

From Plate to Policy: The Role of Collaborative Governance in Sustainable Urban Food Transformation

The Case Study of Malmö, Sweden

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Thesis for the fulfilment of the
Master of Science in Environmental Management and Policy
Lund, Sweden, May 2026



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Published in 2026 by IIEEE, Lund University, P.O. Box 196, S-221 00 LUND, Sweden,
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ISSN 1401-9191

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Yuliya Voytenko Palgan, for her wise guidance and continuous support throughout the whole thesis process. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all participants of this study who generously took their time to share their knowledge and insights. Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends who have shown endless support and unconditional love.

Abstract

Urban food systems are increasingly recognised as critical arenas for addressing sustainability challenges related to climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, and social inequality. In response, cities are adopting collaborative governance approaches that engage public authorities, civil society organisations, academia, and private actors in collective efforts to transform food systems. This study examines the role of collaborative governance in supporting sustainable urban food transformation in Malmö, Sweden, through a qualitative case study of Malmö Food Council. Drawing on Emerson et al.'s (2012) Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance, the research analyses how collaboration among food system stakeholders is organised and how governance dynamics influence collective action. The study identifies enabling factors including shared recognition of food system challenges, facilitative leadership, local sustainability networks, and institutional support through funding and policy alignment. At the same time, collaboration is constrained by fragmented governance structures, uneven stakeholder participation, limited institutionalisation, and resource dependency. The study concludes that collaborative governance can strengthen local capacity for sustainability transformation by fostering collective learning and coordination among stakeholders. However, its transformative potential remains dependent on stronger institutional support, inclusive participation, and long-term political commitment.

Keywords: collaborative governance; urban food system; sustainability transformation; transformation intermediary; Food Policy Council; Malmö

Executive Summary

The global food system is increasingly recognised as a major contributor to climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and social inequality. In response, cities are adopting collaborative governance approaches that engage public authorities, civil society organisations, academia, and private actors in efforts to support sustainable food system transformation. Despite growing interest in collaborative governance within urban food systems, limited research has examined how these governance arrangements operate in practice and what factors shape their effectiveness. This thesis investigates the role of collaborative governance as a transformation intermediary in supporting sustainable urban food transformation in Malmö, Sweden, through a qualitative case study of Malmö Food Council.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the research is to analyse what role collaborative governance plays in sustainable food transformation in Malmö, Sweden using the case study of Malmö Food Council. This is done by examining how governance processes are structured and what factors support or constrain effective collaboration among actors.

RQ 1. What role does collaborative governance, as exercised through the Malmö Food Council, play in supporting or impeding sustainable food transformation in Malmö?

- RQ 1.1 How is the collaboration process structured by urban food system stakeholders in Malmö Food Council?
- RQ 1.2. What supports and hinders this collaboration process, and how they affect sustainable food transformation?

Methodology and research design

To answer these research questions, the study applies Emerson et al.'s (2012) Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance to analyse how collaborative governance processes are structured and what factors enable or constrain collaboration among urban food system stakeholders. Empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The collected data were transcribed and coded for analysis.

Main findings

The main research question asks what role collaborative governance, as exercised through Malmö Food Council, plays in supporting or impeding sustainable food transformation in Malmö. The findings demonstrate that collaborative governance plays an important intermediary role by facilitating communication, coordination, and collective learning among actors engaged in food system initiatives. Malmö Food Council functions as a collaborative platform that connects fragmented actors and sectors within Malmö's urban food system and creates opportunities for knowledge exchange, relationship-building, and joint problem framing. Through these collaborative processes, the council contributes to strengthening local sustainability initiatives and enabling experimentation with alternative approaches to food

governance. However, the findings also show that collaborative governance alone is insufficient to achieve systemic transformation due to institutional fragmentation, uneven participation, limited political authority, and dependence on temporary funding structures.

The first sub-question examines how the collaboration process is structured among urban food system stakeholders within Malmö Food Council. The analysis shows that collaboration is structured through a membership-based multi-stakeholder platform consisting of representatives from civil society, academia, food businesses, producers, regional authorities, and municipal or regional actors. The governance structure is organised through members, working groups, board representatives, and a coordinating core group that facilitates communication and strategic direction. The collaborative process is largely characterised by informal and horizontal interaction rather than hierarchical decision-making. *Principled engagement* occurs through meetings, workshops, and thematic working groups where actors deliberate on shared food system challenges and explore possible solutions collectively. *Shared motivation* is developed through recognition of common sustainability concerns and mutual interdependence among stakeholders. *Capacity for joint action* is supported through knowledge-sharing, local sustainability networks, and facilitative leadership within the council. At the same time, participation within the collaborative process remains uneven, with stronger engagement from small-scale food actors, academia, and civil society organisations than from larger businesses and municipal departments.

The second sub-question investigates what supports and hinders the collaboration process and how these factors influence sustainable food transformation. Several *enabling factors* were identified throughout the analysis. First, *existing sustainability agendas* at global, national, and regional levels created favourable political conditions for local food governance initiatives in Malmö. Funding opportunities and policy alignment supported the establishment and continuation of collaborative activities. Second, *facilitative leadership* and strong *local sustainability networks* contributed to building trust, maintaining stakeholder engagement, and coordinating collaborative activities. Third, collaborative governance supported *collective learning* by creating spaces where stakeholders could exchange knowledge, discuss challenges, and develop shared understandings of sustainability issues within the urban food system.

However, the findings also identify *significant constraints* limiting the effectiveness and transformative potential of collaborative governance. *Fragmented governance structures* within the municipality constrained holistic engagement across departments and limited integration of food issues into broader governance processes. The *voluntary nature of participation* further created challenges for sustained engagement, particularly among private sector actors who lacked economic incentives to participate actively. *Resource dependency* and reliance on *project-based funding* also weakened long-term stability and institutionalisation of collaborative initiatives. In addition, *underlying power asymmetries* shaped participation and influence within the governance process, as actors with greater institutional capacity and access to resources held stronger influence over collaborative activities than smaller or marginalised actors.

The thesis concludes that collaborative governance can strengthen local capacities for sustainable urban food transformation by facilitating coordination, cross-sectoral interaction, and collective learning among food system stakeholders. Malmö Food Council demonstrates

how Food Policy Councils may function as transformation intermediaries that connect actors, initiatives, and governance levels within urban sustainability governance. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the transformative potential of collaborative governance depends on stronger institutional integration, broader participation, stable financial support, and long-term political commitment. The study contributes to literature on collaborative governance and urban food systems by providing empirical insights into how collaborative governance processes are organised in practice and how Food Policy Councils may support sustainability transformation within urban food systems.

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Abbreviations (if required)

AFN	Alternative Food Network
CGR	Collaborative Governance Regime
CRFS	City Region Food System

EU	European Union
FPC	Food Policy Council
IFCG	Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance
MFC	Malmö Food Council
RQ	Research Question
UFS	Urban Food Strategies

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Food system sustainability challenge

The global food system has been widely recognised as a major contributor to the ecosystem degradation and climate change by many scholars (Marsden & Sonnino, 2012; Willett et al., 2019; Lever & Sonnino, 2022). Food system is widely argued as a “major driver of climate change, land-use change and biodiversity loss, depletion of freshwater resources, and pollution of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems” that contributed to crossing planetary boundaries and disrupting the Earth system across climate change, biosphere integrity, and biogeochemical flows (Springmann et al., 2018, p.1). It is further warned once those planetary boundaries, defining a safe operating space for humanity based on environmental thresholds, are crossed, environmental sustainability along with humanity will be at risk (Springmann et al., 2018).

According to te Wierik et al. (2025), food system is a dominant driver of planetary boundary transgressions in biosphere integrity, land system change, freshwater change and biogeochemical flows and a contributing driver of transgressions in climate change and novel entities. Furthermore, te Wierik et al. (2025) argue that the global food system is beyond safe operating space for food systems in all nine planetary boundaries. Thus, the authors urgently call for an action to transform food system and move to safe operating space.

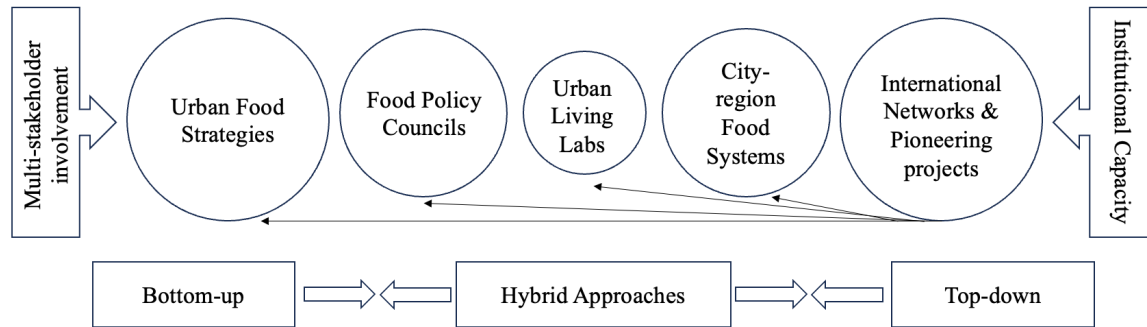
1.1.2 Drivers of food system challenge

Béné et al. (2019) introduce 12 key drivers of food system challenge within the systems of consumption, production, and distribution. Except for a few deliberate drivers such as technological innovation and internationalisation of private investments, most of drivers are identified as unintentional (Béné et al., 2019). Among these unintentional principal drivers, urbanisation is identified as a major influence over demand growth accelerated by population growth since 1960s (Béné et al., 2019). In fact, urbanisation has shifted not only consumption patterns but also the way of food production, supply chain, and social perception of food (Seto & Ramankutty, 2016; Rocha & Pires, 2025). These invisible connections between urbanisation and food system have placed significant pressure on cities and acknowledged cities as critical levers for food system transformation (Zhang, 2016; Rocha & Pires, 2025). Especially the fact that multiple actors and institutions related to food system are aggregated within limited spatial boundary enables cities to facilitate transformations efficiently (Ostrom, 2010). Despite the great potential of cities to facilitate changes, significant limitations are highlighted such as lack of coordination among decision-making bodies and diverse governance arrangements within food system (van Bers et al., 2019). In order to achieve sustainability transformation, Donner et al. (2024) emphasises that participatory and inclusive form of governance arrangement should be ensured. Several studies acknowledge participatory and inclusive multi-actor governance models are condition for addressing sustainability challenges as well as ecological and social justice within food system (Hammelman et al., 2020; Fesenfeld et al., 2023). It is further highlighted that without properly engaging non-state actors to decision making and local level development can cause further vulnerability to climate change and sustainability risks (McNaught, 2024).

1.1.3 Urban food governance structure and approaches

Urban food governance consists of diverse range of actors, institutions, infrastructures, flow of food, and governance arrangement in the process of production, distribution, consumption and food waste management (Preiss et al., 2017). Rocha and Pires (2025) categorised urban food governance approach into three types based on how decision power in shaping food policies is distributed: Top-down, Bottom-up, and Hybrid.

Figure 1 Urban food governance structures and approaches



Source: Adapted from Rocha and Pires (2025)

Top-down approach is when national or regional governments determine institutional frameworks and local actors are expected to implement local strategies based on the frameworks (Rocha & Pires, 2025). The bottom-up approach is when local agencies such as municipal departments, civil organisations, or grassroot initiatives adapt policies to local contexts (Rocha & Pires, 2025). The hybrid approach is introduced as a more integrated concept that emphasises dynamic interactions across governance levels (Rocha & Pires, 2025). The authors argue that hybrid and integrative approach is vital to achieve sustainable urban food system and resolve sociopolitical complexities in food system through fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration (Rocha & Pires, 2025).

Moragues-Faus (2021) further highlights that urban food governance increasingly operates through collaborative and translocal governance arrangements that extend beyond conventional municipal governance structures. The author argues that cities are becoming increasingly important actors within sustainability governance as they engage in cross-sectoral collaboration and participate in broader city networks that facilitate policy learning, knowledge exchange, and collective action across geographical contexts. In this regard, urban food governance is no longer confined solely to local administrative processes but is increasingly shaped through interconnected governance relations operating across local, regional, national, and transnational scales. Such developments reflect broader transformations in governance structures where responsibilities for food-related sustainability challenges are distributed among multiple state and non-state actors rather than concentrated solely within state institutions.

Although there have been many studies conducted on integrative governance arrangement on urban food system such as participatory governance approach supporting transitioning process (Sanz Sanz et al., 2023), challenges and opportunities in transformative governance arrangement (Luger et al., 2025), collaborative governance conditions in local food system (Kang et al., 2022),

it is acknowledged by scholars that there is yet limited empirical evidence on how the integrative and collaborative governance arrangement can effectively drive systemic transformation in urban food system.

1.2 Problem Definition

1.2.1 Multi-stakeholder collaboration in food governance

Within the emerging urban food governance scholarship, the involvement of diverse actors and strengthening of collaboration between state and non-state actors in the food system have gained significant traction (Rocha & Pires, 2025; Sonnino, 2023). Connecting actors and involving them in governance process is critical to address gaps in unsustainability paths of food system, and limited interaction between actors can hinder clear shaping of urban strategies for sustainable food system (Rocha & Pires, 2025). In line with this movement, several innovative food governance initiatives are adopted such as Food Policy Council (FPC), Urban Food Strategies (UFS), City Region Food System (CRFS), and alternative food network (AFN).

FPC serves as a deliberative platform for multiple stakeholders' involvement and allows actors to promote changes and foster reflections on food (Fattibene et al., 2023). UFS is an action plan that is generally developed by local authorities often with academic institutions which aims to interconnect relevant other fields such as social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and public health. (Minotti et al., 2022; Rocha & Pires, 2025). CRFS is introduced as an inclusive structure that integrates urban and rural food systems beyond city-centric vision and enhance territorial strategies for more cohesive food systems (Blay-Palmer et al., 2018). AFN is an alternative model that overcomes limitations of conventional supply chain by promoting local production and shortening supply chains as a whole (Gori & Castellini, 2023). Among these arrangements, FPCs are repetitively recognised as a collaborative governance model engaging diverse stakeholders in addressing food system challenges, but accountability, power asymmetries, lack of institutionalisation, and symbolic participation are pointed out as remaining limitations to achieve balanced collaboration (Sieveking, 2019; Sonnino, 2023). Therefore, further research is needed to understand challenges and limitations of FPCs, as well as when and how they have a potential to contribute to sustainable food transformations in cities.

