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The co-production of urban food policies: Exploring the emergence of new governance spaces in three Spanish cities

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

City councils around the globe are developing food policies that aim to integrate different sectors and actors involved in delivering sustainability and food security outcomes fostering changes in policy-making processes. However, the co-production of public policies faces multiple drawbacks to establish new forms of governance that generate greater legitimacy for institutions, improved efficiency, tighter social cohesion and deeper democratisation. This paper draws on recent literature on social innovation and critical governance to portray food policy co-production processes in Cordoba, Madrid and Valencia, analysing the changing role of the actors involved, identifying key factors and tools that sustain co-production processes, and highlighting common barriers. The results illustrate the changing roles of key actors in co-productive policies, together with the need to acknowledge the diversity of knowledge, capacities and interests within the public sector and civil society organisations to design effective policies. This includes crafting formal and informal governance spaces that underpin the fluid and constantly evolving process of developing food policies. This comparative study, thus, contributes to progress in conceptual and practical debates on co-production, providing new insights to inform future urban food policy developments.

1. Introduction

Cities have become key sites to transform our current food system and deliver good food for all. Urban areas are powerful agents shaping socio-economic development and multiscale political agendas (Moragues-Faus & Morgan, 2015), as exemplified by the US metropolitan revolution, and the rise of municipalism in Spain (Katz and Bradley, 2013; Vilaseca, 2014; Cameron, 2014). Recently, cities have reasserted their powers and responsibilities in driving food system reforms. Indeed, municipal governments around the globe are developing local food policies to integrate different sectors and actors involved in delivering food security outcomes (Blay-Palmer, 2009; Morgan, 2009). The international dimension of this urban food revolution is encapsulated by the success of the Milan Food Policy Pact (2015), a protocol now signed by more than 200 cities committed to developing sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, and provide healthy and

affordable food to all people. This integration of urban and non-agricultural actors in food system transformations is establishing a new geography of food governance based on cross-sectoral and cross-scalar action (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019).

In the last decade, the burgeoning literature on urban food policy has focused predominantly on two domains. First, the analysis of the emergence and implementation of specific policies and programmes, such as public procurement (Smith et al., 2016; Sonnino, 2009), urban agriculture (Cohen and Reynolds, 2014; Poulsen et al., 2015) and urban planning (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; Viljoen and Wiskerke, 2012). Secondly, many scholars have documented the creation and evolution of cross-sectoral spaces of deliberation, such as food policy councils. These groups convene stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector to take a holistic and place-based approach to food policy reform. To date, researchers have explored in depth the creation, actions, and initial impacts of individual food alliances (Blay-Palmer,

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2009; Landert et al., 2017; Mendes, 2008; Santo et al., 2014; Shey and Belis, 2013), as well as comparing the structures, issues, and activities of multiple food governance spaces (Clayton et al., 2015; Moragues-Faus et al., 2013; Scherb et al., 2012; Schiff, 2008), although with limited evaluation of their collective impact on changing policy or shifting conventional food governance paradigms (Clark et al., 2015). Furthermore, the opening-up of institutions to the effective participation of civil society remains a challenge. The co-production of public policies faces multiple hurdles to establish new forms of governance that generate greater legitimacy for institutions, improved efficiency, tighter social cohesion and deeper democratisation (see Gerometta et al., 2005; Moragues-Faus, 2020; McKeon, 2017; Pereira et al., 2019).

It is, therefore, necessary to further our understanding of policy co-production processes and how they impact the development of food policies. What do co-production processes actually entail? What are the enablers and barriers at play in these processes? What are the discursive, governance and material impacts of co-producing policies? For this purpose, we rely on two key and complementary bodies of work to study co-production processes. On the one hand, social innovation scholarship provides a clear framework to characterise types of policy co-production processes. On the other hand, recent debates on critical governance allow us to examine the role of the state and non-state actors and how co-production processes reshape their roles and relationships.

In order to start addressing these key questions we explore the co-production of food policies in three Spanish cities, which range not only in terms of size, but also in the level of formality/informality of their new food governance spaces. The study of governance changes in Spain is particularly relevant due the emergence and rise to power of "municipalist" parties in major Spanish cities. These new city governments emerge from progressive coalitions of anti-austerity, anti-eviction and pro-democracy movements (Janoschka and Mota, 2020), positing new questions around the changing roles of different stakeholders in the process of co-producing public policies. The new municipalism situates the municipality as a strategic front for the organisation of progressive transformations - i.e. as a means to democratise power and respond to local needs -, while also building multiscale solidarity networks to effectively oppose wider neoliberal dynamics (Russell, 2019, Purcell, 2006).

In this context, the overall aim of this paper is to understand the co-production processes of public policies in these cities by analysing the changing role of the actors involved, the key factors and tools that have sustained these processes, and the barriers they face. By taking a critical approach to policy co-production and providing evidence from three different cities, this study contributes to progress in conceptual and practical debates on co-production, offering new insights to inform future urban food policy developments.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section two presents a literature review on social innovation and critical governance debates to identify key dimensions in guiding the analysis of policy co-production processes. Section three describes the methodology, followed by an introduction of the three case studies in section four. Section five analyses the roles and lessons learned by different stakeholders in co-production processes, identifies key enabling tools deployed to co-produce public policies, and explores the barriers faced throughout these processes. We conclude by providing policy recommendations stemming from the analysis of these processes and highlighting the importance of understanding urban food policies as a continuous, interactive, unstable and complex process where key actors (both civil society and the public sector) display a wide range of internal diversity regarding their capacities and commitment to food system transformation.

2. Literature review: Understanding policy co-production and the emergence of new governance spaces

In order to study policy co-production processes, in this section we review key texts from the social innovation literature to identify different types of co-production processes and key success factors. We also synthesise recent contributions to multistakeholder governance, which are developing a more critical and fluid approach to understanding these new forms of collective action.

