches” (INT-UTR-12)

### 3.3.4 Subsidies

#### **Nature and environment communication and education**

*Nature and environment communication and education* is the name of a subsidy rule which is designed for a single party to run the municipality-owned city farms and gardens, to organise public activities at these locations and to provide education and communication about nature, sustainability and the environment for citizens of Utrecht and specifically school aged children. Whilst the subsidy is technically open for any party to apply, in practice it is meant for Utrecht Natuurlijk who has been managing the city farms ever since it established itself by splitting from the municipality. As a result of these historical ties, the municipality has one official (so-called “account holder”) who is responsible for writing this subsidy rule, evaluating the execution of the activities and, effectively, communicating with Utrecht Natuurlijk. The current subsidy (DOC-UTR-52) covers the period 2024-2029, while previous two rounds funded Utrecht Natuurlijk for 4 years each.

#### **Shared recreational use**

This subsidy ‘Recreatief Medegebruik’ (DOC-UTR-51) serves to expand the reach of allotment associations in facilitating recreation and environmental education for inhabitants who are not their members. Allotment associations can apply yearly for 5000 EUR for joint projects with the neighbourhood, the placement of benches and similar infrastructures, the splitting of existing gardening plots (in order to accommodate more gardeners), education and increasing accessibility.

#### **Other Utrecht subsidies**

The [Initiative Fund](#) is not specifically for urban agriculture, but rather for all initiatives that contribute to improving the urban environment and to social cohesion. It is one of the ways in which starting or established CBUA initiatives can access municipal funding. This fund is quite accessible, and it is used by many of the initiatives that were interviewed

Urban agriculture initiatives with social (integration) goals are eligible for subsidies via [Volunteering for each other \(VIVE\)](#), [Social activities and day care](#) and, depending on their location, [Together for Overvecht](#). All the above-mentioned subsidies are not focused solely on CBUA but can be used for (supplementary) funding in urban agriculture initiatives.

## Regional subsidies

Utrecht municipality lies within two regional governing bodies, the Province of Utrecht and the Waterschap de Stichtse Rijnlanden (the regional public governing body responsible for the water management). Both have a grant that can be used for UA. The Waterschap has a subsidy called 'Blauwe Bewonersinitiatieven'<sup>37</sup> or Blue Citizen Initiatives, which is intended for sustainable water management project, e.g. transforming paved areas into green spaces.

The province of Utrecht has a subsidy called KIEM<sup>38</sup>, or Sprout, which supports associations or foundations that want to create a green or sustainable project. Installing beehives, establishing picking gardens and vegetable gardens and greening schoolyards are explicitly mentioned as examples of eligible activities. The projects need to be located in public spaces in the Province of Utrecht, and involve volunteers.

## Subsidy overview

Subsidy name	Intended/potential beneficiaries	Amounts <sup>39</sup>
Nature and environment communication and education	Utrecht Natuurlijk	unknown
Allotment maintenance	AVVN	183 k€ in 2023
Recreational Shared Use	Allotment gardens	Max. €5000 per initiative. One initiative per year per allotment association
<a href="#">Initiative Fund</a>	Citizen initiatives that benefit their neighbourhood. Application by individual citizens or organisations.	Max. €35,000 per year, for a max. of three years (see above for details) For 2024, 3,3 million euro is budgeted.
<a href="#">Volunteering for each other</a>	Volunteering and social integration	There is no maximum on the amount for which people can apply. However, only certain "necessary costs" are eligible, no labour costs. A multiyear subsidy up to three years is possible. For 2024, 8,8 million euro is budgeted
<a href="#">Social performance and day care</a>	Initiatives providing day activities for vulnerable inhabitants	There is no minimum or maximum amount. A multiyear subsidy up to three years is possible. For 2024, 6,6 million euro is budgeted
Blue citizen initiatives	Foundations and associations located on the Utrecht	Maximum amount of 5000€ per initiative, one time

<sup>37</sup> Subsidieregeling Blauwe Bewonersinitiatieven van Waterschap De Stichtse Rijnlanden  
<https://www.hdsr.nl/werk/subsidieregeling/>

<sup>38</sup> Subsidieregeling KIEM, Provincie Utrecht <https://kiemutrecht.nl/>

<sup>39</sup> Subsidy register 2023 <https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/subsidiehulp/subsidieregister/>

	province, projects related to nature and sustainability that involve volunteers.	
KIEM	Projects by at least 8 residents in Utrecht water authority region for increasing sustainable water management and water awareness.	Maximum amount of 5000€ per initiative, one time

### 3.3.5 Projects and programs

#### Edible neighbourhood project

Rijnvliet is a new neighbourhood co-designed by Utrecht municipality, planning and (landscape) architecture experts and the future neighbours of that area. Promoted as an “Edible neighbourhood”, Rijnvliet is specific by the prevalence of edible plant species in the public green area, and a central food forest park. The design, initially called “Green Lungs of Rijnvliet” was co-initiated by the inhabitants of the surrounding area and proposed to the municipality in 2015. The municipality accepted the proposal to co-create an edible neighbourhood and took the lead in developing Rijnvliet, organising several more cooperation sessions with the future neighbours, and sometimes the future inhabitants. Architects and landscape architects were hired for the actual design (DOC-UTR-41).

The neighbourhood will consist of 1100 (social) rental houses/apartments and houses for sale. Between November 2018 and December 2023 approximately 650 of these houses were finished, which are already inhabited<sup>40</sup>. The neighbourhood was designed with mostly two-story houses creating a spacious design with a lower density (1,8 people/km<sup>2</sup>) than the average of Utrecht (3,7 people/km<sup>2</sup>). The facilities available in the Rijnvliet neighbourhood are: the food forest, a sports park, playgrounds, dog walking areas, a small recreational lake, and the Rijnvliet children’s centre with a primary school, after-school childcare and various sports and cultural activities. The children’s centre is located directly next to the food forest and even has a bridge over the street to go straight from the centre to the food forest. The neighbourhood also includes a cultural venue, a bakery and a restaurant. However, local inhabitants perceive a lack of food provisioning options as well as communal meeting spaces.

In the end of 2023, Rijnvliet was inhabited by approximately 1500 people. The neighbourhood is inhabited by many families, 66% of households are families with children. This is also reflected in the largest age groups, which are 27-44 (41%) and 0-17 (39%). Compared to the average in Utrecht

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/wonen-en-leven/bouwprojecten-en-stedelijke-ontwikkeling/bouwprojecten/projecten-in-leidsche-rijn/buurtten-in-leidsche-rijn/rijnvliet/>

(39%), Rijnvliet has slightly more inhabitants with a non-Dutch background (43%). The level of spendable income is higher (643 000€/year) than average in Utrecht (473 000€/year).

Rijnvliet emerged as a flagship project of the municipality, but it has not been systematically integrated to the policy landscape. One of the practical challenges lies in the maintenance of the public green spaces of Rijnvliet. Similarly to other neighbourhoods, the municipality is responsible for managing the public green. However, the project for Rijnvliet assumed a transition to self-management by the local inhabitants. The edible landscape is a challenge for the maintenance department of the municipality (*Stadsbedrijven*) is not used to this type of green space that may require activities outside of the regular mowing lawns and trimming hedges (INT-UTR-14, involved in Rijnvliet in multiple capacities). The municipality is currently considering how to solve this problem.

The interaction between the residents of Rijnvliet and the edible green structure is still in development. Various interviewees from the municipality state that new residents tend to focus on their own house for the first two years, before participating more broadly in the neighbourhood. A food forest ranger is currently hired by the municipality to facilitate connections to the food forest. School children are involved in the food forest as part of their education, and the school thus serves as an important knowledge hub on edible plants. However, residents express lack of knowledge and competences for harvesting and caring for the food forest.

#### **Incentive program urban agriculture Utrecht 2011-2017**

In the period of 2011-2017, the municipality of Utrecht had a special project for urban agriculture which included a subsidy scheme, an attempt to create a network of local CBUA actors and a national network with other Dutch cities. The subsidy scheme has since been discontinued and there is little to no record of the projects that were granted a fund within the project. The network of CBUA actors was active throughout the project period but was eventually discontinued as actors became inactive.

Several other cities such as the Hague and Rotterdam were involved in a national network which aimed to promote CBUA and campaign to put urban agriculture on the national agenda. By exchanging experiences on their own CBUA programs, the members produced a document called 'Agenda Urban Agriculture 2013' which states the intentions of the cities and the challenges they encountered. The Agenda calls on the national government to create space for UA, to include it into national policies and to facilitate more research (DOC-UTR-47). A response from the national government did not come. During this period, the municipality of Utrecht also signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department).

## 3.4 Main enablers to food sharing practices related to CBUA in Utrecht

### 3.4.1 Access to funding and institutional support

Urban agriculture initiatives can access public funding through several subsidy schemes. Allotment associations and Utrecht Natuurlijk have tailor-made subsidy schemes. Other (grassroots) CBUA initiatives do not have access to thematic funding, but they often make use of the Initiative Funds. The municipality is somewhat flexible in giving out funding when initiatives cannot precisely tick all the boxes of the requirements of the subsidies. An example of a tailored solution is given in this quote:

“The money [for the community garden] comes from the neighbourhood’s Initiative Fund. Which is actually incorrect because some labour hours are paid from it. And you actually can't do that from the subsidy. So that’s already a bit on the edge. And there is money from a volunteering subsidy [Vrijwillige inzet voor elkaar], but it doesn't really fit at all. It just doesn't fit.” (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens)

Even though the initiative “does not fit” the subsidy scheme, it still receives funds from it. This points to a certain level of institutional support and good will of the municipality to support CBUA initiatives despite not having specific means to do so.

Another form of institutional support is the Groene Golf (Green Wave), a municipal help desk for green or sustainable initiatives. The Groene Golf supports the initiatives in navigating the “jungle that is called the municipality of Utrecht” (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens), to find the right subsidies or contacts within the municipality. It is particularly suited for initiatives whose activities do not easily fall under one specific regulation, department or subsidy scheme, but rather touch upon a range of subjects.

### 3.4.2 More (public) space for urban agriculture

Utrecht’s urban planning, as expressed in the [Spatial development strategy](#) (DOC-UTR-12) is supportive of urban agriculture in that any green public space can be used for an CBUA initiative, as long as it remains publicly accessible and it is supported by the neighbourhood. The Spatial development strategy also foresees an increase in green spaces in and around the city, implying further opportunities for bottom-up CBUA initiatives in public space.

The municipality of Utrecht profiles itself as green, with the Rijnvliet edible neighbourhood as a flagship urban agriculture project. The Rijnvliet case illustrates the possibilities of including CBUA in urban planning and the political will of the current green-progressive City Council. An interviewee involved in Rijnvliet in multiple capacities reflected: “It is very brave that Rijnvliet was made, outside of the standard way of building” (INT-UTR-14). In the Spatial development strategy, urban agriculture falls under green space, together with recreational, sport, play and nature areas. Such lack of specific spatial designation is generally seen as a threat in CBUA literature (Tornaghi 2017). The case of Rijnvliet shows that multifunctional and productive green areas can be realized within such framework as long as they have political support.

### 3.4.3 Urban agriculture as a social tool

The inclusion of CBUA in spatial planning and policies is enabled by a generally accepted discourse of CBUA as multifunctional, with a significant emphasis on its social functions. In this view, CBUA is valued not only for its contribution to food production, but – perhaps more importantly - as a means of fostering social bonds and community engagement. This understanding of CBUA is shared among diverse actors, as illustrated in the following two quotes:

“And then when you start building a community around it, it also touches on loneliness and social connection “(INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens)

“Although also the community gardens and allotments - these are of course also very important places where people come together and work together. That is of course socially very interesting. [...] “So not just the food, but food as a means of social cohesion or biodiversity.”” (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department)

The understanding of CBUA as a social tool is also reflected in the funding schemes used by most small CBUA initiatives, which support participation and community building rather than CBUA per se. This can be seen as an asset, as it enables CBUA initiatives to access a broader range of opportunities. At the same time, the unspecificity of these funding means that CBUA competes with other initiatives pursuing the same social goals.

### 3.4.4 Collaboration among municipal departments

Despite the policy fragmentation and lack of specific policies on food or urban agriculture, there is an effort for an integrated approach and collaboration across municipal departments. For example, the Green and Public health departments collaborated closely within the CBUA project of 2011-2017 (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department). The flexible and ad-hoc collaborations emerge around specific projects or new policies, thus furthering the topic of urban agriculture despite a lack of coherent policy.

### 3.4.5 Participation, volunteering and self-organisation

The waiting lists for current allotments as well as numerous small bottom-up green initiatives show a high level of interest in CBUA in Utrecht. Apart from the funding and institutional support, CBUA initiatives are grounded in social norms around participation and volunteering. Allotment gardens in particular have a long tradition. They are viewed as part of Dutch cultural heritage and the tradition of having an allotment is often passed from one family generation to the next.

### 3.4.6 Networks for sharing knowledge, skills and opportunities

Utrecht Natuurlijk sits at the heart of the CBUA network in Utrecht in terms of knowledge and experience as the largest CBUA organization in Utrecht. Apart from managing the municipal farms and gardens, it also serves as a knowledge hub, sharing knowledge online, through courses, and by advising initiatives. Thanks to its importance and visibility, Utrecht Natuurlijk is an accessible entry point for new CBUA initiatives seeking information or skills development.

Allotment associations constitute another centre of skills and knowledge. Each association has a gardening committee that is staffed with some of their most experienced members. Additionally,

they “also actively try to create the atmosphere of asking help from an old hand or your [garden] neighbour” (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation) and thus facilitate knowledge transfer.

Established neighbourhood initiatives are connected to networks that enable them to practice CBUA and to share opportunities. One example is illustrated in this quote:

“Through my network, I met a Moroccan lady who just finished a course in beekeeping. And then the question came to me: do you know a place where I can do beekeeping in the neighbourhood? And I'm involved in the development of garden centre. So, I call them up and now she's probably just going to start up there next year.” (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens)

The relevance of knowledge sharing and social networks is also apparent in Rijnvliet, where these connections are gradually emerging. Current inhabitants use group chats to share tips on picking opportunities in the public area and recipes to process their harvest (INT-UTR-14, involved in Rijnvliet in multiple capacities). Apart from knowledge sharing, this network also supports community building in the new neighbourhood.

## 3.5 Main barriers to food sharing practices around CBUA in Utrecht

### 3.5.1 Fragmentation and bureaucracy

UA governance in Utrecht illustrates the difficulties of fitting a multidimensional subject into compartmentalized governance structure. Existing collaborations within the municipality are not systematic but rather incidental or project based. Even though individual public administrators recognize food as a cross-disciplinary subject (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department), there is not enough structural coordination between departments:

“You see municipal organizations growing because there is much more to do. But then you have to keep working together [within the municipality] and working in a coordinated way with initiatives. And then also include the city council, who have to determine how we organize that. I think it is still fairly fragmented. Everyone is doing their own thing.” (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department)

The fragmentation of CBUA governance leads to a lack of policy coherence which affects both civic and private actors. This becomes evident when initiatives are looking for funding or a contact within the municipality for a project. Initiatives are often bounced around between departments, where no department feels ownership of the topic:

“We have an [allotment] association that wants to make a new entrance area so it's a little more open, also for the neighbourhood. They are next to an immigration centre, and they also want to have a garden where the asylum seekers can work, [...] enjoy being in nature together, with one or two members of the association helping and advising them. [...] And then it's a case of being sent from pillar to post, because which department of the



municipality is responsible? Who should pay for that?” (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation).