1.3 Aim and Research Question

The aim of the research is to analyse what role collaborative governance plays in sustainable food transformation in Malmö, Sweden using the case study of Malmö Food Council (MFC). This is done by examining how governance processes are structured and what factors support or constrain effective collaboration among actors.

RQ 1. What role does collaborative governance, as exercised through the Malmö Food Council, play in supporting or impeding sustainable food transformation in Malmö?

- RQ 1.1 How is the collaboration process structured by urban food system stakeholders in Malmö Food Council?

- RQ 1.2. What supports and hinders this collaboration process, and how they affect sustainable food transformation?

1.4 Scope and Delimitation

1.4.1 Geographic scope – Malmö, Sweden

Malmö is Sweden's third-largest city that is committed to climate neutrality by 2030 as a signatory member of Klimatkontrakt 2030, including reducing food-related emissions (Malmö Stad, 2026). Malmö has implemented multiple collaborative food governance initiatives since the adoption of *Policy for sustainable development and food - The City of Malmö* in 2010 which had two main environmental goals: First, all food served in Malmö should be organic by 2020; second, reduce greenhouse gas emissions relating to food procurement by 40 % by 2020 from 2002 level (Malmö Stad, 2023). Malmö city has reached 30% food-related emissions reduction and 70% meals served in Malmö are organic which is beyond the national target (Malmö Stad, 2023). The city also highlighted its effort in ensuring collaboration with internal (state actor) and external stakeholders (non-state actor) related to food system by building local actor coalition such as Klimatkontrakt Malmö (Climate contract Malmö) and MFC for climate transition (Malmö Stad, 2025; Malmö Food Council, n.d). However, systematic analysis on how collaborative governance process is structured among food system stakeholders, what supports or hinders effective collaboration in governance process, and how the tension within current governance approach is managed are largely underexplored. Especially, holistic study in clear articulation of what roles MFC, Malmö's local collaborative governance model, plays throughout sustainable food transformation initiatives and how this has impacted food system governance dynamic needs to be addressed. As Malmö city is in the process of renewing its food policy after the termination of previous policy in 2020, the findings from this empirical study on collaborative governance analysis in Malmö's food system will be able to provide timely support to its policy and governance structure renewal.

1.4.2 Topic scope

This research aims to analyse the collaborative governance structure and identify enabling and constraining factors of effective collaboration. The geographical scope of the study is the municipality of Malmö located in the southwestern part of Skåne County in Sweden. The selected case for this study is MFC – membership-based multi-stakeholder platform where public (from both local and regional authorities), private, and civil society organisation are gathered to convene and implement sustainable food initiatives. The case is selected based on geographical relevance of the project as well as collaborative characteristics among multiple actors of the initiatives. The MFC is a central actor in urban food system in Malmö which connects diverse state and non-state actors as well as act as a key stakeholder representing food sustainability in Klimatkontrakt Malmö (Climate contract Malmö). As this study aims to focus on how the food system is collaboratively governed by diverse local actors, MFC is a suitable case to be studied.

This research has some limitations. It is not analysing effectiveness of the collaborative governance initiatives or impact of the selected governance approaches as the scope of the study

is limited to focus on process and structure of the governance initiatives. Moreover, the result or impact of each case in sustainable food transformation initiative will not be measured or included to the analysis as the focus will be limited to research on enabling factors and barriers of collaborative governance and not on success or failure of each action implemented by these governance structures. As the term collaborative governance is understood in varied ways by different scholars, in this study the collaborative governance will be regarded as a broad cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder collaboration concept proposed by Emerson et al. (2012), Ansell and Gash (2008), and Bryson et al. (2006). This is to include wide range of cross-sectoral collaborations emerged within urban food governance field and not only be limited to formally institutionalised governance models. Finally, it is acknowledged that there is resource limitation within given timeframe for the thesis project, financial limitation as this research is not funded, and language limitation as main source of information are written in English or translated to English from Swedish.

1.5 Ethical consideration

This research is not funded or supported by any external organisation, and no one is in a position to unduly influence the analysis or conclusions. In order to ensure integrity, all research procedures, including data collection, coding, and thematic analysis are documented in a transparent manner. Findings of research are reported based on empirical data and interpreted according to the theoretical frameworks used. In relation to ethical responsibilities to the subjects of research, all participants were recruited in a voluntary manner with consent and secured confidentiality. All interview participants to the study were informed with structure of interview, use of recording, and process of data handling prior to interviews. It is clearly communicated that participants could withdraw at any time without consequence during the interview process. Although this study poses generally low risk, all data collected from interviews is anonymised, and identifiable information is removed from the final output of the study. Furthermore, to safely handle personal information of participants, all identifiable personal information and data is omitted before the data is processed in coding stage. In consideration of handling data safely, all collected data, including transcripts and documents, are stored on password-protected, encrypted devices, with access limited to the researcher. All records are handled in accordance with Lund University's institutional guidelines to ensure participant confidentiality and data security.

1.6 Disposition

This thesis is structured into six chapters, each addressing a specific component of the research in a logical manner.

Chapter 1 (Introduction) outlines the background and rationale of the study by situating the sustainability challenges of the global and urban food system within contemporary academic discourse. It presents the research aim and research questions, defines the scope and delimitation of the study, and addresses ethical considerations relevant to the research process.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) establishes the theoretical foundation of the study. It reviews existing scholarship on the rescaling of food governance from national to local levels,

governance approaches in urban food systems, and the conceptualisation of collaborative governance. The chapter further introduces the concept of sustainability transformation and examines the role of FPCs as transformation intermediaries. It concludes by presenting the analytical framework that guides the empirical investigation.

Chapter 3 (Research Design and Methods) details the methodological approach adopted in the study. It justifies the use of a qualitative case study design and describes the data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The chapter also elaborates on the analytical strategy based on the Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance and reflects upon methodological limitations and considerations of validity and reliability.

Chapter 4 (Analysis and Findings) presents the results of the empirical analysis. It examines how collaborative governance processes are structured within Malmö's urban food system, with particular focus on the MFC. The chapter identifies key themes related to principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action, and highlights factors that enable or constrain effective collaboration.

Chapter 5 (Discussion) interprets the empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework. It analyses how collaborative governance contributes to sustainability transformation and critically examines the role of the MFC as a transformation intermediary across different levels of intermediation. The chapter further discusses the tensions, challenges, and opportunities associated with current governance arrangements.

Chapter 6 (Conclusion) synthesises the main findings of the study and provides answers to the research questions. It outlines the theoretical and practical contributions of the research, offers recommendations for strengthening collaborative governance in urban food systems, and identifies avenues for future research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 From National Agendas to Local Food Movements

2.1.1 Rescaling food movement from national to local

Discussions on sustainable food systems in Europe and North America have been largely framed at national (e.g. food or health strategies) or supra-national level (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, European Union Green Deal, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact), but implementations of sustainable food system initiatives have been shifted towards cities and local partnerships (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019; Sonnino et al., 2019; Galli et al., 2020; Zaharia et al., 2021). National policies set broad objectives for sustainability and rural development, but concrete promotion of sustainable food system initiatives are mainly led by municipalities and large cities in Europe (López-García et al., 2024).

National and supra-national level food policies offer the regulatory and financial context for food system transformation but often remain fragmented (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019; Galli et al., 2020; Zaharia et al., 2021). Zaharia et al. (2021) similarly identifies gaps and incoherencies that hinder transformation in the existing national policies for sustainable food system. These limitations and recognition of food-related challenges create pressures and opportunities for sub-national actors such as municipalities to develop more place-based and tailored responses (Santo & Moragues-Faus, 2019; Sonnino et al., 2019; Galli et al., 2020). By leveraging on these emerging opportunities, local authorities and local stakeholders started forming collaborative governance arrangements engaging cross-sectoral local stakeholders to collectively address food system challenges on the ground level (Moragues-Faus, 2021).

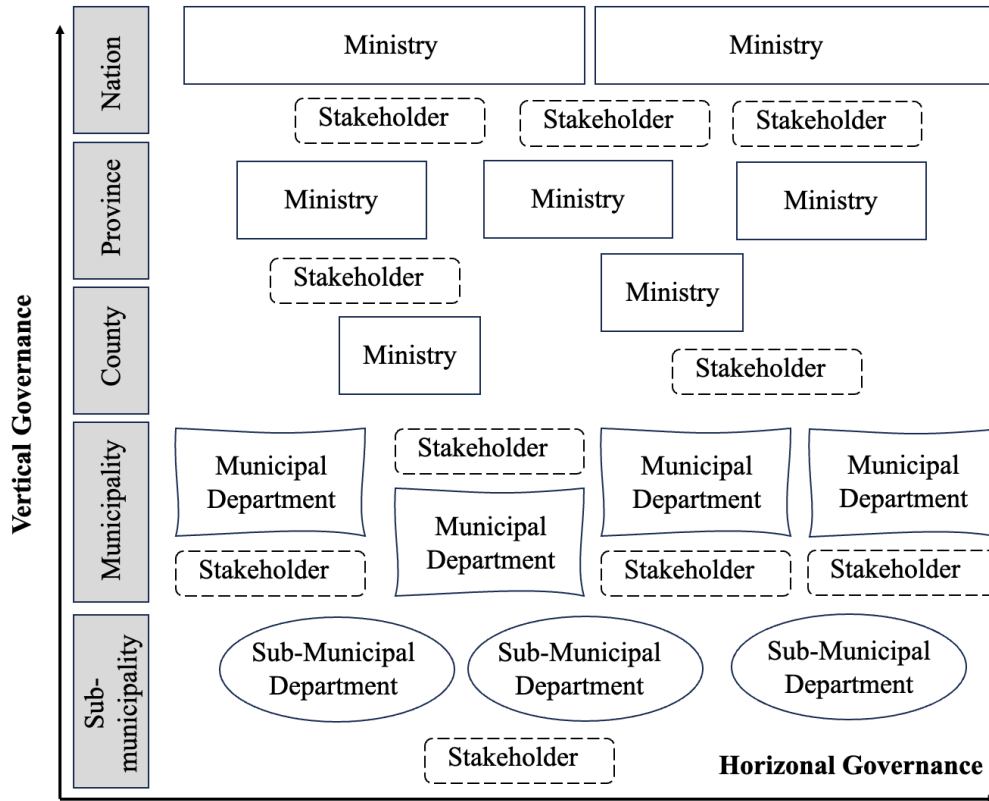
2.2 Governance Approaches in Urban Food System

2.2.1 Multi-level governance of urban food system

Cities are identified as critical spaces for food system transformation because of their multi-actor nature constitutes of civil society, local government, and the private sector (Zhang, 2016; Pereira et al., 2020; Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021; Rocha & Pires, 2025). However, food system is not confined to geographical boundary of cities. Tefft et al. (2020) illustrates governance level of food system in five layers: nation, province, county, municipality, and sub-municipality. The authors further explains that food system is governed in both vertical and horizontal ways with different level of engaging actors (Tefft et al., 2020). The vertical governance is defined as “linkages and relationships between the different levels of government, including their institutional, financial and informational aspects” and horizontal governance is defined as “connections between actors at the same level, namely between the multiple departments or agencies and diverse private and civil society actors at the municipal level” (Tefft et al., 2020, p.69). It is further argued that in terms of vertical governance, it is important to understand the clear roles and responsibilities of different levels of government as this can generate challenge in efficient governance (Tefft et al., 2020). For horizontal governance, it should be ensured that municipal governments have requisite capacities and there are effective coordination mechanisms for collaboration among horizontal level of actors such as diverse municipal departments, private sector, and civil society actors (Tefft et al., 2020). The authors also

recognises that this can be stipulated by national policies which emphasises horizontal governance is not separated from vertical governance.

Figure 2 Urban Food System Governance Relationship



Source: Adapted from Tefft et al. (2020)

As it is stated under delimitation and scope chapter, this thesis project does not focus on roles or responsibilities of regional or national authorities connected to food system, however the understanding of urban food system's governance relationship enables this study to illustrate the background of broad food system structure beyond spatial limitation of city in governance and provide proper understanding where does the local authority locate in multi-level governance structure.

2.2.2 Hybrid approach fostering collaboration among actors

It is argued that the “effective governance of urban food systems requires a hybrid approach” that fosters multi-stakeholder collaboration and adaptability (Rocha & Pires, 2025, P.12). The hybrid approach is defined as “the self-coordination among actors coming together for a common purpose, but also interacting with a diversity of agents (e.g. communities, state, entrepreneurs, businesses, and so on) towards the achievement of aspired societal objectives” (Manganelli, 2022, p.58). By adopting this definition, it can be understood that hybrid approach fosters collaborative space that enables diverse players representing different interests in food system to achieve sustainable transformation collectively (Moragues-Faus, 2017). In this approach, collaborative interaction can occur when there are agreements among grassroot and state actors and forming bottom-linked governance involving synergies between top-down and

bottom-up approaches (Moulaert et al. 2019; Manganelli, 2022). Further it is highlighted that the self-governing partnership platforms with reflexive and horizontal coordination allows actors to collaborate in food governance as well as achieve their own objectives (Manganelli, 2022).

2.3 Collaborative Governance in Food System

2.3.1 Defining collaborative governance

Collaborative governance has first received great attention by public administrative scholars as a solution to complex public issues that involves multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-sectoral challenges (Bianchi et al., 2021). The collaborative governance model received particular attention over its inclusive characteristics in involving community stakeholders in the process of designing, producing, and assessing policies (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Despite there has been substantial research done in this governance model, terminologies describing this type of governance are variegated (Bianchi et al., 2021). Some major terminologies used to describe same or related concepts over collaborative public governance include network governance (Rhodes, 1990), new public governance (Osborne, 2010), cross-sector collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006), participatory governance (Fung & Wright, 2001), and interactive governance (Torfing, 2013). Among many related terminologies, network governance and collaborative governance have been often used interchangeably as they overlap conceptually (Wang & Ran, 2021). In the core, all introduced concepts emphasise collective decision-making process for achieving common goals. In order to avoid further confusions around meaning for collaborative governance borne by variegated terminologies, this paper adopts broad definition proposed by Emerson et al. (2012), Ansell and Gash (2008), and Bryson et al. (2006). The collaborative governance is understood here as *the decentralised, multi-actor decision-making process across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres to achieve goals that could not otherwise be accomplished.*

The benefit of adopting inclusive governance model to address wicked sustainability issues are highly discussed such as lowered cost of adversarial policy making, expanded democratic participation, enhanced conflict management, and increased policy compliance (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Simultaneously, it is also warned that considering single approach as a panacea for solving multiple issues altogether should be cautioned (Emerson et al., 2012). Some major challenges identified within collaborative governance approach include substantive problem-solving challenge (e.g. difficulty in defining problem, measuring success), collaborative process challenge (e.g. trust building, reconciling different perspectives), and multi-relational accountability challenge (Waardenburg et al., 2019). Ansell and Gash (2008) further acknowledged the collaborative governance process is a time-consuming process as it takes long time to build consensus among all relevant actors and this can be difficult to be achieved with lack of trust and interdependence. This long and time-consuming process can result in high transaction cost of initiating a collaborative effort (Emerson et al., 2012). Despite of these limitations and challenges, it is pointed out that these initiating costs and efforts can eventually save time in implementation stage as the process can occur rapid with established consensus (Emerson et al., 2012).

