



Local food policies – their constraints and drivers: Insights from Portuguese Urban Agriculture initiatives

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Abstract

Two interconnected questions are addressed in this paper: (i) why urban agriculture (UA) and food-related initiatives take usually years to materialise in Portugal; and (ii) why resilient initiatives do not scale up and shift from practices to local food policies. We argue that existing initiatives are viewed as single events and therefore garner quite limited long-term political commitment and support. Based on interviews with food champions and a literature review, four Portuguese UA initiatives are analysed and these highlight the constraints that hinder their scaling-up. We conclude that drivers to lead to scaling-up are a combination of factors, with an enabling environment the most relevant one. On the other hand, constraints are related to limited democratic governance and poor policies, insufficient funding and weak participatory processes. Such findings are quite in line with existing literature. The limited integration of Portugal within the international UA and food debates might partially explain why UA is still struggling to find its proper place in Portuguese cities and their peripheries. Raising awareness among decision makers is critical to scaling-up UA initiatives and turning them an integral component of local food systems. A national observatory able to gather relevant data and produce knowledge, assess and monitor on-going initiatives may be the key step to gather different stakeholders together, that can then better advocate and then lead to higher political support, not only in Portugal but in any country where UA and food issues are emerging.

Key words: urban agriculture; drivers; constraints; local food policies; Portugal

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1. Introduction: Objectives and background

Complex issues, such as Urban Agriculture (UA) and other food-related activities in cities, require new ways of thinking about urban development and a new paradigm of governance (Charlotte Prové et al., 2016; Lohrberg et al., 2016; Nathan McClintock et al., n.d.; Sonnino, 2015). UA cannot be reduced to hobbyists growing vegetables in their backyard for their self-consumption (Lohrberg et al., 2016). Instead, “UA is an activity located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows or raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-) using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that urban area” (Mougeot, 2005).

According to RUAF¹ (2006), UA is part of the urban food system, competing for land with other urban functions, being influenced by urban policies and plans, etc.

A central assumption of this paper is that UA needs to be supported by local policies (Faus et al., 2013), and not left to market dynamics. This is extremely important in countries such as Portugal, where the third sector is weak (Franco et al., 2005; Quintão and de, 2011) and ideological differences between stakeholders (namely city authorities) are not acknowledged and managed (Rego, 2018).

We claim that the public sector should play a relevant leadership role, notably in defining local food policies through collaborative processes and multi-level governance. In addition, the public sector is required to integrate food into the urban food system, in order to: 1) propose alternatives

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¹ RUAF (Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture & Food Security) is a global partnership promoting sustainable urban agriculture and food systems. See: <http://www.ruaf.org/>

to existing land use plans and productive re-use for vacant plots; 2) legitimise existing occupations through integration into the local food system; 3) provide municipalities with sustainable and long-term local development solutions, based on community economic and social empowerment; and 4) generate jobs and increase income. Finally, UA is an outstanding channel to strengthen multi-level governance and deepen citizen participation mechanisms through participatory processes (Delgado, 2017). Cities such as Paris², Ghent³ and Toronto⁴ have developed successful local food policies which can be taken as inspirational examples for other cities aiming to do the same. Such cities have connected UA and food programs through urban planning ordinances, or through environmental and climate change adaptation strategies. In Portugal, however, UA and food issues are not incorporated into the all-urban system complexity, which can be partially explained by the public administration and local power's inability to work with inter-departmental (Rego, 2018) and holistic issues such as UA.

Since the beginning of 2016, we have been working with Portuguese municipalities to assist them in developing UA agendas, through a Multi-stakeholder Policy Formulation and Action Planning approach (Dubbeling and Zeeuw, 2008). So far, limited success has been achieved. This situation leads us to formulate the following research questions that are addressed in the present paper:

- Why do urban agriculture and food-related initiatives take usually years to materialise in Portugal?; and,
- Why do resilient initiatives not scale-up and shift from localised practices to local food policies?

We argue essentially that existing initiatives are viewed as single events and therefore garner quite limited long-term political commitment and support.

In order to better understand the constraints and the drivers related to implementing UA and food-related initiatives, four Portuguese projects are explored and discussed: two of them are led by local governments and the other two by Non-Governmental Organisations. The time taken to materialise each initiative ranged from one year to 13 years. A closer look at each of the four processes reveals a huge time gap from the “emergence of the original idea” and the actual starting day of the process. After an identification of the reasons behind these different time horizons, some insights are provided in order to facilitate the implementation of future processes, on the one hand, and on the other, to their scaling-up and integration into more holistic perspectives and local food policies.

This paper is an exploratory attempt to identify the drivers and constraints in making local food policies happen in Portugal, with UA as an entry point. This is carried out through the analysis of the opinions of key-informants, involved into four UA and food initiatives since their very beginning. Section one provides a brief international account of drivers that enable the emergence of local food policies. Then, in section two, the reasons why the four cases were selected are given, followed by the research methods, tools and

indicators. Section three summarises the findings obtained through the interviews, and subsequently the fourth section discusses these findings based on the drivers and constraints identified in the literature. Concluding remarks and the implications of the findings close the present paper.