The fragmentation of the subject of food specifically increases the difficulty “to then find the right person within the municipality to move your project and your ideas and your vision forward” (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens). Even if the right person has been found, there are frequent changes and reorganization within the municipality:

“We suffer from the bureaucracy of the municipality from time to time and it reorganizes every so often and then suddenly people fall under a different department again” (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation).

Given this complexity, cooperation with the municipality requires significant knowledge and capacity. This creates a disadvantage particularly for new entrants and organizations with lower personal capacities. Bigger and more established organizations can rely on a history of collaboration, their institutional experience and (sometimes paid) staff members.

In addition, the national government recently passed new laws on the monitoring of associations and foundations<sup>41</sup>. This legislation was instated to prevent mismanagement, but it increases the administrative burden for these organizations, where even small mistakes may be penalized (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation).

### 3.5.2 Lack of political ambition and consideration of CBUA in urban planning

The municipality does not have ambitions to provide more systematic support to CBUA initiatives. It sees itself as a facilitator for citizen initiatives rather than an active promotor of CBUA specifically. While Rijnvliet is presented as a visionary project, it is standalone, without linking to more city-wide ambitions in the area of UA. Such ambitions could translate both into steering through funding (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens) and into urban planning.

Without a strategic approach, municipal support of CBUA relies on active individuals in the public administration. Most UA-related actions over the past 15 years can be traced back to one person that has been particularly interested in the subject and has pushed for UA-projects within the municipality. The continuity of this support is under threat once this person retires.

In Rijnvliet, lack of practical foresight leads to many unanswered questions in this pioneering project. The municipality envisions that the neighbourhood inhabitants will take over the care of the edible green areas within 5-years’ time as the public actors withdraw their support. However, there is no plan to stimulate knowledge, skills and sense of ownership to achieve this:

“I think it's fantastic that Rijnvliet is there. But who is going to implement it, who is going to provide that education? Do you care that those hedges stay in place? Because if you plan these hedges [around private gardens], but then there is no capacity to enforce it anyway or

---

<sup>41</sup> Wet bestuur en toezicht rechtspersonen

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/brochures/2021/06/15/informatieblad-wet-bestuur-en-toezicht-rechtspersonen>



there are actually no resources to invest in it beforehand... Well, let it go then, you don't have to do anything with it. But it would be a real shame.” (INT-UTR-14, involved in Rijnvliet in multiple capacities)

### 3.5.3 Limited and monopolized funding

The dependence on public funding makes CBUA initiatives vulnerable to political changes. Utrecht Natuurlijk and allotment associations have specific subsidy titles allocated to them, and are thus effectively monopolizing part of the funding available for UA. This creates stability in the management of allotments and municipal farms and gardens, but it also constraints the possibilities for new actors to enter the field.

Smaller grassroots initiatives mostly rely on funding which is not UA-specific, which means that CBUA projects are competing with other initiatives. An interviewee involved in community gardens also remarked that it is difficult to fund novel and experimental initiatives, as most subsidy schemes are highly result driven (INT-UTR-15, initiator of community gardens). Furthermore, the setup of the subsidies creates an atmosphere of competition, which is at odds with the shared goals of many CBUA actors:

“There is only one pot of subsidy that different parties are bidding on every time. In that sense, there is competition. But in terms of message and in terms of content, there really isn't. So, it's mainly about that yes there are relatively limited resources. But in terms of content, we are all on the same page. [...] And well it would be nice if the message was central and not so much the money. The money creates a kind of competitive feeling, which I don't think should be happening. It would be nice if that money could somehow lead to all those parties working together much more.” (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation)

Furthermore, the unclear and fragmented governance structure creates an untransparent situation in which access to funding and support might depend on personal connections and experience with navigating the administrative requirements. This further hinders access to funding for new entrants, as illustrated in this quote on the [VIVE](#) subsidies: “those are all organisations that are used to applying” (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain).

### 3.5.4 Reliance on volunteers

Most CBUA initiatives rely on volunteers, a situation which is reinforced by the municipality's support to volunteering and participation. This can be seen as a potential threat as volunteer engagement might fluctuate over time, leading to instability. While some initiatives have an overload of participants, others experience a lack of volunteers. Furthermore, Utrecht Natuurlijk shared that most of their volunteers cannot work independently but require guidance.

The risks of relying on volunteers as key drivers of CBUA is well visible in the Rijnvliet neighbourhood. While the neighbourhood design process entailed a participatory element involving people from the neighbouring area, current inhabitants do not (yet) have a sense of ownership of the neighbourhood. Inhabitants are not always motivated to get involved in the public edible green and often perceive a lack of legitimacy as well as practical knowledge and skills. A food forest ranger

instated by the municipality is currently working to build a knowledge base about the food forest, with the vision of transferring the responsibility for the area to the locals.

### 3.5.5 Legislation on animal agriculture

Farms that keep animals face a particular difficulty due to a lack of differentiation of education-oriented urban farming within agricultural legislation. Utrecht Natuurlijk keeps animals for educational purposes on several of their farms. The initiative would like to manage the farms in a circular fashion by using their own manure. However, the legislation does not allow for manure to be stored in inhabited areas in any amounts. Urban farms are subject to the same standards as agrobusinesses, despite clear differences in purpose and design.

## 3.6 Conflicting interests among different actors involved in FSIs related to UA

### 3.6.1 Competition for space

Utrecht is a very dense city with a growing population which is causing a competition for space between public green, housing and other forms of land use. Even though the [Spatial development strategy](#) foresees an increase in green space, this space is meant to accommodate nature, recreation, sports and play areas together with UA, and not all land might be suitable for cultivation. This creates a tension between the municipality's declared support for CBUA and the space actually available. The situation of allotment gardens is illustrative. The interest in this form of gardening is clear from their long waiting lists. However, the municipality is reluctant to expand the allotments as this form of CBUA is relatively space-demanding, accommodating fewer people than more communal forms of CBUA in public space (see next section).

Existing allotments remain intact thanks to their cultural and historical significance, and possibly thanks to the authority held by umbrella organisation. However, the competition for space is increasing the price of land, affecting rent for allotment plots and the overall budgets of allotment associations. This creates inequalities on several levels. First, there are disparities between allotments, as wealthier associations can afford more and better facilities. Second, the increase of rent makes allotments less accessible for people with lower incomes. This might be contributing to changing demographic composition of the allotments: "Old Moroccans, for example, used to have a third of the gardens in the city I think. Nowadays you see them slowly disappearing." (INT-UTR-11, member of volkstuin umbrella organisation).

### 3.6.2 Private, communal and public food growing

The competition for space as well as the culture of participation privileges communal forms of CBUA over private ones. Allotment gardens are again a good illustration of this development. While they were historically conceived as rather individualised (or household-centred) spaces of food production, recently there is more emphasis on their community function:

"You can see now that at all the associations people also really do it because they enjoy being in a club of like-minded people. It is more social and fun. The gardening days that are

held every month where you have to help for communal, trimming hedges, cleaning ditches and clearing out nest boxes or a little painting here and there. That's always very nice. It involves some cake and coffee. [...] I think in the last ten years that's slowly grown. Everybody now lists that one of the top two of the fun of having an allotment garden.” (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation)

Nonetheless, the municipality puts pressure on allotments to become open more to the public. This would enable more people to enjoy recreation in the garden areas, without expanding on the space available. This leads to a conflict of interests as allotment members are not always happy to share the garden space due to incidents where outsiders would walk through the garden and pick some produce, or even vandalise the garden (DOC-UTR-45). The subsidy for Shared recreational use is well used by allotments associations, e.g. to install kitchen equipment or benches (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation). But at the same time, allotments are reluctant to change their form and would like to be recognized as cultural heritage in their traditional shape.

The efforts to provide more people with a gardening experience on less space leads to support for more communal forms of UA, such as the gardens and farms of Utrecht Natuurlijk, and the requirement for new gardening initiatives to remain publicly accessible. The Rijnvliet project is an extreme example of this endeavour, as food is grown in public areas. Preliminary observations from this still-developing neighbourhood reveal tensions between a universal physical access and an unclear sense of ownership and social access. The following quotes illustrate these negotiations:

“The most asked question was: are we allowed to pick?” (INT-UTR-14, involved in Rijnvliet in multiple capacities)

“For me an eye opener was when the cook [working in a restaurant in the neighbourhood] asked me: can I just pick here? They were actually used to picking at home [in Finland]. And we are so far away from that that we don't know what to eat anymore. Super interesting.” (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department)

“That group chat [with local residents] is great. They are often all correcting each other. Don't pick too much, for example. Or someone talks about robbing and then someone else says yes but you cannot call it that because I am just picking and that is allowed. Who gets what and how much is very interesting. Also with animals.” (INT-UTR-12, municipal official of the Green department)

The experiment with public food production in Rijnvliet is also a novelty for the broader landscape of social movement actors traditionally involved in UA. For instance, Utrecht Natuurlijk was surprised that they were not involved in the project, considering their position as a key organization in CBUA and nature education in Utrecht (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation).

## 3.7 The influence of the cultural and socio-ecological context

### 3.7.1 Cultural context

Historically, Utrecht has been closely connected to food production, as shown on a recent book supported by the municipality with a subtitle “2000 years of urban agriculture and foodscape in

Utrecht”. Despite the loss of connection to agriculture in modern times, this historical association may reflect a cultural appreciation for local food and culinary traditions. The little food production that still takes place in Dutch cities is largely done in allotment gardens. The presence of allotment gardens in Utrecht as a long-standing tradition in the Netherlands is a part of the cultural fabric of the city. Allotment gardens often serve as spaces for both food production and social interaction. The cultural significance of *volkstuinen* makes them relevant in urban planning and other policy making in Dutch cities.

Utrecht's cultural context is enriched by a high diversity of different ethnic and national communities inhabiting the city. People from a lot of different cultures have used allotment gardens since they migrated to the Netherlands to provide themselves with crops native to their motherland. For example, many Moroccan immigrants have been gardening in Utrecht as illustrated in this quote:

“Those people who were always there really, those were production gardens with onions, garlic and mint.” (INT-UTR-11, member of allotment umbrella organisation)

The same interviewee remarked, however, that the composition of the allotments is changing, which might be caused by a generational change but also rising rent prices.

### 3.7.2 Socio-political context

The socio-political context of Utrecht plays a crucial role in shaping and supporting urban agriculture practices. Particularly relevant is the left-progressive (within the Dutch context) political climate of Utrecht. The long-term dominance these parties in the city council for translates into a commitment to green and progressive policies and subsidies.

Furthermore, the generally growing awareness of sustainability and green transitions provides a conducive environment for urban agriculture initiatives:

“People are looking much more to nature for recreation and relaxation. I think we have the wind in our sails, much more so now than we did a few years ago” (INT-UTR-13, employee of green education foundation).

The left, green, and progressive government in Utrecht is similar to some larger cities in the Netherlands. However, national elections in November 2023 resulted in a significant shift of the political landscape towards right-wing, conservative and anti-environmentalist parties. This shift exposes social polarization around, among others, environmental and climate issues, with lack of housing and intensive agriculture as main points of contention. The Dutch political system affords relative autonomy to sub-national levels of governance where municipalities hold significant power in shaping the foodsharing governance landscape and form cooperations such as the [City deals](#). Despite that, developments on the national level are likely to shape debates on urban agriculture and food sharing.

### 3.7.3 Ecological context

Utrecht is experiencing warmer summers, a trend associated with global warming. The rising temperatures have implications for urban agriculture as they affect growing conditions and water

availability. Green spaces, including urban farms and gardens, are increasingly viewed by the municipality as essential places for residents to cool off during hot summers (DOC-UTR-12). While water scarcity is not currently a significant issue for gardens and farms in Utrecht, climate change could potentially lead to challenges in the future.

### 3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has sketched the governance landscape shaping food sharing initiatives involved in urban agriculture in the city of Utrecht. After reviewing key types of CBUA present in the city, most of the report focuses in food growing located in public and semi-public areas: allotments, community gardens and public edible green. These types are represented by the main civic actors involved in the field: the allotment associations and the Utrecht Natuurlijk foundation which was established by a transformation from a municipal department. Both of these actors have close ties and a long lasting history of collaboration with the municipality. They have formalized structures including paid staff and are funded by tailor-made subsidy titles. This results in a stability in the management of the largest CBUA forms in the city, but also a de facto monopoly on part of the CBUA funding.

Another form of CBUA typical for Utrecht are more or less formalized bottom-up initiatives. These are able to start small gardening or greening projects on public land, provided that they have sufficient neighbourhood support and remain accessible to the public. Apart from using public land free of charge, these initiatives are also eligible for material support and they can apply for funding through subsidy titles stimulating volunteering and participation.

Lastly, a specific and highly promoted case of CBUA is the Rijnvliet neighbourhood, which features edible plants in most of its green areas. The project presents an interesting combination of top-down and grassroots approaches: while it was put forward by the municipality (with some citizen participation in the design process), it is envisioned as self-managed by the local inhabitants. While the municipality promotes Rijnvliet as a flagship project, it is not integrated into the broader governance landscape, which poses some practical challenges regarding the management of the area.

The municipality of Utrecht values urban agriculture and green living environment as means of fostering social cohesion and public health. This discourse shapes the local governance landscape in which CBUA and food policies are fragmented across policy domains, with no ambitions for a more integrative approach. The understanding of CBUA as a social tool enables initiatives to access a broader range of funds. However, lack of UA-specific policies, subsidies and contact points within the municipality creates a barrier particularly for new initiatives. This results in a nontransparent environment which privileges well established actors in the field.

Utrecht is a growing city negotiating competing land use demands. The city's strategy explicitly frames housing and public green as complementary, and it recognizes the importance of green and CBUA spaces. The wish to make gardening accessible for more inhabitants while being space efficient results in a pressure on more community-based forms of CBUA (allotments and community gardens) to become more open to the public. The experiment with food production in public land in Rijnvliet reveals important questions regarding access, management and ownership.

The presented analysis is based on a limited number of interviews, which capture the most important actors in the field, but cannot account for a broad range of experiences particularly among less formalized grass-roots initiatives. Furthermore, the municipality has been a partner and a gatekeeper in this research, resulting in a possible bias. Lastly, the fragmentation of food and CBUA governance in the municipality presented a challenge in creating a comprehensive analysis.

## 3.9 Recommendations

### 3.9.1 Recommendation to municipality

- Centre your approach to CBUA by creating a coherent policy with clearly defined ambitions.
- Develop specific programs to support urban agriculture
- Make subsidies accessible to a more diverse range of initiatives. Streamline and simplify administrative procedures and provide training and support to new entrants. Make existing support structures more visible and accessible.
- Find a balance between stability and monopolisation of the sector.
- Ensure coherence between planning and executive departments of the municipality. Provide training and education *Stadsbedrijven* to facilitate the management of edible public green.
- Allocate suitable spaces to UA
- Create a legislative framework for small-scale animal agriculture in the city.
- Develop a plan for the management and governance of Rijnvliet ensuring long-term social sustainability.

### 3.9.2 Recommendation to civil society:

- Find ways to engage with the private sector for financial (and other) collaborations
- Engage in the existing networks, such as BuurtNatuur030
- Share knowledge, including administrative expertise
- Create opportunities for collaboration instead of competition
- Lobby for UA-specific support
- Promote socially sustainable engagement and stable participation

### 3.9.3 Recommendation to private sector:

- Support civil society actors
- Engage in CBUA in collaboration with existing networks

### 3.10 Future lines of research

- Which groups of inhabitants participate (or not) in CBUA and what are possible access barriers? How does this change over time?
- How can community ownership develop in an edible neighbourhood designed by the municipality?
- What zoning policies favour development of UA?