2.3.2 Participatory forum – Food Policy Council

With enhanced acknowledgement in importance of local actions on food system transformation, diverse forms of tactical local food initiatives such as food cooperatives, community gardens, and farmers market arose that mainly aimed to promote democracy in food system (Zerbian et al., 2022; Gori & Castellini, 2023). However, limitations remain in ensuring long-term sustainability and inclusivity within those initiatives (Alkon & Mares, 2012). With the need of addressing these limitations, local authorities made efforts in forming participatory forum across sectors with both state and non-state actors where synergies across local food initiatives can occur as well as establishing urban food strategies that can support institutionalising forums (Zerbian et al., 2022). The participatory forums for urban food system, aiming to bridge diverse local actors and food initiatives, can range from independent non-profit civil organisations to local government-led public initiatives (Andreola et al., 2025). These forums are often connected to implementation or development of urban food strategies allowing relevant actors to actively take part in collaborative decision-making process and avoid limiting role of non-state actors passively (Zerbian et al., 2022). The degree of local authorities' involvement in the forums vary because of differences in political aim, available resources, and the governance culture (Zerbian et al., 2022).

The varied forms of participatory forums in urban food governance also have been labelled in different names in different countries (Michel et al., 2022). The term *FPC* is often used in North American countries, *food alliance* or *food policy coalition* in Australia, *food policy alliance* in the United Kingdom, *food council* in Germany, *food forum* in Switzerland, and *regional food project* in France (Michel et al., 2022). The most commonly used term is *FPC* as this is the name used by pioneering countries such as United States of America and Canada in establishing participatory forum for cross-sectoral actors in discussing urban food matters. Therefore, in this paper, the term *FPC* is mainly used as a term indicating abovementioned types of participatory forums with multi-stakeholders in food system. Although it has been over 40 years since the concept of collaborative urban food governance implementation through *FPCs* is introduced, the degree of maturation level varies in many European cities as this concept mainly evolved in Europe in the mid-2010s aligned with the launch of Milan Urban Food Policy Pact in 2015 (Michel et al., 2022). The *FPCs* is a good mechanism to achieve collaborative governance, still the symbolic participation by actors and lack of institutionalisation are limiting the effective utilisation of participatory forums (Sieveking, 2019; Sonnino, 2023).

The *FPCs* serve as collaboration-oriented space where diverse actors share information, define problems, discuss solutions, and pool resources to implement programs and provide recommendations for policy development (Nadeau & Koebele, 2023). The common overarching goal of *FPCs* are to create environmentally and socially sustainable food systems, but individual local forums have unique structures, rules and priorities depends on different local contexts such as food waste reduction, food security, economic success of food-related businesses (Nadeau & Koebele, 2023). The organisational type of *FPCs* is also varied as they can be embedded in a non-profit, university, government, independent grassroots organisation or independent non-profit (Nadeau & Koebele, 2023). While the ones that are embedded in governments are often focusing on recommending and enacting policies, those that have independently emerged from academic or community interests often focus on implementing

projects and advocating of policies rather than actively engaging in development process (Schiff, 2008). In terms of access to resources, government-led FPCs have more stabilised access to resources with dedicated workforce and allocated budget for project implementation compared to the ones that are not tied to government agencies (Nadeau & Koebele, 2023). Therefore, the organisational type of FPCs is important factor that affects level of capacity.

Depends on origins of establishment, the functions of FPCs are differentiated. Nunes and Lamine (2024) classifies functions into two major categories, 1) policy specific activities and 2) larger activities with sub-functions. First, policy specific activities have four sub-functions including policy advisory providing expertise, implementation of policy and public action, control, monitoring, and evaluation of policy and public action, and advocacy for political change focusing on lobbying. Second, larger activities have six sub-functions including sharing of resources, launching programs and initiatives, supporting initiatives, and generating spaces for deliberation among food stakeholders and collecting information, promoting public awareness, and conducting dialogue on community engagement (Nunes & Lamine, 2024). The authors further argue that the FPCs established by government with strong institutionalisation often focus on policy specific activities such as policy advisory and monitoring and evaluating policy and public actions. The FPCs established by network of local initiatives led by civil society with weak institutionalisation mostly focus on larger activities such as sharing resources and ideas, implement programs, and generate space for deliberation among food stakeholders.

Table 1. Function of Food Policy Councils

Policy specific activities	Policy advisory providing expertise, technical assistance and training; Implementation of policy and public action; Control, monitoring, and evaluation of policy and public action; Advocacy for political change focusing on lobbying
Larger activities with sub-functions	Sharing of resources, ideas, and information; Development, implementation, launch of programs and initiatives; Support, fund, facilitate program and initiatives; Generation of spaces for deliberation among food stakeholders; Collection and dissemination of information, promoting public awareness; Exchange and dialogue focusing on community engagement

Source: Adapted from Nunes and Lamine (2024)

2.3.3 Collaborative governance process

The collaborative process in participatory forums is varied depends on goals and characteristics of the forums, but it is commonly emphasised that the process is structured as a cyclical, multi-stage process rather than a simple linear sequence. Ansell and Gash (2008) describe collaborative process is an iterative cycle of face-to-face dialogue, trust building, commitment to the process, shared understanding, and intermediate outcomes that reinforce cooperation. Emerson et al. (2012) further elaborates that collective actions are iteratively generated by continuous process of principled engagement (discovery, definition, deliberation, determination), shared motivation (trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, commitment), and capacity for joint action

(procedural arrangement, leadership, knowledge, resources). In these two papers, the collaborative process starts with joint problem framing, deliberation, and decision-making, while building trust and mutual understanding as well as investing in capacity building. Emerson et al. (2012) highlights that all elements and steps of the collaboration process support and reinforce each other, therefore self-reinforcing interactions among these steps needs to be ensured for high quality of collaboration.

2.3.4 Enablers and constraints of collaboration in food governance

Across many empirical studies in collaborative urban food governance, several recurring enablers of effective collaboration are highlighted. First, inclusive and well-coordinated arrangement where in-person or online dialogue and consensus-oriented decision making occur can enable sustained collaboration. In the case of urban food policy co-production in Spanish cities (Córdoba, Madrid, València), creation of formal and informal arenas such as working group, assembly, and food council is considered crucial for maintaining dialogue, negotiating different interests, and further co-producing policy (Vara-Sánchez et al., 2021). Similarly, Medina-García et al. (2022) also highlights these arrangements allow actors to align goals, share resources and learn together for effective governance. The facilitative leadership is also highlighted by urban food governance studies as a central enabler to effective collaboration. The facilitative leadership help mobilising stakeholders to move collaboration forward and navigating shared goals throughout collaboration process (Medina-García et al., 2022). Lastly, broad, meaningful participation and collective learning are identified as a key enabling factor to an effective collaboration (Kang et al., 2022).

Opposed to these enabling factors, a few cross-cutting constraining barriers are further identified. Moragues-Faus (2019) and Coulson and Sonnino (2019) argue that power asymmetry and constrained participation can hinder collaborative process especially when marginalised groups participate but only have limited influence over agendas or decisions. Steyaert et al. (2023) further points out that effective participation of non-state actors is often restricted compared to state-actors. As it is mentioned earlier in this paper, interconnected climate risk such as food system sustainability issue can be aggravated without properly engaging state and non-state actors to decision making process (Hammelman et al., 2020; Fesenfeld et al., 2023; McNaught, 2024). Furthermore, symbolic participation can hinder balanced participation to collaborative process (Sieveking, 2019; Sonnino, 2023). Secondly, weak institutionalisation, unclear roles and limited administrative capacity are majorly discussed as hindering factor to effective collaboration. The lack of clearly defined roles and monitoring instruments undermine collaboration (Zerbian & de Luis Romero, 2021), unclear ambition and insufficient political commitment hinder concrete joint action implementation (Sibbing et al., 2021), and scarce funding and limited power of local government due to political cycle further constrain sustained collaboration and impact (Moragues-Faus, 2021). Lastly, several studies repeatedly point out that structural constraint of local setting is also a barrier. Often city initiatives operate with downscaled responsibilities with limited authority, resources, and weak engagement from higher governance levels (Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). Thus, urban food partnerships face limitation in scaling local innovation to systemic shift (Sonnino et al., 2019; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). Zerbian et al. (2024) points that lack of political prioritisation of food issues as one of structural obstacles to embedding collaboratively produced knowledge into formal policy.

2.4 Sustainability Transformation

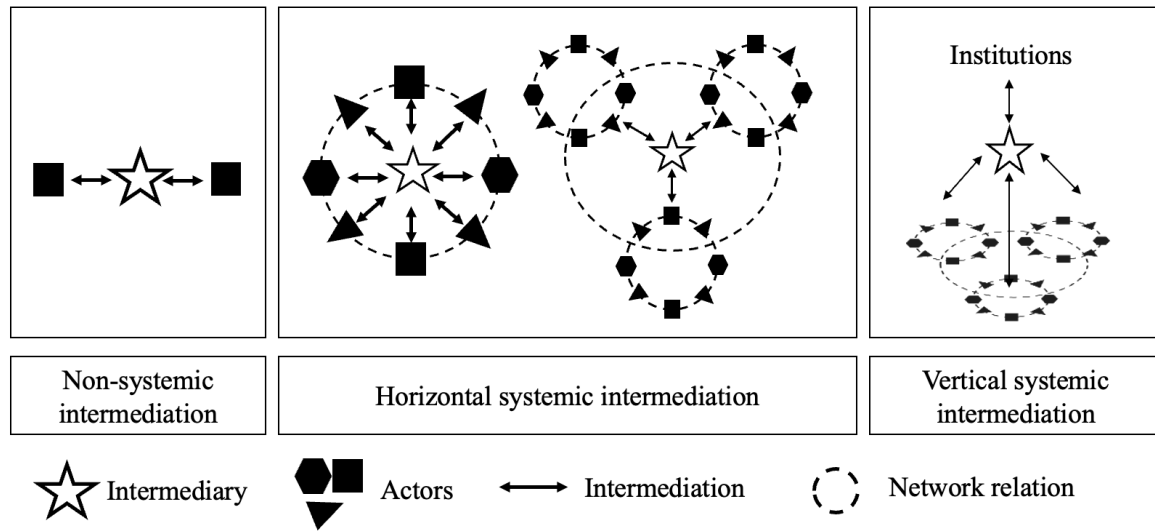
2.4.1 Sustainability transformation in urban food system

Sustainability transformation is often understood as a long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental change that involves socio-technical systemic shift in production and consumption (El Bilali, 2019; Zerbian et al., 2023). El Bilali further argues that sustainability transformation is complex for its “multi-dimensionality and co-evolution, multi-actor process, dialectic relationship between stability and change, long-term process, open-endedness and uncertainty, values contestation, and the central role of public policy” (El Bilali, 2019, p.1). In many sustainability transformation literature, it is repetitively highlighted that the transformation requires multi-actor participation to generate solutions to address sustainability problems (Frantzeskaki & Rok, 2018; Zerbian et al., 2023). Based on this wide range of discourse on transformation, cities implement several urban food governance instruments to shift urban food system towards more sustainable in the form of FPCs which can address gaps in multi-level governance contexts (Sonnino et al., 2019; Zerbian et al., 2023). With this transformation movement, several governance approaches are researched by scholars such as network governance and collaborative governance that can mobilise resources, efforts, and perspectives from different actors to form collective action (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Although there are many literatures about food governance and food system transformation, there is still limited studies on how multi-actor collaboration is structured and how they are coordinated or governed in an urban setting (Medina-García et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Food Policy Council as transformation intermediary

Many sustainability transformation scholars such as Kanda et al. (2020) argues that transformation intermediaries are key actors for stimulating the transformation process. The transformation intermediaries are generally defined as “actors and platforms that positively influence sustainability transition processes by linking actors and activities, and their related skills and resources, or by connecting transition visions and demands of networks of actors with existing regimes in order to create momentum for socio-technical system change, to create new collaborations within and across niche technologies, ideas and markets, and to disrupt dominant unsustainable socio-technical configurations” (Kivimaa et al., 2019, p. 1072). In line with this, den Boer et al. (2023) proposes to consider multi-stakeholder food network in the form of FPCs as systemic transformation intermediaries given their overarching aim to stimulate change in food system. The authors adopt three levels of intermediation concept developed by Kanda et al. (2020). According to Kanda et al. (2020)’s concept, the non-systemic intermediation occurs among individual entities such as actors, projects, and organisations. The systemic intermediation can occur horizontally within a single network or between different networks with the same goals (Kanda et al., 2020). Lastly, the systemic intermediation can also occur vertically between actor networks and their related institutions (Kanda et al., 2020).

Figure 3 Different system levels of intermediation



Source: Adapted from Kanda et al. (2020)

In the study about multi-stakeholder network in food system, den Boer et al. (2023) identifies that FPCs initiate non-systematic intermediation by supporting food entrepreneurs or citizen initiatives, providing overview of initiatives or projects, and raising awareness among actors across food system about the need for system transformation. The FPCs initiate horizontal systemic intermediation by facilitating multi-stakeholder meetings among food system actors, cross-connecting different initiatives or projects, launching multi-stakeholder projects, and building regional network (den Boer et al., 2023). The vertical systemic intermediation is initiated by providing policy advice to related institutions such as municipal government, engaging in decision making such as changing government agenda, laws, and regulations, connecting different discourses, and stimulating actor empowerment to support institutional changes (den Boer et al., 2023). As Nunes and Lamine (2024) points out, many FPCs focus on sustainability, however most are failing to provide in-depth exploration of sustainability and address different aspects of sustainability transformation. Therefore, there is a need to further analyse how the interaction or collaboration among different actors in FPCs as a transformation intermediary stimulate systemic change in food system.

