



**Engaging with Nature through Food in Urban Spaces:
Alternative Food Initiatives Cultivating Changes in Bogotá**

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Abstract:

This research analyses how different food initiatives in Bogotá shape socio-nature relations through their food practices with the aim to realise the transformations they envision, advocate, and cultivate. Through a decolonial and relational approach, the study examines how these initiatives challenge the dominant food system's focus on economic values and instead advocate values based on care and interdependence between all living beings and Nature. Using a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, the study shows that these initiatives promote alternative relationships with Nature that emphasise care, connection, community, and well-being. The analysis concludes that these struggles have materialised through the politicisation of food, the defence and assertion of the right to a socially and environmentally just food system, and the defence of local food practices and values, leading to a revaluation of the social, spiritual, environmental and cultural aspects of food and Nature.

Keywords: Food, Nature, Socio-nature relations, Alternatives, Relationality, Interdependence

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Disconnection from Nature and the Industrialised Food System

For this reason, stemming from the profound need to eat and drink daily, food becomes the essence of life, the common thread in human relationships and between them and their surroundings (León Sicard, 2018, p. 14) [Trans.]

We are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, driven by economic, social, political, and epistemological imperatives that are eroding the foundations of life on our planet. While the interpretation, adaptation, and transformation of Nature have historically been shaped by diverse cultures and worldviews, the contemporary social order has created an imbalance in our relationship with Nature (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, hereafter referred to as IPBES, 2022). This disruption stems from particular relations to Nature that have been guided by an ethos of perpetual accumulation rooted in an economic rationality that has resulted in the commodification of living beings, the exploitation of Nature, the imposition of modernity over alternative worldviews, and the degradation of life itself (Görg, 2004; Holloway, 2010; Leff, 2021, 2022).

The rationality imposed by capitalist society has led to the domination of Nature, reducing it to a mere resource and object of study, divorced from any conception that does not conform to the scientific and instrumental rationality of modernity (Leff, 2022). As a result, Nature has been defined as a material, external and ahistorical object, governed and organised by laws that are considered fundamental and immutable and which can only be discovered through 'Western' reason (Castree & Braun, 2001; Fraser, 2021; Holloway, 2010; Leff, 2022). As a consequence, "our relationship with the world around us came to be seen as one of separation, of distance, of knowledge and use or exploitation" (Holloway, 2010, p. 127), creating a sharp and dangerous dichotomy between 'humans' and 'Nature' (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018; Hornborg, 2021; Moore, 2015; Tiburi, 2020).

This rupture, conceptualised as a 'metabolic rift', was first introduced by Marx and later elaborated by Foster. It refers to the alienation of people from the natural conditions on which they depend, disrupting the metabolic exchange between humans and Nature (Foster, 1999). It has resulted from the displacement of individuals from

their lands through colonial processes, industrialisation and globalisation (Foster, 1999; Moore, 2015), which has led to a significant shift in the meaning of human activity or labour, turning everyday interactions with Nature into the empty execution of instructions, transforming ‘doing’ into ‘labour’ (Holloway, 2010, p. 127).

The development of this rift has had disruptive effects on urban-rural relations, as it is linked to urbanisation and industrialisation (Harvey, 2013). The disappearance of the traditional peasantry due to rural urbanisation has transformed self-sufficient rural agriculture into a practice linked to the commodification of goods in urban markets. Similarly, urbanisation has transformed cities into centres of capital accumulation, prioritising capital over the well-being of the population and the environment (Harvey, 2013). In this process, Nature has been urbanised; that is, it has been shaped by economic and cultural practices aligned with the interests of capital (Heynen et al., 2006). This process has exacerbated the separation between humans and the environment, making the connections between society and Nature opaque, transient and partial (Heynen et al., 2006).

However, the transformation of urban life has not only been physical but has also resulted in an epistemological rupture or 'epistemic rift,' with profound epistemological and ontological consequences (Foster, 2013; Fraser, 2021; McMichael, 2012). The consumerist and productivist approach to life, supported by urbanisation and its associated power dynamics, has led to a ‘disenchantment’ (Holloway, 2010) or ‘denaturalisation’ of Nature (Leff, 2022), suppressing its spiritual and cultural value and impacting affective, emotional and cognitive domains (Tiburi, 2020). The separation of citizens from other forms of life has turned them into ‘restricted town animals’, impacting the emotional well-being and vitality of urban communities (Holloway, 2010, p. 127). These dynamics have also promoted the development of increasingly individualistic societies, with high rates of isolation, anxiety, neurosis and depression associated with highly divided, fragmented and unequal societies (Harvey, 2013; Holloway, 2010).

Now, what does this have to do with food? As Atkins and Bowel (2001) remark, food is an environmental issue in itself, as its consumption represents one of our most intimate interactions with Nature. A key aspect of alienation from Nature is linked to food since it has been reduced to a commodity by industrial and urban societies, resulting in a 'distant' and 'strange' relationship with it (Heynen et al., 2006; Porcheddu, 2022; Tiburi, 2020). Food has lost its symbolic, spiritual, cultural, political, and social value, becoming a resource to be used, consumed, and discarded.

Historically, the relationship with food has been transformed under the development of various regimes, defined by political and economic processes that have structured how it is produced and consumed (McMichael, 2009; Porcheddu, 2022). The development of these regimes has consolidated colonial, imperialist, and unequal structures of food production, commercialisation, and consumption, which are currently sustained by the widespread use of mechanisation and industrialisation technologies. The neoliberal order underpins the current food regime, leading to the standardisation of the global food system, supported by policies, markets and food corporations (McMichael, 2009). This regime has led to a rapid decline in food diversity, exacerbated food crises, negatively impacted ecosystems and biodiversity, and increased the vulnerability and dependence of communities on agro-industries that control food supplies (McMichael, 2009). This not only leads to the continued overshooting of ecological limits and the degradation of planetary health, including human health but also to the colonisation of 'taste', dictating the types, places and ways in which food is produced and consumed (McMichael, 2009; Tiburi, 2020). Consequently, this corporate approach has transformed pre-existing relationships between humans and Nature and altered food production and consumption practices, demonstrating that our approach to food is deeply connected to power dynamics (Parasecoli, 2019).

However, in response to the corporate food regime, there has been an expansion in social movements seeking to re-configure the socio-ecological orders that the conventional agrifood industry has imposed (Beacham, 2022; McMichael, 2009). The efforts of these movements centre on exposing and reshaping the social and

environmental dynamics inherent in the food system. They aim to localise food production and to promote greater cohesion among producers and consumers, opposing the prevailing dynamics that detach food from its origins and production conditions (Beacham, 2018; McMichael, 2009; Porcheddu, 2022). Based on this context, several authors have analysed and proposed different approaches to examining the social and political aspects of the food system and how it is being redefined, demonstrating that food plays roles of expression, cohesion, and construction of common desires and different futures (Tiburi, 2020). Analyses revolving around the redefinition of these systems have focused on relational approaches that propose a reorientation of the food system through ecologies of care (Dowler et al., 2009; Pavlovich & Roche, 2024), affectivities (Carolan, 2015), ethical eating (Kushnir, 2020), and feminist ethics of care (Beacham, 2018; Perez Neira & Soler Montiel, 2013). Others have focused on exploring possibilities that seek a de-commodification of living beings within the food system (Rundgren, 2016), the localisation of food systems and the redesign of urban spaces (Allen, 2010; Roggema, 2023), and the return to local and ancestral knowledge (Gould, 2004).

The importance of these kinds of practices as contestation projects lies in their potential to open spaces of struggle that not only emerge in defence of food justice but also become political scenarios for the reconfiguration of human-nature relations (Alkon, 2008; Parasecoli, 2019), acknowledging alternatives that redress existing inequalities and prevent the economic and political interests driving “unlimited” accumulation and exploitative degradation of Nature (including humans) from guiding our ways of life. In this sense, the eco-social crisis requires a vision of socio-nature relations that consider our relatedness and embeddedness in our ecologies (Egmoose et al., 2022).

The study of alternative urban food movements has not been as extensive in Latin America as in countries of the Global North (Gravante, 2020). The academic research in the region has mainly focused on rural development, which is linked to issues of rural, local, and indigenous territorialities (Gravante, 2020). In the Colombian context, the study of alternative food projects has mainly focused on rural areas, as

their transformative potential lies in changing social practices and developing alternative social processes related to the end of the armed conflict that especially afflicted these territories for half a century (Hoinle & Cepeda, 2018). However, despite the low visibility given to urban movements, they are gaining importance in territorial struggles by advocating for fairer food systems linked to urban-rural dynamics (Hoinle & Cepeda, 2018). Hence, alternative food movements developed in the country have had local and national impacts in rural and urban territories. They have emerged based on the 'endogenous forces' of territories that place life at the centre of discussions, with a prominent political character proposing new ways of building society through counter-narratives, such as food sovereignty¹ as a counterproposal to food security² (Hoinle & Cepeda, 2018). Their struggles are not only about demanding a different food system but also about caring for the environment, preserving cultural roots, creating and maintaining networks that support community processes, and integrating health and care practices with income-generating activities (Grupo Semillas, 2009; Hoinle & Cepeda, 2018). By doing so, they have strengthened social fabrics and affective relationships with Nature, promoted solidarity economies and transformed physical places and social relations (Hoinle & Cepeda, 2018).