The *social innovation* literature has actively embraced the concept of co-production, in many instances as a synonym of co-creation, and broadly defined it as the active involvement of citizens in the process of developing policies (Gebauer et al., 2010). In a recent systematic review of the literature on co-production in public innovation studies, Voorberg et al. (2015) identify three degrees of citizen involvement: citizens as co-implementers of public services, as co-designers, or as initiators and the government as an actor that follows their lead. They also characterise the distinct nature of these partnerships, which range from forging sustainable *relations*, acquiring joint *responsibility* or conceptualising the involvement of citizens and co-creation processes as a *value* in itself.

Table 1 summarises key factors that condition the success of co-production processes and critical actions to enhance the quality of co-production processes. However, while actions impact both organisations and citizens, the responsibility for and framing of these interventions are still directed towards the realm of public institutions, which reveals an inherent unequal distribution of power in the conceptualisation of co-production processes. Indeed, the establishment of the rules of participation and decision-making, or what Jessop (2016) calls "metagovernance" (i.e. the governance of governance) traditionally has been deemed the role of the public sector.

Nevertheless, the governance scholarship has increasingly embraced the notion of 'spaces' as a means to integrate more fully the diversity of stakeholders and their changing roles in policy co-production processes. For example, Moragues-Faus and Morgan (2015) cite the notion of "spaces of deliberation" to analyse the different places where civil society, private actors, and the state meet to build more just and sustainable urban food systems. These can be more or less formalised and embodied in the form of food policy councils (e.g., Toronto), food boards (e.g., London), food partnerships (e.g., Brighton), and the like (see also Clark et al., 2021, Duncan and Claeys, 2018). Similarly, Routledge (2003) proposes the concept of "convergence spaces" comprised of diverse social formations that articulate collective visions and facilitate uneven processes of interaction and political action, but that also inevitably showcase contested social relations in the form, for example, of conflicting goals, ideologies or strategies. The recent uptake of assemblage theory in food governance literature also highlights the

Table 1

Influential factors and critical actions that impact the quality of co-production processes.

Influential Factors conditioning co-production outcomes	
Organisational side	*Citizen side*
Existing structures and procedures within the public sector to communicate with citizens and promote participation	Participants' characteristics (from skills to values or socio-economic conditions)
The attitude of the institution towards participation processes and its associated capacity to overcome a risk-averse administrative culture	Sense of ownership and responsibility for the matter at stake
Presence of incentives for co-creation	Trust and collective action potential of the group(s) involved
Critical actions to enhance positive outcomes	
Organisational side	
Develop policies within public institutions that support co-production	Lower the thresholds for citizens to participate, including financial support
Employ knowledge brokers or policy entrepreneurs to act as facilitators	Provide a sense of ownership in the matter at stake
Enhance the autonomy of professionals	

Source: own elaboration based on Voorberg et al. (2015) review of the literature.

importance of understanding these new spaces and interactions as "heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated" (Collier and Ong, 2005: 12). This fluidity provides multistakeholder spaces with different capacities to act, endowing them with simultaneous cross-scalar, collective and distributive agencies (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019).

While the emergence and development of these governance spaces is well documented in the food literature (see, for example, Blay-Palmer, 2009; Landert et al., 2017; Mendes, 2008; Santo et al., 2014; Shey and Belis, 2013), there is an increasing debate around how they can contribute to effective policy outcomes. For example, Voorberg et al. (2015) state that most studies do not evaluate the outcomes of co-production processes. Rather, scholars focus on the process itself. In the cases when concrete outcomes are reported they revolve around gaining effectiveness and efficiency, increasing citizen involvement, gaining customer satisfaction, strengthening social cohesion or democratizing public services (Voorberg et al., 2015). This lack of assessment and of evaluation parameters call for further and critical exploration of the impacts of co-producing policies and associated spaces.

In this realm, critical scholars addressing processes of multistakeholder governance and, specifically, *beyond-the-state governance* literature, highlight the importance of critically assessing the implications of governance processes where non-elected stakeholders actively shape policies and other government mechanisms (Swyngedouw 2005). In this context, practitioners and scholars have been actively calling for more sound public engagement in policy making by, for example, ensuring that participation and deliberation processes tap into different forms of knowledge and experiences, and effectively democratise science and policies (Forsyth, 2003; Levkoe and Sheedy, 2017). This includes problematizing why and how particular forms of knowledge and expertise predominate in policy-making processes, and, therefore, the inclusion of more diverse understandings of what the key challenges and potential solutions are (Moragues-Faus and Marsden, 2017). However, rationales behind calls for further public engagement by the state are diverse. According to Demeritt (2015) they can be normative - participation as a fundamental democratic right, particularly of those affected by specific policies or decisions; instrumental – when public engagement is an efficient way of developing broadly acceptable polices-; or a means to improve the quality and even legitimacy of policies and underlying research. This diversity of motivations and types of co-production processes results in variegated positive and negative impacts which call for further examination.

For example, despite the praised benefits of participation, critical scholars have pointed out how participatory processes can reproduce power asymmetries and facilitate the co-optation of civil society organisations into neoliberal rationalities that weaken citizen empowerment and democracy (Davies 2012). According to Swyngedouw (2005), beyond-the-state governance processes risk eroding fundamental democratic principles, such as representativeness, legitimacy, transparency and accountability. This includes public-private partnerships, but also the emergence of civil society-public sector alliances. In this line, the post-political literature (see Beveridge & Koch, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2017 for recent debates) prompts us to consider how new alliances with the public sector and related policy co-production processes might build more *egalitarian food democracies* by incorporating and dealing with conflict and dissent (Moragues-Faus, 2017:468).

The embeddedness of these expressions of dissent in policy-making processes, or, in other words, understanding how policy co-production incorporates 'the political', requires a critical analysis of the impacts of these so-called co-creation processes and related outcomes. Among others, this includes adopting a critical approach to social movements, the state and their changing nature. For that purpose, it is necessary to adopt more fluid definitions of these actors in order to account for the contested social relations, power imbalances and diverse worldviews that coexist within these social formations. Routledge (2003) proposes using the concept of 'convergence space' not only to capture the

heterogeneous worlds that come together through multistakeholder coalitions, but also within these individual actors. Indeed, this conceptualisation makes it possible to incorporate the fluid identities and roles of actors into co-production processes. For example, Lenoble and De Schutter (2010) describe how NGOs cooperating with governments face tensions in terms of their roles and loyalties, which requires a constant redefining of their identity: who they are and which constituencies they are accountable to. Similarly, the state and public sector actors are actively shaped by their interactions with different stakeholders, for instance enhancing their capacity to provide more effective services by collaborating with communities or embedding new knowledge and discourses that lead to changes in departments, programmes, services and practices (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; Mitlin, 2008).