## 4. Food Waste Recovery and Redistribution (FWR)

---

### 4.1 Introduction

The governance of food waste is fragmented, marked by governmental, sectoral and voluntary initiatives (Szulecka & Strøm-Andersen, 2021). This fragmentation reflects the dynamics of surplus food which are caused by and also impact different parts of the food supply chain (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2015; Diaz-Ruiz et al., 2019; Göbel et al., 2015; Righettini & Lizzi, 2020).

According to [data of the European Commission](#), the Netherlands produces 161 kg of food waste per capita annually, ranking as the fifth country with most food waste in the EU (Soethoudt and Vollebregt 2023). Reducing food waste is high on the Dutch national agenda, with the Dutch government confirming its commitment to halving per capita food waste at the retail and consumer level by 2030 (SDG 12.3). In line with this commitment, food waste has been monitored nationally since 2009, with annual updates, though the data does not include municipal monitoring. Research confirms that since 2010, there has been a 29% reduction in food waste, particularly in the wastage of bread, dairy produce, fruit and vegetables, “although these food types still remain among the most discarded products by consumers.” At the same time, most recent reports show a stagnation in food waste reduction and signal a need to accelerate the process in order to meet the set goals (Bos-Brouwers et al 2023).

Within the Netherlands, regulations on waste are generally organized nationally, in interaction with EU agendas. As will be discussed below, the broad scope of these regulations point to a complex, fragmented and multi-level landscape. It also highlights the lack of regulation to address food waste at the sub-national level.

### 4.2 Regulatory regimes shaping food sharing landscapes in Utrecht

#### 4.2.1 The main social movements and community organisations operating in the FWR arena

While the governance and monitoring of food waste mostly happens at national level, in day-to-day practice food (waste) redistribution in Utrecht is mostly addressed by civil society and private actors. Within the civil sector, foodbanks are the most visible actors with ties to the municipality. Other forms of food redistribution such food collection and meal eating are organized bottom-up and their operation is to a large extent independent from the municipal government.

Initiatives and businesses addressing food surplus and food waste exhibit distinct motivations and discourses, reflecting a diverse landscape of goals and approaches. At the core, there is a shared objective among these initiatives—to minimize food waste as much as possible, which underscores a clear collective commitment. However, beyond this shared goal, motivations diverge. Some

initiatives extend their focus to supporting eating initiatives with a social focus such as tackling loneliness and fostering community cohesion, such as Resto van Harte and Buurtbuik which, despite using rescued food do not highlight it in their mission statements.

Another subset of initiatives adopts an environmental justice lens with an strong emphasis on the politics of resource distribution, viewing access to food as a fundamental right. For these initiatives, the fight against food waste is intrinsically tied to broader socio-political ideals, challenging existing systems and advocating for a more equitable distribution of resources. This perspective frames their efforts not only as a means to reduce waste but as a transformative action against systemic inequalities.

Some of these initiatives are rooted in the history of squatting culture in the Netherlands, which has given rise to anarchist hubs in larger cities, where communities actively engage in reclaiming resources, including making use of rescued food to run communal kitchens. As these initiatives have wider goals than food waste redistribution, we discuss them more thoroughly in the section on social solidarity economy, noting that the current Utrecht scene is smaller than in other big cities, as explained by our interviewee:

"So I think it's just that the squatting history has allowed this to grow. Because there are a lot of VOKUs [community kitchens, from German Volks Küche] in Amsterdam indeed. But since there's just one small centre here in Utrecht, there is only one." (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food)

#### 4.2.1.1 Food collection and meal sharing

Apart from targeted food aid provided by the foodbanks in cooperation with social welfare departments, Utrecht hosts a diversity of organizations involved in distributing and sharing meals and food to the general public. While some of these organizations are run by private actors (see next section), many are community based non-profits, and they contribute in different ways to the social solidarity economy. Most organizations rely on multiple sources of food: donations from companies and individuals, purchased food as well as dumpster diving.

[Buurtbuik](#) ("Neighbourhood Belly") is a national foundation with 16 branches across 5 Dutch cities. Buurtbuik activities include collecting food and organizing cooking and eating activities. The initiative claims to have rescued around 300,000 kg food and hosted 250,000 meals across the Netherlands. In Utrecht, the initiative is active at 5 locations serving a three course meal at each location on a weekly basis. The food is collected by volunteers from small, independent grocery stores close to the location.

[Taste before you waste](#) (TBYW) is a youth run anti-food waste collective active in two Dutch cities: Utrecht & Amsterdam. TBYW Utrecht is running weekly pick-ups from local grocery stores and distributes the food to a shelter for undocumented people and to the [Weggeefwinkel](#) (GiveAway Shop). Additionally they host meals at [ACU](#), an anarchist political-cultural centre. Through their food waste collection and dumpster diving activities, TBYW occasionally supports political and cultural events by providing cooked food. Similarly, the [Barricade Kitchen](#), an off-line initiative sourcing their food exclusively through dumpster diving activities organizes meals in [ACU](#). Both organizations are

politically active and question the phenomenon of food waste in relation to the current economic system, engaging in social and solidarity activities promoting food as a right.

[Voedselsurplus](#) is a foundation working on a national level to tackle the issues of food waste and food poverty by establishing connections between food businesses and social restaurants, i.e. neighbourhood or community centres providing free meals. The foundation mostly works with supermarkets and large grocery stores, and it facilitates food distribution to kitchens cooking free meals. They also provide trainings and workshops for cooks. Even though the foundation has been active in Utrecht, it did not create a continuous presence here.

Buurtkasjes (“Neighbourhood Cupboards”) are cupboards or refrigerators that contain food or other items (books, hygiene products) that anyone can take for free or swap for something else. The cupboards are initiated and run informally by individual or neighbourhood groups and can be found in front gardens, parks, community centres, town halls and other public spaces. The [Buurtkasjekaart](#), an online inventory identified 556 community cupboards across the Netherlands. In Utrecht, the [Weggeefwinkel](#) (the GiveAway Shop) is a community run free shop that hosts a community refrigerator which is weekly supplied by Taste Before You Waste. In the Rijnvliet neighbourhood, the artist collective Cascoland introduced food sharing cabinets during their pop-up intervention in September 2023. Residents who “adopted” a food sharing cupboard are currently organizing themselves to promote food sharing in the neighbourhood.



Other channels facilitating access to free food include a Facebook group Free in Utrecht (Gratis In Utrecht, not specific to food). There is a website that makes visible dumpster diving sites across the Netherlands (see [www.Trashwiki.org](http://www.Trashwiki.org) though we note the site is not very active and not updated since 2022). For Utrecht, there is also a closed Facebook group ([Dumpster Diving | Food Sharing \(Utrecht\)](#)) that has over 500 members and has been active since 2014. A [google map of dumpster diving](#) and food sharing locations in Utrecht was also published in 2023.

#### 4.2.1.2 Foodbanks

Similar to other affluent countries, the rate of poor households in the Netherlands increased steadily over the past years (van der Horst et al 2014). Food banks have been founded from 2002 in the Netherlands, and they present the main form of food aid, helping households acquiring the necessary quantity of food. In 2008, regional food bank organizations have been consolidated in the

[Foundation of Dutch Foodbanks](#) which currently brings together most of the local food banks: 173 in total. In 2022, these foodbanks were used by 197 000 people, a 33% increase compared to the previous year<sup>42</sup>. The amount of households potentially qualifying is even higher, but only households who make a request and are referred by a municipal social welfare organization can access the food bank. The Dutch food bank system is run fully by volunteers – 13 500 people volunteer in the Foundation. Municipalities support 84% of the local food banks by financial and other means.

Dutch food banks mostly distribute food that, for a variety of reasons, became redundant during any of the steps in the food chain (van der Horst et al 2014), including food that overproduced, mislabelled or close to or have passed the expiration date. Some food banks purchase food, or ask food donations from grocery shoppers. Food bank clients can collect their package once a week. People can only access the food bank if they are involved in the broader social assistance system organized on municipal level, which includes an assessment of their disposable income. According to the Foundation's 2022 report, people make use of the foodbank for a period of 18 months on average. In Utrecht, an interview with a municipal official working in the social domain confirmed the view of food banks as a temporary assistance:

“It's my personal opinion of the food bank, but I think it's also the municipality's view: it shouldn't be provided for one person in the long term. So it is really to bridge a period of time of people not being able to buy food, but basically you should just get out, should be able to make ends meet.” (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

[Voedselbank Utrecht](#) is the regional branch of the Foundation of Dutch Foodbanks. Eight locations spread throughout the city distribute premade packages once a week. The food is partly based on donations and partly bought from [Local2local](#), which is an Utrecht organisation that distributes local food (see section 3). The foodbanks in Utrecht are mostly run by volunteers, supported by a coordinator that is employed by the [Tussenvoorziening](#), an Utrecht non-profit that works with people who are in debt or homeless<sup>43</sup>.

In addition to Voedselbank Utrecht, the Leidsche Rijn neighbourhood hosts an independent foodbank that has split off from the larger organisation, called [VoedselbankPlus Leidsche Rijn](#). Instead of handing out packages, it operates as a small supermarket with a point system. Similarly to “regular” foodbanks, access is mediated by social welfare providers who assess clients' eligibility. Clients receive a weekly point budget (e.g. 20 points for a 1 person household) which they can spend in the social supermarket for goods (priced generally between 1-3 points) of their choosing. Research has shown that a shop-like setting supports can improve agency of food aid recipients in meeting their personal needs (Andriessen et al 2020).

---

<sup>42</sup> Microsoft Word - Feiten en Cijfers per 31-12-2022 (versie 29-12-2023) (voedselbanknederland.nl)

<sup>43</sup> Voedselbank Utrecht's policy <https://voedselbankutrecht.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Beleidsplan-Stichting-Voedselbank-Utrecht-2019-2021.pdf>

## 4.2.2 The main private sector enterprises operating in the FWR arena?

Growing debates on food waste reduction have attracted a number of private sector actors in this field. In most cases, businesses find their niche in helping retailers address pressures on food waste reduction. [Too Good To Go](#) is an international company that helps businesses sell food parcels with foods that are (almost) on their expiry date for a reduced price. The company runs a mobile phone application through which people can reserve discounted parcels from participating shops. The exact content of these parcels are mostly unknown, although the shops often provide a category of food that is in the bag, such as bakery products or fresh produce. Too Good To Go was established in 2016 and has ever since become highly popular in the Netherlands. Globally, the company works with nearly 85 000 stores in 17 countries in Europe and North America. The app is used with over 85 million registered users.<sup>44</sup> The Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn has developed a similar system in their [Overblijvers](#) (Leftovers) app. In both cases, companies appeal to consumer by financial savings, food waste reduction and an element of surprise. In addition, most Dutch supermarkets sell products close to the expiration date at a discount.

The headquarters of [Orbisk](#) are located in Utrecht. This company produces scales with visual recognition software that can help restaurants or other food businesses make their waste more visible. The scale weighs and identifies the product that is being discarded and creates a digital overview of all the food that is wasted in a restaurant. Knowing what foods go to waste can help businesses reduce their food waste by at least 50% according to Orbisk.

[Instock](#) was established in 2014 with the mission to help retailers reduce their food waste. From 2014 to 2020 Instock focused on developing the waste-free catering and restaurant concept. More recently, Instock developed added-value products such as beer and granola. From 2023 they are focusing exclusively on whole-sale redistribution of food waste to catering and hospitality sector in Utrecht and beyond. Alongside their Food Rescue Centre in Diemen, Instock runs several educational programs in primary schools.

Apart from food waste prevention, Utrecht hosts several companies that revalorise waste streams. [De Clique](#) and [Funghi Factory](#) produce mushrooms on used coffee grounds. De Clique also collects orange peels for their production of essential oils, and compost food waste collected from businesses. Another company working with revalorization of food waste is the brewery of [Wasted Beer](#). They produce beer with residual streams of bread. Their beers are sold throughout all of the Netherlands and also in Belgium.

## 4.2.3 Main policies, regulations and plans regarding FWR

The regulatory landscape concerning food waste management and redistribution is multileveled, with most policies and strategies pertaining to national and European levels of governance. In the Netherlands, there are no specific policies on food waste. Instead, the topic is variously touched upon in regulations pertaining food safety on one hand, and (organic) waste management on the other hand.

---

<sup>44</sup> [Too Good To Go 2023 Impact Report](#)



#### 4.2.3.1 European regulations

The EU has expressed a strong commitment to addressing food lost and waste. To this end, the Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597 supplementing Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council provides a common methodology and minimum quality requirements for the uniform measurement of levels of food waste. Furthermore, food redistribution is subject to Regulation 2002/178 on General principles and requirement of food law concerning health safety.

#### 4.2.3.2 European Strategies

Reducing food loss and waste is an integral part of the Green Deal's Farm to Fork Strategy's Action Plan. As part of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission was expected to propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste across the EU by the end of 2023. These targets were to be defined against a baseline for EU food waste levels set following the first EU-wide food waste monitoring. The Commission has also proposed a revision of EU rules on date marking ('use by' and 'best before' dates).

#### 4.2.3.3 National Government

While the Netherlands has no specific regulations on food waste. In lieu of concrete policies we note two main government-supported actions related to food waste: Monitoring and a Public-Private Platform to support businesses in reducing food waste.

##### Monitoring

With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the Netherlands committed to goal 12.3: to halve per capita food waste at the retail and consumer level by 2030, and reduce food losses along the food production and supply chains. To this end, The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) launched the Foodwaste Monitor ([Monitor Voedselverspilling](#)): an assignment to track the amount of food waste, which has been commissioned from Wageningen University and Research's Food and Biobased Research Institute. It does appear that the project ended in 2023. The Foodwaste Monitor is completed yearly, with an additional Household Food Waste Monitor conducted every three years. The calculations are based on publicly available figures and the monitor distinguishes six types of residual streams, depending on their destination: food bank, animal feed, fermentation, composting, incineration and landfill/disposal. Apart from those for the food bank and animal feed, all these streams are considered food waste. The first monitor was 2009, but now the data is particularly relevant because in 2020, the Netherlands had to report that food waste according to the European directive. The Foodwaste Monitor initially defined food waste as follows:

"Food waste occurs when food intended for human consumption is not used for this purpose, whereby the higher level valorization according to Moerman's ladder<sup>45</sup> is used for the purpose of quantification of waste in kilograms. Food that is not intended for human

---

<sup>45</sup> Moerman's ladder refers to the hierarchy of food waste where higher-value uses (preventing foodwaste, human nutrition, animal feed, material reuse) is preferred over recycling (anaerobic digestion and composting) and waste (incineration and disposal). In the current approach, food that is reused, i.e. donated to food banks or used for animal feed, is not counted as food waste, while both of these streams are being monitored.

consumption does not fall under the definition of food waste and it is therefore not included in the quantification.” ([Kamerbrief over Europees beleid voedselverspilling](#) 2014: 2).

According to this definition, the food waste monitoring in the Netherlands excluded unavoidable food waste, i.e. inedible parts of food such as fruit pits and peels. The 2020 report corrected the methodology in accordance with EU approaches which also include inedible parts of food. This resulted in an increase of quantified food waste in the Netherlands. (Southoudt and Vollebregt 2023).