2. Drivers that enable the emergence of local food policies

The concept of integrating food into urban planning is relatively new in the professional literature (APA, 2007; Cabannes et al., 2017; Zeeuw et al., 2000; London Assembly, Planning and Housing Committee (LA PHC, 2010); Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999). Today, however, the issues are on local government agendas (Brand, 2017; McClintock, 2010; Moragues-Faus and Marceau, 2019; Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; Sonnino, 2009), and in policy making, with a landmark being the Milan Urban Food Pact Policy (MUFPP, 2015) enacted in 2015, and signed since then by more than 200 cities and local governments worldwide. Only two of them are in Portugal.

Some of the reasons why local food policy fails were already pointed out by Rod MacRae (1999) in the late 1990s. For the Canadian food system, MacRae underlined the limits and contradictions inherent in an emerging issue such as UA – the difficulties of inter-departmental collaboration, as well as government unwillingness to support it. Scaling up UA into urban local food policies requires a complex combination of factors ranging from governance, coordination, and financial support infrastructures, among other factors (Faus et al., 2013; Nasr et al., 2010; Magarini and Calori, 2015; Moragues-Faus and Morgan, 2015; Morgan and Sonnino, 2010; Sonnino, 2015, 2016; Steel, 2013).

More recently, discussion on the drivers and constraints to make local food policy happen was reopened by three world-wide organisation with strong connections to practice. The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-FOOD) published “What makes urban Food Policies happen?” (IPES-FOOD, 2017), which provides insights from four cities and one city-region: Nairobi (Kenya), Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Detroit (USA), Amsterdam (Netherlands) and the Toronto city-region (Canada) with its Golden Horseshoe area. A second report, “Linking Cities on UA and Urban Food Systems” (2013), resulted from the joint venture efforts from two foundations, RUA and ICLEI⁵: it analyses successful programs in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Linköping (Sweden), Dumangas (The Philippines), Amman (Jordan), Kesbawa Urban Council and Western Providence (Sri Lanka), and finally, Kathmandu (Nepal). The last report comes from Eurocities⁶ (Cunto et al., 2017), an European food working group, and is an outcome of two years worth of analysis of five European funded projects in Rotterdam (Netherlands), Lisbon (Portugal), Ljubljana (Slovenia), Gothenburg (Sweden) and Milan (Italy). This report presents clues to understand project constraints and/or keys for success. These three publications are complementary as they do not report the same city projects (with the exception

² See <http://www.parisculteurs.paris/>

³ See <https://stad.gent/ghent-international/city-policy/food-strategy-ghent/food-strategy-ghent-gent-en-garde>

⁴ See <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2018/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-118079.pdf>

⁵ ICLEI is a leading global network of cities, towns and regions committed to building a sustainable future. See: <http://www.iclei.org/>

⁶ Eurocities is a working food group that aims to become a “creative hub” for sharing information, ideas, best practices and experimenting with innovative solutions related to urban food. See http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/working_groups/Food&tpl=home

| Dimensions | IPES FOOD – Drivers | RUAF/ICLEI – Drivers | Eurocities – Drivers |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Data, Monitoring and learning | Background and base line research have been carried out to inform policy | Monitoring of clearly defined indicators of the desired changes in the functioning of the urban food system | Collaborate with universities and research centres to collect data and monitor the impact of the food activities |
| Governance and policy | Impacts are monitored and new data are collected throughout implementation Policy is continually reviewed and renewed The necessary policy powers and responsibilities exist at the local city/ government level Policy at the national level is supportive | Joint food system assessment, visioning, and design of a comprehensive food strategy or action plan Creating a facilitating legal system Linking local, regional, and national food security, social welfare, economic or climate change programs, including those from different stakeholders Involving various government departments and disciplines on food issues (e.g. health, agriculture, economic development, marketing, climate change, transport, land use planning, social welfare, and education) with a strong coordinating departmental or champion. Outline how food can help meet different and multiple policy objectives Strong political leadership and long-term continuation of the process | Secure parallel sectoral or multi-level governmental support (e.g. from sub-national, regional or national governments) Establish mechanisms for the engagement of different city departments, different levels of government and different local actors, such as food councils with the full and meaningful inclusion of civil society and cross-department working groups. Use longer planning cycles to transcend political or election cycles. |
| Participatory Process | The institutional home of the policy lends it strategic importance and/or provides channels of influence A governance body has been established to oversee the policy, that promotes accountability and efficiency Multiple city government departments are engaged with and committed to the policy High-level political commitment from city government is secure and leveraged Political commitment transcends electoral cycles | Creating space for broad multi-stakeholder involvement (local government, private sector, civil society, universities) in planning and implementation of food strategies and related projects. | Build demand-driven and mutually beneficial learning and exchange networks with local authorities at national or international level. |
| Funding | Conflicts and ideological differences between actors are acknowledged and managed Part – funding is provided by city government Overall funds obtained are sufficient for implementation There are no restrictive conditions attached to funding | Leveraging of financial resources from framework and larger scale programs at city level | Not applicable – Cities received European funds |
| Environment | | Building on existing local initiatives: supporting community-based and innovative private sector food projects, replicating and up-scaling successful initiatives Designing a variety of (short-term) projects that have strong possibilities of success to help build credibility, next to promoting institutional and policy uptake of food strategies Media attention and public dialogue on food issues and the multiple roles of agricultures | Identify and select entry points for food-related activities that will be both successful and demonstrate impact, in order to build a coalition of support across government and other stakeholders and actors |