Table 2. Role of Food Policy Councils at each level of intermediation

Level of intermediation	Level of interaction	Role of FPC as intermediary
Non-systemic intermediation	In-between individual actors	Support food entrepreneurs or citizen initiatives; Provide overview of initiatives or projects; Raise awareness among actors across food system
Horizontal systemic intermediation	Between diverse actors or network of other actors	Facilitate multi-stakeholder meetings among actors, Cross-connecting different initiatives or projects, Launch multi-stakeholder projects; Build regional network

Vertical systemic intermediation	Between institutions and network of other entities	Provide policy advice to related institutions; Engage in decision making in institutional level; Stimulate actor empowerment to support institutional changes
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Source: Adapted from den Boer et al. (2023)

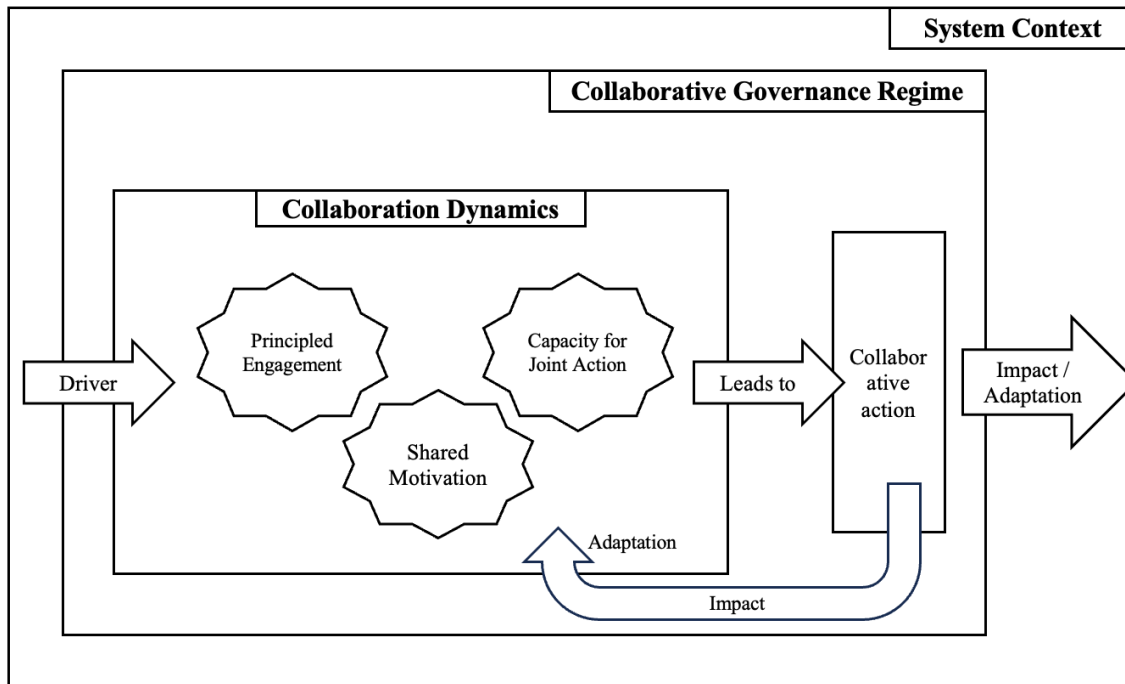
2.5 Analytical Framework on Urban Food Governance

2.5.1 Integrative framework for collaborative governance

This study adopts Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance (IFCG) by Emerson et al. (2012) as its primary analytical foundation. As it is discussed above, collaborative governance is favoured by many scholars as an effective governance model for engaging multi-stakeholders in urban food system. As this framework is developed for analysing collaborative governance process, it is well suited to analyse the governance process in urban food system and identify enabling and hindering factors to effective governance. This framework is designed based on relevant conceptual frameworks such as cross-sectoral collaboration, collaborative planning, collaborative process, collaborative governance, and environmental governance with enhanced applicability for different settings or sectors (Emerson et al., 2012). Therefore, it is overall well aligned with the research aim of this thesis. Furthermore, the specified elements within each component part of the framework will provide indicators and navigating guidance to establish interview questionnaire for semi-structured interviews for qualitative data collection as well as data analysis of this study.

Emerson et al. (2012)'s integrative framework consists of three dimensions. The outermost dimension is a system context that represents surrounding space of collaborative governance regime (Emerson et al., 2012). The system context is used to analyse legal, political, and institutional conditions of selected collaborative governance initiatives in scope (Emerson et al., 2012). This system context is not part of collaborative governance regime (CGR) but rather it is the host of political, legal, socioeconomic, and environmental influences that affect CGR (Emerson et al., 2012). Some major elements of system context in the framework include resource condition, policy and legal framework, prior failure, and historic level of conflicts. These elements from the system context generate drivers that are essential to begin CGR (Emerson et al., 2012). It is emphasised by the author that initiating collaborative effort is accompanied by high transaction cost, therefore drivers of leadership, incentives, and interdependence are necessary for initiation.

Figure 4. Elaboration of Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance



Source: Adapted from Emerson et al. (2012)

The middle dimension is CGR where collaborative dynamics and collaborative actions are operated and implemented. The CGR is a central part in this integrative framework as it is a space where cross-boundary collaboration for public decision making occurs (Emerson et al., 2012). The CGR is induced by the drivers, however the development of CGR is majorly influenced by collaborative dynamics and actions (Emerson et al., 2012).

The innermost dimension is collaboration dynamics that consists of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. The collaborative dynamics is understood as iterative and interactive way to produce collaborative actions. It is described as iterative or cyclical interaction as it is not a linear process but rather facilitated in a loop (Emerson et al., 2012). The quality of collaborative dynamics depends on the interactions among three mentioned elements, therefore all three elements are individually examined with suggested indicators.

The collaborative action led by collaboration dynamics is understood as both processes and outcomes rather than a mere outcome of a linear collaborative process. This is regarded as a joint action resulted by iterative interaction within collaborative dynamics. The case selected for this thesis can be considered as a collaborative action in this context that induces sustainability transformation as a transformation intermediary. As the purpose of collaboration is to achieve desired outcomes together, the collaborative action case shall be analysed in terms of meeting desired outcomes of the collective goals. However, considering the delimitation of the scope of the study, impact and adaptation process that are included to IFCG will be excluded from this study. Furthermore, as it is stated in Emerson et al. (2012), not all sub elements of each dimension are relevant or necessary for analysing collaborative governance. Therefore, only the

relevant elements to the proposed case of the study will be considered for the analysis and interview questionnaire designing.

3 Research Design and Methods

This section outlines the data sources and methodology utilised to answer the research question. It covers the choice of research design including the characteristics of qualitative research, inquiry strategies, data collection and recording procedures and data analysis methods. The section will also discuss and reflect upon the validity and reliability of this study.

3.1 Qualitative Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine how collaborative governance operates among diverse stakeholders in Malmö and how institutional and contextual factors enable or constrain collaboration towards sustainable food system transformation. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this study because collaborative governance is fundamentally relational, process-oriented, and context-dependent. Rather than measuring predefined variables or testing causal relationships, the study seeks to understand how actors interpret governance processes, construct shared meanings, negotiate priorities, and experience collaboration within a complex urban governance environment. These characteristics align closely with qualitative inquiry, which Creswell (2009) defines as an approach “for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p.22).

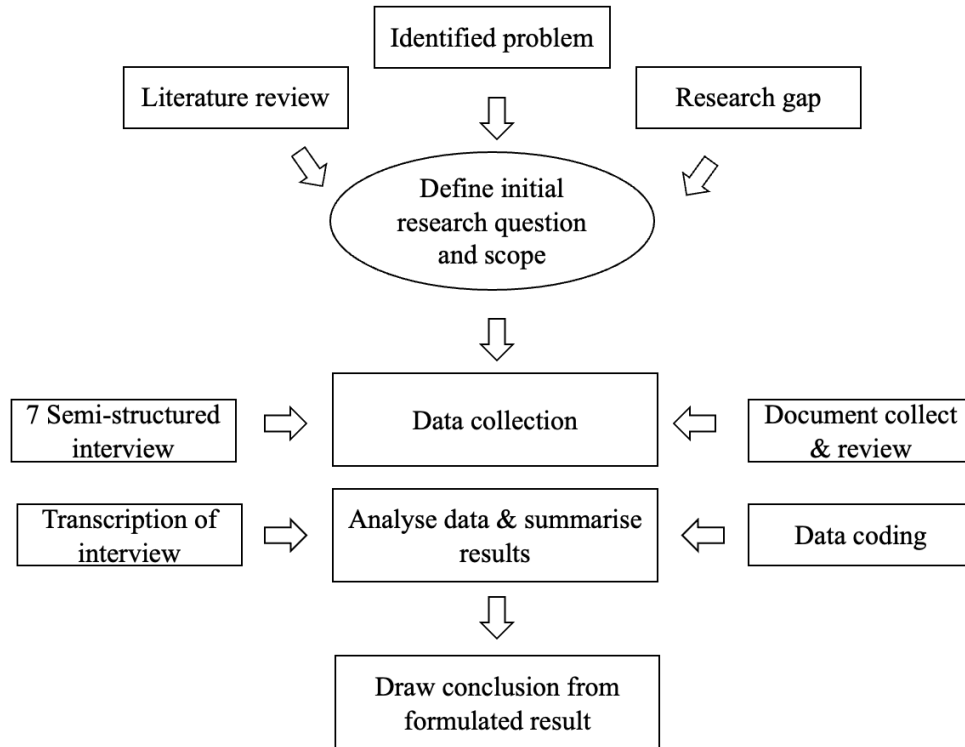
The use of a qualitative approach is further justified by the theoretical framework guiding this study. Emerson et al.’s (2012) IFCG conceptualises collaboration as an iterative and dynamic process shaped by interaction, trust-building, institutional arrangements, and shared motivation. Such relational dynamics cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone, as they require contextual interpretation and attention to actor perspectives, organisational relationships, and governance practices. A qualitative approach therefore enables a deeper understanding of how collaborative governance is experienced and operationalised in practice within the case of MFC.

Furthermore, sustainability transformation processes are inherently complex, involving multiple actors, competing interests, evolving institutional conditions, and uncertain outcomes. Qualitative research is well suited for examining these complexities because it allows exploration of governance dynamics in their real-life context rather than isolating variables from their institutional and socio-political environment. Consequently, the study prioritises interpretive understanding over causal explanation and seeks to generate in-depth insights into collaborative governance processes within urban food systems.

In order to interpret the data on collaborative governance process, this thesis focuses on meanings drawn from responses to open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders in Malmö’s urban food system. The research follows four steps. First, the research is designed based on literature review and identified problems within the scope of topic and research gap. Second, data is collected from document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Third, the collected data from second step is analysed through transcription and data coding. Lastly, results that are formulated from analysed data is interpreted based on proposed

research questions of this study. This interpretation draws conclusion and recommendation for future studies.

Figure 5. Flowchart of research methodology



Source: Own elaboration

3.2 Case Study Approach

Creswell (2009) identifies several strategies for research approach. Among listed strategies case studies are highlighted as they involve a “detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues” (Cresswell 2009, p 165). This research utilises a case study approach as collaborative governance involve multiple actors, institutional regimes and contextual factors. A wide sampling, either through a purposefully, or random design, would be too broad to sufficiently capture the research question.

This research employs a single-case study design with embedded units of analysis. The primary case is Malmö, Sweden, selected for its active engagement in sustainable urban food governance and its ongoing policy renewal processes. Malmö represents a strategically relevant case for examining collaborative governance within a decentralised governance context. Within this broader case, one embedded initiative, MFC, is analysed. This initiative represents a configuration of collaborative governance involving public authorities, civil society, private sector actors, and academic institutions. Analysing embedded cases allows for comparative insights within the same institutional and geographical setting, while maintaining contextual coherence.

A case study approach is particularly suitable because collaborative governance processes are deeply embedded within specific institutional, political, and socio-cultural contexts. Yin (2018) argues that case study research is appropriate when examining contemporary phenomena in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. This is especially relevant for collaborative governance research, as governance processes are shaped by broader policy environments, organisational structures, historical relationships, and local political cultures. The case study approach therefore enables contextualised and in-depth examination of how governance processes are structured and experienced within Malmö's urban food system.

The selection of Malmö as a strategic case is further justified by the city's reputation as a sustainability-oriented municipality and its active participation in collaborative climate and food governance initiatives. MFC represents a particularly relevant case because it illustrates the increasing use of participatory and network-based governance arrangements within urban sustainability governance. The case therefore provides valuable opportunities to examine both the opportunities and limitations of collaborative governance in practice.

3.3 Data Collection Method

Qualitative research relies on purposefully selected sites or individuals as a means to answer the research question. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, combining semi-structured interviews and document analysis to capture both actor perspectives and institutional context. Using multiple data sources enables triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

This study does not utilise observations as a form of data collection since it would involve on-site participation in multiple forums across a wide range of stakeholder groups. While such observations would constitute relevant complements to the interviews and the document analysis, the limitations in scope and time renders such an inquiry non-feasible. However, this could be a potential topic for future research as it would generate valuable insights from active execution of collaborative governance.

3.3.1 Qualitative in-depth semi-structured interview

To explore how collaborative governance operates in practice, how actors perceive enabling and constraining factors, and what motivated their engagement in the food system transformation initiatives in Malmö, 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from urban and regional office, civil society organisation, private sector, academia associated with the MFC.

Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in responses with open-ended questions. Therefore, this interview process enables respondents to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions of collaborative governance processes. Interview questions are derived deductively from the IFCG components, particularly focusing on system context, drivers, principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action. This approach ensures theoretical alignment while preserving openness to emerging themes.

Interviews were conducted 30-60 minutes on average with all participants. Total of 7 interviews were conducted. This number is chosen to effectively capture thematic saturation through interviews within limited research time (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The interviews were conducted via online meeting software and written communication to allow flexibility for interviewees. The interviews were recorded with consent (Appendix A) and transcribed using a secured transcription tool Sunet Scribe recommended by Lund University. As recordings and transcripts contain sensitive personal data, they were securely saved and processed following EU's General Data Protection Regulation and guideline provided by Lund University. Furthermore, all sensitive personal information such as name or job title of interviewees were anonymised for further process. Interview questions and guides are included in the Appendix B.