The most recent data from the Monitor is available for 2020: the total amount of food waste in the Netherlands amounted to 2811 kilotons, or 161 kg per inhabitant. About one third of this amount concerns waste in primary production, one third of waste occurs during processing and manufacturing. Southoudt and Vollebregt (2023: 2) point out that part of the food wasted in the Netherlands relates to the country’s agricultural imports and exports. The third biggest contributor were households, where over 1000 kilotons of food was wasted.<sup>46</sup> In addition to food waste, 13.5 kilotons of food was donated to food banks and 620 kilotons were used as animal feed. According to the report, the amount of food waste has decreased compared to previous years. However, at the current rate the halving of waste by 2030 will not be achieved.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality therefore commissioned another report to advise on how the transition can be accelerated. The [report](#), carried out by Bos-Brouwers et al (2023) at Wageningen University & Research advises the government to take an integrated approach by developing a Vision of the Dutch Foodsystem 2030-2050 and clearly committing to the goals formulated by the EU. It gives recommendations for improving the quality of data and setting quantitative mid-term goals per sector. Other relevant advised measures include:

- setting binding requirements as opposed to the currently used voluntary approach (e.g. with regards to food waste monitoring and performance)
- specific actions aimed at reducing losses in agriculture and fisheries
- improving options for donation to food banks
- preventing overconsumption, for instance by banning volume discounts
- developing measures against unfair commercial practices, e.g. last-minute cancellations and rejections of goods based on cosmetic factors
- expanding legal options for using plant and animal waste streams as animal feed
- removing import tariffs or criteria that can lead to food waste (while taking food safety into consideration)
- promote fair pricing where wasteful practices are penalized.

### **Public-Private Platform: Food Waste Free United**

The main platform for action against food waste is a public-private partnership Stichting Samen Tegen Voedselverspilling (Food Waste Free United, STV). STV emerged in 2018 from the Taskforce Circular Economy in Food operating within the EU-funded REFRESH project. Since then, it brings

---

<sup>46</sup> The report shows very low amounts of food waste in the catering sector which is caused by the Covid-19 lockdowns and not representative of its regular operations.



together diverse actors working on the topic of food waste. Key members are the Ministry for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (which is also a key funder), The Netherlands Nutrition Centre (Voedingscentrum, also fully government-funded), representatives of municipal and provincial governments as well as Wageningen University & Research and key private actors.

The foundation operates as a multi-actor and multi-level collaboration platform. It is active in monitoring, developing measuring tools for businesses and advising them on minimising food waste. Methodologies developed by the STV facilitate self-reporting at company and sectoral level. STV also supports innovations in valorisation of waste streams. Currently, STV has voluntary agreements on food waste reduction with more than 110 civil society and private organisations (Bos-Brouwer et al 2023). It has also formulated ambitions in food waste reductions for specific sectors.

Together with the Netherlands Nutrition Centre, the STV carries out information campaigns for consumers, targeting shopping, cooking and food storing practices. Campaigns are also realised within school.

STV also monitors legislation in order to identify existing barriers for companies to combat food waste. In 2020, a [report](#) by STV and Wageningen University & Research identified top ten priority measures related to food waste policy (Bos-Brouwers et al 2020):

1. Aligning the Dutch definition of food waste with that of the EU, whereby the animal feed destination is not considered to be food waste.
2. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) should focus on production that meets demand exactly, removing all incentives for overproduction, and coordinating legislation between EU member states.
3. Providing financial incentives to prevent the destruction of products whose minimum auction price has not been reached. (Thus removing financial barriers for reselling unsold products.)
4. Separating pet feed standards from food/livestock feed standards, so that food scraps can be used in animal feed (subject to the conditions relating to animal health).
5. Deploying targeted tracking and tracing technologies and adapting regulations to enable rejection at the product or batch level instead of entire batches being rejected in the event of deviating values.
6. Stimulating the adaptation of European legislation on animal feed (e.g. Feed ban) in order to enable the use of residual waste streams and by-products with possible traces of animal products or by-products from the animal feed chain.
7. Developing an overarching vision and coordinating an integrated policy (NL and EU) for the relationship between packaging, packaging waste, and food waste so that packaging retains the product optimally while at the same time contributing to good recyclability.
8. Using financial incentives to encourage valorisation of organic residual waste streams (reduction of waste, prevention of low-grade use of organic waste in industry, e.g. pricing of raw materials, emission rights)
9. Clarify the expiration dates (Best Before / Use By) for consumers and businesses.
10. Including the use of smart sensor technology for flexible expiry date labelling in legislation.

We derive two general conclusions from the reports and recommendations. First, much of the legislation related to food is bound to EU standards and directives. This concerns health and safety regulations which might typically cause food to be wasted before the retail stage of the supply chain (e.g. foods are deemed unsafe for human consumption and need to be discarded), but also trade standards which include, among others, product liability directive or VAT directive on food donations (see below). Even though national governments have certain flexibility in the implementation of EU directives, their manoeuvring space within existing legislation is limited.

Second, we notice that definitions of food waste strongly shape the proposed measures. This is particularly clear in the case of food bank donations and animal feed. As both of these streams are not considered food waste, many recommendations focus on facilitating the flows of unused food to these channels. While relevant for the utilization of waste streams, this approach might be at odds with food waste prevention or other forms of redistribution. In the case of animal feed, we also notice tensions with the efforts to reduce the number of livestock in the Netherlands<sup>47</sup>, pointing to gaps in alignment across national policy objectives.

#### 4.2.3.4 Key regulations relevant for food sharing initiatives

Building on the definitions of food waste described above wherein food donated to food banks and animal feed are not considered waste streams, there are additional regulations on food waste that are of particular relevance for food sharing initiatives. Regulations on product liability and taxes are relevant for businesses wishing to donate food. Food safety regulations concerning the operation of food redistributing initiatives are detailed in an [Information sheet](#) produced by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) based on Hygiene Regulation (EC) No. 852/2004.

NVWA's Information sheet is intended for two types of initiatives, defined as *charitable institutions* and *charitable organisations* (p. 1). *Charitable institution* is defined as an institution that collects foodstuffs to distribute to others. The food may be distributed directly to persons in need as part of a scheme aimed at providing food aid and combating poverty. The institution can also act as an assembly point where distribution to share out points is organised. Food banks are cited as an example of charitable institution. *Charitable organization* is understood more broadly as "a non-profit organisation of a humanitarian nature that distributes foodstuffs to persons in need as part of a scheme aimed at providing food aid and combating poverty." This explicitly also includes charity restaurants, charity food shops, sheltered workshops, and potentially other food sharing initiatives involved in FWR.

#### Product liability

Until the product is delivered to the consumer, producers, retailers, and caterers are responsible for any damage caused by a defect in a product they have supplied. Directive 85/374/EEC deals specifically with food safety, whereas the Warenwet (Commodities act) describes product liability in general. NVWA's Information sheet states that if foodstuffs are transported and stored in the right conditions, the manufacturer remains responsible for their quality until their use by or best before date. This liability might cause businesses to be extremely careful when dealing with food with a potentially lower quality. Risk of claims for damages and reputation damage leads to

---

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/11/30/dutch-farmers-could-be-paid-to-close-their-livestock-farms-under-new-scheme>

precautions. According to Bos-Brouwers et al (2020: 22), some businesses therefore choose to not donate surplus food to avoid this risk, leading to unnecessary waste.

### **VAT regarding food donations**

Bos-Brouwers et al (2020: 24) notice ambiguity in the European VAT Directive, which can have an impact on food donation. It is not always clear to businesses and retailers whether food close to its expiration date is subject to VAT or not. In the Netherlands, businesses are not obliged to pay VAT on *unsellable* foodstuffs which are donated or destroyed. However, if the food in question still has value and could potentially be sold, the VAT must be paid in cases where the donation amounts to more than € 227 (excluding VAT) per year per food bank or other beneficiary. Donations to food banks are also tax deductible if entered as an expense, gift or sponsorship expense in kind. However, the ambiguity of the legislation and the administrative requirements might be a deterrent to food donations.

### **Consumption dates and food safety**

Following the European Labelling Directive, the Dutch Warenwetbesluit Etikettering van Levensmiddelen (Commodities decree on the labelling of food) uses a system with two types of dates: 'tenminste houdbaar tot' or THT which means best before, and 'te gebruiken tot' or TGT which means use by. According to NVWA, products that are "highly perishable from a microbiological point of view and may pose an immediate danger to human health after a short period of time" are required to have a *use by* date, accompanied with instructions for storage<sup>48</sup>. After the date has passed, these products are seen as not suitable for consumption due to health risks, and therefore cannot be sold or distributed.

The *best before* date is used for all other food products (with the exception of whole fresh produce, alcoholic drinks, fresh bakery products, vinegar, salt and sugar). It relates primarily to quality guarantees, with low risks to consumer health. If the best-by date has passed a product is often still perfectly suitable for consumption and can still be sold or distributed. For a number of products, the seller may even extend the best-by date, subject to certain conditions, but the NVWO advises food redistribution initiatives to not take this action by themselves.

Food redistribution initiatives might choose to use food passed the best before date, but they are then responsible for its quality. The quality of the products therefore needs to be checked thoroughly. NVWO's Information sheet provides detailed instructions for estimating the quality of four indicative products categories based on their shelf life, which also gives an estimate of the time window within which the food remains fit for distribution. The NVWO encourages food distributing initiatives to consult the supplier if needed, and always apply the precautionary principle and stop distribution in case of doubt.

The Information sheet also provides guidelines regarding storage temperatures. Food redistributing initiatives need to ensure that the cool chain remains unbroken. This also includes making arrangements on cooled transportation with the suppliers. Food distributors or suppliers can freeze pre-packed foods before their shelf life date expired, provided they meet several technical

---

<sup>48</sup> Labelling of food products <https://www.nvwa.nl/onderwerpen/etikettering-van-levensmiddelen/houdbaarheidsdatum-levensmiddelen>

requirements (e.g. quick freezing in an appropriate installation) and convey clear information to consumers (especially when the food was frozen and that it needs to be consumed immediately after defrosting). Lastly, food safety is enhanced by recommendations regarding traceability (it needs to be clear where food donations came from), workplace hygiene and clear agreements with suppliers.

### **Dumpster Diving: legal grey zone**

Taking food waste out of a bin (dumpster diving or skipping) is a practice operating in a legal grey zone, as the legislation is not explicit about what can be done with food waste. On one hand, disposed items (food or other) are considered to be “res nullius”, i.e. belonging to nobody. These objects can be legally picked up – whoever collects them becomes the new owner. This legal definition does not specifically focus on food but it can be applied to dumpster diving. At the same time, when food is disposed off in containers belonging to a retail or other food venue, it remains in the company’s property until it is collected by the waste management company. Legally, it is not given up but handed over from one business to another<sup>49</sup>, and picking it from the bin in this process is considered theft.

This makes dumpster diving a contested area. While taking food from road side bins is technically not illegal, [popular media](#) reports that in practice, getting caught while taking food from open and locked containers results in fines. When containers are located in closed off areas on private grounds, dumpster divers also risk charges for trespassing or property damages. Municipalities are entitled to issue a *Morgenster permit* which explicitly allows people to go through trash, but to our knowledge, this is not the case in Utrecht. Ultimately, more organized initiatives such as Taste Before You Waste rely on making agreements with food stores rather than dumpster diving under cover.<sup>50</sup>

### **Growing from Waste**

There are multiple companies in Utrecht (and the Netherlands in general) that grow mushrooms on used coffee grounds from cafes and restaurant which is normally considered food waste. If the coffee grounds are never disposed of in a waste bin, but kept in a separate container, the coffee grounds do not acquire the status of waste. Therefore special licensing may be avoided.

#### **4.2.3.5 Municipal Policies**

Most of the policies regulating food waste and redistribution are defined on national level. The table below gives overview of the municipal departments involved in food waste and redistribution through the circularity strategy, subsidy programs available to FWR initiatives as well as the collection of food waste. We note very little to no attention is paid to the sharing of edible food across these policies.

---

<sup>49</sup> Handover or give away? [https://pure.rug.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/16156335/JANSEN\\_JE\\_over\\_prijsggeving\\_ove\\_1.pdf](https://pure.rug.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/16156335/JANSEN_JE_over_prijsggeving_ove_1.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> Koning 2022: Your Waste Is Someone Else’s Dinner

## Key municipal departments

Department	Subdepartment	Function regarding urban agriculture
Spatial development	Circular Economy	Responsible for creating a vision on how Utrecht can become circular
Work and Income	Economy / Entrepreneurs	Stimulate and support entrepreneurs in food waste
	Work and Income	Responsible for a subsidy <a href="#">Social activities and day care</a> which can be used by FWR initiatives providing care for vulnerable people.
	Work and Income	Responsible for subsidies for housing of food banks (see below)
Societal development	Wellbeing / social development	Responsible for a subsidy <a href="#">Volunteering for each other (VIVE)</a> which can be used by FWR initiatives.
<i>Stadsbedrijven</i>		The executive maintenance department of Utrecht, responsible for waste collection, clean streets and maintenance of green areas. Collects organic waste from households for composting and fermenting to biogas.
Neighbourhoods		Responsible for a subsidy <a href="#">Initiative Funds</a> which can be used by FWR initiatives

## Organic waste collection

In Utrecht, households can separate food waste together with garden waste in the organic waste bin. This waste is collected by the *Stadsbedrijven* (City Companies) department and centrally processed for compost and biogas. The municipality has an information campaign on waste separation and organic waste specifically. It has also developed a free Waste Guide App (Afvalwijzer app) and produced a series of videos to teach citizens about organic waste management, but there is nothing specific to food waste or redistribution of edible food.



## Sustainable catering Utrecht Municipality

The Utrecht Municipality pursues sustainability in its purchasing policies. The catering company uses local food sources and provides training and employment for people reintegrating in the labour market. Food waste prevention is taken into account. The caterer uses a weighing system to monitor how much food is left each day. Coffee grounds and plant-based waste is collected by De Clique and used for compost and oyster mushroom production.

### Utrecht's circular strategy

Between 2020 and 2023, Utrecht had a program called *Utrecht Circulair 2020-2023* with the goal to “learn and experiment” with circularity (DOC-UTR-11, INT-UTR-10). From these learnings, a vision document called *Visie Utrecht Circulair 2050* was created (DOC-UTR-10). In 2024, this vision document will be used to create a policy note that will set the stage for actions.

The vision for a circular Utrecht by 2050 has three focus sectors: construction, food and healthcare. The vision on food is a circular food sector, with “where possible, food from regional food systems that is produced using sustainable and circular methods that strengthen nature” (DOC-UTR-10, p.12). The shorter chains also imply a closer cooperation between farmers, resident and businesses.

The document mentions food waste as a significant source of CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions which should be “seriously tackled” by 2050. The vision of Utrecht for food waste by 2050 is the following:

“It has become natural for both consumers and businesses to handle food diligently and to share food through apps and other smart digital systems. Innovative entrepreneurs are working hard to reuse, map and optimize food and residual streams. For example, coffee grounds are collected, used as raw material for growing oyster mushrooms and supplied back as an ingredient for croquettes. Caterers work with flexible menus and make meals with leftovers from the previous day. Smart purchasing and pricing in stores also combats food waste. This prevents unnecessary CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and use of water and land. The ‘GFE’ (fruit, vegetable and food) residues we have left over are effectively separated and collected so we can recycle them as new raw materials. Creative and high-value uses of these materials are identified in cooperation with regional and local food producers. They bring leftovers back into the food chain as much as possible.” (DOC-UTR-10)

The practical implementation of this vision into municipal governance is not clearly stated. However, it gives a sense of the direction of desirable measures in terms of digital and technical innovations and entrepreneurial private-public partnerships.

#### 4.2.3.6 Relevant subsidies

Food redistribution initiatives are eligible for [Volunteering subsidies in Utrecht](#). While these schemes are not specifically designed to support FWR, they can be used by initiatives who work with volunteers or use food redistribution to achieve social goals. In 2023, the [Foodbank Utrecht](#) received 87 k€ from the [VIVE](#) subsidy scheme supporting volunteer work. In addition to this, the municipality also subsidizes the foodbanks’ running costs, “including, but not limited to: rent, utilities, taxes, insurance, minor maintenance, and pest control” (DOC-UTR-53). The application for this subsidy has to be done by the Foodbank Utrecht, the local branch of the Foundation of Dutch Foodbanks. This means that other initiatives, such as the independent foodbank in Leidsche Rijn are not eligible.