Tab. 1: Drivers for the development and implementation of Local Food Policies: IPES FOOD (2017); RUAF/ICLEI (2013); Eurocities (2017)
Source: author's elaboration based on IPES – FOOD (2017), RUAF/ICLEI (2013), Eurocities (2017)

of Belo Horizonte), and analyse practices located on different continents. All together, these three reports are grounded in 15 cities and one city-region.

A closer look at each city's initial entry point, for Local Food Policy development, reveals that cities have quite different entry points, such as hunger (e.g. Belo Horizonte), regulation of existing city farming (e.g. Nairobi), social and economic challenges (e.g. Detroit and Kathmandu), youth obesity (e.g. Amsterdam), supporting spatial development (e.g. Rotterdam), or Environmental Challenges (e.g. Lisbon, Milan, Amman, Dumanga). As stated by Cabannes and Marocchino (2018), a recurrent question in urban food systems planning, and we would add, local food policies, is whether or not there is a better entry point to generate a sustainable process? According to these authors, entry point and early drivers are usually quite specific and depend a lot on local political, historical and social conditions. Nevertheless, local food policies do not depend so much on the entry point but on the capacity of actors, from local governments to grassroots organisations, interested in and with the capacity to connect the different UA dots in a coherent, comprehensive and systematic way (Cabannes and Marocchino, 2018). Whatever the entry point might be, local food policies do have a starting point, through UA in all cases referred to by IPES – FOOD (2017), RUAF-ICLEI (2013), and Eurocities (2017). This setting is in line with the Portuguese context, as we will illustrate in Section 2, and gives us the perfect framework to better understand the Portuguese drivers and constraints to make local food policies happen, having Urban Agriculture as a 'kick off' point.

As evidenced in the three reports mentioned above, Table 1 summarises the drivers and constraints that make food policies happen: IPES-FOOD proposes a set of 15 drivers; RUAF-ICLEI proposes 12 drivers; and Eurocities proposes 6 drivers. Similarities between the three different reports demonstrate that there are common reasons that explain why local food policies are successful worldwide. For sake of clarity, the different drivers and constraints are organised into five dimensions: 1) Data, monitoring and learning;

2) Governance and Policy; 3) Participatory processes; 4) Funding; and 5) Environment. Table 2 matches those listed by IPES-FOOD (2017) and Eurocities (2017), as RUAF – ICLEI (2013) does not include them in their list. These constraints fit into three of the five proposed dimensions: i) Governance and policy; ii) Funding; and iii) Participatory processes. Again, a few common factors can be identified.

3. Methodology and data collection

Although not representative of all the initiatives underway in Portugal, the four selected cases fairly typify the variety of UA initiatives currently taking place in the country. The common UA characteristics, according to Delgado (Delgado, 2015, 2017) can be summarised as follows:

- a. They are either run by the public sector and local municipal governments (cases 1 and 2), or civil society organisations and non-profit organisations (cases 3 and 4);
- b. UA as a sector is relatively young, as none are more than 15 years old and all flourished during or as a result of the world-wide economic crisis that struck the country in 2008 (all cases);
- c. Access to land for farming remains at the core for making UA possible, with municipalities playing a pro-active role (cases 1 and 2);
- d. UA is much more about production, i.e. growing plants for self-consumption than for their distribution (cases 1, 2 and 3);
- e. UA is largely found in large metropolitan areas with some outreach to key secondary cities (all cases);
- f. UA initiatives are expanding through the replication of a production approach with only a limited expansion through the whole food chain, or even less through a holistic food system approach (cases 1, 2 and 3); and
- g. UA practices with food waste and hunger mitigation as an entry point do exist, even if rarely recognised as part of a food system approach (case 4).

| Dimensions | IPES – FOOD – Constraints | Eurocities – Constraints |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Governance and Policy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsupportive national level policy • Absence of necessary powers and responsibilities at the local city level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging or adverse political situations: i.e. food activities are not seen as a political priority • Absence of policy coherence among different level of governments, i.e. presence of national policies that restrict, limit or contradict municipal authority priorities • Lack of jurisdiction in food-related activities, i.e. food production is often a competence of the regional level |
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient funding and/or restrictive conditions on how funding can be used | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of participation – and therefore engagement and support – of main actors in the food system within and outside local government |
| Participatory Processes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of acknowledgement or management of conflicts and ideological differences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of effective multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level engagement mechanisms, among different city departments, different levels of government and different types of actors (CSOs, private sector, research organisations) • Missing links between research, practice and policy |

Tab. 2: Comparison of constraints for the development and implementation of Urban Local Food Policies, according to IPES FOOD (2017) and Eurocities (2017)

Source: author's elaboration based on IPES – FOOD (2017) and Eurocities (2017)

