CULTiVATE

POLICY BRIEF - N°2

PARTICIPATORY SCENARIO PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN FOOD SHARING

Cities face growing climate, social and food system pressures. Food sharing initiatives help, but it is challenging to increase their impact. This policy brief shows how futures thinking, especially scenario planning, can test ideas and co-create shared visions and plans for action. Drawing on CULTIVATE project workshops in Barcelona, Milan and Utrecht, it outlines **key lessons and actionable recommendations for embedding scenario planning into food governance, with emphasis on workshop design, inclusive participation, facilitation and policy shaping**.

INTRODUCTION

Urban food systems face growing ecological and social pressure, **making cities central to sustainability transitions**. Food sharing initiatives offer real benefits but are limited by fragmented governance, weak funding, unequal participation and poor policy integration, raising questions about **how to amplify their impact**.

Futures thinking, particularly scenario planning, helps address this by bringing **diverse actors** together to **co-create shared visions** for resilient food systems. The aim is to help policymakers and practitioners anticipate challenges, identify adaptive strategies and strengthen their capacity to deliver **positive impacts in ever changing contexts**.

Participatory scenario planning workshops in Barcelona, Milan and Utrecht, gathered policymakers, private actors and civil society to co-create **pathways for fairer, more sustainable urban food sharing,** testing them against exploratory future scenarios.

This brief offers key recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on how to design and embed scenario planning into food governance processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKSHOPS ON SUSTAINABLE FUTURE SCENARIO PLANNING

The recommendations below offer **practical ways to make scenario planning more inclusive, participatory, and resilient**, while maximising the impact of urban food sharing. Each set of recommendations is illustrated with a practical example from the CULTIVATE project, showing how this approach can be applied in specific contexts.

WORKSHOP PREPARATION AND RELEVANCE

RECOMMENDATIONS ON WORKSHOP PREPARATION AND RELEVANCE:

- **Ensure contextual relevance**: Choose a workshop topic meaningful to the local context by consulting key actors on their priorities. Agree on it collaboratively to boost engagement and impact.
- **Acknowledge trade-offs**: Recognise and openly name conflicting perspectives among actors in food system transitions in order to engage honestly and build more robust strategies.
- **Value diverse knowledge**: Include scientific and experience-based expertise, ensuring technical insights and lived experience both shape outcomes.
- **Ensure transparency**: Clearly communicate objectives, process and expected outputs.

EXAMPLE:

During the **Barcelona workshop** on food waste and redistribution issues, organisers and participants openly acknowledged underlying tensions in order to clarify diverging underlying concerns. These centred on the **trade-off between expanding food redistribution to reduce waste and address food insecurity**, and prioritising measures that prevent food waste at its source.

A Food Waste Cafe, an example of a food-sharing initiative featured in the CULTIVATE project. © Imogen Shawn

PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND ENGAGEMENT

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARTICIPANT SELECTION AND ENGAGEMENT:

- **Promote diversity**: Engage a wide range of food system actors (public, private and civil society sectors) and across diverse socio-demographic and economic backgrounds. If including vulnerable groups, avoid tokenistic inclusion by engaging early and meaningfully.

- **Address accessibility barriers**: Address any financial, linguistic, mobility, digital or caregiving barriers that may prevent participation.

- **Provide support**: Offer logistical support, background materials and interpretation services to ensure meaningful engagement.

- **Create safe and trusting spaces**: Establish clear ground rules and foster environments conducive to honest and respectful dialogue.

EXAMPLE:

In **Barcelona**, **Milan** and **Utrecht** organisers worked closely with representatives from relevant entities to promote diversity, refine and expand their initial lists of potential participants, ensuring **more comprehensive mapping of key actors**. For example, the Municipal Food Policy Office in Milan reviewed the participant list and suggested additional actors, thereby broadening **inclusion** and strengthening the **diversity of perspectives**.

A community garden, an example of a food-sharing initiative featured in the CULTIVATE project. © Imogen Shawn

WORKSHOP FACILITATION

RECOMMENDATIONS ON WORKSHOP FACILITATION:

- **Manage power dynamics**: Use facilitation techniques to balance participation and help ensure that no single actor or perspective dominates, enabling more inclusive dialogue and more equitable co-creation.
- **Employ diverse engagement formats**: Alternate between individual reflection, small-group discussion and plenary sessions to ensure all voices are heard.
- P**rovide accessible visual information**: Accessible tools and outputs (e.g., roadmaps, illustrations and graphic templates) support actors' deliberation and engagement.
- **Ensure accountability**: Clearly communicate the influence of workshop outcomes and follow up with concrete actions.

EXAMPLE:

In **Barcelona**, an illustrator captured key workshop insights through drawings and text, making **information more accessible**. To spark engagement and imagination, they also designed tarot-inspired **scenario planning cards**, turning complex ideas into playful, thought-provoking tools for exploring future possibilities.

Tarot-inspired scenario planning cards. © Sergio Espín

TRANSLATING OUTPUTS INTO POLICY AND PRACTICE

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TRANSLATING OUTPUTS INTO POLICY AND PRACTICE:

- **Build capacity**: Strengthen participants' ability to apply scenario outputs across policy areas and scales, beyond food policy alone. Diverse outputs (visuals, decalogues, guides) and cross-actor connections help translate insights into concrete decision-making.
- **Allocate time for relationship-building**: Workshops are networking platforms too. Space for dialogue helps diverse actors build lasting relationships.
- **Integrate into policy**: Link outcomes to local policy agendas via consultations and strategic forums to ensure they shape real decision-making.
- **Disseminate strategically**: Share outputs with key actors converting them into guides.
- **Track impact**: Keep participants informed of outcomes to sustain engagement.

EXAMPLE:

Milan's City Council considered the methodology for its **air quality plan**. **Barcelona** shared outcomes with its Food Waste Working Group, informing the city's food waste diagnosis, and it co-created a **Decalogue on Food Waste and the Right to Food**, aligned with the Barcelona Healthy and Sustainable Food Strategy 2030.

A community kitchen, an example of a food-sharing initiative featured in the CULTIVATE project. © Imogen Shawn

RESOURCES

TITLE: Guidebook on inclusive, participatory and resilient sustainable urban food sharing scenario planning

DESCRIPTION: This guide provides practical tools for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to apply futures thinking to urban food systems, helping cities navigate environmental, social, and governance challenges. LINK: https://zenodo.org/records/17278574

TITLE: Urban and Peri-Urban Food Sharing Governance: Discover The Potential Of Urban Food Sharing To Foster Sustainable City Transformations

DESCRIPTION: This policy brief outlines the key governance barriers that currently constrain the sustainability potential of food sharing and presents a set of high-level policy recommendations to address them. LINK: https://zenodo.org/records/14013675

TITLE: The Menu of Good Governance

DESCRIPTION: A novel, dynamic and interactive online decision support tool for policymakers and other actors who develop and implement policies and projects on food sharing. LINK: https://www.menuofgoodgovernance.eu/

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