As many food redistribution initiatives are housed in neighbourhood [community centres](#), they can also access subsidies indirectly through them. As mentioned, the self-managed community centres united under Dwarsverband receive subsidies through the VIVE scheme.

The table below provides an overview of the subsidies available for FWR initiatives.



<b>Subsidy name</b>	<b>Intended/potential beneficiaries</b>	<b>Amounts<sup>51</sup></b>
Initiative Fund	Citizen initiatives that benefit their neighbourhood. Application by individual citizens or organisations.	Max. €35,000 per year, for a max. of three years (but longer under a few conditions, e.g., when the initiative is carried exclusively by volunteers). We were not able to identify use by FWR initiatives in 2023. <sup>52</sup>
Volunteering for each other	Volunteering initiatives for creating a strong social base in which people help each other	There is no maximum on the amount for which people can apply. However, only certain “necessary costs” are eligible, no labour costs. Used by Foodbank Utrecht in 2023.
Social activities and day care	Organisations or initiatives that offer work opportunities to individuals with a distance to the regular labour market	There is no minimum or maximum amount. A multiyear subsidy up to three years is possible. We were not able to identify use by FWR initiatives in 2023.
Food Bank housing	Food banks connected to Food Bank Utrecht	A total of €150,000 is available for the nine locations in Utrecht
Together for Overvecht	Projects and programs in the neighbourhood of Overvecht that stimulate quality of living in Overvecht	A total of 2 million euro is available for the whole program. We were not able to identify use by FWR initiatives in 2023.

## 4.3 Main enablers to food sharing practices related to FWR in Utrecht

### 4.3.1 Participation and passionate volunteers

FWR initiatives often rely on one or a few very passionate volunteers, such as the interviewee from foodbank Leidsche Rijn who has been running the foodbank for twenty years now. Other foodbanks in Utrecht have similarly passionate volunteers as stated in this quote:

“Because you see that with these food banks, I have something going on now at the food bank in Ondiep in Old West. I saw the name of that contact person. I thought oh that's been the same one for at least ten years. So that's a very passionate volunteer who really stands for that. You just need people like that.” (UTR-INT-05, municipal officer in the social domain)

<sup>51</sup> Subsidy register 2023 <https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/subsidiehulp/subsidieregister/>

<sup>52</sup> Recipients of this subsidy are difficult to identify as they might be listed as private individuals.



Apart from having a dedicated leader, most FWR initiatives rely on regular and ad hoc volunteers to secure their functioning. Being able to find the people to volunteer and to keep them on is therefore essential. The municipality's subsidy programs and the general volunteering culture act as enablers in this sense.

#### 4.3.2 Space for operation

A space to operate is a pre-condition to FWR initiatives. Depending on the type of initiative this may be a kitchen, a community centre or a store location. A common factor within the type of location needed is the need for storage space. FWR initiatives deal with food surplus that can come in unpredictable amounts, creating a need for storage space. The structure of [neighbourhood community centres](#) and the connections to other SSE actors are a vital resource.

#### 4.3.3 Cooperation with private sector

Effective collaboration with the private sector is another significant enabler for FWR initiatives. The private sector is a large and relatively accessible source of food surplus, making it crucial for initiatives to establish fruitful partnerships, as stated in this quote:

"And of course that the stores help out. For the cooking and pickups. Yeah so that's nice that there are quite a few stores that want to participate in that. And the food bank. I think we get food from the food bank because at some point the food bank finds the quality too low. Then we take that and then we give that away again." (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food),

Collaborations can take various forms, such as one-time or regular donations from stores or permission for dumpster diving. Such partnerships can ensure a consistent supply of food. Connections to other food initiatives operating in the social solidarity economy also ensure the provision of organic food, which might otherwise be inaccessible to lower-income groups:

"I think the collaboration with Herenboeren is a really nice development. That you can make sure that people, who normally would certainly not have access to organically grown food, have access to it and that they can eat a meal once a week with mainly organic ingredients" (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative).

A strong cooperation can transform into a robust network that contributes to the continuity of FWR initiatives as highlighted in this quote:

"It just works really super well and we don't have to do anything to get store filled, the neighbourhood does. The neighbourhood that makes sure it's all stocked. Individuals, kids, schools, daycare centers, entrepreneurs. For example, if I have a shortage of soup, I call an entrepreneur. I need 100 packs or cans of soup. Ok, we'll have it delivered tomorrow. I've invested in my network for years and it's really paying off now." (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

A stable commitment is key to maintain the involvement of the private sector, as food businesses are more likely to cooperate if a regular scheme is established. This is explained by a member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food:

“We need to make sure that we have someone who can go by the shop every week. If you skip a week, the shops is no longer interested. You need to have a trustworthy system.” (INT-UTR-07)

#### 4.3.4 Institutional leniency and support

The persistence of initiatives involved in dumpster diving and cooking with food waste is, in part, enabled by the leniency of inspections, as they operate in a regulatory environment that could lead to closure by the Dutch food safety agency (NVWA) or the municipality. The NVWA does come for inspection to ACU, the location where both Taste Before You Waste, and the Barricade kitchen do their cooking, but takes no other action against the initiatives as stated in this quote:

“It’s nice that there’s not too much whining about the fact that we’re just giving away illegally dumpster-dived food. They also could have had the municipality just roll us up, I guess.” (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food)

It seems that a relaxed attitude towards rule enforcement stems from a general appreciation of FWR initiatives. This is also illustrated in the support provided by the municipality in their daily functioning:

“We do not interfere with food distribution, but the case that came along, for example, is noise pollution from the food bank. Because of course we also have an interest in that there is such a facility. So there we do extend an extra hand.” (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

Having the right contact within the municipality makes a positive difference for initiatives. This contact person can support the initiative to find funding or a location and navigate policy in general, as illustrated in this quote:

“There we did have contact with someone who found that interesting. So it depends a lot on if you happen to find the right person within a municipality. Who can then expand that within the municipality and so you can make the right contacts.” (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

The experiences of initiatives working in various municipalities underscore the impact of local authorities and specifically dedicated personnel. Municipalities who have dedicated personnel or department for food-related projects were more easier to access and facilitated quicker and more effective collaboration.

#### 4.3.5 Funding from public and private sector

Financial support is a crucial enabler for FWR initiatives. Despite the overall reliance on volunteering, some of the initiatives get municipal support to cover (part of) their labour costs:

“We are doing this full time if possible and we have no benefits, no pension, nothing yet. So yes we just have to live on something and that is our hours have to be paid. That’s what we mainly need the municipality for.” (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

This support is not free of tensions, as the social norms at the municipality suggests that initiatives should not rely exclusively on public funding:

"I always find that quite complicated, because in the social domain it's almost dirty if someone wants to make a living out of that. Whereas if you just offer a service and that covers the purpose of the subsidy rule, then I would not know why that would not be possible. If you simply comply with the rules and so on. I don't know if this is social domain specific, but I recognize this from other municipalities too, so it is not even Utrecht-specific." (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

In practice, FWR initiatives often mobilise a mix of public and private funds. In this process, the municipality's support can serve as a catalyst:

"Once the municipality gets behind you and says well we'll pay half or I don't know what, then it's also easy to bring in other funds. But yes you have to have a starting point with the municipality." (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

Our interviewees from FWR FSIs mentioned receiving funds from private donors in both monetary and material terms. This support is linked to longstanding relationships, as illustrated in this quote:

"I had an energy bill that went from 350 a month to 1000. The moment that won't come from donations, then I'm going to pay that out of my own pocket. Then I called a supplier. I said, I'm really in trouble, I really need money for my energy costs. No problem, five minutes later, money in the account. That is the unconditional trust they have." (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

## 4.4 Main barriers to food sharing practices related to FWR in Utrecht

### 4.4.1 Lack of clarity on expiration dates

A significant barrier in working with food surplus and food waste is food safety, particularly regarding the handling of food that has surpassed its expiration date. The challenge lies both in the extra checks that are necessary to ensure food is safe, and in levels of awareness among different initiatives. The Dutch national food inspection agency (NVWA) is responsible for reviewing all commercial and public kitchen. Some initiatives seek additional consultations to ensure they meet the regulations:

"We separately hire a company that checks us for food safety, that inspects everything. We pay separately for that." (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

Research shows that a large proportion of consumers in the Netherlands do not know the difference between the best-by date and latest date for consumption, and sometimes throw away products unnecessarily quickly (Bos-Brouwers 2020). Our interviews confirm lack of clarity and precautionary attitudes among FWR FSIs. For this reason, Dutch foodbanks are generally reluctant to distribute food past its best-before date:

"Some community centers are like, well, date is date and whether it's a THT [best before] or a TGT [use by], date is date and anything over the date does not enter the kitchen. And that makes it a little bit more difficult for us from time to time, to make sure that everything gets

a good destination. So in that sense we are sometimes troubled by the regulations concerning expiration dates.” (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

Indeed, adhering to regulations and ensuring food safety is a key concern for FSIs:

“Everything is checked. If it's past the date, everything has to go immediately. Because we are always strict with food safety. Also for children.” (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

As a result, FSIs may discard edible food which is legally fit for distribution, strictly based on best-before dates, contributing to unnecessary food waste. Other initiatives develop creative ways to navigate regulations which are perceived as ambiguous:

“I think technically we are not allowed to cook with the dumpster-dived food but we just do it. I don't know how it is, but at least we are not allowed to keep it in the kitchen. It's always just outside of the kitchen. So that when the inspection comes it's not in the kitchen. Because it's a legal kitchen they also come to inspect it and they almost threatened us with fines before. Or that we had to stop. And I understand that very well for maybe a business kitchen or something like that. but it's also the public we target, they know exactly what we do. Yeah and we also just do vegan food, so the chances of it going wrong is just practically zero. And we're not stupid either, we're not going to put mouldy food in the oven either. So that's kind of annoying because we have to throw away so much because we're not allowed to keep it in the fridge.” (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food)

This underscores the need for enhancing knowledge within the FWR community to reduce such avoidable waste. The Information sheet issued by the NWVA contributes to this goal, and some of the FSIs also develop training programs:

"We also provide additional guidance on how to deal with foodstuffs that are more vulnerable because they are so close to the date. So we also provide training to ensure that these community centers are well informed, at least in terms of food safety. And we also try to teach them about food waste so that they can cook in a more waste-free way." (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

#### 4.4.2 Fragmented and unclear institutional environment

The lack of knowledge and skills to navigate bureaucratic processes emerges as a substantial barrier for FWR initiatives, impacting their ability to access crucial funding and support. One key aspect is the limited understanding of grant application procedures, particularly by smaller and grassroots FSIs:

Researcher: “Are you missing any specific knowledge for your work?”

Interviewee: “How we can apply for a grant. That would be nice! We haven't really thought about that being possible either” (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food)

Due to low policy coherence and integration, FSIs often find themselves navigating across different policy domains. As one participant notes, initiatives like theirs operate at the intersection of sustainability, poverty reduction, and economic support, each falling under separate administrative departments (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative). This lack of alignment poses a challenge in securing comprehensive grants or general support from the municipality.

From the perspective of the municipality, the current dynamics reveal that many subsidies tend to attract organizations already familiar with the application process, potentially creating exclusionary dynamics. While municipality representatives see subsidies as effective tools for stimulating initiatives, there is a recognition that existing programs may not necessarily cater to the needs of smaller and less formalised initiatives (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain).

#### 4.4.3 Access to funding and infrastructure

Insufficient funding is a barrier for initiatives, impacting their activities in various ways.

The lack of funding for labour costs can pose a threat to the continuity of organisations. As explained, initiatives rely on unpaid work, which also limits participation:

“It's certainly not something really viable for someone who can't ‘hitch a ride’ on their partner’s salary” (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

The absence of financial resources also becomes apparent in the vulnerability of essential infrastructure, particularly kitchens. A broken appliance could lead to the demise of an FSI, as they have no fund readily available for repairs:

"I mostly think that if that kitchen breaks down, we will just disappear. If things really break in the kitchen, we'll just disappear because we just don't have the money to fix that. Because yeah, we don't make money." (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food)

Furthermore, limited funding affects the availability of operational and storage space. The independent foodbank of Leidsche Rijn for example has had a lot of problems with finding a space for their social store, as the municipality only supports housing costs for food banks which are part of the national food bank foundation. This foodbank was hosted in multiple locations provided by the municipality, but some of those were insufficient or only temporarily available. The food bank is currently setting up a new location, however it experiences resistance from the local inhabitants:

“And now we have a permit and then someone objects again. We had though oh, that grey cabin might be ugly to the local residents. We'll put a green cabin there, it only costs 1,500 more in paint. But we'll do it. Then the local residents won't be bothered. But then they object again. Now I'm 1.5 years down the road again. And it was really only about us changing the colour of the portable cabin [that will serve as a small food store]. That's what the objection was about.” (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

The lack of appropriated storage facilities is another issue for initiatives working with surplus food because the food sometimes often come in bulk and some products need refrigeration. This proves particularly challenging for specific seasonal inflows:

“Those are the seasonal items. Last year the supermarkets threw this out after Christmas. This year we say ok, we'll put it in the store it's almost Christmas. Only thing we always have trouble with that's the storage space. (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

#### 4.4.4 Reliance on volunteers

While passionate volunteers make FSIs run, finding people who are able and willing to invest their time on a regular basis is often challenging. Regularity is key to ensure a smooth cooperation with private sector partners. However, FSIs often “attract people who like to come occasionally. But it is very difficult to find people for such a volunteer-thing who can do something on a regular basis.” (INT-UTR-07, member of an activist collective for cooking community meals from leftover food). According to this interview partner, COVID-19 caused a disruption in the functioning of many FSIs, and particularly smaller initiatives are still recovering from this:

“Recruiting is difficult right now because, if you're small then it doesn't appeal to many people. Because you are small, you have little food and then few people come and few people join. But that is slowly building up again.”

Research by Dekkinga et al (2022) confirmed that COVID-19 had a significant impact on volunteering in the Dutch FWR sector. Their interviewee from the national food bank organisation estimated that 80% of people volunteering in food banks are older than 60, thus belonging to a high-risk category for COVID-19. During the pandemic, some food banks and even regional distribution centres had to close due to lack of staff. While this shortage was soon resolved by an inflow of new volunteers, reliance on volunteers generally threatens the resilience of FWR initiatives.

#### 4.4.5 Reliance on businesses' good will

In acquiring surplus food, FSIs mostly rely on the willingness of food businesses. Lack of clarity of the regulations on dumpster diving and the risk of punishment present a barrier in distributing food surplus without the agreement of the food business in question. While many FSIs manage to establish open partnerships with the private sector, there is room for improvement. One of our interviewees reported difficulties particularly when reaching bigger corporate players:

“Those corporate headquarters, that's kind of an impenetrable fortress for us at times, too. [...] They also hide a little behind we are already doing something because we do three bags Too Good To Go every day” (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative).

Indeed, some of the supermarkets decide to pursue more [commercial ways](#) of FWR. Other barriers for suppliers' cooperation might concern convenience as well as concerns about food safety and liability.