3.3.2 Recruitment of interview participants

Selection of interview participants is a key factor in this study as it highly affects the results. This study utilises a purposeful sampling method where interview participants are deliberately picked based on stakeholder group affiliation and roles within the collaborative governance regime. The study also utilises snowballing tactic by receiving connections from key stakeholders. This approach is deemed the most suitable to generate data that helps answer the research question as a high degree of experience and expertise is needed from each participant. The selection of participants aims to reflect key stakeholders within the collaborative governance structure. As such, representatives for public authorities, private sector, civil society and academia. The individuals and entities are selected based on document analysis such as reports highlighting certain sectors or entities, discussions with key stakeholders and research of which entities are likely to be engaged in collaborative governance and food systems. Specific discussions have taken place with public authorities responsible for the collaborative governance forums in order to identify relevant stakeholders and reduce the risk to interview entities that do not engage in or lack experience from collaborative governance.

Table 3 Summary of conducted interviews

Code	Representing sector	Interview method / time	Interview date
A1	Academia	Online interview / 30 minutes	2026-March-30
B1	Business	Online interview / 30 minutes	2026-March-19
R1	Regional Office Co-founder of MFC	Written interview	2026-March-25
M1	Municipal Office	Online interview / 50 minutes	2026-March-30
M2	Municipal Office	Online interview / 60 minutes	2026-March-31
N1	Non-profit Organisation	Online interview / 45 minutes	2026-March-23

P1	Producer	Online interview /45 minutes	2026-March-25
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Source: Own elaboration

3.3.3 Literature and document analysis

For a secondary data collection, document analysis is conducted. Document for review includes formal and informal reports about Malmö food strategy, policy documents related to food, sustainability, climate, and public health, national food policy and strategy document, regional food policy and strategy document, and EU food policy and strategy document. In order to reflect relevant international framework to the analysis, monitoring framework report published under Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is also included for review. Internal documents acquired from MFC are further analysed which contains detailed information on operational arrangement of the organisation.

As a preparatory work prior to conduct data collection and analysis process, academic papers published focusing on urban food system, collaborative governance, sustainable transformation, and FPCs are reviewed as part of literature review process. These academic papers are not included to the document analysis process directly, but reviewed by the researcher to fully capture current research status and trend on the said topic that is highly relevant to this research. For gathering relevant academic papers, ScienceDirect is used as a search tool. The keywords used for searching are “urban food system”, “local food system”, “urban food governance”, “food policy council”, “food council”, “alternative food network”, “collaborative governance”, “participatory governance”, “sustainable transition”, and “sustainable transformation”. The literature that is not available in English is removed from the list. Then literature with high relevance to the research topic are selected by scanning of titles and abstracts. Main criterion used for the selection of papers is relevance to the main research topic, then the date of publication and number of citations of the papers are checked to impose high priority to the recently published papers and highly cited papers.

This exercise of document analysis expected to provide insights into the formal, discursive, and institutional dimensions of collaborative governance that may not be fully captured through interviews alone. The analysis thus enables examination of how collaborative governance is formally articulated and institutionalised, and it provides contextual background for interpreting interview findings.

Table 4. List of documents for analysis

Title	Publisher
Farm to Fork Strategy	European Union
Livsmedelsstrategin 2.0	Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure
The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Monitoring Framework	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Policy för hållbar utveckling och mat för Malmö stad	Malmö stad
Organisationsstruktur	Malmö Food Council

Styrelsens verksamhetsberättelse 2024	Malmö Food Council
Styrelsens verksamhetsberättelse 2025	Malmö Food Council
Stadgar för Malmö Food Council	Malmö Food Council

Source: Own elaboration

3.4 Method for Data Analysis

Collected data from semi-structured interviews and document reviews is analysed using a theory-driven thematic approach based on Emerson et al. (2012)'s IFCG introduced in Chapter 2.5. As the study seeks to examine how collaborative governance processes are organised and what factors enable or constrain effective collaboration, the analytical strategy combines deductive and inductive reasoning. The deductive dimension is grounded in the core components of the IFCG, particularly the Collaborative Dynamics dimension (principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action), while the inductive dimension allows for the identification of context-specific patterns that emerge from empirical material. The purpose of the analysis is to generate a structured and interpretive understanding of governance processes within the selected initiative in Malmö, rather than to test hypotheses or measure outcomes. Accordingly, emphasis is placed on understanding relational dynamics, institutional arrangements, actor perceptions, and structural conditions shaping collaboration.

3.4.1 Analytical framework operationalisation

The IFCG provides the conceptual frame for organising and interpreting the empirical material. While the framework consists of several dimensions, this study operationalises selected components in line with the research scope. The analysis is structured around four main categories introduced above (System Context, Drivers, Collaborative Dynamics, Collaborative Actions).

Table 5. Selected elements of Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance for analysis

System Context	Broad political, institutional, and socio-economic environment where collaborative governance operates. It includes policy frameworks, administrative traditions, and structural conditions influencing collaboration	
Drivers	Factors that initiate or stimulate collaborative governance processes, such as leadership initiatives, funding opportunities, regulatory pressures, or recognised interdependence among actors	
Collaborative Dynamics	Principled Engagement	Inclusion mechanisms, participation structures, deliberation processes, and decision-making arrangements
	Shared Motivation	Trust, legitimacy, mutual understanding, and shared commitment among stakeholders
	Capacity for Joint Action	Institutional arrangements, procedural mechanisms, leadership structures, resource mobilisation, and knowledge-sharing capacities

Collaborative Actions	Intermediate outcomes and joint initiatives emerging from collaborative processes
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Source: Own selection from IFCG by Emerson et al. (2012)

The dimensions of adaptation and impact, also included in the original framework, are excluded from the analysis, as this study does not assess policy effectiveness or long-term outcomes. Instead, focus remains on governance processes and enabling or constraining factors.

3.4.2 Data analysis phases

The analysis is conducted with repeated readings of interview transcripts and selected relevant documents to gain an overall understanding of governance processes. Analytic memos are written during this stage to capture preliminary insights and reflections. After this familiarisation phase, coding is conducted using qualitative data analysis software NVivo to facilitate systematic organisation of material as well as achieve thematic saturation. After coding, themes are examined within each initiative to understand how collaborative governance operates in that specific context. The findings are presented thematically aligned with the collaborative dynamics dimension, directly linking empirical insights to the research questions.

3.4.3 Methodological limitation

While the qualitative analysis is deemed the most suitable research design for this study, it also comes with certain limitations. One major limitation of the qualitative design compared to quantitative designs is the difficulty to establish causality based on the results (Creswell, 2009). The difficulty to establish a causality between the governance models and actual effectiveness remain a limitation for this study as well. Another limitation is the difficulty to generalise the results as the study is limited in its scope to one city with its own specific contextual, institutional regimes and organisational attributes. The selection of a relatively a few numbers of interview participants also limit the study's external reliability and ability to draw statistical conclusions based on the results (Creswell, 2009). The study aims to involve interview participants from different governance levels, both horizontally and vertically. However, since the study utilises purposive sampling where most participants are experts or heavily involved in collaborative governance, there is a risk that the interview participants are subjected to confirmation bias. This potential social desirability bias may result in them ascribing collaborative governance higher impact or putting more emphasis on enablers than the obstacles than a random interview participant might have done. In order to mitigate these limitations, the study employs a number of solutions related both to the document research and interview design. Bias from the interviews is mitigated by triangulating responses with analysed documents. The interviews are also anonymised to reduce the social desirability bias. Lastly, the study's use of a wide range of stakeholders is also done intentionally in order to compare responses between different stakeholder groups and reduce potential bias that could arise from potential overrepresentation by a single stakeholder group.

4 Analysis and Findings

Under this chapter, the results of empirical analysis are presented. The analysis is structured according to selected elements of the analytical framework, IFCG by Emerson et al. (2012). Based on the research question of this study, “*What role does collaborative governance, as exercised through the Food Council, play in supporting or impeding sustainable food transformation in Malmö?*”, collaboration process and supporting and hindering factors of the collaboration in MFC are analysed with application of IFCG by Emerson et al. (2012). The components of collaborative governance process are correlative and cyclical, therefore it was taken into account for analysis that data can correspond to several categories than just one. This result contributes to the understanding of how collaborative governance is structured and operates in the urban food system as well as identifying what are perceived as supporting and limiting to effective governance approach in practice by analysing responses from interviewees and relevant document. Thereafter, chapters 4.1 present collaborative governance process in separate themes and hindering and supporting factors to collaboration identified under 4.1 are elaborated under chapter 4.2, and 4.3 respectively.

4.1 Collaborative Governance Process

4.1.1 System Context

System context in Emerson et al. (2012)’s framework refers to the broad political, legal, socio-economic, and institutional environment in which collaborative governance takes place. This context shapes the opportunities and constraints of collaboration such as resource conditions, power dynamics, existing policies, past conflicts, and network connections. The system context also evolves over time and is influenced by the collaboration itself (Emerson et al., 2012).

In order to comprehensively understand the contextual background of establishment of the chosen case of the study, MFC, elements of the system context are closely analysed via structured interviews and document analysis. Several interviews confirmed that political shift in global, national, and regional level created opportunities for collaboration in the city of Malmö. At the global level, the topic of food made into the agendas in the United Nations Agenda 2030 and European Commission Farm to Fork Strategy. These supranational level of political recognition on the issue of food influenced development of national and regional food strategies in Sweden. The national food strategy of Sweden and regional food strategy of Skåne focusing on food preparedness and security opened funding opportunities as well as enabled establishment of own local food strategy.

“... when the first national food strategy was launched and we said that we should have a local food strategy. It was the idea for what is not the public sector but the rest of the society then the process started ...” – M1

The global movement in neighbouring cities in Europe also influenced political environment at the local level such as Milan Urban Food Policy Pact adopted in 2015 and Bristol Food Policy Council launched in 2011. The interviewees from the public sector acknowledged that the assignment delivered from the national government focusing on food production and

preparedness challenge helped placing food agenda in higher priority for municipal tasks including shortening food supply chain, promoting local production, and strengthening alternative food networks.

“... it's coming from the Swedish government to municipalities that we need to focus on our preparedness challenges that we have. And we see that dependence on imports are a big thing and we are quite vulnerable as a city.” – M2

Socio-economic environment such as food poverty and vulnerability as well as health and social challenges were also recognised as a major element to the general system context of collaboration initiation. Furthermore, international diversity and strong community engagement in the city of Malmö were pointed out as an enabling factor for the collaborative governance.

“... we can see that we have a little bit of some kind of food poverty and vulnerability in different sectors. So, the health and the social challenges is also some examples of challenges that we see.” – M2

Some constraints borne by institutional environment are also observed during interviews. Especially bureaucratic complexity within the municipal government constrained active engagement of municipal representation in the beginning of collaborative governance process establishment. Therefore, only limited contribution from municipal staff at the individual level was allowed. As the political priority changed, official representation of municipality in MFC became possible. However, the nature of structural fragmentation exists in the local government further constrained holistic inter-departmental level of engagement from the municipality to the overall collaboration governance process.

4.1.2 Drivers

Drivers are the key forces that initiate and sustain collaborative governance by providing the necessary impetus for stakeholders to work together (Emerson et al., 2012). These include *leadership*, actors who convene and support collaboration, *consequential incentives*, pressures or opportunities that make collaboration worthwhile, *interdependence*, the inability of actors to solve problems alone, and *uncertainty*, lack of clear solutions or information. The presence and recognition of these drivers motivate participants to engage collectively, with stronger or multiple drivers increasing the likelihood that collaboration will begin and continue.

Major drivers that stimulated collaborative governance process in Malmö highlighted by interviewees were funding opportunities, recognition of interdependence, and initiative from administrative level. Although political movement and priority shift created opportunity for initiating collaborative governance, the major actors who supported establishing collaboration were administrative staff from the municipality rather than politician or senior management actors.

“...there was an interest at the civil servant level within the municipality, meaning individual staff members, rather than a political or senior management initiative. It is important to be clear that this originated from the administrative level.” – R1

Funding opportunities are recognised as a consequential incentive that initiates and sustains collaborative governance. The funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development supported initiating pilot scale collaborative governance forum. This pilot project fund enabled conducting pre-study on establishing formal Food Council as a collaborative governance space. This pre-study focused on exploring local food strategy for the city of Malmö and interests from local stakeholders. Upon termination of pilot project period, engaged local stakeholders worked together for applying for additional fundings to establish formal MFC and continue the collaboration. During this process, local stakeholders collectively recognised consequential benefits of collaborative actions which sustained their motivation for working together.

Another important driver noted by interviewees was recognition of interdependence. Recognising interdependence and complexity of food system issues such as fragmented responsibilities and local relations in different parts of the food sector motivated local actors to work together and engage in collaboration works. Several interviewees acknowledged that they recognise food system challenge is widely spread, therefore working in silo cannot make systemic transformation which calls for collective actions.

“...urban food system is very complex because food is everywhere and we started to notice right in the start that we needed a good collaboration with people and organisations that already are working on these issues, but also just started to talk and do stuff about them” – M2

4.1.3 Collaborative Dynamics

Collaborative dynamics is a set of interactive processes that drive collaborative governance over time (Emerson et al., 2012). Rather than unfolding in a linear sequence, these dynamics are cyclical and consist of three mutually reinforcing components: *principled engagement* with structured interaction among stakeholders, *shared motivation* cultivating trust, mutual understanding, and commitment, and *capacity for joint action* encompassing resources, knowledge, and institutional arrangements. Together, these elements continuously influence one another, sustaining collaboration and enabling effective collective action. Under the concept of collaborative dynamics, detailed elements of principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action are closely analysed throughout the study.

Principled engagement, as defined by Emerson et al. (2012), is an ongoing, iterative process in collaborative governance where diverse stakeholders work across boundaries to address shared problems through fair, inclusive, and informed dialogue. It emphasises bringing the right participants together who are representing varied interests and perspectives and engaging them in a cyclical process of discovery (revealing interests and information), definition (building shared meaning and goals), deliberation (open, reasoned discussion and conflict management), and determination (making joint decisions). Through this repeated interaction, participants develop shared understanding, trust, and a collective approach to action, ultimately producing more legitimate, durable, and effective outcomes.

Participation structure and inclusion mechanism

Under Principled engagement element, it is particularly highlighted by the authors that discussing who the participants and who they represent are important to collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012). In this regard, inclusion mechanism and participation structure of the case are closely studied through semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

The participation to MFC is categorised into four groups: member, board, follower, core group, and working group. Member refers to all competent stakeholders who are interested in partaking in collaborative works and signed up to become member of the MFC. In order to become a member, it is required to hold relevant knowledge, experience, and competence in food and have willingness to actively contribute these resources to MFC work. Currently, MFC member consist of various interest groups including researchers from universities, urban farmers representing producer's interest, civil servants representing municipality, coordinators from regional non-profit organisation, and restaurant owner representing small-scale food businesses. Among active members, board members are elected at the annual general meeting. The member of board changes annually based on the result of election with consideration of balanced representation of stakeholders within the food system. The core group consists of operational staff who facilitate collaboration works to bridge different sectors and drive strategic changes within the food system. As core group is responsible for bridging different sectors, they made the most engagement and interaction with local stakeholders. Lastly, working group refers to the group of members working with area-specific issue in accordance with the strategic and operational goal. With shifts in goals, working group members change accordingly.