The four Portuguese cases analysed (see Tab. 3) in this paper were chosen for the following reasons:

- The first related to access to information and to the project's key-informant willingness to share information with us. This means that the champions⁷ were keen to share their opinions and to reveal what were the drivers and constraints to the initiatives/processes that they had been part of. This is quite rare in Portugal, as there is quite a limited tradition of self-assessment, meaning that lessons learned from unsuccessful initiatives are generally lost;
- The second factor was related to the initiative's life span, stretching from mature to starting ones. Two of the cases have been active for less than 15 years and pioneered UA formal initiatives in the country. The other two started right at the peak of the 2008 crisis (Delgado, 2015, 2017);
- Third, the cases mirror diverse types of leaderships from top-down initiatives spearheaded by municipalities to bottom-up ones originated by civil society and non-profit organisations;
- Fourth, the cases reflect geographical diversity with emphasis on the Lisbon Metropolitan Region, the most active locale for UA and food initiatives; and
- Finally, they represent diverse activity patterns from production to self-consumption⁸.

The investigation included empirical observation, primary data collection, a grey literature review, and inclusion of results from previous research. In addition, in-depth face-to-face interviews were carried out for each case key-informant, following a set of open questions.

All four key-informants were designated by the institutions as the spokesperson for the cases and had been involved in their respective projects from their very beginning. None

of the city representatives (Case 1 and Case 2) had political decision powers. The two key-informants from Case 3 and Case 4 were the initiatives leaders. A deep knowledge of the initiative and permanent relations with food champions, in order to allow for complementary information when necessary, were utterly important given the limited tradition of self-assessment and self-disclosure practices in Portugal. At this stage, we decided not to interview other stakeholders, as our main aim was to explore Portugal's urban agriculture drivers and constraints, based on these in-depth case analyses, and to put them into perspective with international literature. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the key-informants have not been made public.

On the subject of the key-informants interviews, our target was to draw the initiative roadmap, taking into particular consideration the most relevant milestones, key drivers and constraints, as well as the actors and partners that were involved in each moment. Some key milestones were suggested by the interviews such as:

1. Entry point that kicked off the process;
2. Institutional steps for process implementation;
3. Relevant events after initiative implementation;
4. Delays and interruptions, if any; and
5. Next steps and challenges for the future (prospective view).

In addition, we asked the interviewees to list the three most relevant drivers and constraints over time, based on examples and facts drawn from the initiative roadmap. Lastly, we asked for suggestions and recommendations that would help other food actors who might be willing to develop similar initiatives. Each face-to-face interview and the initiative visit, ran from half a day to a full day. Finally, each in-depth interview was transcribed and analysed

| Name | Start | Organisations | Location | Activity pattern (main) |
|------------------------|-------|------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 Seixal Municipality | 2001 | Local Government | Lisbon Metropolitan Region | Food production for self-consumption |
| 2 Funchal Municipality | 2001 | Local Government | Madeira Island | Food production for self-consumption |
| 3 AVAAL | 2008 | Local NGO | Lisbon | Food production for self-consumption |
| 4 National Food Bank | 2009 | National NGO | National | Food production contribution to the Food Bank |

Tab. 3: UA case studies: Detailed information
Source: author's elaboration (2019)

through content analysis techniques, labelling the constraint and drivers mentioned at each milestone. The results were cross-tabulated with the range of drivers and constraints mentioned in the previous questions (the three most relevant drivers and constraints) to ensure key-informant discourse coherence. The narratives below summarise and highlight the most important milestones for each case study.

3.1 Case 1⁹: Seixal Municipality: 13 years since opening the first allotment garden

Seixal Municipality is located 20 km south of Lisbon and has a population of 184,269 inhabitants (INE, 2011: see footnote 12). In the second half of the 20th century,

the national steel industry in Seixal attracted a significant amount of rural labour. Since 1961, steel workers have been formally allowed to cultivate land around the factory. In 2001, with the closure of the steel plant, the municipality inherited a liability of 22 hectares of contaminated land, of which a significant part has been cultivated since then.

At that time, either the municipality or the new urban farmers, most of them of rural origin, were aware of the health problems related to the contaminated soil. To assess how much land in Seixal was dedicated to farming, including the contaminated steel factory site, a team of municipal technicians, led by a landscape architect, began a land mapping process that identified 200 hectares of informally¹⁰ cultivated

⁷ According to the Oxford Dictionary, a champion is "a person who fights for, or speaks in support of, a group of people or a belief". Throughout this paper we refer to "food champion" as the person who supports and advocates for the initiative.

⁸ The most common found patterns in Portugal, as food waste and hunger mitigation are still cutting-edge issues.

⁹ <http://www.cm-seixal.pt/agricultura-urbana/hortas-urbanas> (Accessed September 2019)

¹⁰ By "informally" we mean without the landowner's permission. This happens quite often in large companies where control of land occupation is not carried out regularly.

land. The mapping alerted the municipal authorities to the importance of urban farming. In 2005 and 2008, two additional land use mappings were completed.