#### 4.4.6 Food quality and uncertainty of food supply

Working with food surplus entails an irregular inflow of unpredictable products, presenting a challenge to initiatives redistributing or cooking the food. Within this uncertainty, FSIs established their own preferences and norms about food they accept:

“There's the occasional scratch or dent or something and that's okay with community centers. The foodbank often doesn't want that because they don't like to give to their

customers a pumpkin with a dent or with a dirty piece." (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

These norms in turn mediate the relationships FSIs establish with suppliers. One of the food bank interviewees explained that they do not work with foods that are past date. Instead:

We cooperate with the Turkish entrepreneurs. So I can get all the halal products for free, not past date. The slaughterhouse there, it is made and they deliver it, so it costs me nothing. Transport is arranged. There are also the stickers of the foodbank on it." (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank)

Dependence on food donations and surplus further implies uncertainty regarding the specific products available. Consequently, planning meals in advance becomes challenging, requiring a level of flexibility varying among initiatives. An interviewee from an organisation which works to connect social eating initiatives to sources of surplus food explained the resistance they faced from volunteers maintaining their independent sourcing methods:

"And those volunteers who all kind of have their own - to put it very unkindly - little kingdom and like to do it the way they want. They have a relationship with the butcher. They have a relationship with the greengrocer. They go out to the farm themselves to pick up stuff to buy as cheaply as possible. And they didn't want to suddenly get a lot of free stuff shoved down their throats which means they can't determine the menu themselves." (INT-UTR-09, founder of a food surplus redistribution initiative)

Maintaining relations with suppliers is therefore a way in which initiatives enhance their agency in planning the menu.

#### 4.4.7 Acquiring healthy food

Acquiring healthy and nutritious food was a concern particularly for food banks. Much of the donated food consists of shelf-stable products, often salty and sweet snacks. This raises concerns about food bank clients' access to healthy food. Some food banks therefore refuse to accept unhealthy foods in excessive quantities. One of the interviewed food banks also uses a points system which encourages healthy eating choices (INT-UTR-08, founder of a food bank). The umbrella organisation Foodbank Utrecht, has a contract with Local2local for the provision of fresh produce.

#### 4.4.8 Social stigma

The social stigma surrounding food banks and poverty is a pervasive issue that both initiatives and the municipality have to engage with. The discreet nature of the foodbank Leidsche Rijn, without prominent signage, reflects a conscious effort to prevent stigmatization and make the experience more dignified for those seeking assistance. Additionally, this foodbank has adopted a store model where participants shop with a points system, rather than handing out pre-made parcels.

The municipal officer described the social divide in Utrecht and the municipality's effort for an integrated approach:

"It really is two worlds. [...] And well, building that bridge and narrowing the gap. That is something that the work and income department is also looking at. We are now working on a new policy document and one of the main points is that you can also discuss debt with



people from the municipality or whoever. That it's not weird at all to say that you are experiencing a problem with something. And that is very difficult.” (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

## 4.5 Relationship and conflicting interests between public, private and civil society actors

### 4.5.1 FSIs and the Private Sector

We see evidence of cooperation between civil initiatives and private sector food businesses in Utrecht. For example, civil society initiatives cooperate with stores where leftover food is collected (often past best before date). Voedselplus works with larger supermarkets through formalised partnerships, whereas more activist organisations such as Taste Before You Waste work mostly with eco-stores and smaller independent ethnic grocery stores. These organisations rely on relations ranging from established cooperations, ad-hoc pickups or even dumpster diving.

Despite the general good relations between initiatives and the private sector in terms of use of food surplus, we notice a tension regarding trust and agency in these partnerships. Some store owners strongly dislike less formalised collection strategies (i.e. dumpster diving). TBYW dumpster divers were asked to leave after store owners have called the police, even though they managed to avoid penalty. This signals that food businesses want to maintain decision power over their own involvement in FWR.

Some businesses have expressed doubt about the knowledge and expertise of community centres in being capable of processing and serving the food they have collected. Voedselplus aims to serve as an intermediary in this process, as it provides additional education for community centres and helps create trust and encourage food businesses to participate.

FSIs, on the other hand, like to maintain overview and agency over the foods they accept from donors. This has to do with multiple aspects of food quality (food products in a good state, with attractive appearance, not over date, with nutritional value) as well as the logistics of processing these donations. Even though the interviewed FSIs negotiated this process in different ways, we did not notice any signs of rivalry or mutual disapproval – contrarily, some of the initiatives mentioned working together.

### 4.5.2 FSIs and the Public Sector

In general, there seems to be good cooperation between the municipal government and the foodbanks that are part of the Utrecht Foodbank foundation. The municipality supports foodbank volunteers and running costs. However, our interviews suggest that the municipality also weighs in on ideas on how the foodbanks should function, as well as the organisational matters in shared locations. This sometimes causes tensions. The case of the independent food bank is interesting in this sense, even though our insights only rely on an interview with the founder and might therefore be limited. In the interviewee's accounts, the conflict with the municipality originated in the foodbank's ambition to switch from a food parcel system to a social store format, which was met with opposition. While the reasons for this remain unknown, the case points to a rigidity in the

municipality's approach that poses a barrier to this particular foodbank, but could potentially also create challenges for other initiatives.

In general, there is an ongoing tension between the municipality and social initiatives on the role of the municipality. Many initiatives think the municipality should both take a more active role in resolving these issues and make more money available for them because their activities and goals are so vital to society. On the other hand, the municipality sees itself mostly in a facilitating role and wants to encourage society to create their own solutions as illustrated in this quote:

Yes, well I think a lot of things get complicated if you have to organize things as a municipality. [...] But if it is arranged by people among yourselves, then fine. And I think if you as a municipality or as a government are going to play quite a leading or guiding role in many of these kinds of initiatives, you're also quite undermining the niceness that can arise. (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

The same municipal officer reinforced the role of the municipality in setting up effective pre-conditions for civil society initiatives:

The preconditions we try to provide and then what actually has to happen, which is handing out a food package, we then hope that because the preconditions are good, the activity can take place. Not necessarily that those volunteers get paid, but for example that they can get training [and a location is provided]. (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

Establishing precondition, particularly in terms of funding and physical infrastructure, makes the municipality a powerful actor with significant influence on the FWR landscape. The fact that there are little FSW specific policies and municipality staff creates a sense of intransparency and a risk of exclusionary dynamics which might privilege initiatives who already have established relationships with the municipality and are apt in navigating administrative requirements. Conversely, FSIs lose trust in the municipality when they feel that their needs are not addressed and efforts not appreciated:

"If you have a group of volunteers who say, we're going to commit ourselves free of charge to an issue to do something in the neighbourhood. Then the municipality should be the first to reach out and stand behind it. But that didn't happen. The confidence in the municipality is just not there. [...] I am so done with this hassle with the municipality. Just take it gladly or leave it." (INT-UTR-08)

In sum, the Municipality understands its role as providing subsidies and related pre-conditions for the work of civil society organizations but in practice, their unwillingness to take a more proactive role, for fear of being too 'top-down', still impacts the innovative capacity of food waste and redistribution organizations, particularly when they want to move beyond the status quo.

## 4.6 Recommendations

### 4.6.1 For the municipality:

- Diversify support. Food banks seem to be very well established, with good connections to national level organisation and support from the municipality. However, research

shows that this form of food redistribution is not accessible for everyone and threatens clients' dignity (Andriessen et al 2020). A more proactive support to other forms, e.g. neighbourhood meals, social supermarkets or community food sharing, could complement the existing food bank infrastructures.

- In line with the above, we recommend more support to initiatives that facilitate food sharing and redistribution without connection to food aid and poverty. This can democratize access to food and remove social stigma.

#### 4.6.2 In relation to the civic sector

- Education of FSIs on food safety legislation needs to be improved to prevent unnecessary food waste. While this has been picked up by FSIs and platform organisations, we also see a role for the municipality as facilitator.
- Partnerships between FSIs have proven useful when they need to deal with fluctuating supply of unpredictable types of foods. We notice here that the coordination work required for this might exceed the capacities of individual FSIs.
- Partnerships with local food producers (e.g. peri-urban farms, urban gardens) can improve access to fresh foods. The municipality could support them, especially where gardeners operate on municipal-owned land.

#### 4.6.3 In relation to the private sector

- The participation of private businesses can be facilitated by providing an overview of the options (types of FSIs) available. This is another opportunity for a strong leadership from the municipality.
- Discussion around businesses to profit off of restricted public services.

### 4.7 Conclusions

Based on the above, it emerges that at the municipal level, there is no coherent policy to address food waste and redistribution. This relates to the fact that FWR is mostly regulated at the national level, responding also to EU regulatory and legal frameworks. The resultant governance arrangement is multilevel and complex, with lack of clarity around the role of the municipality in addressing FWR and in facilitating FWR initiatives, both public and private. We note that there is value in comparing FWR governance architectures across different contexts to reflect on the impact and implications for municipalities, FSI and citizens and we formulate some specific recommendations for the municipality below. We have further highlighted a number of completed research projects that have analysed food waste policy, practice and impact at the national scale and have referenced a number of relevant recommendations that emerged from these food waste monitors and reports.

In reflecting on the governance of food waste across the municipality of Utrecht, we note that the municipality's actions are informed by the logic of neoliberalism, which promotes corporate

engagement and volunteerism over the strengthening of independent social initiatives. Within the civic sector, there is some funding and support available but that it is funnelled to a specific type of actor: food banks. These initiatives are well networked in a robust, cross-national platform organisation as well as on the municipal level where they fit into an integrated approach providing food aid as part of poverty mitigation. This embeddedness enables a close contact with the municipality, including access to funding. Similarly to the CBUA governance, we see a long-standing cooperation which creates stability but also hinders innovation and access of other types of FSIs to municipal support.

## 4.8 Future lines of research

- What role can the municipality play in translating EU and National regulations?
- Comparing FWR governance architectures across different contexts to reflect on the impact and implications for municipalities, FSI and citizens
- What do FSIs see as the role of the municipality in facilitating a more diverse range of FWR activities/initiatives?
- What is the role of the community centres in FWR, and what is the space for linking FWR to other social objectives (connectivity (reducing loneliness), integration, etc).
- Food waste prevention is working at the national-level but there are social, ecological and economic implications of preventing food waste. More research into what the municipality can do to support this locally could be relevant (e.g. best practices from other municipalities – linking to MUFPP, Ghent, etc).
- More research to understand the experiences of food bank recipients and alternative models of accessing food.

## 5. Social and solidarity economy (SSE)

---

### 5.1 SSE in the Netherlands

The concept of Social and Solidarity Economy has gained traction in the European Union and the United Nations.<sup>53</sup> According to the UN, “Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) refers to forms of economic activities and relations that prioritize social and often environmental objectives over profit motives. It involves citizens acting collectively and in solidarity for democratization of economy and society, including producers, workers, and consumers. It is often used as an umbrella term to encompass “social economy”, “solidarity economy”, or third sector organizations and enterprises. SSE is fundamentally about reasserting social control over economy and relinking economy with society and nature”<sup>54</sup>

In the Netherlands the Solidarity Economy and the Social Economy are separate movements, each with their own histories, networks, and governance frameworks. The origins of the solidarity economy can be traced back to a long tradition of DIY culture, self-help, mutual aid, and working together evident in the squatting movement in the 1960s and 1980s, or even further back to 1892 when the first Buurthuizen (community centres) were built in Amsterdam to bring different kinds of people together and enrich their cultural lives<sup>55</sup>. The social economy has its origins in the post World War II growth of the third sector, and is influenced by the reliance of the government on third sector actors to provide essential public services (at a competitive cost). We will therefore discuss the solidarity economy and social economy separately, before discussing them together and the common barriers they face when it comes to funding and support from the municipality of Utrecht.

#### 5.1.1 Solidarity Economy in the Netherlands and Utrecht

The solidarity economy is not very visible in Utrecht or in public policy, but it has a long history in arts, culture, housing, and food. Until they were made illegal in 2010<sup>56</sup>, squats were important hubs for dumpster diving and surplus food redistribution. An Utrecht squat on Voorstraat was known to *leave free food outside the door, normally bread and fruit, for anyone to take*.<sup>57</sup> Squats are also the originators of the VoKu an abbreviation for Volkskeuken (people's kitchens), where people can come together to cook and share meals made from surplus food. In Utrecht the former squat [Anarchist Community Center](#) keeps this tradition alive by hosting two anti-food waste Voku's each week organized by Taste Before you Waste and the Barricade (see [Food and meal sharing](#)). These VOKUs contribute to food waste and redistribution.

There is a small but vibrant Solidarity Economy in Utrecht, that is captured by the research network Utrecht Anders and their [map of initiatives](#). The map includes initiatives involved in sharing stuff, spaces, skills, and cultural experiences – from shared growing and food waste dinners to repair

---

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.riposs.org/adoption-of-the-un-resolution-promoting-the-social-and-solidarity-economy-for-sustainable-development/?lang=en>

<sup>54</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/social\\_and\\_solidarity\\_economy\\_29\\_march\\_2023.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/social_and_solidarity_economy_29_march_2023.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.canonsociaalwerk.eu/nl/details.php?cps=18>

<sup>56</sup> <https://en.squat.net/2019/08/30/netherlands-stop-the-new-law-against-squatting/>

<sup>57</sup> <https://unusualbusiness.nl/en/theory/squatting-alternative-spaces-and-anti-capitalist-commons/index.html#:~:text=The%20most%20renowned%20squat%20in,the%20building%20up%20for%20sale.>

cafes. To this list of initiatives we could also add Utrecht's 49 community centers (buurthuis), collective purchasing groups like [VOKO Utrecht](#) and [Groentetas](#), the Odin consumer cooperative, the community currency the [Utrechtse Euro](#), and the growing number of neighborhood food sharing cupboards (Buurtkasjs) and Giveaway shops (Weggeefwinkel).

#### 5.1.1.1 Food for (political) thought

[The Food Autonomy Festival](#) (FAF) describes itself as a platform for activists, farmers, academic and food enthusiasts to meet, organize and celebrate struggles against the corporate and state controlled food system and to present and support grassroots practices. Initiated by [ASEED](#) in Amsterdam in 2017, the festival is currently organized every year in May-June in different locations around the Netherlands, including Utrecht. There is great emphasis put on self-organization and autonomy, thus the programme responds to place-specific capacities, interests and struggles. In Utrecht, Taste before you Waste takes a leading role in the organization of FAF.

Basic activist kitchen is a collective of Utrecht-based food activists, artists and researchers who explore political issues through collective cooking sessions and workshops, as for example [How to Set Up a Community Kitchen](#) workshop in 2023. The Basic activist kitchen is part of [Basis for Actuele Kunst](#) – an Utrecht-based art collective interested in social action, solidarity and political struggles. Since 2017 BAK has been running Propositions for Non-Fascist Living program offering fellowships to artists and activists working on social, ideological and environmental struggles.

#### 5.1.1.2 Solidarity Purchasing

There are several solidarity purchasing networks and short food supply chains in Utrecht, which make use of food logistics provided by Local2Local. This business acts as a broker between farmers, governments and private groups offering solutions for a sustainable food supply, with an emphasis on local, organic and fair price. Initiated in 2014 in the Utrecht Province, the initiative is currently active in 5 regions across the Netherlands. One of their flagship project is [Operation Food Freedom](#) (OPF) a public-private partnership meant to increase accessibility to healthy food for everyone. The OPF operates through a veggie-box subscription scheme which is further distributed to local hubs. Customers may choose to purchase a standard box or make a solidarity purchase through a pay-forward system. Currently, there is only one hub active, however the OPF & Local2Local staff provide training and support for anyone who wishes to start one. Local2Local already supply produce to various initiatives from corporate catering companies to grassroots collectives as for example Groentetas.

Another company focused on shorter food supply is Rechstreeks. With three pop-up locations in Utrecht, [Rechstreeks](#) supplies food boxes with products from the locality. Customers can place their order on the Rechstreek website and collect their food package at the designated location and timeslot or opt for home delivery.