Pereira et al. (2019) also highlight the importance of re-shaping roles and agencies of actors to enact socio-ecological changes through the notion of 'transformative spaces'. Transformative spaces are those ones that "allow and enable dialogue, reflection and reflexive learning, while reframing issues in ways that allow solutions — or at the very least, attempts to experiment and transform — to be co-created and co-realized" (Pereira et al., 2019: 2). While all governance spaces are political, this preparedness to address power asymmetries by allowing participants to reflect on their agencies and capacities is considered an essential part of building alternative pathways forward (Pereira et al., 2019). Taking a step further, Avelino et al. (2019) call for greater attention to the transformative capacity of social innovations such as new governance spaces; that is, how changes in "the way how people decide, act and behave, alone or together" (Franz et al., 2012:5) effectively challenge, alter or replace dominant institutions in the social context (Haxeltine et al., 2016). This notion of 'transformative' as "irreversible, persistent adjustment in societal values, outlooks and behaviours" is conceptualised as a process (Avelino et al., 2019). Nonetheless, more fluid understandings of social change, such as those emerging from assemblage perspectives, locate transformative capacities in the unstable, flexible and messy processes of "producing a new reality by making numerous and unexpected connections" (Livesey, 2010: 19; cited in Santo and Moragues-Faus, 2019).

This literature review allows us, on the one hand, to characterise co-production processes through a social innovation lens, focusing on the context and goals of each process, the roles of the different stakeholders, the tools employed to enact co-production and the identification barriers in the process of co-producing policies. And, by incorporating critical interventions in governance debates, we are able to pay overdue attention to the changing powers and relations amongst key stakeholders. These analytical categories are used to analyse three case studies discussed in section four and five.

3. Methodology

In order to analyse the co-production processes of urban food policies, we employed a range of qualitative methods that allowed us to include diverse experiences and discourses leading to a more holistic understanding of social innovation processes, such as policy co-production (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The research's design includes three exploratory case studies: Madrid, Valencia and Córdoba. Exploratory case studies contribute to unveiling *how* and *what* research questions, and are particularly useful to identify emerging characteristics of processes, such as the development of policies (Yin, 2009). Within the exploratory case studies, three different methods were used to collect data. First, participant observation, which took place in different formal and informal spaces linked to the development of urban food policies, therefore including a wide range of actors. The researchers involved in this publication have been actively participating in the design of urban food policies in the selected cities since 2016. Second, semi-structured interviews with key actors were carried out in the three cities between March and July 2019: five in Valencia, five in Madrid and four in Córdoba. The people interviewed in

each city had the following roles: 1) political representatives; 2) city council staff; 3) members of civil society organisations (CSOs); and 4) food producers. The information collected was triangulated during the participatory research process. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed by coding them in Atlas.ti, using the following basic codes: Role [of each identified actor], Discourse, Political Style, Interests, Strategies, Mutual Influence, Benefits and Limitations for the process and for each actor, Conflict Resolution, Decision-making, Process Opening, Impact, Democratisation/Co-production, Confluence, Agroecology and Keys.

Finally, secondary data was collected and analysed throughout the research process, which included websites, reports, minutes from meetings, and grey literature. This data helped to refine and further contextualise primary data.

4. Fertile ground for change: Introduction to the case studies

The processes of co-producing food policies in the Spanish cities of Córdoba, Madrid and Valencia were shaped by a broader context characterised by the international uptake of food as an urban issue, propelled by the Milan Food Policy Pact, and the rise of a municipalism movement formalised in political alliances that began governing many cities in the 2015 local elections[1]. The so-called "governments of change" in Madrid, Córdoba and Valencia began their mandates by activating new ways of 'doing politics' in which there was a more direct and open relationship with civil society organisations (CSOs), partly manifested through the direct participation of CSO members in the local government as politicians and policy-makers. In addition to other areas, such as housing, mobility and transport, education, the environment and the social economy (Cameron, 2014), their new agenda also prioritised, to some extent, agricultural and food issues thanks to the advocacy work of a relatively strong and consolidated "food movement" present in the three cities.

In this context, the three cities committed to co-produce urban food policies. Through this policy-making process, both local governments and civil society faced common challenges around how to create spaces of convergence to successfully co-create urban food policies. Below we present how this process unfolded in the three cities.

In Córdoba, in the summer of 2016, a meeting between the food movement and the newly elected coalition government resulted in the city signing the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, and making an institutional commitment to develop comprehensive food policies in a participatory fashion. For this purpose, first a diagnosis of the agri-food system was conducted, partly funded by the City Council. Meanwhile, a governance space was created, the Milan Pact Coordination Committee (April 2017), to propose, discuss and agree on specific actions and decision-making procedures. This Coordination Committee is comprised of local politicians and civil servants from various departments (Environment, Trade, Participation, Health, Social Services), municipal companies (MercaCórdoba, SADECO), the Andalusian Regional Government, the association of organic traders (EcoCórdoba), organic producers organised around the EcoMercado, a group of chefs using organic produce, various NGOs in the field of food sovereignty, and a research group from the University of Córdoba.

In the case of Madrid, the 2015 elections resulted in a new municipalist government. In October of the same year, the Madrid City Council signed the Milan Pact, and in early 2016 a first meeting was held with representatives from the agroecological movement, which evolved into the "Milan Pact Follow-up Committee". This Committee became a forum to propose, coordinate and organise joint initiatives. A key outcome of the collaborative work of the Committee was the *Healthy and Sustainable Food Strategy 2018–2020*, developed through a wider participatory process which involved social entities, economic and professional

organisations, academics and the relevant council departments. The Committee currently includes 6 representatives from civil society organisations (restaurant and trade associations, nutritionists, agroecologists, and right-to-food groups), 7 municipal departments (social services, environment, health, consumption, trade, nursery schools, economy), a public company (Mercamadrid, the city's wholesale market) and a representative from FAO. A separate collaborative space has been established with public universities based in Madrid.