Given the scarcity of research on urban alternative projects in the country and the growing importance and interest in understanding their transformative potential, this study aims to analyse the political, cultural, and social dimensions of urban food initiatives to understand how they shape relationships between people and Nature, and the strategies and practices they are developing to generate social changes. The research aims to answer the following questions:

- How do alternative food actors in Bogotá shape socio-natural relations based on their food practices?

¹ Food sovereignty responds to the right of the people who produce, distribute, and consume food to define their food policy and systems based on nutritious and culturally appropriate food. It seeks to ensure that food is produced using methods based on social justice and environmental respect (Nyéléni, 2007).

² Food security focuses on ensuring access to food through food aid, trade development and the support of international markets. It abstracts food from its social and environmental settings, focusing on food as an individual act (Micarelli, 2020).

- How do alternative food initiatives envision, advocate, and cultivate alternatives to the dominant food system?

In the following, I present the theoretical framework, delving into the conceptualisation of alternative food movements, socio-natures, food socio-natures and relational approaches through which I centre the analysis. I then outline the methodology used, my positionality and the limitations of the research. Subsequently, I develop the analysis, which is divided into three parts. The first provides an overview of the problematisation of the food system identified by the participants, laying the groundwork for the emergence of their initiatives. The second examines the socio-natural relations fostered by the participants, arguing that this relationship is the basis of the resistance practices that support their struggles. The third part of the analysis concludes by examining practices of resistance and contestation to the dominant food system as a form of materialisation of the struggles these alternatives seek to strengthen. In the final chapter, conclusions from the analysis are drawn in an effort to answer, in general terms, the research questions that have guided this research.

Critical Food Theory

Food has become an element of contestation in which power dynamics and social structures reproduce, reinforce, and challenge dominant values and practices reflected in its material, cultural, and symbolic dimensions (Parasecoli, 2019). In this context, food has been positioned as an interdisciplinary field of study that explores the complex interplay of social, economic, historical, and political factors (Stroink et al., 2022). Critical approaches have unpacked the multiple spheres – political, economic, social and environmental – of how the food system works and how urban actors respond to it, identifying areas of contestation and highlighting the limitations of alternative approaches. These studies have opened the way for research focused on promoting alternative forms of society based on the struggle for different food systems (Stroink et al., 2022). In doing so, they have enabled a critical approach to the core values of the dominant model and opened a way to reconfigure our understanding and practice of food systems towards greater social and environmental justice and the re-configuration of values that support different ways of living (Stroink et al., 2022).

Alternative food initiatives

In response to consequences linked to the dominant food system, alternative movements have emerged that seek to transform the relationship with food in different spheres by developing spatial, economic, environmental and social alternatives (Rosol, 2020). These movements have been conceptualised in the academic literature as food activism, food citizenship or alternative food networks, all of which are forms of dissent or resistance practised by diverse actors to take control and responsibility over food production, distribution and/or consumption (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2014).

These movements have been significant in urban areas, not only concerning ethical and critical consumption but also by linking their struggles with other crucial aspects of urban development such as urban mobility, territorial inequalities, crime reduction, healthcare access, and gender struggles, among others (Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2014; Gravante, 2020). They have focused on encouraging changes or modifications

in collective behaviour at the local level and demonstrating a critical approach to the urban context through bottom-up initiatives (Forno, Grasseni, and Signori, 2013 as cited in Gravante 2020).

One aspect of these movements that has been questioned and problematised is the definition of “alternative” as a key concept to grasp the diversity of these initiatives and their transformative potential (Holloway et al., 2007; Misleh, 2022; Rosol, 2020; Turkkan, 2023). Despite their complexity, which leaves room for different norms, constructions and imaginaries, what these projects have in common is that they represent different challenges to the dominant model (Clapp, 2012; Counihan & Siniscalchi, 2014). As such, they are conceived as a heterogeneous set of practices and actors within the food chain with diverse political and social implications (Clapp, 2012; Follett, 2009). "Alternativity", then, suggests different ways of thinking, embedding senses of diversity, particularity (Holloway et al., 2007) and incommensurability (Leff, 2022). This leads to an openness and acceptance of *the difference* in terms of struggles and approaches, as the forms of resistance deployed are based on cultural aspects, linked to processes of social and cultural re-appropriation and restoration of Nature (Leff, 2022). Alternatives root food in its natural and social context, promoting relationships of proximity and connectivity and deploying strategic components at different levels, seeking a transformation of the dominant food system from different directions (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Tarditti, 2012). Thus, these movements can be understood both as a critique of the current food regime and as a practical alternative to it (Rosol, 2020), opening up spaces for analysing how power and transformations could be conceived more broadly.

The focus of its analysis is not to create a utopian or romantic idea of the alternatives configured by these initiatives. A critical approach is needed when examining the configuration of these projects. Despite their intention to transform the dominant food system, they may face obstacles that lead to the reproduction of patterns and forms of injustice they oppose (Tornaghi, 2017). Contradictions are always present, as they derive from an inherent dialectical tension with the dominant system (McClintock, 2014). They would lack viability without the interplay of radical

and neoliberal elements (McClintock, 2014, p. 11). Thus, these alternatives emerge as a potential for change, being diverse and decentralised forms of resistance that unfold from everyday actions (Holloway, 2010). Despite these contradictions, they can foster open, ongoing and reflexive processes that bring diverse groups together to explore and debate different approaches to societal transformation (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Goodman et al., 2012).

Society, Nature and food

Societal relations to Nature and *Socio-natural relations* are key concepts within human ecology, social ecology, environmental sociology, and political ecology, as they account for the connections between society and Nature, emphasising the historicity of this relationship, the possibility of change, and the significance of power relations and struggles that shape them (Berghoefer et al., 2010; Brand and Wissen, 2013, as cited in Eversberg et al., 2022; Görg, 2004; Valera, 2013). The importance of analysing this relationship lies in the fact that the spheres of 'society' and 'Nature' have become susceptible to being maintained or contested through the imposition, creation and shaping of social structures, institutions and relationships between individuals and groups in a community (Berghoefer et al., 2010; Eversberg et al., 2022).

Two levels of discourse can be identified when analysing these relationships (Becker & Jahn, 2005). The first is linked to a general conceptual analysis of the current type of relationship between society and Nature, which is derived from the current economic rationality that defines Nature as an object to be dominated (Becker & Jahn, 2005; Castree & Braun, 2001; Görg, 2004). The second level focuses on conceptualising this relationship in time and space in a specific empirical context (Becker & Jahn, 2005). In this sense, a plurality of social relationships with Nature emerges, depending on culture, forms of knowledge, and social actors, resulting in different interactions (Becker & Jahn, 2005). However, these levels have a dialectical relationship as they constitute and reinforce each other (Becker & Jahn, 2005; Hornborg, 2001).

For the purposes of this research, I will focus on the second type, which requires considering the triangular relationship between individuals, Nature, and society in a specific context. In this case, society and Nature are not considered totalities but elements which, although different, are dynamically interrelated (Becker & Jahn, 2005; Hornborg, 2001). The interaction occurs within a given social context, reflecting that it regulates the distribution of material and energy between society and Nature, influencing how societies and individuals relate to their natural environment (Becker & Jahn, 2005). As this relationship depends on place-specific socialisation processes, this perspective opens the possibility of unfolding different ways of interacting with Nature by moving from monistic attributions of Nature centred on economic values to a plurality of approaches that prioritise intangible, cultural and immeasurable values (Becker & Jahn, 2005; Gould et al. 2014 as cited in Berghöfer et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2016). This perspective broadens the understanding of the complexity of socio-natural relations and recognises that integrating a diversity of values can foster transformative change (IPBES, 2022).

Adopting a pluralist approach to analysing the relationship between society and Nature enables me to integrate a decolonial perspective. This approach facilitates a critical examination of Western rationalities that have historically portrayed 'Nature' as something to be controlled and subjugated (Escobar, 2016; Page, 2023). In doing so, this approach facilitates openness to alternative forms of knowledge, worldviews, and experiences historically marginalised (Escobar, 2016), making visible and reconnecting with different perspectives and positionalities as a process of developing alternative futures (Meek & Tarlau, 2022; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This perspective brings into discussion and reflection of the coloniality of Nature and life itself, sustained in the dichotomy between Nature and society, denying the magical-spiritual-social aspects of the relationship between the human, biophysical, and spiritual realms that support life and humanity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Walsh, 2008). In other words, human relations with Nature become a fundamental domain for understanding the complexity of these processes, the scenarios of contestation, and the possibilities for change (Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017).