In Utrecht, initiatives such as VOKO and Operation Food Freedom embody a discourse centred on food accessibility as a fundamental right. Rooted in principles of sustainability, locality, and reducing packaging, these initiatives aim to empower both consumers and producers, fostering a sense of food sovereignty within the community. Both initiatives underscore the idea that food should be accessible to all. This discourse challenges conventional notions of food distribution and

consumption, advocating for a future where communities actively participate in shaping their food landscapes.

### 5.1.2 Social Economy in the Netherlands and Utrecht

As Noortje Keurhorst<sup>58</sup> writes, “In the Netherlands, the concept of social and solidarity economy has not gained widespread traction among the public or the government. The prevailing governmental approach is associated with neoliberalism and the idea of a 'participation society.' The country's shift from the classical welfare state to a participatory model is evident, urging individuals to take greater responsibility for their lives and communities, as stated in the [2013 throne speech](#) by the king in name of the government: “The traditional welfare state is slowly changing into a participation society. Everyone who can is asked to take responsibility for his or her own life and environment.” In this speech, the transformation of society is deemed partly due to the individualization of society, and it also becomes clear that the governmental push towards a participation society is due to austerity measures.

In academic research, the participation society has been characterised as neoliberal communitarianism (Schinkel & van Houdt, 2010). This governance perspective sees policy focusing on active citizenship; where a free citizen is one who exercises individual freedom choosing to contribute to constructive community initiatives like neighbourhood or social initiatives. Population management takes the shape of articulating freedom and social policy aims to shape the setting in which individual freedom to choose to be a responsible citizen is enabled (neoliberal governmentality borrowed from Foucault, 2007). The aim of fostering active citizenship has created an ideal of individuals taking responsibility for themselves while actively contributing to their community, blurring the lines of responsibility between nation-state, local government, market, third sector, and citizens. Policy aims to guide people in their quest of becoming an active citizen, problematizing those who do not fit with the expected, calculated values and then responsibilising them to better their own situation<sup>59</sup>.

The Dutch social economy is dominated by the third sector, which plays a large role in carrying out public services like health care, education, research, and social housing. The Dutch third sector is one of the largest in the world and accounts for 12.9% of all nonagricultural paid employment in the country (Salamon, 1998).

#### 5.1.2.1 Social Enterprises

Since 2012, the field of social enterprise has become more structured – especially through the creation of Social Enterprise NL is a platform connecting and representing more than 390 members. As Noortje Keurhorst writes, “Social enterprises aim to fulfil societal needs. However, these needs tend to revolve around people’s ability to take part in the market economy; e.g. social enterprises main focus was providing work opportunities for vulnerable groups (During, van der Jagt & de Sena, 2014). A second characteristic of social enterprises is their aim for ‘autonomy’ from the state. By engaging in commercial activities social enterprises can run without state funding – making them strategic partners for municipalities who, through decreasing public budgets, benefit from social enterprise solutions to societal problems (Social Enterprise NL, 2014). Social enterprises claim to be

---

<sup>58</sup> <https://edepot.wur.nl/529839>

<sup>59</sup> sourced from thesis Keurhorst, 2020 <https://edepot.wur.nl/529839>



more efficient and effective at carrying out ‘public sector’ tasks like caring for green spaces or education. Partnerships with municipalities see the latter facilitating activities of social enterprises by outsourcing public tasks to these businesses rather than traditional subsidy schemes. Municipalities financially benefit from social enterprises more efficient and effective serving of social needs (Hillen et al. 2014).

The public sector (including municipalities) is the largest client and revenue stream for social enterprises in the Netherlands. In the most recent (2021) Social Enterprise NL monitor, 48% of enterprises provide services to the government, but almost half social enterprises feel there is little to no political support for social enterprises. The report recommends that municipalities increase their purchases from social enterprises, ensure the integration of social enterprises at all levels of authority, and increase their knowledge and expertise of social enterprises.<sup>60</sup>

According to the European Social enterprise monitor there is a lack of awareness and recognition of the social enterprises (SE) in the Netherlands. Compared to SE’s in other European countries, Dutch SE’s engage fewer volunteers and receive less of their income from grants, subsidies, and donations.

<sup>61</sup> The Dutch tax authority has recently created a new legal designation for social enterprises called BVm<sup>62</sup>, which may eventually contribute to the visibility of SE – and allow social economy actors to wear fewer tax and legal hats (ranging from association, foundation, charity, LLC, etc.) to resource their activities. The report does give some insight into the strong neo-liberal market orientation of Dutch social enterprises and the challenges SE’s face in accessing public funding. In Utrecht, the only policy in support of social enterprise is written into the city’s governing coalition agreement on social return on investment in public procurement.<sup>63</sup> This policy would give SE’s who can demonstrate that they operate in a sustainable and circular manner a competitive advantage in public tenders and permits.<sup>64</sup>

There are 37 social enterprises operating in and around Utrecht, mainly working on social cohesion and the integration of people with a distance to the labor market<sup>65</sup>. There are nine social enterprises working on food (mainly catering, but also food production). Within these nine enterprises, we could identify three food sharing initiatives. These are [De Clique](#), a food waste revalorization initiative described in FWR 2.2, and [De Moestuין](#) a social (care) farm mentioned in the section on UA, and [A Beautiful Mess](#) restaurant in Utrecht which runs a weekly solidarity dinner program, where for each menu purchased a person in the asylum seeker centre receives a free spot at the dinner. Food sharing initiatives are not well represented among social enterprises in the Netherlands, this may be due to their reliance on selling rather than gifting and sharing. Given the current CITYDEAL on

---

<sup>60</sup> [https://knowledgecentre.euclidnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/se\\_monitor\\_nl\\_2021\\_2022-updated.pdf](https://knowledgecentre.euclidnetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/se_monitor_nl_2021_2022-updated.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> [https://knowledgecentre.euclidnetwork.eu/european-social-enterprise-monitor-2021-2022/?\\_gl=1\\*1md689w\\*\\_ga\\*MTA5NTg1Nzk0NC4xNzA2NTM0NDcy\\*\\_ga\\_829YQLNDY5\\*MTcwNjUzNDQ3Mi4xLjAuMTcwNjUzNDQ3Mi42MC4wLjA.\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*MjAyMzU3MTg4OS4xNzA2NTM0NDcy#](https://knowledgecentre.euclidnetwork.eu/european-social-enterprise-monitor-2021-2022/?_gl=1*1md689w*_ga*MTA5NTg1Nzk0NC4xNzA2NTM0NDcy*_ga_829YQLNDY5*MTcwNjUzNDQ3Mi4xLjAuMTcwNjUzNDQ3Mi42MC4wLjA.*_gcl_au*MjAyMzU3MTg4OS4xNzA2NTM0NDcy#)

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/03/05/consultatie-maatschappelijke-bv-bvm-volgende-stap-in-erkenning-sociale-ondernemers>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.social-enterprise.nl/over-sociaal-ondernemen/publicaties/intern/sociaal-ondernemerschap-goed-aanwezig-coalitieakkoorden-2022-2026>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.utrecht.nl/ondernemen/inkopen-en-aanbesteden/social-return/>

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.social-enterprise.nl/>

social enterprise<sup>66</sup>, where the city of Utrecht is also a member – we may expect support for social enterprise to increase.

#### 5.1.2.2 Care farms

Care farms (zorgborderij) present a specific legal form operating within the social economy in the agricultural sector. As a concept, a care farm is a place that offers day time farm-related activities, guidance, housing or reintegration. The farm services are directed at people that have any form difficulty in finding work including physical or mental disabilities, long-term unemployment, legal convictions or asylum seekers. [There are an estimated 1250 care farms in the Netherlands](#)<sup>67</sup>, overseen by the Minister of Health, Well-being and Sport.

In the Utrecht Province there are 14 registered care farms under the [VUZB](#), the regional association of care farmers. The farms provide care for diverse groups of clients (e.g. people with dementia, autism or addiction), and receive payments from health care providers as well as public subsidies. While most care farms are in rural or peri-urban areas, Hassink et al. 2020 argue that “the establishment of care farm services in urban areas will benefit from the fact that most people in need of support live in cities and from policies that focus increasingly on providing support as close to home as possible—especially since the decentralisation of the healthcare sector in 2015, and because current budget cuts make it harder to transport people to farms in the country” p. 14. We can expect that care farms may grow in their importance to urban and periurban food sharing economies, where care and social services also enable urban farms to diversify their income sources.

The quality of care services offered on participating farms are overseen by the [Federation for Agriculture and Care](#). The Federation offers training and support for farmers that want to become active in the care sector and keeps care farmers informed on the legislative changes as well as representing the interest of care farmers in national negotiations. Care farms are subject to several legislation, firstly depending on the legal identity of the farm the corresponding legislation apply. Often these farms operate as private limited companies (BV) or foundations (Stichting) and have employed staff. Besides the general legislation for companies, employment and specific agricultural legislation depending on the production system (livestock, crop, mixed), care farms must adhere to the rules regarding care so that they are eligible for funding. The laws that oversee care activities on farms include the Youth Act, the Social Support Act and the Long-term Care Act and the Health Insurance Act. Funding for farms is made available at the municipal level through Zorg in Natura (Care in Kind). Individuals can also finance their participation in care farms through the Persoonsgebonden Budget (Personal Budget) made available by municipalities, CIZ (Care Assessment Centre) and the Health officers.

#### 5.1.2.3 Meal and food sharing

A number of foundations and charities are involved in meal sharing and registered as social benefit organizations ANBI (Algemeen nut beogende instelling), meaning their efforts are almost entirely committed to the public benefit.<sup>68</sup> ANBI initiatives do not pay tax on gifts or inheritance, and allow

---

<sup>66</sup> 600197-22 Jaarrekening 2022 definitief was getekend.pdf (social-enterprise.nl)

<sup>67</sup> Hassink, J., Agricola, H., Veen, E. J., Pijpker, R., de Bruin, S. R., Meulen, H. A. V. D., & Plug, L. B. (2020). The care farming sector in the Netherlands: A reflection on its developments and promising innovations. *Sustainability*, 12(9), 3811.

<sup>68</sup> [https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontenten/belastingdienst/business/business-public-benefit-organisations/public\\_benefit\\_organisations/what\\_is\\_pbo/what\\_is\\_a\\_pbo](https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/bldcontenten/belastingdienst/business/business-public-benefit-organisations/public_benefit_organisations/what_is_pbo/what_is_a_pbo)

donors to claim a tax benefit. This is the most common tax designation for charitable food sharing actors like food banks.

Two ANBI organizations that are active in cooking and eating together are BuurtBuik and Resto van Harte. [Resto van Harte](#) organizes shared meals targeting specifically the elderly. Their focus is on social encounters and combating loneliness, compared to Buurtbuik, RvH dinners are paid for by the guests. For U-pass holders dinners are served at a reduced price. These two initiatives are among the many communal meal events hosted in the community centres in Utrecht. Many of the almost 50 centres have one or more weekly dinners, some include cooking or other activities<sup>69</sup>.

Besides weekly communal meals, Utrecht-based initiatives also collaborate for yearly events that involve food sharing. For example, [Stadsdiner](#) was started by a coalition of public and civil society actors to commemorate World Poverty Day (17<sup>th</sup> October) by encouraging residents and initiatives in Utrecht to organize a shared meal based on the same ingredients and recipe. The organizers create the recipe and distribute ingredient packages to anyone who subscribes prior to the day. On the day, people are invited to meet, cook and eat together the same dish across the city, either at home or at designated dining locations free of charge. In a similar vein, Soep uit iedere hoek is a yearly event where people around Utrecht cook and serve their soup recipe. In 2023, the event took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> November and served 64 soups at 23 community locations including but not restricted to Buurtcentrums. The event was coordinated by [Lekker Diverse](#), an organization focused on celebrating diversity in all its expressions.

In the diverse landscape of Utrecht's social economy, [Thuisgekookt](#) is a unique initiative focused on fostering one-on-one connections between neighbours through shared meals. Operating as a social meal service, the initiative relies on the commitment of home cooks who prepare an extra portion of their daily meals, which they bring to, or is collected by a neighbour. This collaborative effort addresses the challenge some individuals face in securing regular, healthy meals and promotes a spirit of sharing and caring within the community. The relations that Thuisgekookt is committed to building are not only practical in nature, but are also meant to create a lasting social connection that are very desirable because Thuisgekookt caters to groups that can experience social exclusion; the target audience includes those that are unable to join in communal meals in community centres. The organisation of Thuisgekookt receives the volunteering (VIVA) fund for their operations.

#### 5.1.2.4 Food for community building

A common theme among food and meal sharing initiatives is that food serves as a catalyst for community building and emphasizing the role of food-related initiatives in fostering connections and support networks within local communities. Thuisgekookt, for instance, underscores the importance of returning to a more communal approach reminiscent of the past, where neighbors looked out for each other. This becomes particularly relevant in the context of increased social isolation, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thuisgekookt also sees itself as more than just a meal service; it positions itself as a social meal provision. The goal extends beyond providing a meal, emphasizing the value of creating moments for social interaction. Especially for individuals with limited mobility or a lack of local networks, having a neighborly cook can be a source of companionship. The personal connections between cooks and eaters set Thuisgekookt apart from

---

<sup>69</sup> List of social dining <https://www.armoedecoalitie-utrecht.nl/onderwerpen/ontmoeting/>

commercial meal providers, highlighting the additional social benefits it offers, on top of the affordability compared to commercial meal services. (INT-UTR-02, employee of a meal service foundation)

Similarly, [Resto van Harte](#) views its role in the social economy as a means to counteract social isolation and break down associated taboos. The initiative emphasizes that everyone belongs and contributes, promoting social cohesion and providing opportunities for individuals who may need extra support. Work at Resto van Harte is not just about preparing meals; it serves a broader social function, aiding in language acquisition, skill development, and potentially serving as a steppingstone to paid employment, particularly in the hospitality sector (INT-UTR-03, leading volunteer of a weekly community meal).

These initiatives share a discourse with the municipality (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain), INT-UTR-05, INT-UTR-06) that food is a powerful tool for building and strengthening communities, offering not only sustenance but also a platform for social connections and shared experience, as illustrated in this quote:

A lot of initiatives involve food because food unites people and makes them feel connected: a) there's initiatives in which food plays the main role, and b) there's initiatives with different activities but that also serve food because a lot of people are just specifically attracted to food. (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain)

### 5.1.3 Funding & Subsidies for SSE food sharing

Access to funding is a crucial enabler to SSE initiatives. Many initiatives are (partially) funded by municipal subsidies, mostly through the IF and VIVA (INT-UTR-02, INT-UTR-03). Remaining funding can be found in private sector investments (INT-UTR-03, leading volunteer of a weekly community meal) or sometimes in national funds, for example:

We also get applications from people in a municipality where we are not active, and where we don't have a subsidy relationship with the municipality. Previously, we could just pick those up and fund them through national funds, for example Postcode-Lottery or the Orange-fund. Those are often temporary in nature or a one-time donation. Ultimately, of course, we really just want those structural collaborations and solutions. (INT-UTR-02, employee of a meal service foundation)

While such donations, whether from the private sector or another type of fund can provide a temporary solution, a structural partnership is much more desired for the security it provides.

#### 5.1.3.1 Grants for community centres

Neighbourhood centres (Buurthuis/Buurtcentrum) aim to be spaces for residents and initiatives to run their own activities and meet with each other. Community centres often host foodbanks and communal meal initiatives such as Resto van Harte and Buurtbuik. The centres cater primarily to people in the neighbourhood organizing activities cultural activities often targeting youth and elderly. There are [25 community centres](#) under municipal management. The neighbourhood centers are eligible for a special state subsidies<sup>65</sup>. Users, the social manager or the municipal coordinator of the municipal community centre can apply for up to €2,500 subsidy annually to improve the



infrastructure of the community centre<sup>70</sup>. This budget is meant for building material capacity such as improving kitchen infrastructure, materials for activities or costs for communication.