In Valencia, a new coalition government including a municipalist party rose to power in 2015, and the same year signed the Milan Pact, which included a commitment to promote more sustainable food policies and incorporate food sovereignty and agroecology organisations into their development. In addition, in 2017 Valencia was designated World Food Capital by FAO and hosted the annual Milan Urban Food Policy Pact gathering and Mayors' Summit. Valencia has developed, through a broad participative process, the Valencia Agri-Food Strategy 2025 and established a multistakeholder Food Policy Council where 30 organisations participate, including farmers' unions, consumer associations, environmental and food groups; together with a member of each political party present in the council, 3 municipal departments (agriculture, health and trade and markets) and 2 regional departments (health and agriculture). More initiatives have also been carried out through multistakeholder partnerships, such as the promotion of local farmers' markets in the city, the creation of a label to promote local products and direct sales from producer to consumer, the Citizens' Farmland Observatory, a municipal land bank, and the development of regulations to sell food on the street.

The development of urban food policies in the three cities has progressed in different ways (see Table 2). Since the Milan Pact was signed, the cities have successfully incorporated agricultural and food issues into municipal agendas, which has been manifested in the creation of new governance spaces (the Milan Pact Monitoring or Steering Committees in Madrid and Córdoba, and the Food Council in Valencia), but also the development of diagnoses and strategies to guide actions, resulting in new regulatory frameworks and specific activities. These different initiatives invariably rely on participatory and collaborative processes, where different actors are reshaping their relationships and building new capacities

As discussed below, all three cities have invested many resources and efforts to build these processes, but they are still in an initial stage of collective learning to ensure the establishment of sustainable, long-term relationships based on shared responsibilities (Voorberg et al., 2015).

5. An analysis of policy co-production processes: actors, tools and barriers

This section contains a critical analysis of the process of co-production of three urban food policies. First, we provide insights into the roles of the actors involved and their changing relations. Secondly, we analyse key factors and tools that have sustained the emergence of these processes and the first phase of co-creation. Thirdly, we explore the main limitations of these processes.

5.1. Understanding the fluid roles of different actors in policy co-production processes

5.1.1. Local governments: Navigating their political dimensions and institutional fixes

The three cities initiated their policy co-production processes under new municipalist parties which advocate for creating multistakeholder spaces of governance within public institutions. The process of opening up local governments to new issues and ways of working has a political dimension, but also relies on the administrative capacities and structures of public institutions, as discussed below.

Regarding the political dimension, two key elements can be observed. First, as already highlighted in the literature (Halliday, 2019),

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[1] http://ciudadesdelcambio.org/

Table 2
Milestones of the public policy co-production process.

	Córdoba	Madrid	Valencia
Governance structures	Milan Pact Steering Committee	Milan Pact Follow-up Committee and Annual Meeting	Municipal Food Council
Strategic processes	Diagnostic process and collective strategic planning workshops Feeding Córdoba Project	Healthy and Sustainable Food Strategy 2018–2020	Diagnostics (public purchase, short channels) Agri-food Strategy 2025 Valencia
Regulatory Frameworks	Ecomercado Legalisation Agreement	Nursery school tender documents Public procurement guidelines (in process)	Municipal Ordinance for Non-Fixed Markets Recommendation Guide for Sustainable School Canteens
Actions	Sustainable Gastronomy Project 2017–20 Milan Pact 2017 information campaign Training days for local commerce Food Bank with local and organic food Sustainable School Canteens Agreement on the need for a collection centre in Mercacórdoba for local and organic products	Organic and local food in the canteens of the Municipal Network of Schools Public allotments Here and Now campaign, committed to local and seasonal products in Mercamadrid MARES Food (shared kitchen and technical assistance for social economy projects) *Producer to consumer direct selling markets Madrid agrocompost (in *peri*-urban farms) *Community Composting Sustainable public procurement program * completed projects with no future continuity	World Food Capital 2017 Citizen Farmland Monitor Agrarian Land Bank Sustainable School Canteens

the commitment of the mayor shapes the participation of key public actors in developing local food policies. For example, in Valencia, the mayor's office applied to become the 2017 World Food Capital, established a new municipal department on agriculture and sustainable food, and created a job position to hire an expert on agroecology with clear links to the local food movement. In the three cities, all the actors would have liked to have seen greater involvement by the mayor, stating that more decided intervention by the mayor's office would have expedited processes and facilitated resources, and could have overcome certain political and technical resistance, and given actions and processes greater energy. In the case of Valencia, the mayor directly promoted the creation of the World Sustainable Urban Food Center of Valencia (CEMAS)[2]. In fact, it was even recognised, within the process, that it was "a project of the mayor's".

> "It is very difficult to come to an agreement (…) Nevertheless, when the Mayor decided that there would be a Municipal Market of Producers… they quickly developed the conditions and the specifications. If there were communication regarding the neighbourhood markets, or the Mayor's Office issued some recommendations or showed some interest, it would be a substantial change." (Madrid, Food Movement)

Second, the appearance of social movement actors in the local government, as politicians but also staff, has contributed to the creation of convergence spaces that benefit from these fluid identities, and simultaneously belong to different groups of stakeholders (see Routledge, 2003 above). For example, these simultaneous alliances provide legitimacy and generate trust among different actors, which facilitates a convergence of discourses and actions. The leadership of these champions has facilitated the development of new relationships, common language, and codes between (and within) the administration and civil society, as well as the inclusion of food-related expertise in the public administration, which, taken together, fosters a commitment to creating more inclusive and diverse governance spaces.

These hybrid actors have been a key "hinge" between the political and the social spheres by facilitating communication and seeking innovative solutions for further collaboration. They provide "creative" interpretations of existing rules, or develop new guidelines to facilitate collaborative work within the institution. Examples include overcoming administrative burdens to embed sustainability criteria in public procurement tenders for school meals in Madrid, addressing multiple administrative barriers to develop an agroecological food hub in the wholesale market of Córdoba regarding the economic viability of the project, agreements to lease the space and refurbishment works; or modifying food safety and planning regulations to establish regular farmers' markets in Valencia's main square.