Food is a crucial element within this framework (Alkon, 2008; León Sicard, 2018). It can be defined as primary socio-nature, as the plants and animals consumed by humans are living beings that have been historically shaped, domesticated, and bred for consumption (Alkon, 2008; León Sicard, 2018). This approach to food has led to the coining of the term *food socio-natures* representing different understandings of the boundaries between human practices, natural elements, and food (Alkon, 2008). This concept has been addressed through the analysis of discourses and resignifications of agri-food narratives, as they have tended to separate food and agriculture from their ecological basis, reinforcing the construction of a food landscape detached from its ecologies (Moragues-Faus & Marsden, 2017).

Similarly, a deeper focus on *food socio-natures* in urban contexts has provided insights into discourses, ideas, and practices that support more equitable and sustainable food systems (Leach et al., 2020), recognising new narratives, discourses, knowledge, practices, and alternative understandings to the dominant system (Alkon, 2013; Leach et al., 2020). This concept integrates political and power dimensions by deeply questioning the rationalities contributing to the crisis and the development of injustices in the global food system.

Relational approach

Global struggles reflect the need to rebuild communal spaces to reconnect with Nature through relational approaches (Escobar, 2016), as transformations begin when our relationship or embeddedness in larger ecologies becomes visible (Egmore et al., 2022; Helne & Salonen, 2016). Reconnecting with our environment, therefore, involves changing the current practices that guide our ways of life, and renegotiating how we relate to the world (Egmore et al., 2021).

This is why I focus on relational approaches, as they allow me to address the relationship of humans within their living ecologies by critically addressing the different ways in which they understand themselves and their embeddedness within Nature (Egmore et al., 2021). This approach enables the exploration of new languages and learning from tangible and embodied practices that reflect concrete ways of living beyond the extractive approach to Nature, addressing spheres "where

human entanglements with living ecologies still persist" (Egmose et al., 2022, p. 673).

This approach is presented as an alternative to human exceptionalism, as it considers the interdependence between humans and Nature (Helne & Salonen, 2016; Pavlovich & Roche, 2024). It recognises the importance of equity and respect for other species, providing "the fulfilment of the needs of having, doing, loving and being, all of which form its interrelated dimensions" (Helne & Salonen, 2016, p. 5). Consequently, this perspective offers a holistic view of social organisations by recognising the interconnectedness in which human beings are embedded, challenging the modern logic that has disregarded the relational qualities of life (Pavlovich & Roche, 2024).

As such, this perspective pursues human, animal and planetary well-being, presenting itself as an integrating perspective that accounts for a more integral understanding of human-nature relations while also approaching interventions and transformations in a more situated manner (Helne & Salonen, 2016; Pavlovich & Roche, 2024; West et al., 2020).

In this regard, ethics and culture are also positioned as leverage points to promote coexistence between people and Nature (Foggin et al., 2021; West et al., 2020), articulated through forms of activism based on the intersection of socio-cultural and spatiotemporal realities that shape connections between culture, society, and Nature (Foggin et al., 2021; West et al., 2018).

Methodology

Critical realism

This research is supported by the epistemology and ontology derived from critical realism, which understands that 'Nature' and 'Society' are neither separate nor undifferentiated entities (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). This stand defends the assumption that there is a reality independent of human perceptions, language, or mental constructs. However, some of that reality is also constructed through subjective interpretations that influence the way people perceive and experience the world (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). It allows reconciliation between the objectivism of positivist approaches and the subjectivism of socio-constructivist frameworks, overcoming the dichotomy that creates the illusion of two different worlds (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

Values that unfold from interactions with Nature are intersubjective and interobjective, not merely something 'subjective' that humans project onto a meaningless world (Gorski, 2018). They result from concrete interactions with the world and with other people (Gorski, 2018). Consequently, human 'cognition' or 'knowledge' is neither defined as an exact representation of reality nor as pure construction since the external reality and subjective constructions are not treated as two totalities utterly distinct from each other but as different related elements (Gorski, 2018). In other words, human perceptions of reality are linked to social structures. They are shaped by a spatial and historical context that imposes objective conditions that limit individual choices and actions (Parada Corrales, 2004).

However, critical realism recognises that individuals are not passive products of these structures but agents with the capacity to challenge and transform them. In this sense, it emphasises the importance of analysing the contradictions inherent in these social structures to unravel the underlying social forms and explain change (Parada Corrales, 2004).

Positionality

I decided to do my thesis in Bogotá because it is my home city. It seemed meaningful to me to be able to contribute to the local context from a researcher role. In recent

decades, this city has been the scene of social, environmental, political, and economic complexities that have led to new forms of citizenship or urban activism. The defence of environmental causes has been an axis in the search for new models of urban organisation in Bogotá, seeking and building collective solutions in response to the environmental and social problems affecting the city (Hernández, 2010). However, due to its complexity and size, it is not easy to glimpse the range of alternatives that are emerging and developing, nor to conceptualise and make connections between them, so I expect to be able to contribute in this respect. Additionally, I had a more personal goal: to find hope in the socio-environmental changes taking place in my city. Although I have been close to local struggles, I have never been an active member or directly involved in popular and territorial movements. Hence, this research allowed me to discover and put me in contact with different projects that are changing current social paradigms.

My approach to the initiatives was guided by curiosity and openness, which let me develop active and methodical listening based on Bourdieu's (1999) understanding of reflexivity and reciprocity in research. Being a local in this context and my proximity to the subject helped me to develop closer and more horizontal conversations, less tied to researcher-interviewee dynamics. Moreover, considering that interviews unfold a series of interactions and social relations that are not exempt from dynamics of domination and coercion (Bourdieu, 1999), I tried to develop a 'non-violent' communication and to balance the power inequalities inherent in any research dynamic. To do so, I attempted not to reproduce any impositions, intrusions, or extractive patterns by negotiating the rules of the interviews with the participants, creating spaces of trust, reciprocity and transparency about the aims of the study, and engaging in learning and sharing processes with them. I created spaces for dialogues that encouraged mutual openness, fostering an environment where I not only absorbed and learned from the insights shared by the participants but also shared knowledge and food practices gained from personal experiences in similar contexts.

Methods

Participants

I chose to work with initiatives that focus on building alternative ways of producing food and developing different ways of educating about consumption practices in urban and peri-urban areas of Bogotá. I approached the participants by identifying initiatives and individuals who met the research criteria through personal connections, my personal experience, and referrals from existing participants. Also, I actively engaged with various communities involved in developing alternative food projects, facilitating encounters with potential interviewees.

The participants encompass a range of individuals and initiatives that, together, represent a diverse array of projects that have emerged within Bogotá's alternative food landscape. Some engage in political struggles under the defence of food sovereignty, others focus on localising production and consumption at the community level, and others spread knowledge through non-formal education spaces. Additionally, the diversity is seen in the partnerships, relationships, and alliances they have, as some are part of the Slow Food movement, others have worked together with governmental and formal education institutions, and others are related to spiritual and philosophical schools of thought.

The participants were the following: P1 and P2, members of ASOGRANG, an urban farm in Bogotá; P3, a student who has been involved as a volunteer with ASOGRANG. In the analysis section the P4, a social media content creator who advocates for local and plant-based food awareness; P5, a beekeeper who is developing a beekeeping project in the peri-urban area of Bogotá; P6 and P7, artisanal sourdough bakers behind a small-scale initiative; P8, who produces and commercialises plant-based "dairy" products through her own small business; and P9, a shareholder of a local restaurant called Comedor Transformación: Centro de Autoeducación Viticultura de Colombia y Escuela de Nutrición (an education centre specialised in macrobiotic nutrition).

Although there is no sensitive context that could harm the integrity of the participants, I have decided to anonymise their responses to protect their privacy. However, some of the participants voluntarily and expressly stated that they would

like their initiatives to be mentioned in this research, so their names are included in the description above and throughout the analysis.

Semi-structured Interviews

I decided to use semi-structured interviews to delve deeper into the specific practices of the participants in each context, their origins, and their effects, as a way of unfolding experiences, perspectives, ideologies, and beliefs through conversations (Brinkmann, 2020; Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2024). This approach encourages an exchange of perspectives on a specific topic and dialogues that help researchers understand how individuals interpret their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). It actively involves participants in knowledge creation and reveals discourses, power dynamics, and ideologies that may be hidden in everyday narratives (Brinkmann, 2020).