From the semi-structured interviews, it was repetitively brought up by interviewees that there has been polarised participation by different interest groups in the urban food system. In contrast to active participation by small food entrepreneurs, universities, and small-scale farmers, it was acknowledged that there has been limited participation by large-scale food industry companies, public sectors, political representatives, and well-established restaurant businesses. Furthermore, due to the nature of voluntary engagement of MFC, active participation from private sectors were limited. It was emphasised by one of interviewees that without economic compensation measure, engagement difficulties of private businesses will continue. Furthermore, the lack of holistic participation by municipality was highlighted by several interviews. The food system is broad that often needs engagement from multiple departments from the municipality to make holistic collaboration, but currently the municipal engagement is limited to environmental department. This therefore often leads to fragmented communication with municipality and limited impact of collaboration actions.

Significant difficulty related to engaging right participant was also highlighted by one of interviewees. The MFC serves as an umbrella organisation that brings people from different sectors ensuring inclusivity and democracy within the participation, but it also makes the conversation very broad and vague rather than touching on real issue.

“... with a lot of people from different sectors and what usually happens is that people start talking about issues that are very broad and, just saying things without actually saying how

we could be hands-on with that issue. (...) it's really hard to do unless you have the right people in the room.” – M2

Discovery, definition, deliberation

In Emerson et al. (2012)'s framework, discovery, definition, and deliberation are key phases of principled engagement that help stakeholders build shared understanding and move toward collective action. Discovery involves uncovering participants' interests, values, and relevant information, often through joint fact-finding. Definition follows as stakeholders work to establish common goals, clarify concepts, and develop a shared language and understanding of the problem. Deliberation then centres on open, reasoned dialogue where participants exchange perspectives, challenge assumptions, and manage disagreements constructively. Together, these stages foster mutual learning, align diverse viewpoints, and lay the groundwork for effective and legitimate joint decisions.

From interviews, it was observed that the process of discovery, definition, and deliberation often conducted in a connected manner through virtual and in-person communications. The process of discovering individual and shared interests is done via online channel and in-person activities. These diversified channels allow relevant stakeholders, both member and non-member, to feed in their input and perspectives to the main agenda of discussions. The discovery process mainly contributed to scoping directions for projects or activities which then led relevant stakeholders to jointly establish common goals and developing concepts under the definition process. It was notable that the range of topic for the definition process is often tied to the specific project or availability of funding. As MFC is a non-profit organisation with high dependence on external fundings, only economically viable topics among collected inputs from the discovery process were selected for definition and deliberation process.

The deliberation is a candid communication with thoughtful examination of issues that is conducted under the safe space (Emerson et al., 2012). The annual general meeting and irregularly organised activities served as a deliberative space where open dialogues occur.

“... we hold an annual general meeting every year. (...) we also create space for networking and informal exchanges among members of Malmö Food Council, as well as with other organisations and stakeholders. This provides an opportunity to gather interests, perspectives, and input from our members. In addition, through the various activities, projects, and initiatives we run, we continuously collect input—both from members and from non-members who engage with our work.” – R1

These open dialogues provided valuable opportunities for urban food system stakeholders to develop better understandings about problems from different sectors. Especially it was remarked by an interviewee that often small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs are constrained in time for interaction with public sectors and fully taking advantage of funding opportunities or sharing their issues. Therefore, these open deliberation arrangements with multiple stakeholders including public sector officials help those small stakeholders to effectively communicate their interests and improve understanding on regulations and opportunities.

However, several interviewees pointed out that it has been challenging to arrange consistent deliberation process due to funding tied to specific projects rather than organising general deliberation sessions.

Decision making arrangement

Joint determination is the stage where participants in a collaboration make shared decisions, both procedural and substantive (Emerson et al., 2012). Rather than occurring only at the end, these determinations happen continuously throughout the collaboration and are embedded within principled engagement (Emerson et al., 2012). When shaped by strong, inclusive dialogue, they tend to be more legitimate, durable, and effective, often relying on consensus-building approaches, and they contribute to a reinforcing cycle that strengthens shared motivation and the group's capacity for joint action (Emerson et al., 2012).

Throughout interviews, several factors that influence decision making are identified. First, the problems or ideas that can generate result in a short period with high impact are the most prioritised as this yields high visibility. Secondly, funding availability influences determinations greatly. The democratically collected inputs from the stakeholders are first analysed by the core group and then evaluated by the members of board. The final agenda determined by the board is discussed at the general annual meeting where members outside of the board can react to these decisions. Most of interviewees acknowledged this decision-making process is handled democratically with low level of conflict among members. However, limited feedback loop that currently exists and high influence of resource condition lower the legitimacy of the decision-making arrangement.

Shared motivation is the relational and interpersonal foundation that sustains collaboration, built through a self-reinforcing cycle of trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment (Emerson et al., 2012). It emerges from repeated quality interactions in principled engagement, where participants come to trust one another, appreciate differing perspectives, recognise each other as credible and legitimate partners, and develop a shared commitment to the collaborative process (Emerson et al., 2012). Once established, shared motivation strengthens and accelerates ongoing engagement, creating a virtuous cycle that supports effective collaboration.

Trust and mutual understanding

Emerson et al. (2012) argues that the trust builds over time as parties work together, and the established trust generates mutual understanding which refers to the ability to understand different interests and perspectives. Several interviewees recognised trust and understanding are developed between different actors from deliberation sessions and networking events, however also noted that most people who attended those work meetings and events already have high interests in the same or similar goals therefore it is hard to separately measure how much of MFC meetings helped building new trusts or generating mutual trust additionally.

“I think that the idea of trust goes sort of hand in hand with what we're doing as well, like this idea of networking and connecting people. So, I've seen quite a lot of positivity coming from that and trust has been generated with specific actors (...). But I feel like those people

already were very interested and invested in these ideas anyway. So, I'm not sure if, you know, if Malmö Food Council itself has generated more trust. I'm not so sure about that.”
– P1

Some interviewees specifically highlighted that dialogues between different stakeholders help building mutual understandings among each other. Especially it is noted that these dialogues were helpful in terms of understanding capabilities of different stakeholders and differences in expectations which in turn generating higher trust among each other. It is also noted that without these dialogues it is hard to achieve better understandings, therefore it is an essential element to achieve better trust and understanding among different stakeholders representing different interests.

“I think it's all dialogue is good. And I think it's important to understand each other's perspectives or realities too, because sometimes there is misunderstanding of what could like public procurement what could we achieve through that or not what is the regulations (...). It's not that easy even if you want to do a lot of things it's not that easy legally to do it.” – M1

Internal legitimacy and shared commitment

In the IFCG by Emerson et al. (2012), it is explained that internal legitimacy and shared commitment are generated from matured trust and mutual understanding that confirms participants in collaborative governance process have a collective endeavour which reinforces ongoing collaboration. The authors emphasises that shared commitment is a key element that enables participants to cross the boundaries in jurisdictions or sectors and build a shared path (Emerson et al., 2012). The responses from the participants of collaborative governance in MFC revealed that strengthened internal legitimacy and shared commitment reduces certain conflicts as all participants work towards the same goal. Furthermore, sharing same values in local-centred sustainability actions reinforced participating stakeholders' shared commitment. This observation proves that shared motivation reduces transaction cost significantly by reducing unnecessary conflicts.

Capacity for joint action is the collective ability of stakeholders to work together effectively to achieve shared goals that they could not accomplish individually (Emerson et al., 2012). It is built through collaboration and consists of four key elements: procedural and institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge consists of shared and integrated information and expertise, and resources such as funding, skills, and time (Emerson et al., 2012). The authors note that the capacity emerges from and reinforces ongoing collaboration, enabling more coordinated, effective, and sustainable collective action (Emerson et al., 2012).

Procedural and institutional arrangement

Procedural and institutional arrangements refer to the formal and informal rules, structures, and protocols that organise and manage collaboration over time (Emerson et al., 2012). These include decision-making rules, operating procedures, and governance structures ranging from informal norms to formal mechanisms like charters and regulations that guide how participants interact, coordinate, and make decisions (Emerson et al., 2012). The authors highlight that this

arrangement operates both within and between organisations, and become especially important in larger, more complex collaborations where clear structures are needed to sustain effective joint work. This can be interpreted that in a relatively smaller group, clear structures are needed in a lesser extent.

In order to understand and analyse procedural and institutional arrangement of MFC in a holistic manner, both document analysis and semi-structured interview results are analysed. To understand formal governance structure, MFC's Organisationsstruktur (Organisational Structure) is closely studied, and for studying formal regulation and decision-making rules of MFC, Stadgar för Malmö Food Council (Statutes for Malmö Food Council) is analysed. Responses from the interviewees are mainly used to understand overall governance structure as well as general guide how participants interact with each other.

According to the statutes of MFC, there are four decision-making bodies which are annual general meeting, board, auditor, and representatives for the areas of expertise who are appointed during annual general meeting. During the general meeting, all members have rights to participate in the management of the affairs, and all members get one vote respectively. Providing equal voting right and participation right for all members ensure democracy in decision-making process. Once the decision is made, all members are expected to follow the decisions. Followed by this, the members of board are obligated to implement these decisions made in the general meeting. For ongoing operational decisions are made by the core group consists of the board and the representatives of the areas of expertise.

The statutes did not specify on how members interact and general agreements are reached or how conflicts or complaints from members are handled. To answer these, materials collected from the interviews are mainly utilised. The members acknowledged that the general meeting is annually organised to make the steering decisions for the organisation, but this does not fulfil the needs of members for interactions. Therefore, multiple channels of interaction activities are arranged by MFC such as own workshops or knowledge sharing activities collaborating with different organisations. Although diverse interaction opportunities are provided for the members, interviewees acknowledged that most of them occur irregularly and tied to specific projects rather than MFC's own meetings. Therefore, the topics of discussions from these interactions among members often become limited to the agenda set by specific project aims rather than members' own prioritising agendas. Therefore, the irregularity of institutional arrangement is repetitively pointed as a hindering factor of active involvement from members and taking full advantage of members' capacities. The participants of interviews recognised this is a standing issue for MFC, and further acknowledged difficulties in maintaining a consistent and appropriate level of dialogue and engagement with members. In addition to this, lack of formal membership admission process also adds complexities in the procedural arrangement. As the organisation is currently developing formal membership admission process as well as membership admission fees, the absent of this formal procedure further hindered effective member engagement.

Although several difficulties are identified within procedural and institutional arrangement, it was also highlighted that the arrangement of MFC ensures creating neutral ground for stakeholders in the urban food system. Especially the democratic way of arrangement of MFC

help the local stakeholders to view each other as collaborator or colleagues rather than competitors. Furthermore, some interviewees highlighted that the institutional arrangement provides conflict mediation zone where conflicts or complaints can be collected and mediated or developed into collective action to resolve locally facing issues.

Leadership

Leadership in Emerson et al. (2012)'s framework refers to the various roles and functions that guide, support, and sustain collaboration throughout its lifecycle. It is not limited to a single actor but can take multiple forms such as convening participants, facilitating dialogue, mediating conflicts, representing interests, or championing implementation. In the given framework, it is highlighted that leadership is a core component of collaboration with different roles becoming important at different stages, from initiation to deliberation and execution (Emerson et al., 2012).

In the case of MFC, the leadership role was not distinctively observed as it was distributed to multiple parties. The representatives of the areas of expertise took leadership in leading collaborations in their respective fields, operational staff and municipal office handled resource mobilisation, the board members took responsibility in organisational management, and general members took leadership in engaging wider local community and the public to MFC's initiatives and food issues. As it is acknowledged by Emerson et al. (2012), the leadership of MFC was not limited to a single actor but rather distributed to multiple groups.

Knowledge and resources

Knowledge and resources are essential elements of the capacity for joint action. Knowledge refers to the shared and jointly developed understanding, information, and expertise that guide collaborative decisions and actions, created by integrating diverse perspectives and insights (Emerson et al., 2012). Resources include the practical assets needed for collaboration such as funding, time, skills, and organisational support which can be pooled, shared, and leveraged among participants.

It is acknowledged by interviewees that all participating members of MFC contribute their expertise from their own fields which is a key element for collaboration. The members provide their expert knowledge to help other members or develop the organisational work such as business expertise or environmental expertise to advance sustainability work for small business entrepreneurs. The public sector interviewee also remarked that MFC acts as a knowledge channel of experts in food system which helps them in evaluating feasibility of new projects or decision of project developments.

“Because we are not experts within the food system. (...) we really need a lot of expertise, so we don't start thinking about pilot projects that are not really spot on. So, I see them as a knowledge channel or experts. And because of their great network, it's much easier for them to find the right expertise. It's much harder for us to see, okay, now we need to understand that and that.” – M2

The interviewees also underlined the importance of knowledge gathering as well as dissemination of collected knowledge. As the knowledge collected from workshops, meetings, and individual projects are valuable to make great change within the society and motivate community to join the collective actions, sharing the knowledge is considered important part of MFC's work. However, it is also acknowledged that wider community engagement and broad knowledge communication works have been limited due to limitation in funding and staff time.

“... I think that I can say that has been a big issue for us is communication with membership and with the public in general. And that goes back to the funding (...). The working group spends (...) so much of their time just trying to find more funding.” – P1

Regarding financial resources, three streams of mobilisation are identified from interviews. As the MFC is not an extension of municipality or institutionalised into the municipal structure, it has independent budget structure from the local government. Three streams of financial resource mobilisation consist of public fund, project fund, and membership fee. The public fund is mostly coming from the local municipality which supports operational costs, however this is an application-based grant and not a fixed budget that ensures stability.

“City of Malmö also provides financial support. We apply annually for an operational grant that forms a financial base for running the organization. (...) Through this channel, we receive financial support. (...) This funding comes with reporting requirements: we must submit a report detailing how the funds have been used, what activities have been carried out, and what outcomes have been achieved.” – R1

Another stream of financial resources is external funding from project applications. The interviewees acknowledged that this requires extensive working hours of operational staff as they submit applications for many projects and this is their main source of independent resources aside from the public funds. As not all applications for external funding are successful, this increases instability of the organisational budget. Last stream of financial resource is membership fee collected from the member of MFC. This is a newly adopted budget process that has not been implemented yet. The interviewees emphasised that this would increase economic stability as well as independence of the organisation, furthermore, strengthen stronger engagement from the members of MFC. However, it was continuously observed from the interviews that the organisation struggles with securing more fundings which hinders investing staff time in other activities as well as limits expanding organisation's capacity.