While the arrival of municipalist actors and agendas are changing traditional roles and activities in the public sector, the council's permanent administration and operations team is also a fundamental part of policy co-production processes. Our data revealed that public sector staff can facilitate or hinder policy-making processes, depending on their motivation and commitment to the topic, training, personal opinions, the bureaucratic and regulatory difficulties of the specific environment, and the level of pressure and priority assigned by the council's political leaders. In the three cities, there has been resistance from part of the technical staff who have been overwhelmed by the new ways of working and the high number of actions proposed under this new co-productive framework.

In most cases the staff, in the performance of their functions as public employees, have been overwhelmed by the amount of added work and the extra effort entailed by this new work environment entailed, without being accompanied by the support of new personnel to tackle all the work. Thus, in Córdoba, for example, the staff involved, due to a lack of supplementary personnel, recommended that they not participate in a European project that had already been approved, and with part of the financing for the city, because they did not have the administrative capacity to manage it. Also in Córdoba, two urban agriculture projects are at a standstill, among other things, due to the staff's lack of capacity of to deal with the regulatory framework involved. In Madrid and Valencia projects for producers' markets in the neighbourhoods have been hampered and have not developed sufficiently due to a lack of

agility and willingness on the part of municipal staff, who did not process the corresponding permits. Also in these two cities, Valencia and Madrid, the school canteen project stalled because municipal staff could not cope with the management of this new task, and much less with its execution, which was, ultimately, partially redirected to civil society organizations.

At the same time, other technical staff have been instrumental in supporting the food policy processes in the three cities, innovating to make the collective proposals viable. The institutional structure and their capacity to engage in co-production processes has proven pivotal, since they can ensure that changes are embedded long-term in the local administration and transcend electoral cycles.

Actors operating in the public administration have, therefore, changed throughout the coproduction process in the three cities. For example, politicians and council professionals have been exposed to new knowledge and new ways of making policy, and, in some cases, have tried to adapt and apply these practises to the current regulatory framework. Like in other cities (Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015), the councils have acknowledged the experience and work accomplished by the CSOs and valued the learning process.

> *Without the collaboration of the civil society organizations we would not have been able to carry out even 10% of the actions that have been implemented. (Valencia-Council)*

In this regard, co-production has included not only the co-design and co-implementation of policies and actions (Voorberg et al., 2015), but also supported a wider learning process including changes in practices and discourses. The three administrations have started to engage with sustainability issues around food, and to incorporate a more comprehensive vision of urban food policy. As part of this process, narratives around food system transformation championed by the food movement have gained greater legitimacy in institutional spaces, similarly to the case of German cities (Doernberg et al., 2019). However, it remains a constant challenge for the three administrations to fully incorporate sustainable food systems, thinking about their strategies and activities despite their commitment to the Milan Pact.

5.1.2. A capable, mature and motivated food movement

In the context of Spanish local food policy debates, civil society is mainly represented by organisations and social movements working on sustainable food and agriculture at the local level, and by engaged academics. The food movement is comprised mainly of agroecological/ organic producers, consumers, associations of sustainable producers and consumers, NGOs, Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives, and research-activists. In the three cities studied, this local food movement had its own convergence space, or certain collective identity and structure, before the food policy processes started, taking the form of Alliances for Food Sovereignty where advocacy and training activities took place. Within the food movement, NGOs with specialised knowledge and academics involved in research and training around agroecology and food sovereignty, have taken the lead in promoting discourse around food system transformation, proposing specific projects, and coordinating the collaboration between the food movement and the administration. Other parts of these local food movements have remained less engaged with the local government.

These "promoters" have adopted the role of consultants and advisors (both formally and informally) to politicians and technical staff of the council. Specifically, they have provided nuanced, critical and complex narratives around agri-food system transformations, and supported the political impetus of municipalist governments, which lacked food-related expertise and capacities on the ground. Similarly to other food policy processes (Wekerle, 2004; Derkzen and Morgan, 2012; Halliday, 2019), these NGOs and academics have not only provided knowledge and participatory methodologies, but they have also constituted a complementary infrastructure to the administration. This new infrastructure provides key capacities scant in the public administration for complex co-productive processes, such as methodological agility and flexibility, and linkages with a wider network of social actors - which have proven important for example, to hire facilitators and experts on an *ad-hoc* basis, or deliver rapid participatory projects to comply with electoral cycles.

As the policy-making processes evolved, the CSOs of the three cities have been taking on more responsibilities in the design and execution of the three urban food strategies and in the implementation of specific projects. For example, in Valencia, civil society actors have facilitated the development of the food strategy and policy council, but also advanced proposals to implement changes in public procurement (school meals), short supply chains (markets for agroecological producers), support agroecological producers, and introduce a rights-based approach to food interventions in social services.

These collaborative dynamics have displayed changing choreographies of power between public sector and civil society actors, which can spill over to the local food system. For example, civil society organisations in Valencia were quickly recognised as legitimate actors by the council, which relied heavily on their experience, knowledge and methodological expertise, as well as their country-wide and international networks, by designing and facilitating the process of developing a food strategy and food council. This fruitful collaboration fosters the capacity of CSOs to propose (and help to implement) specific activities and programmes while strengthening their key role as nodes of an increasing interconnected network of local food actors. Consequently, the power of some CSOs is reinforced in formal decision-making spaces, but they can also contribute to changing the geometries of power in the wider urban foodscape.

This new leading role of CSO within policy-making processes, on occasions, has been interpreted by the Administration (both politicians and technical staff) as an intrusion, generating disagreements, misunderstandings and distrust. Also, tensions and contradictions have arisen within the CSOs themselves, as they struggle to maintain a critical perspective despite working with public entities, as noted by Lenoble and De Schutter (2010).