I conducted fieldwork between February and March 2023, in which I carried out interviews and visits to the sites where the different initiatives are taking place. A total of eight interviews were conducted, lasting between half an hour and an hour and a half. There were nine interviewees, seven of whom participated individually, while one interview involved two people. In the two-person interview, I followed a similar approach to the one-on-one interviews, focusing on understanding each participant's unique perspective rather than seeking consensus on the topic at hand. Consequently, I aimed to obtain individual responses to the various questions posed. Likewise, the participants in the paired interview were partners on the same project, which helped create an atmosphere of trust and openness similar to the environment developed in the individual interviews. In addition, seven were conducted in person, while one was held online; however, all were conducted face-to-face. This approach not only provided access to verbal aspects but also facilitated the observation of non-verbal cues and interactions, enriching the understanding of the issues discussed.

I followed an interview guide consisting of 10 questions (Appendix). However, I used it to initiate open-ended conversations to facilitate the possibility of generating further questions or comments to clarify and elaborate on related topics. The guide was shared with participants who demanded it before the interview, enabling

participants to reflect on these matters beforehand and consider how they wanted to incorporate the narratives and their experiences into the conversation (Haukås & Tishakov, 2024). This approach also helped them feel more prepared and reduced any anxieties that could have arisen from this interaction (Haukås & Tishakov, 2024).

Before the interviews, I organised visits, where possible, to the physical locations where these initiatives are taking place and held informal conversations with people involved in or who had some contact with these projects. These visits were organised through people close to me, who acted as a link between the two parts, helping me to present myself as a close contact and opening common ground before the interviews. In the case of the urban farm, which is based on volunteer work, I arranged three visits before the interviews took place to get acquainted and offer them my time and work on the farm in return. I also organised a workshop with different actors involved in this project to share experiences and knowledge about farming and food practices.

Additionally, an informed consent form was used to reassure the participants that their participation was voluntary, explain the purpose of the research, the use of the information collected, and ask permission to record the interviews so that I could focus on the conversation without having to concentrate on taking notes and getting lost in the details and stories they shared.

Thematic Analysis

I employed thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns in the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). This method enabled me to comprehend how interviewees make sense of their experiences and the central and common drivers that have encouraged them to develop alternative approaches to food. By doing so, I aim to express their experiences and voices while also considering social and cultural contexts that have influenced them.

The themes that emerged account for the data concerning the research questions and represent some level of pattern within the information collected. However, the importance of these did not lie in quantifiable measures, but in the relevance of the information to the questions addressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, I carried

out an inductive and deductive analysis of the information, in which I drew out some of the main themes from the proposed theoretical framework, which I complemented and integrated with the information obtained in the interviews. As a result, three main themes emerged: problematisation of the local food context; conceptualisation of socio-nature relationships, and practices that are being developed as a way of facing current challenges.

Limitations

One aspect to consider about the study is that it cannot fully encompass the complexity and diversity of alternative initiatives emerging within Bogotá. Given the city's characteristics, many citizen's initiatives address various political, social, environmental, and economic food-related concerns, each encountering unique challenges and developing distinct forms of activism and social impact. However, I sought to ensure that the participants represented a diverse range of perspectives, encompassing different locations, objectives, actors, and practices deployed. In this sense, my aim is not to generalise the results but rather to study in depth the practices proposed by these alternatives in a specific context, developing an exploratory perspective.

Furthermore, the employed methods can potentially introduce biases in collecting and analysing information. To mitigate this, I triangulated the information gathered by accessing multiple data sources, complementing the interviews with information obtained through informal conversations with external informants who had worked or participated in the projects, and various materials about some of the projects I had access to during my fieldwork (e.g. brochures and social media publications). During data analysis, similar trends and themes emerged across the data from different participants, increasing the validity of the information gathered (Guest et al., 2012). Also, by bringing the participants' voices into the analysis, I intend to support my interpretations of the results (Guest et al., 2012).

Finally, since the interviews were conducted in Spanish, I had to translate the sections I used for the analysis. This translation effort entails a possible loss of meaning or a modification of cultural aspects linked to the linguistic expression

(Temple & Edwards, 2002), so I tried to consider the cultural and contextual interpretations and meanings surrounding the different quotes rather than making a literal translation to ensure correct transmission of meaning.

Unfolding Transformations

What needs to be changed?

Transforming socio-natural relations demands reconfiguring our connections to broader ecologies and recognising their central role in driving social change (Egmore et al., 2022). Hence, adopting a critical approach to these relationships involves addressing the problematic dimensions of our contexts.

One recurring theme across all interviews is the problematisation of the food system, particularly in urban areas, revealing its inherent ties to the industrial regime. The participants recognise the emergence of social and environmental injustices and violence linked to the current food system and the market imperative that supports it. These injustices are linked to the agro-industry's control of seeds and the consequent lack of decision-making power over the food produced and consumed in the country. As P1 and P9 evidenced:

The preservation of seeds is a system of manipulation controlled by multinational corporations that appropriate them. And every time you want to sow, you must buy the seeds from them and pay them at the price they demand. Besides, not even fifty per cent of those seeds germinate (P1)

If Monsanto does not want to sell seeds to a country, that country starves to death, and traditional seeds become illegal. Now (in Colombia), it is a crime to sow seeds that belonged to the people who collected them (P9)

The dominant food system shows how control over production practices and consumption patterns has focused on an approach based on food security supported by multinational corporations, rather than focusing on food as a right, a communitarian, and an ethical aspect of society (Wittman, 2011). As a result, the emphasis has been on increasing food production, without effectively addressing hunger or the quality of food produced. The municipal food programmes deployed in Bogotá, oriented towards this approach, have increased food insecurity in the city (World Food Programme, 2023) and have limited citizens' alternatives to chemical-free food consumption, as P1 and P5 stated:

A lot of food arrives at the supermarket, but we do not know where it comes from. We know that a lot of it is accelerated, at least potatoes are accelerated with glyphosate; they are sprayed to speed up growth (P1)

I feel like there is a lack of knowledge about how much chemicals are being used to grow the lettuce they're eating (P5)

This demonstrates that the imperative of the prevailing food system has led participants to perceive a gap between producers and consumers, making food production conditions in the city unfamiliar to them as there is an immediacy to finding food in supermarkets, supported by a lack of traceability, information, and education about the process behind its production. This separation echoes the alienation from Nature produced by its commodification. In this case, the emphasis on food is on its exchange value, configuring its governance according to the rules of the market, detaching it from the context in which it is produced (Porcheddu, 2022; Prudham, 2009; Robbins, 2015). This sense of alienation develops as a perception of physical and moral distance from food and Nature (often seen as the same). As expressed by the participants, it is related to a lack of knowledge of the origin of food (P7, P4) and a lack of awareness of food's nature due to processed food transformation (P5):

I couldn't believe that I was making bread myself, precisely because we are so far away from what we consume that we don't think about it, just like when children think that vegetables come from a supermarket's bag (P7)

All my life, I have been blinded in that sense. I go to the supermarket, and I find everything I need, but I have no idea what has happened for it to be sold there (P4)

People don't know what they're eating. It's like this separation of the food production and what we consume. This separation can be seen in animal-based food. We don't see a boiled bone; what we see instead is a colourful thing shaped like a bear (P5)

In this sense, food has been disconnected from its non-material values as its life-sustaining value is lost, and it begins to be defined in terms of its marketable features, reducing food to an object devoid of its 'natural' qualities (Dansero & Pettenati, 2018; Gilson, 2015; Vivero-Pol, 2017). These elements reflect what Campbell (2009) conceptualises as *food from nowhere*. This concept refers to a food sub-regimen tied to a cultural model that develops under cheap, convenient, and processed food. It is legitimised and supported by the lack of visibility of the different elements of the food chain and the disconnection of food from its place of origin and context of production (Campbell, 2009). This detachment causes a displacement of non-industrialised food, mostly local, from the market, as it faces economic constraints since it cannot compete with industrially produced food. As P4 pointed out, local organic cocoa producers have found it difficult to position their products in the market due to high prices for their organic and small-scale production. Furthermore, P9 mentioned that local farmers have been forced to stop producing vegetables and fruits to produce dairy products for large industries, leaving them vulnerable to market demands and dependent on these corporations. This process is linked to a *detritorialisation* of food (Dansero & Pettenati, 2018), in which separating food from its context of production leads to its detachment from its cultural elements. This mechanism supports colonising practices by eroding cultural practices within the food system, resulting in the loss of local foods, practices and knowledge, as P9 mentioned. And ultimately, the homogenisation of diets, exemplified by P7:

Traditional seeds were forgotten, and they (agribusiness corporations) destroyed some seeds in Huila a few years ago because they had to be certified seeds (P9)

Production of bread is all the same due to food being homogenised (P7)

Therefore, food has evolved from a vital component to a speculative investment tool, driven by the imperative of profit despite its social and environmental impacts on production and consumption (McMichael, 2012, 2014; Porcheddu, 2022). This trend reinforces the notion that food is not a matter of concern (Vivero-Pol, 2017) and

obscures the labour, power dynamics, and production processes behind it (Harvey, 1990). Economic interests have driven this shift, favouring ultra-processed foods as more convenient and affordable options. As a result, participants argued that food has become secondary in people's lives, with production and consumption primarily driven by price and accessibility. Industrial food producers prioritise profits, neglecting the social and environmental impacts of their practices, as mentioned by P9. While food consumption is guided by affordability and accessibility rather than by quality and health considerations, as noted by P4:

Food. Right? If it makes money, clear-cut the Amazon, clear-cut it, right? If it makes money to poison people, poison them. If it makes money to sell junk food, sell junk food (P9)

I feel that right now, we are in that moment where food doesn't matter. It becomes something that only fills the body... we are in a rush all the time, and the capitalist system doesn't help at all. It's like the more processed it is, the easier it is to consume it (P4)

This perceived widespread disconnection with food has made participants question the processes underlying the food system. The problematic elements they identified focus on the environmental consequences of industrial crops (P1, P3, P6, P7, P9) and their effects on people's health (P1, P4, P7, P8, P9). This problematisation is intertwined with violent practices in the production of animal-based food (P5, P8) and a series of injustices arising from the structure of the food chain. In this respect, P5 mentioned social justice issues, while P4 and P5 discussed affordability and access to quality food, which result from social inequalities that condition access to non-industrialised food:

It's a social problem because, well, slaughterhouses and all that are not located in the wealthiest part of Bogota (P5)

From there, we have to start looking at social inequalities in the food system. For a person who has nothing to eat in a day, the priority is not whether the honey is processed or not (P5)

It's very challenging because there are so many factors connected to how we can access food that, given the current system, one can't expect everyone to be able to afford agroecological food (P4)

The prioritisation of the economic values of food and the consequences and processes this entails has also affected how participants perceive the intersection between the external and internal dimensions of human experience. Through the perception of alienation from food, participants refer to an *external disconnection* from Nature and an *internal disconnection* from their bodies. This demonstrates that there is not only a material separation but also a cognitive rift that has structured the way modern urban life develops (Beery et al., 2023). This has caused participants to perceive Nature as a place removed from their closest contexts (P2, P3, P4), and has led to a generalised feeling of disconnection defined as a “lack of awareness or ignorance of human identity within the material elements and the flows, energy and other non-material elements and values that constitute Nature” (Beery et al., 2023, p. 475). This disconnection is manifested in a separation of all biophysical elements – Nature, food and the body itself – which the participants believe are connected, as P8 and P4 evidenced:

From the beginning, the relationship with Nature and with my body, which I believe is part of Nature, was very disconnected (P8)

My work is focused on raising this awareness and a connection with food, which comes from a connection with ourselves because when we are disconnected from ourselves, we are also disconnected from our food (P4)

This internal and external disconnection has resulted in losing harmony and balance with Nature. It has led to a disregard for the environmental impact of food production and the nutritional implications of food choices, which have negative consequences for the planet and humans' well-being. P1, P2, P4, P5, P8, and P9 highlighted this trend, with some pointing to this disconnect as a catalyst for the current crisis.

The main cause of the deterioration of the external environment is the internal environment of people who do not know how to take care of themselves (P9)

If the world manages to survive the crises we are facing, those who survive will likely be the ones who have understood and harmonised with Nature, both their own and external Nature (P9)

This understanding highlights that human experience is not only a product of individual attitudes, values, and beliefs but is also intricately intertwined with wider social and material conditions shaped by underlying power dynamics and material dimensions (Artmann et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2016) and in this case, derived from the alienation of Nature because of the commodification of food and the development of modern urban life. Hence, the existing relationships between citizens and Nature in Bogotá, particularly concerning food, exhibit a complex interaction involving material, cognitive, and experiential dimensions that are problematised by the participants.

Food, sharing and caring: possible futures

Participants introduce food as an enabler of social change by arguing that relationships with Nature can be transformed by changing how humans relate to food production and consumption. This is echoed by P9, who advocates cultivating a stronger connection between individuals and their food that encompasses every interaction with the external world, believing it can deepen our understanding of both our internal and external environments. Alternatively, P4 advocates a change as follows:

In the discipline in which I work, I would like people to be able to connect more with food. I think that would change things and change the system. It would also be important for people's mental health.

This is underpinned by the participants' understanding of food as a link between humans and Nature. As P8 emphasised, food serves as a means of connecting humans to the Earth by providing nourishment, vital energy, and sustaining life. Moreover, as

P4 suggested, food represents the love that the Earth gives humans, serving as a connection to Nature: “When we eat, we have a small part of Nature inside our bodies, providing wisdom, energy, well-being, and a network of connections”.

This connection demonstrates that a sense of *vincularidad*/relationality emerges, defined by Mignolo and Walsh (2018), as an awareness of the relationship of wholeness and interdependence between all living organisms, leading to the quest for harmony of life on the planet. This opens the possibility of creating new identities and practices that embrace the interdependence between humans and Nature. As P2 and P3 evidenced:

Agriculture is an alternative because you must take care of plants, water them, and remember that they grow, need water, and need food, just like you do. So, there is a parallel between Nature and human beings. There is an articulation between the two, which should not be overlooked (P2)

I define myself as an evolving being who loves Nature and is willing to learn from it through food and to transmit that knowledge through my recipes and my videos (P3)

The relational sense cultivated in this context has fostered a culture of stewardship and care that promotes mutually respectful socio-ecological interactions and places life at the heart of social organisations (Carolan, 2015; Leach et al., 2020; Mallory, 2013; Portocarrero Lacayo, 2024; West et al., 2020). Participants expressed that this connection inspires them to develop caring practices towards themselves, other living beings, and Nature. This is echoed by P4, P7 and P3:

And when we have that certainty (that we are part of Nature), we are able to take care of it more, take care of ourselves more and not see it as something inferior, right? (P4)

To me, Nature means responsibility. It's a call to care, to respect, to value (P7)

Food. Well, let's see, I think it's also a way to take care of oneself. It's a fundamental need and deeply instinctual, but it's also a distinct way to nurture

oneself. So, it's about caring for myself and caring for others. That circle of care extends to include the earth and other people (P3)

Care, defined as practices aimed at “maintaining, continuing, and repairing our world, including our bodies, ourselves, and our environment” (Tronto, 2020, p. 103), is integrated into food production and consumption processes. These practices manifest through various dimensions: self-care practices involve prioritising nutritious, chemical-free food, attending to bodily needs, and engaging in activities promoting mental health (P2, P4, P6, P7, P9); community care practices entail fostering supportive relationships around food provision and ensuring access to healthy food within communities (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8, P9); care for other living beings is demonstrated through the use of non-harmful products, conservation efforts, and support for their well-being (P1, P5, P6, P7); and care for the environment is demonstrated through chemical-free production and agroecological practices that contribute to biodiversity regeneration (P1, P3, P4, P6).

This way of relating to Nature is inspired, expressed and nurtured through material practices and sensory experiences, or as Carolan (2016), develops as *lived experiences* of food, demonstrating that physical contact with food – whether cooking, kneading bread, planting seeds, tasting cocoa, or exploring different ways of preparing and consuming plant-based “dairy” or local food – has had an impact on how they perceive themselves concerning Nature, changing the relationship they have with it. This suggests that an embodied way of relating to food develops interactions between body, mind, and Nature (Carolan, 2015, 2016; Cooke et al., 2016), leading to the consolidation of relational values such as empathy, compassion, respect and responsibility (Chan et al., 2016). Participants expressed that the feeling of interdependence with Nature and care for everything it entails was forged and reinforced by relating to the natural world in its temporalities, scales and textures.

I began to notice smaller things (since I started my beekeeping project). It was as if I had already been able to see animals, but now I could get closer to them as insects. It was like seeing the world from a smaller perspective (P5)

When you hold the amaranth seed in your hand, it looks so small, but at the same time, it means so much (P2)

There is something very important in making bread and relating directly with the dough, the bacteria and yeast, and those materials that change, like water. With everything that happens there materially. That relationship makes you see things from a different time, from a different speed (P6)

When you take a bite of the (locally produced) chocolate, it's delicious because you feel the love of the cocoa farmers and the land because it's cultivated without chemicals (P4)

This understanding of Nature represents a rupture with utilitarian or instrumental relationships, enabling the reintegration of the notion of 'Natural' into the urban environment and daily routines. The participants expressed that interacting with food lets them escape the modern lifestyle characterised by productivity, fast pace, chaos, and hostility, as P2, P3, and P7 mentioned, allowing them to engage in activities that support these relational values towards Nature and their communities.