The need for open space for dialogues or in-person workshops is also mentioned by the interviewees. In order to arrange dialogues or in-person meetings regularly, it requires fixed physical space for people to gather. Currently, all in-person activities are held in a temporarily rented space which are tied to specific project funds, therefore the organisation does not have a fixed space for holding regular deliberation sessions. This hinders capacity of organisation to sufficiently provide procedural and institutional arrangements for local stakeholders.

“... there could be more sort of open meeting spaces for this type of activity that is operated by the municipality to do the exact same thing that we're trying to do to enable these types of collaborations and projects. And I think having a free space where people could do that,

where they could put on a workshop or (...) hold meetings (...), I think that would help a lot in this type of collaborative work, for sure.” – P1

4.1.4 Collaborative Actions

Collaborative actions are concrete activities and interventions that stakeholders carry out together to achieve shared goals that could not be accomplished individually (Emerson et al., 2012). These actions are varied depending on context, but often include policy changes, resource mobilisation, public outreach, implementation efforts, or monitoring, and can be undertaken jointly or by individual partners on behalf of the group (Emerson et al., 2012). Rather than being separate from the overall process, collaborative actions are closely tied to it and depend on a clear shared purpose and theory of action, as well as strong collaborative dynamics that generate the capacity needed to implement them effectively (Emerson et al., 2012).

In order to make a great impact in the society in a holistic manner, all interviewees acknowledged that establishing a food strategy that is agreed by whole city is a high priority in their collaborative actions. Municipality interviewees noted that if it's developed internally within the municipality without reflecting input from the urban food system actors, it may only focus on public food system rather than entire urban food system. Furthermore, the food strategy co-developed by municipality and urban food system actors can accelerate interdepartmental collaboration for food system issues. Currently, there is no formal steering document in place which hinders active cross-departmental collaboration within the municipality. Therefore, creating food strategy with all urban food system actors will ensure balanced view from the whole food system as well as generate positive pressure to accelerate holistic municipal engagement to food system works. Some challenges regarding acquiring political legitimacy for the strategy are observed during interviews as every choice of participant engagement must be justified. Despite of foreseen challenges in the process of legitimatising the strategy, interviewees noted this is an important collaborative action that can elevate political and public priority of food system challenges which can generate great impact in long term.

Another important collaborative action that is observed are public advocacy and education works. As public engagement and wider communication on awareness are important aim of MFC, members of MFC and representatives of the areas of expertise are actively engaged in public advocacy works by organising workshops in local event, publishing white paper on food waste reduction, and food education in preschools. The public advocacy works majorly placed emphasis on knowledge dissemination as well as behavioural change in eating habit. Furthermore, these works are done with expectation of securing public endorsement on food system issues.

Supporting urban farmers and creating alternative market are also identified as major collaborative actions. Some major works are done in regulation adjustment for the short-term farmland renting contract for urban farmers and launching alternative market with locally produced vegetables by coordinating funding, communication with urban farmers and funding authorities.

Lastly, MFC also placed great importance in its collaborative action work in creating network group for different sectors such as food entrepreneurs and restaurants. This work is expected to efficiently collect expert knowledge within respective sectors which can later be widely disseminated. However, it is also noted that difficulties remain in balanced participant engagement as well-established businesses are not very keen on engaging in these local actions.

4.2 Challenges of Collaborative Governance

In order to answer the research question 1.2 “What supports and hinders this collaboration process, and how they affect sustainable food transformation?”, hindering factors of collaborative governance are clustered and elaborated under the chapter 4.2 and supporting factors are elaborated under the chapter 4.3.

Several interrelated factors constraining effective collaborative governance process are identified from interview and document analyses, which are institutional and structural constraints, resource limitations, participation and engagement challenges, and ensuring quality interaction difficulties. Institutional and structural constraints place a significant limitation to the process, as the absence of strong political support such as a formal steering document or clear mandate reduces the legitimacy and influence of the collaboration, particularly in mobilising municipal departments and influential actors. Fragmentation within the municipality further weakens cross-departmental engagement which leads to siloed participation. Additionally, weak or inconsistent procedural and institutional arrangements such as irregular meetings, unclear interaction rules, and underdeveloped membership structures make it difficult to sustain continuous and structured collaboration.

Another major barrier identified is resource limitation. The collaboration heavily depends on short-term, project-based funding, which creates financial instability and limits long-term planning. This also diverts significant staff time toward securing funding rather than facilitating collaboration or communication with local stakeholders in food system. Limited resources further restrict the ability to organise regular meetings, maintain close communication with members and the public, and secure physical spaces for interaction, all of which are essential for effective engagement. Furthermore, challenges with participation and engagement hinder inclusivity and overall balance of the collaboration process. Currently, it is noted that the participation to the process is uneven, with strong involvement from small-scale actors and non-business actors, but limited engagement from key stakeholders such as large businesses, political representatives, and some public sector actors. The voluntary nature of participation, combined with lack of financial incentives, discourages private sector involvement. This imbalanced engagement can lead to gaps in representation and reduce the overall impact of collaborative outcomes. Participatory fatigue and the time-intensive nature of balanced engagement are also noted as a factor which makes stakeholders difficult to be involved consistently. Lastly, difficulties in managing interactions among stakeholders affect the quality and outcomes of collaboration. Broad and diverse participation can sometimes lead to vague discussions rather than actionable solutions, especially when the right mix of participants is missing. Communication gaps and limited feedback loops further reduce transparency and perceived legitimacy in decision-making. Goal conflicts and the prioritisation of short-term, visible results often driven by funding conditions also restrict deeper, long-term transformation efforts.

4.3 Enablers of Collaborative Governance

Despite these challenges, several enabling factors support and strengthen the collaboration process, which are motivational and relational factors, structural and contextual enablers, knowledge and capacity assets, and collaborative practices.

Motivational and relational factors are central to sustaining collaboration. A high level of individual dedication and commitment among participants drives continued engagement, even in the absence of strong institutional support. In the case of MFC, the importance of individual dedication from both state and non-state actors are highlighted from the initiation stage to maintaining and operating the collaborative process. Shared values particularly around sustainability and urban food systems help align stakeholders and reduce conflict. Although members often represent different interests depending on their organisations' priorities, the member of MFC showed aligned goals in achieving sustainable transformation in the food system regardless of differences in perspectives on how to achieve transformation. Trust and mutual understanding among members of MFC, built through dialogue and interaction, further strengthen relationships and create a cooperative environment. This shared motivation fosters a sense of common purpose and encourages stakeholders to work across sectoral boundaries. Structural and contextual enablers such as broad political and societal developments including international food policy agendas and national or regional food strategies have created favourable conditions and legitimacy for collaboration. Recently, regional and urban food system resilience and sustainability have been recognised as a higher political priority by national government of Sweden, therefore this increasing political attention has created several opportunities for urban food initiatives in Swedish cities. In the case of MFC, the funding opportunities, especially initial pilot funding, acted as key catalysts for initiating the collaboration. Furthermore, Malmö's socio-economic context, including strong community engagement and diversity, contributes to a supportive environment for collaborative efforts. The existing tradition of strong community relationship and cultural diversity of the city played an important role in initiating collaboration stage as well as building mutual trusts among different stakeholders.

The knowledge and capacity asset further significantly enhance collaboration. The diversity of participants with a wide range of expertise enabled knowledge sharing and joint learning. The MFC functions as a knowledge hub, helping stakeholders access relevant expertise and make more informed decisions. This collective knowledge strengthens the capacity for joint action and improves the quality of collaborative outputs. Collaborative practices and interaction mechanisms also support effective engagement. The use of both formal and informal spaces for dialogue allows stakeholders to exchange perspectives, build understanding, and identify shared goals. These deliberative spaces are particularly valuable for connecting actors who would not interact in their normal practices such as farmers and environmental staff from the municipality or researchers from university and small food entrepreneurs. Especially, non-state actors value the opportunities to interact with state actors from the municipality or regional office as it is difficult to reach them otherwise. Also it was noted by many stakeholders that opportunities to discuss sustainability topic that are not directly connected to specific projects with representatives of different interest groups are rare, therefore the provision of formal and informal deliberative spaces were well valued by the members. Moreover, democratic decision-

making structures where members have equal voting rights help ensure inclusivity and fairness, reinforcing legitimacy and commitment.

Table 6. Summary of main findings

Dimension	Main Findings	Constraint	Support
System context	Supranational food agendas and national–regional food strategies created political and funding windows for a local food strategy and MFC formation	Bureaucratic complexity and fragmented municipal structure limited early and holistic municipal engagement	Socio-economic challenges (food poverty, health issues), diversity, and strong community engagement motivated collaboration
Drivers	Funding opportunities, administrative-level initiative, recognition of interdependence and food system complexity	Dependence on external funds, siloed actors recognising problems but lacking stable structures	Pilot funding enabled pre-study and establishing formal MFC, shared recognition on interdependence
Participation & engagement	Main participation from researchers, small farmers, civil servants, NGOs, small food businesses	Polarised participation with low involvement from large food companies, political representatives, and limited involvement from municipality	MFC offers an inclusive structure with multiple channels (online, in-person meetings, projects) for discovery, definition, and deliberation
Institutional arrangements & resources	Statutes define democratic governance with one-member-one-vote. MFC acts as neutral ground and conflict mediation space	Irregular interaction structures, underdeveloped membership procedures, lack of fixed meeting space, heavy reliance on short-term project funds, staff time diverted to fundraising	Emerging membership fees expected to increase stability and member engagement, organisational set-up supports viewing actors as collaborators, not competitors
Knowledge & capacity	MFC functions as a knowledge hub, members contribute diverse expertise, supports municipalities in aligning projects with local needs	Limited capacity for communication with members and public, constrained outreach and knowledge dissemination	Joint learning and expertise pooling strengthen capacity for joint action and quality of outputs

Collaborative actions	Co-develop city-wide food strategy with municipality and local actors, public advocacy and education, support urban farmers and alternative markets	Political legitimacy for a food strategy is challenging, imbalanced participation in networks (low engagement of well-established businesses)	Expected to elevate political and public priority of food issues, enable cross-departmental municipal collaboration, and support alternative food networks
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Source: Own elaboration

5 Discussion

This study examined how collaborative governance, exercised through MFC, supports or constrains sustainable urban food transformation in Malmö. By applying Emerson et al.'s (2012) integrative framework, the findings demonstrate that collaborative governance functions as both an enabling and limiting mechanism within sustainability transformation processes. The empirical findings reveal that MFC creates important spaces for dialogue, coordination, and collective learning among actors who would otherwise operate separately within the urban food system. At the same time, the findings also demonstrate that collaborative governance remains shaped by broader institutional structures, power relations, and resource inequalities that constrain the transformative potential of collaborative arrangements.

5.1 Discussing the Results in the Light of Previous Research

The findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative governance plays an important role in facilitating coordination, dialogue, and collective learning within Malmö's urban food system. MFC functions as a collaborative platform that brings together actors from public institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and private businesses to collectively address sustainability challenges related to food systems. These findings support previous research arguing that urban food governance increasingly relies on collaborative and network-based governance arrangements rather than solely hierarchical state-led governance structures (Sonnino et al., 2019; Moragues-Faus, 2021). Consistent with existing literature on FPCs, the findings suggest that MFC contributes to strengthening communication and cooperation among otherwise fragmented actors within the urban food system. Previous studies have highlighted that FPCs create opportunities for stakeholder participation, cross-sectoral coordination, and knowledge exchange within local food governance processes (Michel et al., 2022; Schiff, 2008). Similarly, this study demonstrates that MFC facilitates relationship-building, collective problem framing, and collaborative learning among stakeholders engaged in sustainable food initiatives.

The findings also reinforce previous research emphasising the importance of facilitative leadership and sustainability networks in sustaining collaborative governance processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). The interview participants of the study repeatedly highlighted the importance of coordination, trust-building, and informal interaction in maintaining stakeholder engagement within MFC. This reflects broader collaborative governance literature suggesting that trust and shared understanding are critical conditions for sustaining collaboration among actors with different organisational backgrounds and interests. At the same time, the findings also support more critical perspectives within collaborative governance and urban food governance literature. While collaborative governance arrangements are often associated with inclusivity and participation, the study found that participation within MFC remained uneven across stakeholder groups. Civil society organisations, academia, and smaller sustainability-oriented actors participated more actively than larger private sector actors and several municipal departments. This finding aligns with previous studies arguing that collaborative governance processes may reproduce existing power asymmetries due to differences in institutional resources, organisational capacity, and access to funding (Moragues-Faus, 2019; Coulson & Sonnino, 2019). The study further

supports existing critiques regarding the limited transformative capacity of collaborative governance initiatives operating without stronger institutional integration. Although MFC contributed to local coordination and experimentation, fragmented municipal governance structures and dependence on project-based funding constrained long-term strategic influence. Similar limitations have been identified in previous research on FPCs and sustainability governance initiatives, where collaborative arrangements frequently struggle with unstable funding, limited political authority, and weak institutionalisation (Nadeau & Koebele, 2023). The findings therefore suggest that collaborative governance may strengthen local sustainability capacities while simultaneously remaining constrained by broader political and institutional structures.

5.2 Discussing the Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

Emerson et al.'s (2012) IFCG provided a useful analytical structure for examining how collaborative processes are initiated, maintained, and constrained through interaction among diverse stakeholders. The empirical findings of the qualitative study clearly reflected the three central collaborative dynamics identified within the IFCG framework: principled engagement, shared motivation, and capacity for joint action.

Principled engagement was visible through deliberative meetings, workshops, and collaborative activities where stakeholders collectively discussed sustainability challenges in the food system and negotiated shared priorities. The findings demonstrate that collaborative governance within MFC relies heavily on communicative interaction and deliberative engagement rather than formal hierarchical authority. The study results further indicate that shared motivation was unevenly distributed across actors. While sustainability-focused civil society organisations and small-scaled food actors demonstrated strong commitment to collaborative activities, participation from larger businesses and interdepartmental level of municipal engagement remained rather limited. This suggests that shared motivation within collaborative governance processes is influenced by differences in organisational priorities, institutional incentives, and resource capacities. It was also highlighted from the interviews that although there are high ambitions or interests, without sufficient resource capacities their participations are discouraged.