> *The social movements have become a working tool for the administration, rather than a space for counter-power or working as equals (…) That is, here the NGOs that have participated have been used as mere consultants with intellectual capacity (…) The NGOs were the engine, they were the work force, but the wheel was not steered by the NGOs but rather the administration (Valencia-Food Movement)*
>
> *Of course, we have to make sure that we are there, that we are advocating, that we are demanding. Let us not be just another civil servant, let us not be just another technician who is told what to do. (Córdoba-Food Movement)*

However, not all CSOs have the same level of engagement with the local government. Indeed, conflicts within the food movement have been accentuated when certain organizations are hired by the municipalities. They acquire a new role as policy implementers, in addition to the roles of advisor, critic and articulator of the counter-power to the administrations.

> *Part of the energy of the collectives has gone not so much to advocacy and reclaim change, but rather they are the ones who are executing actions or policy measures (…). We are still trying to figure out how to handle this (Madrid-Food Movement)*

In this regard, the CSOs interviewed are reflexive and recognize the risks of collaborating with public institutions, mainly how this collaboration weakens the critical dimension of social movements, not least by dedicating resources and efforts to complete tasks that are typical of municipalities, rather than organising and providing a political voice to those disenfranchised. In some ways, they perceive that the the debate on how to co-produce public food policies within a broader political

project to promote new citizenships and new food cultures appears briefly (Turnhout et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding, throughout the policy co-production processes CSOs have acquired new knowledge and skills, such as the language, procedures, protocols and rhythms of the public administration. This new knowledge is paramount to collaborate more efficiently, for example formulating demands or changes within administrative frameworks. However, CSOs still struggle to attune to the inflexible, regulated and procedural nature of public institutions, leading to conflicts, discomfort and disappointment. There is a gap between the expectations generated around a co-productive policy process and the pace and capacity of execution within the administration.

5.2. Key factors and tools shaping the emergence and development of co-production processes

The analysis of data collected in the three cities allowed us to identify four key factors and tools which have contributed to the emergence and further development of policy co-production processes, as discussed below.

First, the three cities recognised that the widely accepted and internationally recognised text of **the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP)** was the origin of their food policy processes, in a similar vein to developments in many other cities (Doernberg et al, 2019; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019). The Milan Pact is a declaration of intent, but does not have any direct and immediate commitments for the signatory cities. The Pact, thus, provides a consensus framework based on widely-held values, such as sustainability and food security, with the ability to convene a wide diversity of actors. These characteristics have facilitated its adoption by public institutions, while the food movement also used this wide framework to introduce their transformative food agenda into the institutional dialogue and call for effective action from local governments.

The Milan Pact was a catalyst to assemble diverse actors and interests under a shared framework, and, consequently, instrumental to create convergence spaces. For example, in the case of Valencia, the MUFPP framework was used to design the participative workshops aimed at defining the city's food strategy, due to its capacity to bring together actors and its legitimacy in all constituencies.

A second key tool in the process of co-producing food policies is the **construction of spaces of convergence** with different degrees of formality, which progressively have become spaces of governance, as they shape and design the development of specific food-related activities, programmes and urban food strategies. These spaces facilitate co-productive dynamics by fostering dialogue across different discourses and political cultures, building trust and consolidating a shared commitment to the construction of sustainable agri-food systems and food strategies. However, these spaces are fluid as they assemble actors in different ways and, therefore, create a constellation of formal and informal governance structures.

In the three cities studied there has been the creation of formal spaces, such as the Food Council, in Valencia; the Milan Pact Monitoring Committee, in Madrid; and the Milan Pact Coordination Committee, in Córdoba, which have contributed to collaborative decision-making in the realm of food and promoted more coordination within the council departments, and also with non-public stakeholders. A key challenge faced by all food policy promoters in the cities studied is deciding the criteria for choosing the members of these formal spaces. In every case, there are power dynamics at play between and within each set of participants, i.e different municipal departments, politicians and council staff, and civil society organisations. However, the common objective is to work together to make sure that they are perceived as legitimate by the public, but also so that they constitute "safe enough spaces" for participants; that is, ones in which all the actors can feel comfortable and safe enough to participate, but, at the same time, sufficiently challenged and pushed in order to shed their prejudices and preconceived ideas,

testing their own thinking enough to learn to imagine a new collective horizon with the other actors (Pereira et al., 2019). They are spaces in which all stakeholders have to be willing learn and unlearn something in order to build a shared common vision around what is a sustainable food system for their city.

> *I remember the first meetings: we were really enthusiastic about a local product label process; we were talking with producers and shops, but meanwhile the council worker from the commerce department was just talking about a logo and did not understand us…, and in the end we ended up learning to understand each other and accepted that there were things each of us did not know. (Córdoba-OSC)*

These formal structures are complemented by informal relationships where trust is forged, and which become essential to support successful social innovation processes. New, spontaneous, formal and informal collaborations are emerging between actors who were previously unconnected, which take place beyond the remit and timeframes of the formal committees or policy councils.

These informal interactions have facilitated communication and mutual understanding, facilitating the negotiation of strategies and actions.

> *The mood, the way you listen at meetings. When people present their projects, the way they listen to the project, try to understand it, ask questions… The frame of mind, that is, all of us being very clear that we all share the Milan Pact's ideas, the objectives, the axes we have to work with, the actions and so on. (Córdoba-Public Company)*

Considering that conflict resolution emerges as one of the key issues involved in social innovation (Milley et al, 2018), we can observe how the choreography of power shows that civil society organizations are making an effort to establish and build these spaces within the institutions, with the result that some decisions of the administration are not questioned, and are approved to avoid conflict, and that, at the same time, there is a certain moderation in the proposals of civil society organizations. In turn, the administrations maintain these spaces for dialogue and questioning, and allow a certain control by civil society organizations that did not previously exist. In any case, friction and institutional resistance are inherent to social innovation processes (Christmann, 2020).

In short, in the absence of regulation and a greater distribution of power between the actors in the three cities, decision-making and conflict resolution rely on goodwill, empathy, mutual trust and continuous dialogue in which the actors strive to identify with and understand each other, moving towards more horizontal practices and more agroecological contents, making an effort to maintain these spaces and processes.