For me (after working at the farm), Nature became much more familiar. It became something tangible, something that I interact with. It's like a give-and-take relationship (P3)

Being on the farm is a way to have more contact with the community and with Nature. As I have always liked Nature, I found here the opportunity to learn and socialise many things through farming (P2)

Baking bread is like an escape from fast productivity, like an escape from my work routine, from my hectic, fast work life (P7)

However, this transformation is not merely individual; it has also led participants to reconsider their relationships within their immediate social environment, emphasising the importance of building communities. This way of relating has led to the establishment of *communities of practice* centred on food (Carolan, 2016), which are communities that are created by facilitating spaces in which people in their surrounding contexts – whether as 'customers', neighbours, students, or citizens at

large – cultivate new practices, skills, and knowledge through hands-on experiences (tasting, cooking, gardening or visiting and meeting local producers). In this way, participants aim to bring about social change by opening spaces to share knowledge and practices that enable the development of a sense of relatedness with other living beings and Nature. This is echoed by P5, who believes that teaching people how bees live will change their idea that bees can be harmful. On the other hand, P8 shows that she facilitates contact with Nature by encouraging the consumption of plant-based drinks, as this connection starts with food. While P7 mentions that he would like people to be able to experience the sensory immersion he feels when working with the bread doughs:

I would like to take people to see how and where honey is made, to show them how that super close approach with an insect (bees), which they have always been told will sting them, is, actually, something very beautiful (P5)

I think what we're striving for is to connect people with what they're consuming because the connection with Nature starts from there, more than a specific outdoor experience (P8)

It would be great if people could somehow get closer to the process of making bread. We dream of doing a workshop, as a more participative thing, with the “customer” – in inverted commas – so they also become a creator, immersing themselves in the bread dough (P7)

Finally, this relational approach highlights participants' recognition that their connection to Nature transcends the physical interactions, encompassing social and political frameworks that shape it (West et al., 2018, 2020). Consequently, the proposed actions and practices of social change are not depoliticised or detached from their social context. Rather, they emerge as forms of resistance and contestation, advocating for equitable relationships with humans and animals in food production and consumption processes and acknowledging the social and environmental factors inherent in the food system. For example, P5's beekeeping project seeks to defend practices rooted in the local context, representing a break with the "Eurocentric" industrial model that underpins local regulations. She argues that the current model

ignores the contextual nuances of honey production in the region, as it does not respond to the particularities of its production in the mountains nor the needs of the local bees. In the case of P4, she stated that constant contact with her vegetables has made her consider how they are being produced:

I think now I feel the need to be in contact with Nature in some way, I am in contact with it every day with my vegetables, but now I feel the need to ask where they come from, to know how they are grown, how they are harvested, in other words, everything that has been necessary for their production.

This demonstrates how participants have shaped a relationship with Nature around care in which food has served as a medium, leading to a restructuring and redefinition of social practices associated with the modern model of urban society. This relationship, based on relationality and interdependence, is a guiding principle for community actions, seeking to generate transformations in the way urban life, the relationship with Nature, the organisation of social processes and the food system in the city have developed.

Resistances and re-existences involving food

Building on the conceptualisation of the problems and the principles that these alternatives are developing as the basis for their initiatives, I now turn to analyse how participants have articulated their aspirations through the definition of concrete practices to bring about changes in the current food system and its socio-natural relations. Supported by a decolonial perspective, this opens the way to explore new ways of living, existing, and thinking that confront and dismantle the colonial/modern order governing Western societies (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). From this perspective, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) propose the term re-existence, based on Albán's conceptualisation (2008, as cited in Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), understood as a series of mechanisms that human groups implement to question and make visible practices of racialisation, exclusion, and marginalisation, redefining and resignifying life under conditions of dignity and self-determination. These mechanisms constitute spaces of resistance as active forms of determining and reconstructing disregarded practices, knowledge, and subjectivities (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). By making visible how

these practices of contestation and resistance have unfolded, it is possible to illustrate the development of alternatives that are presented as 'feasible', with the potential to transform dominant paradigms (Egmore et al., 2022; Escobar & Osterweil, 2009; McClintock, 2014).

This perspective is relevant concerning food as it has been a terrain of contestation against the standards established by the food industry, becoming a central element in the intersection of practices of power, domination and resistance (Perez Neira & Soler Montiel, 2013). Its importance as an element of change lies in the fact that it is linked to the defence of cultural and social expressions the current food system has denied. This is why efforts to reform the food system are inextricably linked to the recovery of these elements (Tiburi, 2020).

Politicising food

The interviews brought this aspect to the foregrounded themes related to social struggles for the right to food, environmental care, community care, and territorial governance. The politicisation of food is linked to a series of practices aimed at building a fairer food system. These practices have been developed around the defence of food autonomy, seeking to assert the right to access organic, chemical-free and local food in the city. To this end, participants have focused on strengthening community and regional initiatives, fostering collaboration, and holding public institutions accountable on issues related to the right to food and environmental protection in the local context.

One of the most significant examples is ASOGRANG, the urban farm, that emerged as a community effort to reclaim a plot that had become a focal point of violence in the neighbourhood while also addressing malnutrition and environmental concerns in this specific area of the city. It has developed as a social and political project that addresses food insecurity, community cohesion, food sovereignty, and adaptation to climate change through agroecological practices. Advocating, at the same time, for generating intersections between the projects implemented in ASOGRANG and the municipal programmes to support their environmental commitments, as evidenced by P1:

It means how we see the situation, how we tackle hunger, and how we contribute to counteracting the problem of hunger because hunger is terrifying, right? Many people still don't have anything to eat.

We are contributing to food production, reducing the amount of waste that goes to Doña Juana (the city's landfill), and contributing to the environment. So, we have approached the district and proposed using the compost we produce in their tree planting program.

The project has expanded its impact by replicating its practices in surrounding contexts. This demonstrates how alternatives facilitate the collective creation and replication of situated knowledge, challenging the hegemonic forms imposed by modernity (Escobar & Osterweil, 2009). Knowledge and practices are developed considering the cultural, economic, and environmental context, thus becoming spaces of resistance to current food and urban policies. This is evidenced by the efforts of the farm members who have actively promoted educational spaces on agroecological practices aimed at generating changes ranging from food waste management to the building of self-sufficient communities:

This project is a showcase, a model that I know has been taken away and multiplied in many parts, in many regions (P1)

They used to criticise us and look at how many workshops and thousands of people have visited us. I gave them workshops on how to manage organic waste, how to prepare the soil, how to plant, how to grow crops (P1)

One seeks to replicate (practices and knowledge) not only at the farm but also outside it. As I was saying, I set up a vegetable garden for the women in the community nearby, taking the example of the experience developed here (in ASOGRANG) (P2)

However, this is not a unique example, as the various alternatives have developed self-managed projects that respond to their contextual needs, addressing the weaknesses of the current food model and tackling social inequalities, advocating for changes in both the private and public spheres. These struggles are represented in

public arenas by: (1) promoting the recognition of the rights of urban farmers (P1, P2); (2) encouraging and involving communities in the development of public policies aimed at defending seed custody by local urban producers (P1, P2); (3) implementing social practices that strengthen solidarity and participation in organising common life, by reclaiming local seeds, traditional food, and practices, under the umbrella of food sovereignty (P1, P2, P3, P8, P9); (4) reinforcing food networks and relations with public institutions and other relevant actors within the food sector (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8) and (5) developing educational spaces to promote a change in the consumption habits of the communities in which the participants are involved (P1, P2, P4, P5, P8, P9). Furthermore, the struggles are displayed in private spheres through different ways of food consumption by shifting away from traditional markets by directly contacting local producers (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9), and by producing and selling food that they grow themselves or produce themselves, which allows greater control over its production and consumption (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9). These statements exemplify the political engagement of the projects and their advocacy for creating different spaces to claim control over urban food processes:

We mobilised more than five hundred urban farmers and managed to be recognised within the development plan and allocated resources (P1)

The vegetables that are produced on the farm are the livelihood of the people who live here, as this project aims at raising awareness about environmental care and the right to produce their own food (P3)

This struggle for a fairer food system involves the development of other forms of social organisation (Porcheddu, 2022). The initiatives configure social relationships based on understanding, exploring, and advocating for interdependence, cooperation, and community-building. This is supported by a commitment to build a different form of food governance linked to striving for the community's well-being through the enablement of social consensus, as P2 stated:

Sometimes, you can see that it's possible to partially change some things, some systems, some traditions (...). It's about reaching a consensus through

everyone's discernment. So, what you say is no, I say yes, but how do we reach a middle ground where we both build something new without hurting each other.

In this sense, food becomes a political field, according to Leff's (2003) notion, as a field of dispute and social reappropriation based on contesting power relations that shape its production and reclaiming local autonomy over local resources. However, although the initiatives are advancing to generate changes, political tensions are visible. These have been most visible in the way in which the alternatives perceive a lack of state support and tensions concerning food governance, especially in the case of ASOGRANG, as they have been the most present in the public political sphere. As these initiatives are led by peripheral social actors who generally face dominant political actors, these practices do not generate radical transformation on their own (Egmoose et al., 2022). While these actions are seen as progressive but not radical transformations of the struggle (McClintock, 2014), they can be portrayed as subversive against the dominant system by operating outside the market logic or by revaluing common land, in the case of ASOGRANG.