In 2011, Seixal municipality launched the first international conference on UA in Portugal. This event helped to raise awareness among political leaders, but other benefits on the ground were limited and did not speed up the process to support informal urban agriculture practices. Still, without any funding or strong political commitment, the municipality started to formulate an allotment gardens ordinance, through a participatory process that lasted three years. In 2013, after elections, and thanks to the support of a newly-elected pro-environment councillor, a first allotment garden opened in 2014, and a new land mapping was completed. In 2017, three new allotment gardens opened, totalling 10,000 square metres of cultivated land (see Fig. 1).

3.2 Case 2¹¹: Funchal Municipality: 3 years for a fully blooming process

Funchal is the capital of Madeira Island, one of the two Portuguese autonomous regions, with a population of 111,892 inhabitants (INE¹², 2011). Seventy-five percent of the island's population live on 35% of its territory, primarily in Funchal, which explains why its density of 1,496 houses/km² is higher than in the Lisbon metropolitan area (940 houses/km²). In 2002, the municipality decided to transform six cultivated plots into “kitchen gardens” and to integrate them into a public park. The process of finding six interested farmers was difficult, and therefore the municipality decided

to make an open call. When the news of this call began to spread, a large number of potential farmers enlisted. This huge demand and the commitment of a city councillor, an agronomist by profession, explains largely why in 2005 the municipality started an important allotments garden program: this program integrated more than 900 gardeners, located in 23 different sites, either on public land or on private land rented by the municipality, that summed to the significant amount of 60,000 square metres of cultivated land by 2013. In the middle of this process, the City Council tried to innovate by allowing the raising of small animals such as chickens. The proposal was not well received by the communities and the ordinance was not voted in. In 2013, due to City Council political changes, the project lost its strength and the dedicated staff shrank. As a result, no new allotment gardens were opened and their maintenance was interrupted. In 2017, however, political changes at the municipal level, brought new life to the process, new staff were added and the city signed the Milan Pact as an expression of its renewed interest (see Fig. 2).

3.3 Case 3¹³: AVAAL: 8 years of continuous resilience

AVAAL – the Alta de Lisboa Environmental Enhancement Association¹⁴ – is located in a massive housing development aiming at relocating low-income families and offering housing solutions for the middle classes. In 2008, one new resident, a landscape architect by training, spread the idea of launching an allotment garden initiative, based on the farming tradition of the neighbourhood. He invited the Kcidade¹⁵, a local association, to join the project and together they presented the initiative to the Lisbon Municipality



Fig. 1: Allotment gardens in Seixal, Lisbon Metropolitan Region
Source: author (2017)

¹¹ See link: <http://services.cm-funchal.pt/hortasurbanas/> (Accessed September 2019)

¹² INE – National Institute of Statistics, in Portugal.

¹³ <https://avaal.wordpress.com/> (Accessed, September, 2019)

¹⁴ In Portuguese: Associação para a Valorização Ambiental da Alta de Lisboa

¹⁵ Kcidade is a local NGO funded by the Aga Khan Foundation. Its main aim is to help communities to deal with social and territorial changes.

in 2009. The idea was to invite new dwellers to be tenants of an “Urban green structure”, and to turn an idle piece of land to productive uses. This was possible within the local urban plan as the land was branded as green space. Still, securing the official authorisations from both planning and green public spaces departments took eight months. Meanwhile, the promoters launched social media, television and newspaper campaigns. This allowed the newly-born collective to lobby the municipality and to obtain additional support. Despite these efforts, the approval by the City Council of an allotment garden took almost two years. Once

this approval was obtained, moreover, the project partners entered a national competition launched by the National Energy Company (EDP Foundation). The proposal for solidarity gardens received the needed resources to open a garden for disabled people that gave a great visibility to the overall project. Despite this first success, the City Council continued to raise difficulties regarding local access to the site. This issue took another five years to be unlocked. Finally, in 2016 a beautifully-landscaped 20,000 square metres allotment garden opened, cultivated by 105 farmers (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: Allotment gardens in Funchal, Madeira Island
Source: author (2017)



Fig. 3: Allotment gardens in Lisbon – AVAAL
Source: author (2018)

3.4 Case 4¹⁶: National Food Bank – 1 year to harvest fresh vegetables inside a jail

The first Portuguese Food Bank was created in 1999¹⁷. Its main aim was hunger mitigation and the reduction of food waste. The organisation receives donations from supermarket chains and other food-related organisations, as well as private contributions. In 2008, a voluntary group of a local bank, which at the same time included a staff member of a Lisbon jail, proposed that the Food Bank's national administration use part of the land within the premises of the jail complex for cultivation. The idea was well received by the authorities and promptly discussed with the Ministry in charge, as well as with the central government. This was possible due to personal connections between all three of the involved agencies. In less than six months, a joint agreement between the Land Bank Federation and the Central Government was signed to engage prisoners for gardening. Less than one year later, the project expanded to four additional prison complexes, insuring two harvests yearly of fresh vegetables that are donated to local food banks. To ensure available seeds, equipment and pay for the prisoners, the National Food Bank Federation signed a partnership with a multinational industry that produces fertilizers and seeds. This supported the existing program, but limited funding prevented the project from further expansion during the next six years. In 2016, however, the program won a national award that provided funding to expand the project, as well as paying a consulting company to manage the project on a professional basis. In 2017, the project expanded to five more prisons. Today, nine prisons are involved in the project and prisoners cultivate roughly 150,000 square metres, and the harvested greens (tomatoes, salads, carrots, onions, cabbages) continue to be donated to local food banks (see Fig. 4).