Lastly, capacity for joint action was supported through local sustainability networks, facilitative leadership, procedural arrangements, and external funding opportunities, but the findings also revealed limitations within this collaborative capacity such as dependence on temporary funding structures and voluntary participation weakening the long-term institutional stability of collaborative governance arrangements. This finding extends the IFCG framework by demonstrating that collaborative capacity is not solely generated internally within governance arrangements but is also shaped by broader institutional and economic conditions. In this regard, the study supports theoretical arguments suggesting that sustainability transformation increasingly depends on collaborative, networked, and multi-level governance arrangements capable of addressing complex and interconnected societal challenges.

The study results also reveal limitations within collaborative governance framework theory itself. The IFCG framework effectively captures collaborative dynamics and governance processes but pays less explicit attention to structural inequalities and power asymmetries shaping

participation and influence within collaborative governance arrangements. The findings of this study demonstrate that participation and influence within MFC were shaped by differences in institutional authority, organisational capacity, and access to resources. Consequently, the study suggests that collaborative governance frameworks may benefit from stronger integration of critical perspectives addressing power relations, exclusion, and governance inequalities within collaborative processes.

5.3 Reflections and Limitations

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to examine collaborative governance within MFC and its role in supporting sustainable urban food transformation. The qualitative design enabled an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives, governance dynamics, and collaborative processes within a specific urban context. Applying Emerson et al.'s (2012) IFCG provided a useful analytical structure for understanding how collaborative governance processes are initiated, maintained, and constrained among diverse food system actors. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study such as low generalisability connected to context-specific single case study, process-focused study with lack of concrete impact analysis, and narrow selection of interview participant groups. The single case study approach of this study limits broad generalisability to other urban contexts with different political, institutional, or socio-economic conditions as the case selected for this study is characterised by strong sustainability ambitions and active community engagement in sustainability topic. Although the study results from this single case study provide in-depth analysis in collaborative governance process within urban food system, the study also acknowledges the limitation with lower generalisability. The fact that the interview participant recruitment did not fully capture balanced participation from all relevant sectors should be noted. Due to voluntary-based participation recruitment approach, the study was only able to recruit participants who are already actively engaged to the process and had hard time with recruiting high importance but low interest groups such as large food corporations or municipal and regional departments who are not directly working on sustainability topic. Therefore, low representation by these groups should be acknowledged as one of limitations to the study.

The result of the study also revealed broader tensions concerning participation and power within collaborative governance arrangements. While collaborative governance is frequently associated with inclusivity and participation, the findings indicate that participation and influence remain shaped by differences in institutional capacity, organisational resources, and access to funding. Although the IFCG framework was useful for analysing collaborative dynamics, it provided more limited engagement with structural power relations and governance inequalities. Incorporating more explicit critical perspectives on power and exclusion could therefore strengthen future collaborative governance research. Despite these limitations, the study contributes empirical and theoretical insights into collaborative governance within urban food systems. By examining MFC through the lens of collaborative governance and sustainability transformation, the research provides deeper understanding of how FPCs operate as intermediary governance spaces connecting actors, initiatives, and governance levels within urban sustainability governance.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The overall study results suggest that collaborative governance should not be understood as a universal solution to urban sustainability challenges, but rather as one important governance mechanism operating within broader institutional and political contexts. The effectiveness of collaborative governance arrangements depends not only on the quality of interaction among stakeholders, but also on the presence of supportive institutional structures, political commitment, stable resource conditions, and inclusive participation mechanisms. Collaborative governance may strengthen local capacities for sustainability transformation, but its transformative potential remains conditioned by structural factors that extend beyond the collaborative arena itself.

Given the urban food system issues are aggravating and still there is existing gap in the literature in this topic, there are several avenues for future research. First, conducting comparative and multi-case research across several cities or different food policy councils to examine how different institutional designs, levels of institutionalisation, and political contexts shape participation, collaboration dynamics, and roles as transformation intermediaries would contribute to maturing empirical studies of collaborative governance in urban food system with a greater generalisability. This is expected to play a significant role in enhancing political priority of food governance issue to the higher level. As the adoption level of FPCs or maturation level of FPCs are varied in Europe, this type of future research will bring high benefit to the European cities who are considering initiating the collaborative governance structure or aiming to achieve sustainable food transformation. Secondly, conducting future research with strong focus on measuring outcome or impact can explore connections between collaborative arrangements and tangible transformations more directly. Especially with strong focus of the intermediary role for systemic transformation of collaborative platforms and their connected impacts to the sustainable transformation can provide significant contribution to measuring effectiveness of the FPC as well as provide strong evidence to expanding collaborative initiatives in urban food systems. This future research can further contribute to identifying clear causal relationships between collaborative actions and impacts. Lastly, future research could broaden actor perspectives by interviewing less engaged or critical stakeholders to deepen the research focus on symbolic participation and polarised participations which are recognised in the literature but only indirectly touched upon in this study. Diversifying stakeholder perspectives will allow future studies to critically examine power and justice in collaborative urban food governance more in detail. Especially, the large food companies are recognised and identified as key stakeholders who hold great power and influence in the food system, however in general their participation to the local collaborative initiatives were rather limited. Due to this limited interest, it was challenging to reflect large private sector's perspective to this study result. This limited interest coming from the large private sector is not only due to their lack of interest in sustainability but because there is lack of clear representation of benefit for them. Therefore, future research with strong focus on identifying clear benefit for private sector engagement to the collaborative governance process in urban food transformation can bring expanded engagement from this underengaged participating group.

6 Conclusions

This thesis examined the role of collaborative governance in supporting sustainable urban food transformation in Malmö through the case of MFC. The study addressed the main research question concerning how collaborative governance supports or constrains sustainable food transformation, while also examining how collaboration processes are structured and what factors enable or hinder effective collaboration among stakeholders. Drawing upon Emerson et al.'s (2012) framework, the research analysed collaborative governance as a dynamic and relational process shaped by institutional structures, actor interactions, and broader socio-political contexts.

The findings demonstrate that collaborative governance plays a significant role in supporting sustainable urban food transformation by facilitating dialogue, coordination, knowledge exchange, and collective learning among diverse stakeholders. MFC functions as a collaborative platform where public authorities, civil society organisations, academia, and private actors engage in shared discussions regarding food system sustainability challenges. The study findings also note that these diverse stakeholders do not meet or rarely interact without provision of collaborative platform. This reveals that the collaborative platform such as MFC plays a pivotal role in initiating interaction among stakeholders who normally do not interact. Through these interactions, the council contributes to increasing awareness of food-related sustainability issues, strengthening local networks, and supporting collaborative initiatives related to sustainable food production, consumption, and governance.

The study further demonstrates that the collaborative governance process within MFC is structured through iterative and interconnected collaborative dynamics consistent with the IFCG framework. Principled engagement occurred through dialogue forums or collaborative projects that enabled stakeholders to collectively deliberate on food system challenges. Shared motivation was fostered through trust-building, mutual recognition of sustainability concerns, and collective commitment to the aligned objectives. Capacity for joint action developed through facilitative leadership, knowledge exchange, procedural arrangements, and external funding opportunities that enabled collaborative experimentation and project implementation.

It is also revealed that several structural and institutional constraints limiting the transformative potential of collaborative governance. Participation within MFC remained uneven across stakeholder groups, with stronger engagement from small businesses, civil society organisations, and academia than from larger businesses and municipal sectors who do not work directly with sustainability or environment topic. The fragmented organisational structure of municipal governance as well as relatively low political priority on food sustainability topic constrained cross-sectoral coordination, while dependence on project-based funding generated uncertainty regarding continuity and long-term institutionalisation. These findings indicate that collaborative governance alone cannot overcome broader structural barriers without stronger political prioritisation, institutional integration, and stable resource conditions.

The thesis contributes theoretically by demonstrating the relevance of the IFCG framework for analysing collaborative governance within urban food systems. The findings show that collaborative governance in sustainability transformation processes should be understood not

as a linear process, but as an iterative and relational governance dynamic shaped by both enabling and constraining institutional conditions. The study also contributes to literature on FPCs by illustrating how such initiatives operate as transformation intermediaries that connect actors, sectors, and governance levels while simultaneously facing limitations related to institutional authority and resource dependency.

Several practical implications emerge from the findings. The study highlights the importance of stronger institutional support for collaborative food governance initiatives, particularly regarding long-term funding structures and clearer integration of food-related issues within municipal governance systems. The findings also emphasise the importance of inclusive participation mechanisms capable of engaging a broader range of stakeholders, including larger private sector actors and underrepresented groups. Furthermore, the research underlines the significance of facilitative leadership and coordination capacities in sustaining collaborative governance processes over time. As Malmö city is in the process of renewing the food policy for sustainable transformation with diverse food system stakeholders involved, these practical implications identified from the study results can be integrated into this process. The hindering factors to the collaborative process identified from the study need to be further discussed with potential and feasible pathways as this study is limited in providing solutions.

Several limitations of the study should also be acknowledged. The research focused on a single case study within a specific urban context, limiting the generalisability of findings to other cities and governance settings. The study additionally focused primarily on governance processes and stakeholder perceptions rather than evaluating measurable sustainability outcomes or long-term policy impacts. Future research could therefore benefit from comparative studies across different FPCs and urban contexts, as well as longitudinal studies examining how collaborative governance arrangements evolve over time and contribute to broader sustainability transformations. Although the generalisability of this study is limited due to abovementioned reasons, this study brings very meaningful contribution to sustainability urban food transformation topic in Swedish urban context. Currently, there are limited number of Swedish cities have active collaborative governance platforms for food transformation. However, as the political importance of food supply, food sustainability, and resilience is a growing trend, the interests in urban food governance are expanding as well. Therefore, the findings drawn from this study can provide blueprint to the cities who are newly establishing the collaborative governance structure or exploring pathways to achieve sustainability transformation in their food systems.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that collaborative governance can play a meaningful role in supporting sustainable urban food transformation by facilitating coordination, collective learning, and cross-sectoral interaction among diverse stakeholders. MFC illustrates how collaborative governance arrangements can function as intermediary governance spaces that bridge fragmented actors and sectors within urban food systems. Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that collaborative governance is not inherently transformative and remains dependent upon broader institutional, political, and economic conditions. Achieving sustainable urban food transformation therefore requires not only collaborative governance arrangements, but also stronger institutional commitment, stable resource structures, inclusive participation, and long-term political prioritisation of food system sustainability.

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Appendix A. Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

This form is to ensure that you have been given information about the research project and to give you an opportunity to confirm that you are willing to take part in this research. For all activities below, please indicate which applies to you (*checked box indicates consent*):

☐	I have been familiarised with the "From Policy to Plate: How Collaborative Governance Supports Sustainable Urban Food Transition", I have had the possibility to ask questions, and I have received satisfactory answers to my questions before being interviewed
☐	As a research participant, I am aware of my right to withdraw participation at any time
☐	I give my consent that the interview can be recorded in writing and analysed
☐	I give my consent that the interview can be audio- or video-recorded , transcribed using a third-party speech-to-text transcription application and analysed
☐	I give my consent to be identified by my organisation
☐	I understand that the results of the research will be presented so that no information can be traced to me personally , i.e. the pseudonymity of participants will be ensured
☐	I give my consent that a record of my interview can be safely stored for future reference for research purposes
☐	I have been informed how data will be either destroyed or reused at the end of the research

Note: Your participation is voluntary. As an interviewee, you do not have to answer all the questions that are asked; you reserve the right to refuse or cease participation in the interview process without stating your reason and may request to keep certain materials confidential. In addition, you have the right to review any summary or synthesis of the interview at any time up until the data is published.

There will be no monetary payment for participating in the research, but you will have contributed to a research project that generally aims to advance food system transition.

Please, sign below to confirm your consent – digital signatures are possible:

	Participant	Researcher
Name		
Signature		
Date		

Appendix B. Interview Guide

Research aim

The aim of the research is to analyse how collaborative governance process supports sustainable food transition by examining how governance processes are structured and what factors support or constrain effective collaboration among actors. By conducting an empirical case study in Malmö urban food system, this study aims to contribute to improve governance design and strengthen stakeholder collaboration as well as further support policy renewal process.

RQ 1. How are the collaboration processes organised by different actors in Malmö's urban food system?

RQ 2. What supports and hinders effective collaboration in urban food governance?

Interview structure

- Format: Online/In-person
- Duration: 45 minutes
- Note: interview is recorded and further transcribed for data analysis

Main interview question

- In the collaboration process, how do you **discover/define problems**, **communicate** with other actors, and reach **agreement**?
- Does this process allow you to build **mutual trust** and **understanding** among different stakeholders?
- How is this collaboration **process arranged**? Is the arrangement/process well arranged?
- Who are **leading** this collaboration process?
- How do you build **knowledge** and manage this aggregated knowledge?
- What **resources** do you provide to this collaboration process? And what resources are further required for joint action implementation?
- What **collaborative actions** are reached by this collaboration process?
- Throughout this collaboration process, were there anything particularly **hindering** the process?
- Throughout this collaboration process, were there anything particularly **supporting** the process?

Appendix C. Declaration of Use of Generative AI (GAI) Tools

Project/Assignment title: From Plate to Policy: The Role of Collaborative Governance in Sustainable Urban Food Transformation

Did you use GAI tools for this work? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, complete the items below.

a) Tools used

List the tools and versions (e.g., “ChatGPT, Claude, DeepL”):

ChatGPT 5.5

b) What you used them for (check all that apply)

- ☒ Brainstorming / idea generation
- ☐ Planning / structuring
- ☒ Language editing (grammar/clarity)
- ☒ Translation (non-sensitive content)
- ☐ Outline drafting
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

c) How you used the tools (be specific)

Describe prompts, steps taken, and how you revised the outputs:

For brainstorming, I asked ChatGPT to review published articles in the relevant topic of the study and analyse current trend of research in the said topic. The author carefully reviewed the result provided by ChatGPT and reviewed certain research cases suggested.

For language editing, I used ChatGPT to polish final sentences and check grammar to avoid any grammatical error. All revision suggestions made by ChatGPT is reviewed by the author before reflected on the final paper.

For translation, non-sensitive documents in Swedish are uploaded to ChatGPT and translated into English.

d) Your own contributions

What parts are entirely your original work?

AI tool is limitidly used for reviewing and providing for complemantry perspective. All works regarding research design, research question development, collecting data, and interpreting final result to be presented are done by author self.

e) Verification and editing

How did you verify accuracy and edit AI output?

The accuracy of AI output is reviewed based on reference cross-check as well as author's own knowledge.



Student signature: _____ Date: ____2026. 17. May_____