We (the inhabitants of the neighbourhood) who lived next to the land were encouraged to associate and figure out how we could contribute to making this plot of land a better place to live (P1)

Likewise, recognising the structural constraints that encourage people to rely on industrialised food for convenience and affordability, all the initiatives have chosen to participate in alternative food distribution spaces. These efforts aim to improve accessibility regarding geographic location or price, moving away from traditional commercial channels. They do so by supporting and actively participating in local farmers' markets or free-standing markets, opening physical spaces for neighbours to produce their own vegetables, or enabling contact between local producers and consumers. In conclusion, they can be seen as part of the solution, building change through reshaping power relations and enhancing different social configurations around food deployed in people's everyday lives (Carolan, 2016; Figueroa, 2015).

Additionally, while Dal Gobbo (2024) notes that the individual struggle can be depoliticised by placing all responsibility for change on an individual, it becomes fundamental how some of the initiatives aim to enhance their impact through collective articulations (between local producers, small-scale food initiatives and through partnerships with educational institutions), understanding that one's well-being is associated with the common well-being of the community and the territory³. In this sense, the struggle for a just food system is articulated with the visibility of problems associated with climate change and social and economic violence, seeking to consolidate spaces of solidarity through different institutions and communities.

Reappropriation of the local, recovery of the ancestral, and a return to simplicity

Another aspect that emerged during the interviews is the reappropriation of local knowledge about food, based on the adaptation of traditional practices (P1, P5) and the collaboration with local and ancestral communities (P1, P2, P4, P9, P8). This approach is developed through a *diálogo de saberes*, in which practices are learned and reproduced under the guidance and collaboration of different communities of knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This practice disrupts the coloniality of knowledge and ways of being and living, proposing a horizontal dialogue between Western and popular knowledge (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In doing so, the different initiatives seek to develop an exchange of perspectives and practices to protect and preserve local foods and traditional food practices, rather than pursuing profit through the exploitation of local foods and associated intellectual property rights. These practices have allowed participants to explore and claim alternative ways of relating to food, as well as to recover and promote the knowledge that underpins them. In this way, they have promoted local flavours, products and preparations that have remained invisible within the dominant food system.

³ The concept of territory is understood as a space that extends beyond the sense of geographical, political and administrative boundaries, encompassing social spaces that share ecosystems, struggles and culture (Hernández, 2010, p. 103).

This *diálogo de saberes* is enriched by diverse personal experiences: P1 was raised in a rural setting and has applied that knowledge to the urban environment; by being exposed to alternative food production methods due to family background and values (P5, P6 and P8); by participating and being direct involved in food alternative projects (P2, P3, and P7); by developing synergies with local and traditional communities (P1, P2, P4, P9); by approaching and partnering with different formal educational communities, such as Universities and public institutions engaged in these areas (P1, P2, P3, P5); and by studying spiritual and philosophical currents (P9). This supports a localised relationship to food, as opposed to its current conceptualisation detached from any place, being transformed into *food from somewhere* (Campbell, 2009), as traditional knowledge and practices and local flavours are reclaimed, returning food to its place of production and changing relationships with it and its ecologies (Campbell, 2009).

The recovery of the “local” is accompanied by cultural reappropriation, serving as a decolonial project where traditional practices and cultural norms inspire viable alternatives for constructing a different food model (Chesnais, 2020). An example of such practices is the revival of amaranth, an ancestral food considered "the seed of the gods", as P1 and P2 highlight, and the quinoa, which has led to efforts to educate other producers on how to grow these foods, and consumers on different ways of preparing and consuming it based on traditional practices. The approach to these seeds has raised inquiries about their significance for local people, resulting in a re-establishment of the (lost) physical and spiritual connection with them due to their importance to their ancestors. Another case in point is cocoa, which is beginning to be redefined from a spiritual perspective:

When you really connect with the energy of cacao, you can really connect with that ancestry and, well, appreciate it much more (P4)

The instrumental value of food becomes less important, while its social, cultural and spiritual functions are reclaimed, opening a different understanding of the world where there is a dialogue with diversity and a redefinition of the relationship with the environment. Consequently, in the pursuit of autonomy and sovereignty, there is an

effort to reappropriate the historical heritage of natural and cultural resources through local knowledge, using a set of historical practices adaptable to new contexts, allowing humans to engage in a situated manner (Escobar, 1998; Escobar & Osterweil, 2009). This approach promotes the understanding of the world through pluralism and cultural diversity, as P2 mentions:

One of the mottos of the farm is that we build together through different ways of knowing.

Finally, this defence of the “local” also implies a return to simplicity in practices and ways of consuming and producing food. The participants define simplicity as a way to return to themselves as part of Nature (P4, P8, P9) and to reconnect with the integral and the traditional, in opposition to modernity and processed foods (P1, P4, P7, P8, P9). It becomes a way to build internal and external well-being:

That connection with Nature comes from within, more than from an environment... It’s the contact with the essential, as if the essence of food is also in that naturalness, right? (P8)

This also points toward letting other living beings be by humans adapting to Nature rather than forcing it to adapt to us (P3, P9), or by humans supporting and defending Nature’s processes (P1, P5).

This approach brings a local, spiritual, and traditional dimension to food and Nature, fostering communal ownership and turning food into a bridge to build and transform our relationship with place and our sense of belonging to it (Portocarrero Lacayo, 2024). P4 and P8's connection to local producers and ancestral flavours reflect an attempt to engage more directly with the cultural conditions that shape their lives and their identity linked to the territory. By engaging with local producers, they recognise the importance of understanding and addressing the factors that influence food production and distribution within their own communities and initiatives. Furthermore, by appreciating local flavours, they connect with knowledge rooted in their ancestors' traditions and cultural history.

I had the opportunity to travel and learn about the cashew production process in Vichada, which was an experience that first connected me with my country (P8)

Cocoa is a goddess that opens your heart and allows you to feel and see much more of the love around you. We usually think of it as just sweet. But if you connect with the energy of cocoa, you can connect with that heritage and appreciate it a lot more (P4)

Finally, the return to simplicity translates into a *de-homogenisation* of patterns of thought, food production and consumption models, and the construction of bodies produced by agribusiness, inviting diversity and openness to alternatives against homogenising globalisation (Leff, 2003, 2022). This approach to food enables the acceptance of diverse ways of life linked to cultural diversity at the local level, thereby facilitating the construction of new relationships and rationalities that sustain them. The following statement by P7 exemplifies how this process unfolds.

I believe strongly in the power of bonding, which is why I really like the word. I think that's what you lose when things are done on a large scale, and in mass production, you lose the connection with the particularities. For example, this bread has such small, detailed elements that make it unique, that make you have a very affective bond with it, very particular, singular, compared to industrial bread, where they are all the same, as there is a homogenisation of food. And so, if that's what the food is like, that's what the bodies that consume that food will be like, and that's what the minds of those bodies will think like.

Beyond the market episteme

The politicisation of food and the return to the local are accompanied by principles sustained in an epistemology that transcends the market episteme. Most initiatives aim not to generate profit through their actions, but to improve the relationships between people and their environments, promote wellbeing by developing a connection with Nature through food production and consumption practices, and

educate people about internal and external care. Thus, the alternative food values advocated by participants are expressed in social, psychological, ecological, cultural, and spiritual terms that redefine their approach to food and Nature. This is evidenced by the importance P2 attributes to the urban farm for her emotional well-being and by P9's account of the mental and spiritual closeness to nature through food:

When you have problems, you come here, you get in touch with Nature, and it changes your thinking, and your feelings (P2)

Food provided me with numerous insights into the mental, thought, and spiritual aspects, granting me a better understanding of the way Nature really works (P9)

Food is being redefined in opposition to economic and instrumental rationality, aimed at configuring new identities and knowledge that revalue and re-signify Nature and the processes linked to food production. The focus shifts from a production-centred approach to a community-centred and solidarity-based perspective, emphasising social practices based on care, sharing, solidarity, and community-building, as P4, P2 and P6 state:

This is not about me, it's about precisely building that community around food (P4)

I donate my time so that someone else can learn what I have learned in another way, right? For people everything is money, I don't teach if you don't pay me. Everyone has their own way of thinking, but I try to break paradigms in that sense (P2)

Apart from the economic aspect, which was nice, it was also great that people started to consume and connect with the bread that we made (P6)

These alternatives propose to subvert the economic model under which the dominant food system is structured. Harvey (2014) argues that in the current social model, the use value of commodities is subordinated to their exchange value so that economic value shapes the rest of the social spheres. However, these initiatives contest this imperative, as they seek to reduce the impersonal nature of the market

(Matacena & Corvo, 2020; Porcheddu, 2022) by placing a different value on food based on the elements discussed above. It could be argued that these alternatives are developing a process of '*decommodification*' of food (Matacena & Corvo, 2020; Porcheddu, 2022; Pretty, 2002) as the economic relations maintained through food are re-internalised within a new form of social and ecological relations, not only making visible the nature of labour and the unjust social and ecological structures necessary to produce it, but also by shifting the exchange value – use value relationship. Consequently, the exchange value of food is subordinated to food's use value, thereby losing significance compared to its cultural, social, environmental, and spiritual dimensions. This perspective detaches food from pursuing economic profit, as evidenced by the objectives pursued by the participants through their initiatives, which are linked to working with food as a way of safeguarding "our common home" (P3), nurturing community and family well-being, supporting biodiversity regeneration practices, preserving biocultural heritage, and promoting self-care.