In addition to the 25 municipal community centres, there are 24 self-managed centres operating under the umbrella association called [Dwarsverband](#). These self-managed community centres run their own programs and are eligible for subsidies through 'vrijwillige inzet voor elkaar' scheme (DOC-UTR-05).

#### 5.1.3.2 Grant for citizen initiatives: Initiative Fund

Citizens in Utrecht that have an SSE initiative can find funding in various ways. First and foremost, there is the 'Initiatievenfonds' (DOC-UTR-17). This Initiative Fund is a subsidy for grassroots initiatives that undertake either social or environmental actions

“make your street, neighbourhood, or city better, greener, cosier, more beautiful and more social”. (source?)

Both individual citizens and organisations are eligible for funding. The total budget of 2023 was 2.95 million euro. In 2016, the second year of the fund's existence, this was 4.2 million. The budget per neighbourhood is proportional to number of resident of that neighbourhood. The fund focuses on initiatives on the neighbourhood-level, although a small part of the budget is also reserved for city wide initiatives.

Utrecht has district bureaus (Wijkbureau) with neighbourhood advisors who function as the first contact between citizens and the municipality overall, making connections between residents and specialist colleagues in the department that is needed, and keeping their colleagues informed about the goings-on in the neighbourhood (INT-UTR-06, municipal official of a neighbourhood). These advisors also are the main contacts for the Initiative Fund. A possible initiative will go to their neighbourhood bureau with their application that will firstly be judged by the neighbourhood advisor. If the advisor finds that 1) the initiative is widely (enough) supported by the residents, and 2) it aligns with the main goal of Utrecht municipality for this fund: “people showing commitment to do something for one another or their environment”, they will send it to the subsidy bureau of the municipality for final judgement. An initiative can receive up to 35.000 EU/year, and there is a maximum of three years, unless the initiative is fully carried by volunteers, or in case it is a yearly event.

#### 5.1.3.3 Volunteering subsidy

A subsidy for social volunteering called *Vrijwillige inzet voor elkaar* or VIVA (DOC-UTR-23) is another way for some CBUA initiatives to find funding. These initiatives are likely to focus not only on food production but also give their activities a social function. This subsidy rule focuses specifically on:

“supporting and enabling volunteer efforts for each other, strengthening community power and facilitating organizations with a strong network in the lives of vulnerable residents. We can only achieve the above goals with the active involvement of volunteers and citizens.”

---

<sup>70</sup>Improving the community centre

<https://pki.utrecht.nl/Loket/product/4fa195c5101ae459f36c9adccef1ea14#:~:text=Dan%20kunt%20u%20elk%20jaar,en%20programmering%20van%20het%20buurtcentrum.>

The money is VIVA was accumulated from the joining of several separate volunteering subsidies with different themes. The joining of these grants was meant to simplify the subsidy (application) process for the citizens of Utrecht. There is a total of 8 million euros available for a wide supporting range, such as bringing people together, language skills, digital skills, neighbourhood networks, or 'buddies'. In general, the subsidy is meant for taking care of each other and reaching social goals through practical help (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain). Often the goal and the means differ, for example, in many cooking and eating initiatives the means is the food activity and the goal is connection, social cohesion and to counter loneliness. Those allocating the grants of this subsidy spread intentionally spread the funds over a wide diversity of initiatives, for young and old, and throughout all neighbourhoods. The grant is not allocated to those who want to get a pay out of it (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain). The money comes from two departments: employment and income, and societal development (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain).

The Initiative Fund differs from the Volunteering Subsidy in that the former is designated per neighbourhood to support local initiatives temporarily with smaller amounts, while the VIVA fund is a citywide initiative aimed at funding larger and longer projects that benefit the entire city (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain).

According to the 2023 subsidy overview, two food redistribution initiatives were supported from the Initiative funds and the VIVA subsidies.

#### 5.1.3.4 Social work subsidy

Another social subsidy called "*Sociale prestatie en dagbesteding*" (DOC-UTR-18) helps some initiatives find funding. This grant is specifically meant for

"Utrecht residents in a vulnerable situation to be supported so they can participate in Utrecht and have a meaningful day. Not everyone can provide a work performance (paid work), but a social performance is often possible. People who are active - in one way or another - and 'get out and about' feel better about themselves, have more structure in their lives and are better able to manage (independently)."

This subsidy is thus used initiatives or organisations creating employment circumstances for the 'residents in a vulnerable situation'. The total budget of the subsidy was 5.97 million in 2023.

#### 5.1.3.5 U-pas

The U-pas is a card in Utrecht and a few neighbouring towns that provides various benefits to residents with a lower income. The U-pas offers discounts on a range of mainly cultural, sports, and leisure activities in the city, including dining and food delivery services. It aims to make these activities more accessible to individuals or families with limited financial means. Generally speaking, U-pass holders can purchase a reduce priced meal at any community centers (Buurthuis) in Utrecht as well as at independently run food sharing initiatives such as Resto van Harte, Thuisgekookt, Vers aanTafel, Eet Mee.

#### 5.1.3.6 Cultural Events Subsidies

VSB Fund, KF hein Fund, UMC Utrecht, Elise Mathilde Fund and the Van Baaren Foundation- to be researched if relevant. Stadsdiner was funded through this, but not sure we can connected directly to food sharing activities more broadly.



#### 5.1.3.7 Diverse sources of income

While many initiatives are dependent on municipal funding or space rental, some initiatives – including social enterprises, are financially independent, providing them with a certain freedom within their organisation. While this may be a privileged position for those able to afford it, it is a potential enabler for food initiatives. As illustrated in this quote it provides the initiatives with the tools to overcome their own obstacles:

"I also don't believe we get subsidy for anything, we pay the overhead costs ourselves. [...] And I like the fact that we do it all ourselves, so that we don't depend on - I don't feel that the municipality makes anything possible or that it creates or removes obstacles. I find us quite independent actually. " (INT-UTR-01, member of a food collective).

## 5.2 Discussion

### 5.2.1 Role of the public sector

There is an ongoing tension between the municipality and social initiatives on the role of the municipality. Many initiatives think the municipality should both take a more active role in resolving these issues and make more money available for them because their activities and goals are so vital to society. On the other hand, the municipality sees themselves mostly in a facilitating role and wants to encourage society to create their own solutions as illustrated in this quote:

Yes, well I think a lot of things get complicated if you have to organize things as a municipality. [...] But if it is arranged by people among yourselves, then fine. And I think if you as a municipality or as a government are going to play quite a leading or guiding role in many of these kinds of initiatives, you're also quite undermining the niceness that can arise. (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

The facilitating role of the municipality is the creation of good preconditions for initiatives to thrive on. By providing funding and a location for foodbanks for example, as stated in this quote:

The preconditions we try to provide and then what actually has to happen, which is handing out a food package, we then hope that because the preconditions are good, the activity can take place. Not necessarily that those volunteers get paid, but for example that they can get training [and a location is provided]. (INT-UTR-05, municipal official of the social domain)

The municipality prefers to step back from social food initiatives because they would prefer the citizens make food sharing happen amongst themselves (INT-UTR-04, municipal official of the social domain).

### 5.2.2 Cooperation across sectors

Cooperation with other initiatives or companies within the same field is an important enabler to SSE initiatives. It can support initiatives in finding funding for their activities and in the activities itself. For example, finding partners that can refer potential participants to the initiative can be an enabler, as illustrated here:



“Interviewee: We also very much seek collaboration with other initiatives or companies, such as welfare organisations, informal care organisations, voluntary organisations, but also GPs, and the social departments of the municipality super broadly speaking.

Researcher: And so then to ensure that they possibly pass on people to you who can use your service?

Interviewee Yes exactly, just to eventually reach as many residents as possible and help them with a nice home cook.” (INT-UTR-02, employee of a meal service foundation)

Additionally, the private sector can be a good partner for (additional) funding or campaigns. For example, the PLUS supermarket chain participated in a marketing campaign for a home cooking and sharing initiative where people from the initiative were allowed to stand in the supermarkets with homecooked food and make conversation with the shopping public (INT-UTR-02, employee of a meal service foundation)

### 5.2.3 Participation

Active participation emerges as a vital enabler for initiatives engaging in SSE initiatives. A sense of connection within the group can foster a unique environment where like-minded individuals come together with a shared purpose, such as for example:

“I do find the connection with the group interesting. You are with like-minded people. Yes there is something demonstrative about it. You have the idea that you can do something for a more sustainable world and that gives a good feeling. And I like that you do so together.” (INT-UTR-01, member of a food collective)

Enthusiasm from participants and connection to the cause contribute significantly to the success and organisational capacity of these initiatives, as their shared commitment becomes the driving force behind overcoming challenges such as time, money, and effort. The initiatives find there is a great willingness in Utrecht to contribute to social food initiatives, as illustrated:

“I also just notice from the [amount of] registrations of the home cooks that just the willingness to do something for someone else in Utrecht is just really big” (INT-UTR-02, employee of a meal service foundation).

## 5.3 Conclusion

Despite having no official public policy to support the needs of social and solidarity economy actors, Utrecht is home to a diversity of food sharing initiatives who contribute to the social economy and solidarity economy – with very little public recognition or funding for their efforts. Social economy actors have been extremely creative in combining multiple sources of income, business models, and tax designations to make their work possible. Care farms in particular stand out as a novel way of making the existing health bureaucracy work for socially inclusive food sharing. In the Dutch context of neo-liberal communitarian “participation society” the trend of SSE actors providing essential public services seems to be growing, with civil servants planning for a future of austerity and funding cuts. The preference of the Municipality to fund voluntary initiatives over those that help their members make a living reinforces existing economic inequalities, by rewarding (highly motivated

and often highly educated) residents with the financial means and resources to help (via volunteering), giving them greater power in shaping their communities – than more marginalized groups who are cast as clients, beneficiaries, intervention groups – in need of help. This inequality is an obstacle to creating an inclusive and just social and solidarity economy, premised on solidarity and mutual aid, in which people can earn a living wage while making a difference in their community. Social enterprises offer the promise of combining paid and socially meaningful work, and do hold a competitive advantage in public procurement. However there are very few social enterprises active in the domain of food sharing, perhaps the market orientation of social enterprise is not a good match for food sharing. In mapping the landscape of SSE food sharing, we also see a quite durable physical and social infrastructure for solidarity economy in buurthuisjes, squats, community gardens, and cultural centers, which is the result of decades of public investment, grassroots activism, illegal squatting, and the legacy of a more robust welfare state. However, without continued investment this infrastructure will be lost. It is worrisome that as the city has grown in population and size, funding for SSE activities and investments in infrastructures of food sharing has not kept pace. The Rijnvliet food forest is perhaps an exception, it is a beautiful physical infrastructure for food sharing, however there has been very little investment in social infrastructure – creating barriers to inclusion and citizen engagement.

## Appendix 1: renting municipal community centres (buurtcentrum, buurthuisjes)

---

0% (nothing) or 35% of the rental costs are charged if an initiative meets the following conditions:

- The activity fits within one or more objectives of the municipal welfare policy (we call this 'innovative welfare'):
  - Providing social contacts and improves social cohesion in the neighbourhood
  - Contributing to a healthy lifestyle
  - Improving the self-reliance and independence of the participants
  - Helping personal development or increasing the chances of doing (voluntary) work
  - Increasing social safety in the neighbourhood
- No money comes from the activity as remuneration or salary.
- The participants come from the municipality of Utrecht.
- A charge of 0% has some additional conditions:
- No paid worker is involved in the activity (initiator included).
- The participants pay nothing or only for direct costs of the activity such as materials.
- The initiative do not receive a grant.
- A charge of 35% occurs when the conditions mentioned above are met, but one or more of these points are applicable to an initiative wishing to rent:
- Someone in the organisation receives a salary or remuneration.
- The participants also pay for indirect costs, such as the costs of a website.
- The initiative receives a subsidy.
- The full rent is charged when one or more of the following applies to the initiative:
- The activity does not meet the conditions that apply to the 0% and 35% rate.
- A certain amount is kept as income.
- The activity is not only intended for Utrecht residents. There will also be participants from outside the city.

## References

---

- Andriessen, T., Van der Horst, H., & Morrow, O. (2022). Customer is king: Staging consumer culture in a food aid organization. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 22(3), 615-634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540520935950>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., De Hooge, I., Amani, P., Bech-Larsen, T., & Oostindjer, M. (2015). Consumer-related food waste: Causes and potential for action. *Sustainability*, 7(6), 6457- 6477. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su7066457>
- Bos-Brouwers, H. E. J., Kok, M. G., Snels, J. C. M. A., & van der Sluis, A. A. (2020). *Changing the rules of the game: Impact and feasibility of policy and regulatory measures on the prevention and reduction of food waste*. (Report / Wageningen Food & Biobased Research; No. 2080). Wageningen Food & Biobased Research. <https://doi.org/10.18174/529888>
- Bos-Brouwers, H., Achterbosch, T. J., Castelein, B., & Cloutier, J. M. I. (2023). *Theory of change: acceleration agenda for reducing food waste 2022-2025 : recommendations to the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV)*. (Report / Wageningen Food & Biobased Research; No. 2451). Wageningen Food & Biobased Research. <https://doi.org/10.18174/634947>
- Dekkinga, P., van der Horst, H., & Andriessen, T. (2022). “Too big to fail”: the resilience and entrenchment of food aid through food banks in the Netherlands during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Food Security*, 14(3), 781-789. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-022-01260-5>
- Diaz-Ruiz, R., Costa-Font, M., López-i-Gelats, F., & Gil, J. M. (2019). Food waste prevention along the food supply chain: A multi-actor approach to identify effective solutions. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 149, 249-260.
- Göbel, C., Langen, N., Blumenthal, A., Teitscheid, P., & Ritter, G. (2015). Cutting food waste through cooperation along the food supply chain. *Sustainability*, 7(2), 1429-1445.
- Hillen, M. et al. (2014). *De social enterprise als businesspartner van de gemeente*. Amsterdam: Social Enterprise NL <https://gemeentebestuur.haarlem.nl/bestuurlijke-stukken/2014061478-Publicatie-Social-Enterprise-NL1.pdf>
- Righettini, M. S., & Lizzi, R. (2020). Governance arrangements for Transboundary issues: Lessons from the food waste programs of Italian regions. *Review of Policy Research*, 37(1), 115-134. doi:10.1111/ropr.12360
- Salamon, L.M., and Helmut K.A. (1998). Social Origins of Civil Society: Explaining the Nonprofit Sector Cross-Nationally. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 9 (3): 213-48. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022058200985.10.1023/A:1022058200985>
- Soethoudt, J. M., & Vollebregt, H. M. (2023). *Monitor Voedselverspilling: Update 2009 - 2020*. (Rapport Wageningen Food & Biobased Research; No. 2403). Wageningen Food & Biobased Research. <https://doi.org/10.18174/590306>
- Szulecka, J., & Strøm-Andersen, N. (2021). Norway's food waste reduction governance: From industry self-regulation to governmental regulation?. *Scandinavian Political Studies*. doi:10.1111/1467-9477.12219

Tornaghi C (2017) Urban Agriculture in the Food-Disabling City: (Re)defining Urban Food Justice, Reimagining a Politics of Empowerment. *Antipode* 49(3): 781–801.

van der Horst, H., Pascucci, S. and Bol, W. (2014), "The “dark side” of food banks? Exploring emotional responses of food bank receivers in the Netherlands", *British Food Journal*, Vol. 116 No. 9, pp. 1506-1520. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-02-2014-0081>