4. Results: Lack of governance and political willingness vs. an enabling environment

4.1 What were the main drivers that explain the development of your initiative?

Case 1: According to the Seixal municipality: “Giving visibility to the project” was a key driver, that helped to generate awareness among the population and decision makers. The next factor was community support, which pushed decision makers to act. The Seixal key-informant underlined as well the importance of timing, specifically the importance of achieving tangible results before the end of the campaign for elections, when politicians want to reap votes for their accomplishments. Finally there is funding, as a vital factor in making limited initiatives grow.

Case 2: The Funchal municipality's interviewee mentioned that having a deeply committed and engaged municipal staff was the most important driver. In second place, the support of the community was underlined, followed by access to land as a resource.

Case 3: The AVAAL contact highlighted that having a ‘champion’ who leads the process as the main success factor, followed by funding, and lastly by “project visibility” by means of an effective communication campaign through newspapers, television, etc.

Case 4: The NFB key-informant stressed the need to have a “good relationship with political power”, and to have supportive sponsors to ensure funding in order to increase project awareness. The third factor mentioned related to the identification of existing resources, in this case the availability of potentially cultivable land within jail premises.



Fig. 4: Gardening in jails estates – Portugal
Source: Portuguese Food Bank Federation

¹⁶ <https://www.dn.pt/sociedade/interior/presos-cultivam-hortas-para-dar-de-comer-a-familias-carenciadas-8697687.html> (accessed, September, 2019)

¹⁷ Today, there are 21 National Food Banks in Portugal

4.2 Which were the most important constraints to the development of your project?

Case 1: According to the Seixal interviewee, the first serious difficulty was the “lack of awareness and of long-term commitment by the city government”, followed by the “stop and go” nature of politics, which disrupts the natural flow of the processes. “Lack of proper funding” was mentioned as well.

Case 2: In the case of Funchal, the program impediments were the “lack of commitment and awareness of city government”, followed by the limited engagement and support from the communities. The lack of funding made progress slow and difficult.

Case 3: The AVAAL key-informant highlighted the lack of awareness from city government, along with the lack of community support.

Case 4: In the case of the National Food Bank, limited cooperation between partners and sponsors, was identified as the main constraint. The “lack of proper funding” was

highlighted as well as a constraint, followed by the lack of support from the community (understood as volunteer work contribution).

5. Discussion: Portugal drivers, international examples, constraints

Tables 4 and 5 summarise the drivers and the constraints identified in the Portuguese cases. They are organised along the same dimensions as used in Tables 1 and 2 (for the international situation).

As shown in Table 4, the main drivers highlighted by all key-informants are:

- An “enabling environment”, which can be unpacked as “a team or a food champion engaged and committed”, a “demand by the community, “access to land” and “the attention of the communications media”. The importance of having a committed team (Funchal) or a committed food champion (AVAAL) seems to explain initiatives that have been sustainable and expanding

| Dimensions | Drivers | Findings | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|---------|-------|-----|
| | | City government | | NGO | |
| | | Seixal | Funchal | AVAAL | NFB |
| Governance and policy (2) | Politicians need to show accomplishments by the end of their mandate (new evidence) | yes | | | |
| | Existing good connection with national government (new evidence) | | | | yes |
| Environment (10–12) | City team is engaged and committed and/or there exists a food champion (new evidence) | yes | yes | yes | SH |
| | Communities put pressure on city government requesting city engagement (new evidence) | yes | yes | yes | |
| | Access to land (new evidence) | SH | yes | | yes |
| | Media attention | yes | | yes | SH |
| Funding (3) | Financial resources are sufficient for implementation | yes | | yes | yes |

Tab. 4: Drivers mentioned by the four key-informants (Legend: yes = pointed out by key-informant; SH = Somehow implicit in key-informant discourse and/or author’s observations)

Source: author’s elaboration (2019)

| Dimensions | Drivers | Findings | | | |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|---------|-------|-----|
| | | City government | | NGO | |
| | | Seixal | Funchal | AVAAL | NFB |
| Governance and policy (4) | Challenging or adverse political conditions: i.e. food activities are not perceived as a political priority at city level | yes | yes | yes | |
| | Political commitments do not transcend political cycles at city level | yes | | | |
| Funding (3–4) | Insufficient funding | yes | yes | SH | yes |
| Environment (3) | Insufficient support from communities (new evidence) | | yes | yes | yes |
| Participatory Process (1) | Lack of effective multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level engagement mechanisms, among different city departments, different levels of government and different types of actors (CSOs, private sector, research organisations). | | | yes | |

Tab. 5: Constraints mentioned by the four key-informants (Legend: yes = pointed out by key-informant; SH = somehow implicit in key-informant discourse and/or author’s observation)

Source: author’s elaboration (2019)

through time. Although, not underlined by Seixal and NFB as one of their most important key drivers, the relevance of the elements previously mentioned was emphasised by them for any experiences. For instance, the Seixal key-informant was, at the beginning of the current decade, a very committed UA food champion who coordinated the first international conference on UA in Portugal (Lança, 2011). In the case of the NFB, the food champion is a public national personality. In spite of not being mentioned by the NFB key-informant, it is important to underline the strong national media campaign concurrent with this project since its very beginning. On the other hand, using social media seems to be a key to grasping attention within communities and with decision makers. This is extremely important since such efforts enhance community engagement and their willingness to lobby to get more.