The analysis of the three cities also highlights how **access to situated knowledge, expertise, and training on co-production processes of urban food policies** is a key tool for success. A clear example of the importance of situated knowledge is the reliance on local food system diagnosis as a first step to yield objective information and constitute a common basis to engage different actors in the development of more long-term strategies (i.e in Valencia, the Agri-food Strategy 2025 and in Madrid, the Food Strategy 2018–2020; in Córdoba, lines of action have been agreed upon from based on the diagnosis, although an institutional strategy as such has not been formalised). Similarly to other European processes (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019), the participation in meetings, city-to-city exchanges and training organised by the Spanish Network of Cities for Agroecology has been instrumental in advancing the collective policy-making processes. The network of Cities for Agroecology is made up of 22 Spanish local governments committed to sharing knowledge and experiences to develop agroecological food policies, generate useful resources, and scale up their actions. Interviewees reported how activities within this network have, for example, helped to engage and inspire politicians and council staff by

learning from peers who face similar constraints, while at the same time expanding alliances of local food movement actors providing urban food policy reform with a national dimension. This national network thus also contributes to creating fluid convergence spaces around urban food policies which surpass city limits.

Taken together, these assemblages of formal and informal exchanges allow actors to address conflicts and common obstacles. However, this capacity is conditioned by the actual success of the formal policy councils and committees in effectively taking action and producing outcomes, since they are portrayed as the legitimate space to develop city-wide food policies. Trust and the political and methodological mediation of all the actors are instrumental to convert these governance spaces as "safe enough" spaces of collective loyalty in which the precarious balance of roles can be managed.

Finally, the **availability of resources** has been an essential element in making these processes viable. City councils have shown different degrees of involvement in providing resources, both financial and human, to develop their urban food agendas. Investments range from supporting specific projects, such as composting, school canteens, and farmers' markets, to contributing to funding diagnosis, training, and research. In all these cases, however, the funding is considered insufficient, something that is particularly noticeable in the provisioning of human resources dedicated exclusively to this issue.

The limited public sector funding has been complemented in all three cities by additional resources from the CSOs themselves and from private groups that promote sustainable food, such as the Carasso Foundation. This type of funding has generated a certain autonomy from the local government and has put pressure on the administrations, spotlighting their scarce contribution compared to other funders. External funding permitted more flexible and agile spending, compared to the complex bureaucratic ties of public funds, and also made it possible to pilot initiatives currently restricted by the council's regulations and administrative procedures. It has also meant that the municipalities have committed to working with other cities in taking concrete steps in the agricultural/food agenda. By and large, access to long-term funding for not only projects, but also co-productive processes, such as the time of participants, or expert facilitation, remains a challenge, but it is also an essential tool to support the development of collaborative policies.

5.3. Barriers and limitations

Results from the data analysis show a number of barriers that hinder the co-production of public policies in the three cities studied, which can be classified into five types: 1) political, 2) technical-administrative, 3) collaboration across diverse actors, 4) expectations and impacts, and 5) participant inclusion and diversity.

5.3.1. Political barriers

The lack of political priority assigned to developing urban food policies is a key factor that has slowed down or prevented the progress of co-production processes. This includes an incapacity to engage enough city council politicians and staff with the new urban food agenda - in some cases despite the city's mandate to build a more sustainable food system - and an inadequate allocation of public resources to support the process, mainly economic and human.

5.3.2. Technical and administrative barriers

In the administrative arena, key barriers include bureaucratic obstruction, the lack of legal powers and competencies at the municipal level, and the insufficient involvement of civil servants.

Navigating the complexity of the public administration and understanding how it works and how it can contribute to promoting social change is a barrier for new politicians, council staff and CSOs. Not the least of these is dealing with the convoluted relationships between departments and, in the case of coalition governments, political factions.

One of our realisations with the council is just what a monster administration it is. It's incredible the lack of knowledge there is between the different departments. (Madrid-Food Movement)

It is true that I find it a little incomprehensible when I hear that there are pre-approved budgets and it is not possible to execute them at a later stage. (Córdoba-Food Movement)

These regulatory and procedural barriers can be amplified by the actions of particular council staff members who resist more "creative" interpretations of existing rules (as clearly exemplified by how to include criteria for local produce in public procurement tenders); either because they prefer to follow established administrative routines, or because they are not engaged with the food policy agenda despite the existence of a political mandate. Changing existing routines and creative policy making require more time, which also constitutes a barrier for civil servants with limited availability and capacity.

5.3.3. Limitations in establishing collaborations between diverse actors

There are difficulties to align practices and promote collaboration between diverse actors, especially because of their different ways of understanding participative policy development processes.

Collaboration is further threatened when the roles of the actors involved are changing, as discussed in section 5.1. Indeed, despite the broad acceptance of the leading role of CSOs in developing food policies, on some occasions they have been considered intruders by both politicians and technical staff. This has generated some disagreements, misunderstandings, feelings of mistrust and conflicts around what the legitimate role of each actor is. However, conflict showcasing a lack of convergence has also emerged between different sectors of the food movement.

While the development of formal and informal governance spaces has undoubtedly contributed to aligning actors for collaborative action, as discussed in Section 5.2; these spaces also have limitations, mainly:

(1) The lack of executive power and binding character of these spaces,
(2) Over-reliance on individuals and informal relationships,
(3) Focus on debate and deliberation which delay action, in the form of excessive number of meetings, a lack of efficiency, a need for greater coordination and clearer definition of actors' roles and responsibilities.

5.3.4. Limitations in managing expectations and showcasing impact

The lack of concrete and quick results from these co-productive processes are highlighted as a limiting factor, since they affect stakeholder engagement and their expectations. Producing quick wins would make the process more visible and motivate people to continue investing and expanding the food work. However, the lack of time to refine the processes of policy co-production and generate more tangible impacts, as well as the perception of the food strategies, in many instances, as an amalgam of autonomous projects with little coordination between them, has caused frustration and impatience, hindering the implementation of new steps and actions to strengthen the processes.