However, some initiatives still retain the logic of the market and exchange value, which means that de-commodification is only partial, as Matacena and Corvo (2020) demonstrate. These initiatives "do not transform the essence of value itself but rather have the effect of producing a valorisation of products and relationships" (p. 427), where the exchange value reflects the conditions of their production more fairly. Nonetheless, they face serious obstacles, as their prices are not competitive with industrialised foods, making their products accessible and affordable to a limited population. It has forced them to concentrate their efforts on a specific niche. This is the case for plant-based "dairy" products (P8) and agroecological foods such as cocoa (P4).

Despite the above, the modern logic of accumulation and consumption is contested, breaking with related patterns. This is reflected both in the motivations behind the initiatives, as P3 states, and in the ways of consuming food, which relate to the act of eating in itself, as P7 describes. This shows how lived experiences also contest the dominant logic of the food system in private spheres.

Here on the farm, I see a way to operate with love and social purpose, not focused on generating sales, but on building social fabric and producing food with consciousness (P3)

For me, eating is closely related to consumption, to what I consume, but also as a relationship with this consumption, which is not like hoarding. It has more to do with listening to my body, like a connection with my digestion, with what I consume, how good it makes me, how I feel, how it makes me feel (P7)

Similarly, there is a search for equity and justice through cooperation, where production is not driven by profit but by meeting needs (Jones & Tobin, 2018; Tilzey, 2017), which is linked to the strengthening of food *redistribution over accumulation* (McGreevy et al., 2022). This is demonstrated by how, for example, ASOGRANG has sought to open spaces for the redistribution of food so that it reaches people who need it, beyond the hoarding that is linked to the dynamics of the market, as mentioned by P1:

Whether we sell or not (at the farmers' market), it doesn't matter to them (the local authorities). They don't care if someone has to return to their farms with their products because we don't have their support. There is the food bank, so whatever is left, let us take it to the food bank, right? Instead of throwing it away or returning it to the farm.

In this context of changing economic values around food, the politicisation of food, and the growing awareness and defence of local food production, the concepts of food and Nature are being redefined to forge new futures outside the economic imperative that sustains the food industry. This is based on developing different relationships between human beings, Nature, and food, which underpin their struggles.

Harvesting changes

Throughout this research, I have sought to understand and analyse how different alternative food initiatives relate to Nature and how they envision, advocate, and cultivate changes in the dominant food system in Bogotá. In doing so, I aimed to conceptualise and understand how they relate to Nature through food and, based on that, explore the transformations that are taking place in the food system in urban settings.

Alternative food initiatives in Bogota shape socio-natural relations by promoting relational values linked to Nature. Their relationship with Nature is supported by lived experiences centred on food, as these have nurtured a sense of relationality characterised by an awareness of interconnectedness and interdependence among all living beings. This sense of relationality has led them to develop caring practices, fostering socio-natural relations rooted in empathy and reciprocity. Through these practices—which involve self-care, care for the community, other living beings, and the environment—the participants manifest a connection with Nature, envisioning a food system based on common well-being.

Understanding how contact with food has influenced their relationship with Nature, participants have advocated for nurturing a sense of interconnectedness with food and Nature within their immediate social environments. They have cultivated communities to promote embodied experiences and knowledge-sharing spaces, fostering closeness and connection with food, their communities, and Nature. It highlights how embodied interactions with food promote individual and immediate social environment transformations. Supporting the development of this sense of interdependence has become an element of change concerning the forms of relationship that the current food system has sustained – based on an instrumental rationality linked to market values. The participants have problematised this rationality as it has promoted a food system disconnected from the social and environmental conditions that underpin food production, which, together with modern urban dynamics, has led to a sense of alienation from Nature and a disconnection from food and one's body– as part of Nature. In this sense, food is

positioned as a bridge between external and internal well-being, prompting practices of care for Nature, the community, and individuals.

Considering the relationality that unfolds in the food system, participants advocate for building relationships that recognise the social and environmental factors that underlie food production and consumption. These struggles have materialised in political scenarios in which participants have been involved in practices of reappropriation and redefinition of food practices linked to the defence of food security, the protection of local seeds, the strengthening of community practices, participation in alternative food markets and the creation of networks between different actors. These efforts have reinforced the social fabric by promoting the development of spaces for participation and decision-making and consolidating closer and fairer social relations.

This struggle goes hand in hand with advocacy for the consumption of less processed local foods to challenge the market imperative based on the convenience of ultra-processed foods and the invisibility of its production's social and environmental conditions. To this end, the different initiatives have promoted and defended the recovery of local knowledge and ingredients and traditional food production practices by opening spaces for dialogue and exchanging knowledge with various communities. These practices have led to the reappropriation of ancestral values and the emergence of feelings of attachment to the territory, opening spaces to de-homogenise the food practices imposed by the dominant food system and promoting the integration of different ways of relating to food.

All these processes contest the neoliberal model under which the food system is structured. Food is no longer seen as a mere commodity but as an element that promotes reconnection to the place of origin, favouring the resurgence and preservation of cultural elements, enhancing the social fabric, and facilitating reconnection with Nature and their communities. This has led to a partial de-commodification of food, as its exchange value is subordinated to values linked to individual, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, challenging the current logic of consumption and accumulation.

The transformative potential of these initiatives lies in cultivating caring relationships centred on food, communities, and Nature to challenge the dominant food system imperatives. By using food as a catalyst for social change, they have demonstrated its central role in their political, social, cultural, and environmental struggles. Their efforts have reshaped local food systems, paving the way for new ways of relating to themselves, other living beings, and the Earth itself.

Having shown that the relational dimensions of various food initiatives foster care practices and strengthen social cohesion, future research could explore how these alternatives develop alternative practices of social reproduction around food. While this aspect emerged tangentially in this study, deepening its analysis could enrich the discourse on how these alternatives challenge prevailing social and food paradigms.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide in English

1. Could you share a bit of your story?
2. How did you get involved in food production, especially in the urban context?
What was the motivation behind it?
3. What has this project meant to you?
4. What does producing food mean to you?
5. What does Nature mean to you? How would you describe your relationship with it?
6. How did you relate to Nature before starting this project? Has this relationship changed since then?
7. Since you started, do you think your relationship with Nature has changed? If so, in what way?
8. How has your learning about food production evolved over time? How have you stayed informed, updated, or approached the knowledge you now have about food production?
9. How has your way of relating to work and food production impacted your perception of the world?
10. During the development of this project, what were the main challenges you encountered? (at the Global, National, and Local level)
11. Discussing your process and project development, let's move to a more personal question. How would you define yourself as a person?
12. How do you perceive the future of these food practices?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide in Spanish

1. Podría compartir un poco de su historia.
2. ¿Cómo se involucró en la producción de alimentos? ¿Cómo se involucró en la producción de alimentos en el contexto urbano? ¿Cuál fue la motivación para hacerlo?
3. ¿Qué ha significado este proyecto para usted?
4. ¿Qué significa para usted producir alimentos?
5. ¿Qué significa para usted la Naturaleza? ¿Cómo describiría su relación con esta?
6. Antes de iniciar con este proyecto, ¿cómo se relacionaba con la Naturaleza? ¿Crees que ha cambiado esta relación desde que comenzó este?
7. Desde que empezó, ¿cree que su relación con la Naturaleza ha cambiado? ¿En qué sentido?
8. ¿Cómo ha sido su aprendizaje sobre la producción alimentaria a lo largo de este tiempo? ¿Cómo se ha mantenido informado, actualizado o cómo se ha aproximado al conocimiento que ahora tiene sobre la producción de alimentos?
9. ¿Cómo su forma de relacionarte con el trabajo y la producción de alimentos ha impactado en su forma de percibir el mundo?
10. Durante el desarrollo del proyecto. ¿Cuáles han sido los principales desafíos que ha encontrado? (a nivel Global, Nacional, Local)
11. Habiendo hablado de su proceso y desarrollo del proyecto, pasemos a una pregunta un poco más personal. ¿Cómo se define como persona?
12. ¿Cómo percibe el futuro de este tipo de prácticas?