- “Funding” was identified as an extremely important driver in three of the four cases. Moreover, Funchal is an exception due to the initial political support by a city councillor who was a key person in getting the needed funding.
- Lastly, “governance and policy” was identified as an important driver. The evidence gathered, however, does not highlight so much political commitment but refers to time-related support, primarily during the campaign for the elections, or to the personal connections of the local promoter with national government officials.

A probable explanation for such a remarkable convergence on the “enabling environment” dimension can come from the adverse “governance and policy” framework as summarised in Table 4. Moreover, the two opinions listed under the “governance and policy” drivers, are circumstantial issues, i.e. not depending on the level of food-related political willingness. A possible justification for this could relate to UA being relatively new in Portugal (Delgado, 2018), at least in the way it is perceived today. Besides, these findings are in tune with Rod MacRae’s (1999) conclusions when referring to the Canadian urban agriculture scenario: in the 1990s, when UA there was an emerging issue, as it is today in Portugal, one of the main constraints was indeed to challenge and face government’s lack of commitment and support.

In summary, the lessons from the four cases strongly suggest that UA initiatives rely much more on an enabling environment than on supportive governance either at city (Seixal, Funchal and AVAAL) or at national levels (NFB). The combination of these elements fairly explains why UA and food initiatives usually take years to materialise in Portugal. Indeed, a common entry point for the success of Portuguese urban initiatives seems to be the nature and the extent of the enabling environment.

As shown in Table 5, the main constraints fall under the “governance and policy” dimension. Even though both NFB and Seixal stressed to some extent city political governance as a driver, in general the lack of food and agriculture political willingness was an impediment. In the case of Funchal, while support by the agronomist councillor was critical at the project’s inception, it ended when he left office, resulting in a dormant program for some years. In the case of the National Food Bank, the personal connections of the local promoter with the national government opened doors, and this probably explains why the lack of political commitment was not highlighted as a constraint. On the other hand, the lack of governance engagement of different city departments,

different levels of government and different local actors on UA and food-related issues, was mentioned exclusively by the local non-for-profit organisation: according to AVAAL, turning food into a political priority at city level was quite a challenge. This is seen in the nearly five years that were spent in negotiation with different city departments to access land (Cancela, 2014). Above all, this constraint only mentioned by the local NGO, shows how far cities are from any established mechanisms of engagement by different city departments and other relevant stakeholders in Portugal.

“Lack of funding” emerges as a permanent constraint, since not having a reliable budget inhibits project continuity, even when land, as a resource, can be accessed for free. Even AVAAL, which did not highlight a lack of funding, is struggling every month to garner enough income to pay for renting the land that belongs to the city. The lack of regular and permanent funding, as mentioned by Seixal, might explain why the programs could not shift from single projects into a broader food policy. In fact, Portuguese UA flourished largely as mitigation efforts undertaken during times of economic crisis, but they also seem quite trapped in that singularity. It is a conundrum.

The “crucial role of communities”, which is perceived both as a driver and as a constraint according to the case studies, is a common thread among interviewees. For example, Funchal mentioned an “inconsistent local communities support,” and AVAAL a “lack of awareness and community consistent support”. NFB mentioned the “lack of volunteer work” as a restriction to the continuity of the project. Again, results suggest that initiatives are quite reliant for their up-scaling on the nature of the enabling environment dimension.

In relation to leadership as a driver, they are similar for both city government and the NGOs. The environment dimension, however, seems to be the most important driver primarily for the initiatives that took longer to materialise: Seixal, Funchal and AVAAL. On the other hand, constraints do change from public leadership (city government) to non-public leadership (NGOs). First, governance and political constraints are apparently stronger at the city government level, i.e. between decision makers and the internal departments dealing with UA initiatives – than, for instance, at national and well-established national NGO levels, with some communication channels with national government decision makers.

Finally, and quite relevant in this situation, the “lack of participatory processes”, by means of “effective multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level engagement mechanisms, among different city departments, different levels of government and different types of actors”, is almost absent from our key-informants discourse, notably for the city-led initiatives. Why is this so important? In order to shift from single initiatives to local food policies in countries where the third sector is weak (Franco et al., 2005; Quintão, 2011), a committed authority to the process is mandatory – as they are the ones able to implement mechanisms of city department engagement, at different levels of government, and with local actors (Cunto et al., 2017) which, remarkably, is not yet recognised as needed by our cities key-informants.