The impact cannot be measured in a four-year term. Generating a Food Council is not transformative either: we have to see if this tool is really useful. In other words, at this stage of the process, which for me is the beginning of the process, we are generating the tools to be able to transform the food system from the public administration. We have to test whether or not they are useful for the process. (Valencia-Food Movement)

5.3.5. Limitations related to diversity of participants and specifically farmers

As reported in other urban food policy studies, new spaces of governance, in many instances, do not represent a wide diversity of actors in relation to gender, race, ethnicity or socio-economic

backgrounds. In the case of the three cities analysed, participants highlighted that the primary/agricultural sector (Ecollaures in Valencia, AUPA - Asociación Unida de Productores Agroecológicos in Madrid or the Ecomercado in Córdoba) has not participated effectively in the decision-making of policy co-production processes. Previous studies have shown the lack of engagement by the agricultural sector regarding urban food policy processes, mainly due to an urban and public health-centric approach. Our analysis also reveals other constraints. Farmers unions and organic certification associations/companies have been virtually absent from the processes, apart from attending specific workshops. Other actors, such as the organic traders' associations, in the case of Córdoba, have been more active in promoting and raising awareness for and from their own sector.

Producers interviewed highlighted a range of barriers that have prevented their active and continued participation. On the one hand, the pace and timing of the processes – excessive numbers of many meetings, events scheduled in the morning, quick positioning of actors to input decision-making processes – has made their participation difficult and piecemeal. In addition, producers' demands were often very sectoral and specific, and did not establish connections with a more comprehensive vision of urban food policies. Consequently, participation in broader strategic planning processes was not a priority.

6. Policy implications that inform the co-production of urban food policies

The analysis of the three policy co-production processes allows us to identify key lessons to support cities in learning, improving and furthering their urban food policies in a collaborative fashion. First, it is important to stress the procedural nature of co-producing policies. While the three cities committed to developing an urban food policy, rather than just producing a policy, what started was a complex process of co-production that involved diverse actors and has, so far, resulted in different outcomes, from the establishment of governance spaces to specific projects (see table 2). This process is still evolving, and is still in its infancy if the aim is to build sustainable and just food systems in the three cities. Consequently, the first policy recommendation is to understand policy co-production as a process. For that purpose, it is paramount to create formal and informal "safe enough spaces" (Pereira et al., 2019) that support learning and unlearning, build trust, generate new collective knowledge, and create a shared, collaborative framework.

Our research also allowed us to identify a set of tools to support more effective and agile co-creation dynamics between the various actors involved. Explicit support from the mayor's office included its participation and endorsement in different phases of the process.

- Involvement of politicians and civil servants across municipal departments, emphasizing the importance of training in food and related policy. This includes the provisioning of adequate municipal human and financial resources.
- Maintaining a certain degree of independence regarding organised civil society to manage personnel and financial resources not dependent on the council, as a complement to institutional processes and time frames.
- Setting up specific working groups to translate initiatives into acceptable regulatory frameworks and compliance with administrative procedures in order to ensure implementation.
- Strengthening formal governance spaces through participatory methods that facilitate dialogue and institutional (and not only personal) mutual recognition, fostering assertiveness and an understanding of different needs and capacities.
- Clear definition of the role and power of governance spaces, including if or how decisions would be binding.
- Relying on widely accepted declarations and data to frame the process and involve diverse actors. This includes, for example, relying on texts such as the MUFPP, but also conducting specific diagnoses to generate a shared "objective" baseline. These tools help to address conflicting preconceived notions and political positions.
- Plan strategically the process by incorporating short-term and tangible actions that support the medium- and long-term development of structural interventions and policy-making processes.
- Consider participant diversity, including involvement of producers, when designing governance spaces and participatory processes.
- Invest in city-to-city exchanges and peer support to address challenges and refine and improve actions through mutual learning, evaluation and reflection.

7. Conclusions: Redefining public policies to change society

The paper analyses the different roles of the public administration and civil society organisations in policy co-production processes. The results emphasize the importance of co-design and co-implementation, but also learning, empathy and collective discourse formation. Furthermore, the three cities illustrate how both the public sector and CSOs are constituted by diverse actors with very different forms of engagement and motivations. It is, therefore, paramount to acknowledge the different needs and demands that co-exist within these social actors rather than consider them homogenous entities, incorporating more fluid notions of interaction and governance spaces - like those championed by the assemblage literature - when conceptualising and designing co-productive processes. This includes, for example, providing tools and incentives that go beyond mandates, personal commitment, or ideological affinity to ensure effective engagement.

The study of these three cities allows us to identify four key factors and tools shaping the emergence of policy co-production processes. First, the public commitment to the widely accepted text of the Milan Pact has provided a consensus framework to convene a wide diversity of actors and a lever to demand action from public institutions. Second, spaces of convergence where different actors come together are key tools that constantly evolve with the policy process, creating diverse governance spaces with different degrees of formality. Third, co-production processes of urban food policies are shaped by access to situated knowledge, expertise, and training in the form of diagnosis or city-to-city exchanges. The last tool is related to available resources, since they condition the pace but also the viability of the process in the short and long term.

Despite the fertile ground provided by the political commitment of municipalist parties, existing trust between civil society organisations and the public sector, and the global uptake of urban food policies across the political spectrum, the three case studies face common barriers related to political, administrative and technical aspects, as well as a series of limitations to establishing collaborations, including a wide diversity of actors (particularly farmers), managing expectations and showcasing impact. Building on these lessons learned, a set of policy recommendations are formulated to support policy co-production processes. However, a key element is to conceive the development of food policies as processes underpinned by formal and informal 'safe enough spaces' (Pereira et al., 2019) that support learning and unlearning, build trust, generate new collective knowledge, and create a shared collaborative framework.

Finally, this comparative study evidences the usefulness of incorporating a more fluid and critical perspective into the study of social innovations related to governance, such as those offered by recent contributions on assemblage and critical food governance. These perspectives provide us with a more grounded understanding of stakeholders and their internal diversity, and also challenge notions of transformation linked to permanence, stating that the pathways to achieving change can be messy, unexpected and precarious. Despite these (generally undesirable) characteristics, the three cities are effectively opening up new possibilities to build more sustainable urban food systems, also through the unstable, complex and always unfinished

processes of co-producing food policies.

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