Recalling our initial argument, which underlined the fact that some urban agriculture initiatives are perceived by city government officials and staff as single and limited initiatives, and therefore garnered quite limited long-term political commitment and funding: What can be argued or debated from observations in the field? Findings so far

are insufficient to fully confirm the argument of limited longer-term initiatives. Nevertheless, we believe that lack of scaling-up relates to the virtual absence of UA strategy and vision at city level, which confirms our inability to develop UA and food agendas with Portuguese municipalities, as outlined earlier.

To summarise: One key finding of the current research project is that the lack of an enabling environment and an insufficient policy and multi-actor governance framework, added to extremely limited funding, explains the very slow implementation rhythm of UA and food-related initiatives in Portugal. A second important finding relates to the absence of broad multi-stakeholder involvement, which can explain why UA and food-related initiatives do not scale-up into local public food policies.

6. Concluding remarks

Although this paper is an exploratory attempt to understand why UA and food-related initiatives take usually years to materialise in Portugal, and why resilient ones do not scale-up and shift from practices to local food policies, some significant findings were identified. From the drivers and constraints analysed, we now understand that the Portuguese situation is quite in line with that identified in the broader literature (Cunto et al., 2017; IPES-FOOD, 2017; RUAF-ICLEI, 2013) – namely: (1) lack of “political commitment and governance”; (2) “lack of funding”; and (3) insufficient “participatory process”. A closer look at the drivers confirms, as well, the convergence between our study cases and findings from the literature review, i.e. auspicious “governance and policy” and “funding” scenarios.

An important divergence needs to be highlighted, however, and it comes from the fact that all four initiatives apparently rely to an extreme extent on a friendly ‘environmental context’, notably on a civil servant food champion or a community leader who facilitates the process. The role(s) of a champion are highlighted here.

Another important conclusion from this research on the drivers and constraints to make local UA and food policies happens, is the key-informants’ few references to additional constraints besides the ones mentioned before. In particular, we want to highlight the lack of references in key-informants’ discourse, to a relevant driver listed in the literature, i.e. the element of “initiatives monitoring and assessment”. This monitoring and assessment process comprises background research and the collection of baseline data, which enables the development of policies and can provide evidence of efficacy to help secure on-going or renewed political commitment. In addition, this “evidence of efficacy” is a way to ensure funding. Once again, this lack of reference to this issue, shows that the culture of assessment is not in the key-informants mindset. Without data to demonstrate the social, environmental and economic benefits of UA and food initiatives, it is much harder to convince decision makers to provide political support to initiatives.

Reporting the accomplishments of UA initiatives, mostly reliant on food champions, even with a shortage of “political commitment and governance”, “funding” and an insufficient “participatory process”, shows how far UA national initiatives could be from a friendly public policy context. We contend that this strong environmental context reliance, without a significant political commitment that would

facilitate funding provision and openness to a stakeholder participation, may explain why urban agriculture and food-related initiatives take usually years to materialise in Portugal, and also why resilient ones do not scale-up and shift from practices to local food policies.

What can be done, at this point, to make local public UA and food policies happen in countries where UA and food are still an emerging issue?

We believe that a strong political willingness to change current scenarios at national and city levels emerges as the driver needed to strengthen the existing UA and food initiatives and to foster its up-scaling, as a solid motivation framework already exists from the food champions side. The IPES – FOOD (2017) report summarises the ways to do it at both national and local levels. At the national level it could be done by:

1. recruiting politician(s) to champion the policy through formal procedures;
2. framing the policy in terms of political priorities or problems;
3. identifying opportunities to embed the policy in other city policies, plans and strategies;
4. institutionalising the policy by providing an institutional home, funding, and embedding it in city plans and strategies;
5. ensuring information and values are retained by a cadre of civil servants;
6. attracting and enabling publicity so policy is closely associated with the city’s reputation;
7. establishing co-governance with non-public sector organisations; and
8. monitoring and evaluating outcomes to support the case for continued support.

At a local level it could be done by:

1. positioning the policy as a city-level test-case with scaling-up potential;
2. lobbying regional and national level policymakers for change, and participating in consultations;
3. identifying people who have influence at multiple levels (politicians or civil society) and engaging them to make the case for more supportive policies; and
4. joining countrywide and international networks for a louder, collective voice in policymaking at multiple levels.

These are not compulsive, step-by step approaches, although they can be applied in Portugal and other counties where AU and food policies are still emerging.

In a nutshell, it seems that political commitment at national and city levels will increase if, and when, multiple actors are providing strong evidence of urban agriculture with multiple contributions to long-term local development, be them at local or national levels. In order to do so, two approaches could be followed immediately:

1. strengthening UA and food-related bottom-up initiatives so that communities become aware of the benefits and are willing to lobby for longer-term political commitments; and
2. generating, at the national scale, data on UA and food-related issues to provide evidence of UA impact, not only for social purposes but at environmental and economic levels as well.

In conclusion, a strong national awareness campaign, fed on a regular basis by a national observatory able to gather relevant data and produce knowledge, assess and monitor on-going initiatives, might be a decisive step to engender the involvement of different stakeholders and to attain a higher level of political commitment in Portugal, as well as in all countries where UA and food-related issues are not yet in the political mainstream.

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